V1 Chapter 9 Primary Sources

Peach Blossom Spring

[Introduction] This fable, written by Tao Yuanming in 421, tells the story of a harmonious community who live cut off from all connections with the wider world. **[End introduction]**

Source: http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2090/pg2090.html

In the Jin Dynasty, during the Taiyuan era [376–397], there lived in Wuling Commandery a fisherman. One day, he paddled upstream and lost track of how far he had gone. Suddenly, he came upon a forest of peach blossoms stretching for several hundred paces along both banks of the waterway. There were no stray trees mixed among them. There was a fresh and pleasing scent of fragrant grass. Fallen peach blossoms were scattered about in abundance. Amazed at the sight, the fisherman pressed ahead. He wanted to make his way to the end of the forest. The forest ended at the headwaters of the stream, whereupon he arrived at a mountain.

There was a small cave in the side of the mountain. It seemed as though light was emitting from it. He abandoned his boat and went inside.

At first it was extremely narrow, allowing for only one person to squeeze through. After walking another twenty or thirty paces, he suddenly exited onto an open clearing. The land became flat

and broad. Houses were neatly arranged in rows. There were fertile fields, beautiful ponds, mulberry trees, bamboo groves and the like. Pathways crisscrossed the fields, and one could hear the intermingled sounds of chickens and dogs. There were people walking back and forth, busying themselves with planting crops. The clothing of the men and women was unlike anything he had ever seen. Old and young alike seemed happy and contented. When they saw the fisherman, they were all shocked and asked him where he had come from. He answered each and every one of their questions. They brought him home with them, setting out wine, killing chickens, and preparing food in his honor. When the other villagers heard about the fisherman, they all came to ask him about where he had come from. They told the fisherman that their ancestors had fled the chaos of the Qin Dynasty, and had led their wives and fellow villagers to this isolated area. No one had left since. As a result, they had become completely cut off from the outside world. When asking about the name of the current dynasty, it became apparent that they did not know about the Han Dynasty, much less the Wei or Jin Dynasties. As the fisherman told them in great detail the news from the outside world, they all sighed in despair. More people invited him to their homes to drink and eat. He stayed on for a few more days before taking his leave. As he was departing, some of them said to him, “No need to tell outsiders about us.”

He then left and found his boat, retracing his path and putting up markers as he went. When he arrived at the Commandery headquarters, he paid a formal visit to the Commandery governor and told him what had happened. The Commandery governor then sent people to retrace the fisherman’s steps. However, they got lost while looking for the markers that the fisherman had left behind and were unable to find the trail.

Liu Linzhi [style name Ziji] of Nanyang was man of refinement. When he heard about this story, he cheerfully made plans to go look for the village. However, he died of an illness before he got his chance. After that, nobody made any further inquiries.

***A Letter of Sidonius Apollinaris*. Abridged from the translation in Sheppard, "Fall of Rome"**

[Introduction] William Davis's Introduction from 1912: "Theodoric II reigned over the Visigoths in South Gaul from 453 to 466 A.D. He was the grandson of Alaric the Conqueror. This picture of him is drawn by a courtly Gallo-Roman bishop who had every reason to flatter this leader of the new lords of the land. Making ample allowances, however, we can conclude that the Gothic kings soon absorbed a veneer of Roman culture, and liked to keep up the show of a Ceasar, treating the provincials fairly graciously; although at heart they were still crude Barbarians." **[End introduction]**

Source: William Stearns Davis, *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, vol. 2 (Allyn and Bacon, 1912), 319–322. HathiTrust Digital Library.

"He is a prince well worthy of being known even by those not admitted to his intimate acquaintance, to such a degree have Nature and God, the sovran Arbiter of all things, accumulated in his person gifts of varied excellence. His character is such that even envy itself, that universal accompaniment of all royalty, could not defraud him of his due praise."

You ask me to describe his daily outdoor life. Accompanied by a very small suite he attends before daybreak the services of the Church in his own household; he is careful in his devotions, but although his tone is suppressed, you may perceive that this is more a matter of habit with him than of religious principle. The business of administration occupies the rest of the morning. An armed aide-de-camp stands beside his throne; his band of fur-clad bodyguards is admitted to the Palace in order that they may be near to the royal presence; while in order that there may not be too much noise, they are kept out of the room; and so they talk in murmurs, inside a railing and outside the hangings [of the hall of audience].

"Envoys from foreign powers are then introduced. The King listens much and says little. If their business calls for discussion, he puts it off; if for prompt action, he presses it forward. At eight o'clock he rises, and proceeds to examine either his treasures, or his stables. When he goes to hunt, he does not deem it suitable to the royal dignity to carry his bow upon his own person; when, however, any one points out to him a wild animal or bird, he puts out his hand, and receives his bow unstrung from a page: for, just as he regards it as an undignified thing to carry the weapon in its case, so does he deem it unmanly it should he prepared by another for his use. He selects an arrow and lets fly, first asking what you wish him to strike. You make your choice and invariably he hits the mark; indeed if there is ever any mistake, it is oftener in the sight of him who points out the object than in the aim of him who shoots at it.

"His banquets do not differ from those of a private gentleman. You never see the vulgarity of a vast mass of tarnished plate, heaped upon a groaning table by a puffing and perspiring slave. The only thing that is weighty is the conversation: for either serious subjects are discussed, or none at

all. Sometimes purple, and sometimes fine silk are employed in adorning the furniture of the dining room. The dinner is recommended by the skill of the cookery, not by the costliness of the provisions:—the plate by its brightness, not by its massive weight. The guests are much more frequently called upon to complain of thirst, from finding the goblet too seldom pressed, than to shun ebriety by refusing it. In brief, one sees there the elegance of Greece and promptness of Italy, the splendor of a public along with the personal attention of a private entertainment, likewise the regular order of a royal household. After dinner Theodoric either takes no siesta at all or a very short one. When he feels like it, he picks up the dice quickly, looks at them carefully, shakes them scientifically, throws them at once, jocularly addresses them, and awaits the result with patience. When the cast is a good one he says nothing: when bad, he laughs; good or bad he is never angry, and takes both philosophically.

"About three in the afternoon again come the cares of government, back come the suitors, and back those whose duty it is to keep them at a distance. On all sides is heard a wrangling and intriguing crowd, which, prolonged to the royal dinner hour, then only begins to diminish; after that it disperses, every man to seek his own patron. Occasionally, though not often, jesters are admitted to the royal banquet, without, however, being permitted to vent their malicious raillery upon any persons present. When he has risen from table, the guard of the treasury commences its nightly vigil: armed men take their station at all approaches to the palace, whose duty it will be to watch there during the first hours of the night."

An Account of the Person of Attila. From Jordanes's *History of the Goths*, trans. Mierow.

[Introduction] William Davis's Introduction from 1912: "Attila ruled the Huns from 434 to 453 A.D. During that time the "Scourge of God" held in terror nearly all the known world. A Gothic chronicler leaves us this account of his personal traits and appearance. Probably like other savage conquerors of his type Attila was a curious combination of qualities admirable and diabolical." **[End introduction]**

Source: William Stearns Davis, *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, vol. 2.(Allyn and Bacon, 1912), 322. HathiTrust Digital Library.

When Attila's brother Bleda who ruled over a great part of the Huns had been slain by Attila's treachery, the latter united all the people under his own rule. Gathering also a host of the other tribes which he then held under his sway he sought to subdue the foremost nations of the world—the Romans and the Visigoths. His army is said to have numbered 500,000 men. He was a man born into the world to shake the nations, the scourge of all lands, who in some way terrified all mankind by the dreadful rumors noised abroad concerning him. He was haughty in his walk, rolling his eyes hither and thither, so that the power of his proud spirit appeared in the movement of his body. He was indeed a lover of war, yet restrained in action, mighty in counsel, gracious to suppliants and lenient to those who were once received into his protection. He was short of stature, with a broad chest and a large head: his eyes were small, his beard thin and sprinkled with gray: and he had a flat nose and a swarthy complexion showing the evidences of his origin.