

*Neunzehn Alte Gedichte* (Gushi shijiu shou 古詩十九首) *aus der Han-Zeit*. By MANFRED W. FRÜHAUF. Wiesbaden: HARRASSOWITZ VERLAG, 2019. Pp. x + 369. €58 (paper and e-book).

At just 1,270 characters in 127 pentasyllabic couplets, the Nineteen Old Poems have been of enormous importance for the history of Chinese poetry and have generated a great amount of scholarship inside and outside of China. This new book by Manfred W. Frühauf may well be the longest study of the Nineteen Old Poems to date. The poems first appear as a group in the early sixth-century multigenre anthology *Wen xuan*, where they head the “Diverse Poetry” (*za shi*) section, placed before poems ascribed to several Han dynasty writers. No writers are given for any one of the Nineteen Old Poems in this early source, but the poems’ authorship has given rise to many speculations. Other collections, among them the sixth-century *Yutai xinyong* and the twelfth-century *Yuefu shiji*, have attributed several of the poems to certain poets, although no general agreement has been reached. The date of composition of the poems has also been discussed extensively. Based on linguistic and poetological features (rather than on the poems’ placement in the *Wen xuan*) most scholars agree that the Nineteen Old Poems are of Han dynasty origin, as indicated in the title of the book under review here.

Important editions with Chinese commentary include Sui Shusen’s *Gushi shijiu shou jishi* (1936) and Zhu Ziqing’s *Gushi shijiu shou shi* (1941). The only previous book-length study in a Western language was Jean-Pierre Diény’s *Les dix-neuf poèmes anciens* (1963). There is nothing comparable in English yet. Many eminent scholars have published research on the Nineteen Old Poems, among them Ma Maoyuan (1957), Yoshikawa Kōjirō (1959), Cai Zong-qī (1996), Daniel Hsieh (1998), and Xiaofei Tian (2009). Translations of the whole set or of individual poems are plentiful as well, especially into English, French, and German. One merit of the present study is that it takes the most important scholarship and previous translations into account, although not all to the same extent, as Frühauf declares that translations into German are of particular interest to him (p. 15).

At the heart of Frühauf’s book is the translation and detailed discussion of each of the Nineteen Old Poems (pp. 27–260). Two opening chapters (pp. 1–23) are dedicated to a general introduction of the poems and the challenges of translating them into Indo-European languages, as well as to a discussion of earlier translations and studies. Eleven brief thematic chapters dealing with a broad range of topics related to the poems conclude the book (pp. 261–335).

The nineteen chapters that make up the core of this book follow the same uniform structure. Frühauf first presents the text of the poem in Chinese characters and,

perhaps unnecessarily, Mandarin pronunciation, with rhyme words added in reconstructed historical pronunciations and brief comments on the rhyme scheme. He then offers his own translation, lists previous translations, and mentions textual variants. The discussion that follows the presentation of each poem is arranged under a number of headings, usually in this order: content, authorship, date of composition, geographical indications, descriptions of nature, persons appearing in the poem, literary allusions, peculiarities, special features, interpretation, structure. Each of the Nineteen Old Poems is discussed on about a dozen pages, of which the discussion of literary allusions, peculiarities, and interpretation take up most of the space. Frühauf broadly and impartially includes previous scholarship in all parts of his discussions, obviously aiming at the comprehensive representation of earlier views on the poems rather than at pushing certain interpretations of his own.

The concluding thematic chapters are mixed in character and usefulness. While they all concern relevant aspects—among them prosody, religious influences, the depiction of nature and of human beings in the poems, and reflections on translation and reader reception—these aspects are generally treated too cursorily to make substantial contributions to the history of Chinese poetry in general or to the study of the Nineteen Old Poems in particular. Especially the chapters on prosody (pp. 279–87) and traces of Buddhism in the poems (pp. 299–301) appear rather perfunctory. In the chapter on prosody it would have been helpful to get clearer information on the historical pronunciations given throughout the book, both with regard to what period they represent and on whose reconstructions they are based. I also wondered why Axel Schuessler’s Late Han reconstructions were not used, which would have been a perfect match.

While Harrassowitz is to be applauded for allowing Chinese characters to appear throughout the book, I could not get used to another, possibly editorial decision: to refer to the Nineteen Old Poems by the acronym NAG.

Compared with classical poetry of a more scholarly kind, which is often laden with rare expressions and arcane allusions, the Nineteen Old Poems are relatively easily accessible for beginners in the language and literature of early China, and are thus often used in the teaching of Classical Chinese. To everyone who reads German, this volume will make an excellent companion for such a purpose.

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