

Princeton Oracle Bones

One of several collections assembled by missionary Dr. Frank Herring Chalfant. For his major collection see the Couling-Chalfant collection (assembled with Samuel Couling.) Most if not all of the pieces were purchased in 1904-1908 in Weixian, Shandong. Some of these include forgeries, especially the so-called "amulets".

Chalfant's first publication on oracle bones was in 1906, *Early Chinese writing*, only 3 years after the first Chinese publication, *Tieyun cang gui*.

He suffered a stroke in 1911. By the time of his death, 1914, the readings of his collection, plus other collections he saw personally or saw transcriptions of, were assembled in an unpublished work, *Bone Instructions*. Publication was planned with Berthold Laufer, W.J. Holland (Carnegie Museum), and Lionel C. Hopkins, but because of the war did not take place. The manuscript remained with Laufer until his death in 1934, when it was returned to Chalfant's family members, and via them, to Roswell S. Britton.

Britton published first in 1935 *The Couling-Chalfant Collection of inscribed oracle bone, Shanghai: The Commercial Press Ltd.*, 1935, with the collections of the Royal Scottish Museum (acq. 1909 from Couling), Carnegie Museum (1909, Chalfant), British Museum (1911, Couling), Field Museum (1913, Chalfant). This was followed by *Seven collections of inscribed oracle bone* (New York: 1938) and *The Hopkins collection of inscribed oracle bone* (New York, 1939).

The 7 collections are the Tientsin Anglo-Chinese coll., the Shanghai Museum of the NCBRAS, the Bergen collection (in Jinan), the Princeton University collection, the Wilhelm collection (mainly in Basel), the Sun collection (?Shandong), and the Royal Asiatic Society, London.

According to pp. 2-3 of the 7 collections, Chalfant acquired pieces from a Mr. Li, possibly Li Rubin in Weixian, who might have been an associate of the known dealers Zhao Zhizhai and Fan Weiqing. Because of the Boxer rebellion, earlier sales to Beijing (to, a.o., Wang Yirong and Liu E=Liu Tieyun) had stopped, but had already caused a market for forgeries as well. At that time dealers were very hesitant to reveal their networks and even the fact that the pieces originated in Yinxu was not necessarily known.

The Princeton collection (plates 17-21), 119 pieces (95 shell, 24 bone; two pieces missing in 1938), was probably acquired by Chalfant soon after his return from the US on 20 Nov 1906. It had been long the property of Harold Whitcher, a teacher at the Shantung Union College in Weixian under the English Baptist Mission, who sold it in 1927 to Dr. Frederick J. Tooker, who together with a numismatic collection loaned it to Princeton in 1928, and gave it outright in 1934. The by then 117 pieces were published in photographs in 1935 (Britton, *Yin Bone Photographs*, 102 pieces) and 1937 (Britton, *Yin Bone Rubbings*, remaining 15 pieces +some duplicates), to see how best to publish them. Color pigments were analyzed in *Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 9.149 (1937) and *HJAS* 2.1 (1937.) permission at that time was granted by James Thayer Gerould.