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Plucked-up Tales
Ancient Vietnamese Narratives

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BOOK FOUR

HOMEGROWN CONQUERORS, RULERS, AND RESISTANCE LEADERS



Trúng Trắc and Trúng Nhị, the warlike sisters. This image relates to Story Number 2 below.

The first millennium of the Common Era (year 1 to year 1000 CE) is often referred to by the Vietnamese as “the period of northern domination” (thời bắc thuộc), because throughout this period the ancestors of the Vietnamese were usually ruled by Generals and Administrators sent South from China. The Tales in this section concern periods of resistance to this domination on the part of the local people. – Eric Henry.

Author: Unknown, 15th Century CE.

1. The Story of Bồ Cái Đại Vương

(Lĩnh Nam Chí Quái, Narrative 30, “Truyện Bồ Cái Đại Vương 布蓋大王傳, The Story of the Great King Bồ Cái”)

This recounts the story of Phùng Hưng’s successful rebellion against Táng Rule. Hưng is succeeded by his son An, who reigns for less than three years before surrendering to a Táng force. The characters “Bồ Cái” are used to represent two native words. The item itself states that these words meant “father and mother,” and were intended to celebrate the concern for the common folk shown by the protagonist. It has also been suggested that these two graphs may have been intended to stand for the words “vua cái,” a native way of saying “great king.” Item 1.2 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one, but has many colorful details at the end concerning appearances of Phùng Hưng’s Spirit that are lacking in this account. – Eric Henry.

Đại Vương’s surname was Phùng 馮 and his given name was Hưng 興. He was a person of Đường Lâm 唐林 in Giao Châu 交州. He was a Border Chieftain of the Man Tribesmen, and was known as Lang 郎. He was a wealthy man, courageous and strong, and was able to wrestle with water buffalo and fight tigers. His younger brother Hãi 駭 was also a person of great physical strength. He could lift weights of a thousand



catties, and lift boulders that weighed ten *hộc*, or heft a small boat, and walk with it for ten miles. The Man Tribesmen all feared his strength.

In the Đại Lịch 大曆 Reign period under Táng Dàzōng, when there were military disturbances in Giāo Zhōu, the brothers subdued all the hamlets and villages, after which their territories came into their hands. Húng changed his name to Cự Lão 巨老, and Hãi changed his name to Cự Lực 巨力, and adopted the additional titles of Đô Quân 都君 and Đô Bảo 都保. The Chieftains of Đường Lâm 唐林 and Phong Châu 峯州 all submitted to him, and from then on his prestige grew great. Cao Chính Bình 高正平, the Military Overseer of the Táng, came with troops under his command but, unable to prevail, fell into despondency and rage, which caused him to fall ill and die. Húng entered and occupied the Capital, after which he ruled the land for fourteen years and died. The people wished to elevate Hãi to take his place, but the Officer Tá Lại Đầu Mục Bồ Phá Lặc 佐吏頭目蒲破勤, a man of great strength who could push mountains over, refused to go along with this, so the people shifted their support to Húng's son An 安, who was raised to position of Capital Commandant to satisfy the aspirations of the people. To avoid Bồ Phá Lặc, Hãi went to a tribal community in Chu Nham 朱巖, and afterward died in unknown circumstances.

To honor his father, An gave him the name Bố Cái Đại Vương 布蓋大王 because, in the regional language, fathers were called “bố,” and mothers “cái,” so this was a way of offering respect to him. Phụng An continued his father's rule for for three years. Dézōng then sent Zhào Chāng 趙昌 South to be the Chief of An Nam. On arriving there, Zhào Chāng sent an Emissary to induce An to come to his side. An and his tribal followers finally surrendered to Zhào Chāng, and all members of the Phùng Lineage dispersed and disappeared.

After Phùng Hưng's death, he made miraculous appearances, and the people, believing him to be a Spirit, established a Temple dedicated to him West of the capital, where they offered sacrifices to him. Whenever they met with troubles, such as the depredations of marauders, or the appearance of suspicious strangers, they would go there to offer prayers and were able to gain clear knowledge of their disasters and blessings, so the sacrifices were never broken off. Today the premises are still called “Lang” 郎.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

2. The Story of the Two Pure and Efficacious Ladies of the Trưng Lineage

(*Lĩnh Nam Chí Quái*, Narrative 31, “Truyện Trinh Linh Nhị Trưng Phu Nhân 貞靈二徵夫人傳, Story of the Two Pure and Efficacious Trưng Ladies”)

This recounts the story of the rebellion against Chinese domination led by two sisters, Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị, and the founding of a temple to their spirits. The account goes on to describe how in the time of Lý Anh Tông, the sisters cause rain to descend, ending a long drought, in response to which the King orders the building of a particularly fine Temple to honor them. Finally, the account records a new honorific title given to the Temple during the Trần Dynasty. Item 1.5 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one. – Eric Henry.

Upon examining the *Records of the Historian*, we see that the two Trưng 徵 ladies were Lạc 貉 people. The elder bore the name Trắc 側 and the younger the name Nhị 貳. They were natives of Mê Linh 麓冷 Village in Phong 峰 Prefecture, and were daughters of the Lạc 貉 General of Giao Châu. They were given in marriage to Thi Sách 詩索 of Giao Châu, and were people of bold and active dispositions.

At that time, Tô Định 蘇定, the Governor of Giao Châu, was greedy and violent, and the people under his Prefectural Rule in consequence suffered and were miserable. Indignant at this, the elder of the two ladies joined her younger sister in raising troops, with which they held Giao Châu, and then advanced to neighboring commanderies. The regions of Cửu Chân 九真, Nhật Nam 日南, and Hợp Phố 合浦 all rallied to their cause, and they were, at length, joined by more than sixty cities in the Territory of Lĩnh Nam 嶺南. She then set herself up as King and adopted the Lineage Name of Trưng. The Trưng King established her Capital at Ô Diên 烏鳶, and Tô Định fled to the Southern Sea. Upon hearing this news, Hàn Vũđì sent Mã Viên 馬援 and Lưu Long 劉隆 with a great Army to strike them and, upon going to Lạng Sơn 浪山, the Sisters resisted the attack for more than a year.

Upon finding that Mã Viên's forces were numerous and powerful, the Sisters feared that they might not prevail, and withdrew their troops to Cẩm Khê 禁溪. Many of their soldiers deserted, and the Sisters, being surrounded, met their end at Lăng Bạc 浪泊. Some say that they made their way to Hy Sơn 希山 Mountain, and then went on to parts unknown. Feeling sorrow for their fates, the people established a Temple to them at the entrance to Hải Giang 喝江 River and worshipped them there. Whenever they met with disasters and prayed there, the souls of the Sisters would make an efficacious response.

In the time of Lý Anh Tông 李英宗 (1136–1175; reigned 1138–1175) there was a great drought, and the King sent the Buddhist Master Uy Tịnh 威淨 there to pray for rain. In response, rain came after one day and the weather turned refreshingly cool. Shortly thereafter the King fell asleep, and in a dream saw two people wearing rich headgear dressed in green clothing with red sashes. They rode iron horses and passed by,

following in the rain's wake. The King thought this strange and questioned them.

In answer, the Chief Spirit said, "We are the two Trưng Sisters and, in obedience to the Lord on High, have caused rain to descend."

The King, full of gratitude, pleaded for more time in order to suitably express his thanks. On waking up, he directed that a particularly handsome Temple be built so that they might be worshipped there. After that they again appeared to the King in a dream and asked that the Temple be built in Cổ Lai. The King did as they wished and directed that the Temple be dedicated to "the Two Pure and Efficacious Ladies" (Zhēnlíng Èr Fūrén 貞靈二夫人).

In the Trần Dynasty the place was given the additional holy name of "the Mighty, Victorious, and Pure Protectresses" (Xiǎnlìè Zhìshèng Chúnbǎo 顯烈制勝純保), and sacrifices have never ceased to be performed there.

Author: Unknown, 14th Century CE.

3. The Story of the Dragon's Claw of Khuốc Lỗ

(Lĩnh Nam Chí Quái, Narrative 29, "Truyện Long Trảo Khuốc Lỗ 龍爪卻虜傳, Story of the Khuốc Lỗ Dragon's Claw")

This tells of a series of local heroes who established independent Kingdoms in the South. The second, Triệu Quang Phục, maintains a military stronghold in the "one-night" swamp created by Tiên Dung and Chử Đồng Tử (see Section 2, Tale no. 3) which serves as a base to conduct guerrilla operations against his enemies. A spiritual being confers a Turtle-claw upon him which, used as a crossbow trigger, renders him invincible. But he loses the magic trigger in the same way experienced by An Dương Vương (his daughter gives the trigger to her husband, the son of his military rival), and he is defeated by Nam Đế of the former Lý Dynasty. Item 1.3 in *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* is parallel to this one.— Eric

Henry.

On consulting the *Records of the Historian* and accounts passed down among the people, we see that in the family of Tiên Nam Đế 前南帝, there was a Prince with the surname Lý 李 and the given name Phật Tử 佛子, called Bôn 奔, in Thái Bình District. He was born with remarkable gifts, and served the [Chinese] House of Lương 梁 (Chinese: Liáng) unwillingly as an Official. There was also a person named Tinh Thiều 井韶 who was good at literary composition. He was a Lại Bộ Official of the Lũng who was raised by Thái Tông to the position of Môn Lang Quảng Dương. Ashamed to serve in that capacity, Thiều returned with Lý Bôn to his village.

When the Thú Sứ Tiêu Tư 蕭諮 proved to be cruel and violent, he joined with a band of hardy heroes and sallied North to occupy the City. When Lâm Ấp 林邑 invaded Nhật Nam 日南, Bôn was able to send Phạm Tu 范修 to attack and dispel them, and in the wake of this victory, he assumed the title Nam Việt Đế 南越帝, established the Reign Period Thiên Đức 天德, and changed the name of his land to Vạn Xuân 萬春. After reigning for eight years, he passed away.

At that time there was a King of the Việt people of the Triệu Lineage named Quang Phục 光復, originally a person of Châu Diên 珠鸞, who was General of the Left under Nam Đế of the former Lý Dynasty. In Châu Diên there was a great swamp covering an undefined swath of territory. When Tiên Nam Đế passed away, the Việt King collected more than twenty thousand troops from the remnants of that Ruler's Army, and stationed them in the swamp (now called "Nhất Dạ Trạch 一夜澤," the "One-Night Swamp"). After a twelve-year period, the King made a prayer to all the Spirits of Heaven and Earth, and was given a Dragon's Claw by a spiritual being (said among the people to be Chử Đồng Tử 褚童子)



with instructions to affix it to his headgear. After that, he was victorious wherever he went, the enemy fleeing from his advance, and he was able to behead the enemy General Dương Sần 楊孱. The Lương forces had to retreat, and the King occupied Long Biên 龍編 City, took the Cities of Cổ Loa 古螺 and Vũ Ninh 武寧 into his domain as well, and assumed the title “King of South Việt” (“Nam Việt Quốc Vương”). The King cut off his land from the surrounding territory, fixed the boundaries at the Quân Thần 君臣 Plateau, and ruled the area, later absorbing Ô Diên 烏鳶 as well.

Nhã Lang 雅郎, the son of Hậu Nam Đế 後南帝,¹ asked to marry Triệu Quang Phục’s daughter, Cảo Nương 杲娘, and the King consented. Nhã Lang spoke with Cảo Nương, saying, “In former times our two fathers were enemies, and now they are members of one family. This is truly a fine thing!”

Then, questioning. Cảo Nương, he said, “What magical technique does your father have that has allowed him to defeat my father in all their military encounters?”

Cảo Nương told him the truth and, acceding to a scheme of her husband, she stole the headdress with the embedded Dragon’s Claw and showed it to Nhã Lang. Nhã Lang secretly replaced the Claw with a false substitute and said to Cảo Nương. “I must now interrupt our close relationship to go back and pay a visit to my father. If by any chance some unforeseen event should occur, such as your father’s being unable to prevail on the battlefield, and should you be compelled to flee in any direction, then you must use the goose feathers in your brocaded mattress as a mark, and I shall come to your aid.”

Then Nam Đế came with troops to attack him. King Triệu, unaware of what had occurred, stood at first before his troops, put on his

¹ This was Lý Phất Tử, mentioned at the beginning of the account.

headgear, sat, and awaited the enemy's approach. As the opposing forces continuously advanced, the King realized that he would be unable to resist them and fled at once to the South, taking along his daughter. Suddenly, he saw Long Vương who, pointing to his daughter, said, "Your daughter is scattering feathers along the way. She alone is the enemy!"

The King at once withdrew his sword and beheaded her. He then continued on his horse until he came to the ocean estuary at Tiểu Nha 小鴉. Blocked there by the sea, his path of escape was cut off. But then he saw the Ocean Emperor part the waters, providing him with a further path. The King went further, and the water closed over him.

Nam Đế came in his pursuit to that place and gazed at the endless ocean. King Triệu had occupied his Throne for thirteen years. The people in his land regarded him as a supernatural being, so they founded a Temple at the ocean estuary and performed sacrifices to his Spirit there.

After pursuing King Triệu to his destruction, Nam Đế returned to his strongholds in Lỗ Thành 螺城 and Vũ Ninh 武寧, made his elder brother the Thái Bình Hầu 太平侯 ("Pacification Lord"), charged with holding Long Biên 龍編 City, and conferred the title An Ninh Hầu on his General Lý Tấn Đĩnh 李晉鼎, making him responsible for holding Ô Diên 烏鳶.

Nam Đế held his Throne for thirty-one years, and was at length destroyed by the Suí General Liú Fāng 劉方.