

Critical Notes and Chinese Sources and Contexts
for Unpublished Stèles

The stèles here transcribed are to be found among Segalen's manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (NAFr. 25822). The numbering of stèles becomes speculative at this point, but we follow the conventional ordering of the manuscripts used by Bouillier, Bien, and Taylor.

S65 "On Composition" (DE LA COMPOSITION)

fù bǐ xìng 賦比興

Unlike the majority of the unpublished stèles, the manuscripts for this stèle give a very clear indication of what Segalen was planning to use for an epigraph. The three characters given here are not only written throughout Segalen's drafts, but are also written in the upper right-hand corner of the last draft in the way that Segalen normally wrote epigraphs that he had definitively chosen. Following Segalen's translation on the manuscript drafts, they might be rendered: "Description. Comparison. Allegory." (See below.) Interlinear revisions were made to two words on the manuscript. In the first case, Segalen struck out the word "direct" [*directe*], which he had obviously taken straight out of Couvreur's commentary, and quickly scrawled the almost illegible word "familiar" [*familière*] probably as a more suitable antonym for "strange" [*étrangère*]. In the second case, Segalen seems to have been undecided about whether the final image of the stèle should be two deep shutters [*volets*] thrown open at a window, or the space framed by crenellations [*crénellations*] of the sort that are characteristic both of the great Ming walls (the "Great

Wall” of China) or any other traditional Chinese city wall and also of medieval European battlements alike. In the latter case we have preserved the original word in the text and placed the revision in angle brackets.

Along with Segalen’s unfinished “Essay on Exoticism,” this poem’s advocacy of allegory is often taken by critics to represent Segalen’s own *ars poetica* for his “Chinese” works: “the transfer of the Empire of China to the Empire of the self is constant” (23 September 1911, *Trahison fidèle* 108; see the note in VOL. 1 to SOI). As we have noted elsewhere, this transfer often occurs in the transition between stanzas, where the circles—borrowed from the Chinese paragraph divisions in Wieger’s collections of texts—indicate an intellectual movement comparable to the turn of a sonnet.

As cited in Segalen’s manuscript notes, the immediate source for the trio of much-discussed literary terms is the following commentary in the introduction to Couvreur’s translation of the *Book of Odes* 詩經:

In poetic composition one distinguishes three elements: description or simple narration 賦 *fu*, similitude or comparison 興 *xing*, and allegory 比 *bi*.

The first part of a similitude or comparison 興 *xing* is called 興意 *xing yi* borrowed idea, 借映 *jie yi* borrowed light or image, 賓意 *bin yi* or 客意 *ke yi* idea unfamiliar to the subject. The second part, which is the application of the first part to the subject in question, is called 正意 *zheng yi* or 轉正 *zhuan zheng* idea that refers to or returns directly to the subject, 主意 *zhu yi* idea proper to the subject.

Allegory is a simile whose application is not expressed, like a fable whose moral must be guessed by the reader. The application, thus left to the wisdom of commentators, is not always free of difficulty. In several places, after a good many conjectures, it remains uncertain or obscure.

Dans la composition poétique on distingue trois éléments: la description ou simple narration 賦 *fóu*, la similitude ou comparaison 興 *hing* et l’allégorie 比 *pi*.

La première partie d’une similitude ou comparaison

s'appelle 興意 h́ng í idée empruntée, 借映 tsié íng lumière ou image empruntée, 賓意 Pí í ou 客意 k'ò í idée étrangère au sujet. La seconde partie, qui est l'application de la première au sujet traité, se nomme 正意 tchéng í ou 轉正 tchouén tchéng idée qui se rapporte ou revient directement au sujet, 主意 tchòu í idée propre au sujet.

L'allégorie est une similitude dont l'application n'est pas exprimée, et comme une fable dont la moralité doit être devinée par le lecteur. L'application ainsi laissée à la sagacité des commentateurs n'est pas toujours exempte de difficulté. En plus d'un endroit, après maintes conjectures, elle reste incertaine ou obscure. (CK iv)

The ordering and translation of the three poetic terms in the stèle thus varies from Couvreur's, as explicitly formulated in the manuscript drafts:

Couvreur says:	Descript[ion] 賦
	Simil[itude] 興
	Alleg[ory] 比
I say:	賦 descript[ion]
	比 bǐ compar[ison]
	興 allegory
Couvreur dit:	Descript. 賦
	Simil. 興
	Allég. 比
Moi je dis:	賦 descript.
	比 pì compar.
	興 allégorie

This schematic dialogue thus seems to have been Segalen's initial idea for the stèle, involving a partial reordering and retranslation of these poetical terms before he decided to draft a parallel series of redefined and revalued terms in which allegory emerges triumphant. This little schematic, in fact, provides the key to the stèle, and yet also makes it considerably more difficult to understand, since it suggests that Segalen is swapping the terms that he is redefining: they both pronounce upon "allégorie," but they

disagree about which Chinese term is designated by it. The original passage that Couvreur is discussing appears in “The Great Preface” to the ancient *Book of Odes* 詩經, which reads as follows, in Stephen Owen’s translation:

故詩有六義焉。一曰風。二曰賦。三曰比。四曰興。
五曰頌

Thus there are six principles (*yi*) in the poems: 1) Airs (*feng*); 2) exposition (*fu*); 3) comparison (*pi*); 4) affective image (*hsing*); 5) Odes (*ya*); 6) Hymns (*sung*). (Owen, *Readings* 45).

As Owen observes: “Much ink has been spilled to explain why the ‘Six Principles’ (*liu-yi*) are presented in this sequence. The problem is that two essentially distinct orders have been mixed together. ‘Airs’ (*feng*), ‘Odes,’ and ‘Hymns’ are the three main division of the *Book of Songs*. *Fu*, *pi*, and *hsing* are three modes of presentation under which any poem in the collection might be classified” (45-46).

A note on Segalen’s manuscript reads: “The Master says was written during that rainy and warm stay in Beijing, at the Richard house, which was furnished with mats” [*Le Maître dit a été écrite durant ce séjour pluvieux et chaud de Péking, dans la maison Richard meublée de nattes*]. Working titles for the stèle include “The Master says” [*Le Maître dit*] and “On Literary Composition” [*De la composition littéraire*]. Segalen dismissed the stèle with the following note on the manuscript: “Too enumerative among the warm Steles of the Middle.—Take up again as a *Painting*” [*Trop énumérative dans les Stèles chaudes du Milieu.—A reprendre comme Peinture*], that is, one of the ekphrastic sketches in his *Peintures*.

In addition to several versions of the epigraph, the manuscript also contains a note on *fu* 賦: “Levy, tax, contr[ibution]/ maintenance [of] army/ Poetic descript[ion]” [*Impôt, taxe, contr. / entret. armée/ Descript poétique*], an abbreviated version of the entry for that character in Couvreur’s *Dictionnaire classique de la langue chinoise*.

S66 “The Empress Sings” (L’IMPÉRATRICE CHANTE)

As with the other posthumously published stèles, one can only guess at what Segalen would have ultimately chosen for an epigraph. In this case, the anecdote from which the story is drawn in Wiegier’s *Textes historiques* happens to offer exactly the sort of short phrase that Segalen selected as an epigraph for other such adapted stories: *gongren liang shou* 宮人兩手, “the ‘concubine’s two hands” or “the two hands of the lady in waiting.” We have provided this phrase for an epigraph, but it must be stressed that it is a speculative interpolation.

A comment added to a late manuscript draft of this much-revised stèle reads: “An unskilled perversity. The means a bit crude. Too many veins and too much surgery, and confection—don’t send to Aug[usto Gilbert de Voisins]” [*Une perversité peu adroite. Des moyens un peu gros. Trop de veines et de chirurgie, et de confiserie—pas expéd. à Aug.*]. A slight variation to the ending on one manuscript draft reads: “There it is. / There is my poem [my own] & my pleasure” [*C’est là. / Voilà mon poème [à moi] & mon plaisir*].

A note after the title on the first manuscript draft reads: “often use this title simplified: The Emperor says, etc.” [*employer souvent ce titre simplifié: L’Empereur dit etc.*].

The first ten manuscript drafts were reproduced in *Création* 4:7–18. The eleventh and final draft, which was presented to Debussy, was published in *Victor Segalen, Poète de l’Asie* (Galerie-Librairie Palmes, Paris, 1950) and in *Poésie Présente* 6 (August 1972) (Taylor 1978, 723).

The story of this stèle is derived from the following anecdote in Wiegier’s *Textes historiques*:

One day, as a woman from the harem was pouring water for the emperor, the latter admired the whiteness of her hands. The following day, the empress sent him a candy box. When he opened it, he found the two severed hands of the woman.

Un jour, une dame du harem versant de l’eau à l’empereur, celui-ci admira la blancheur de ses mains. Le lendemain,

l'impératrice lui envoya une boîte à friandises. Quand il l'ouvrit, il y trouva les deux mains coupées de la dame. (TH 1902)

一日帝浣手宮中，覩宮人手白，悅之，他日遣人送食盒於帝，啟之，則宮人兩手也。 (TH 1901)

The original story concerns the Southern Song emperor Guangzong 光宗 (r. 1190–1194) and his empress, who seems to be the speaker of the poem. The unfortunate lady-in-waiting, Cai Yu [Ts'ai-Yu], is a figure invented by Segalen and who also appears in S17 “Mirroirs” and in Segalen’s novel *Le fils du ciel*.

S67 “Monumental gate” (PORTE MONUMENTALE)

There is no indication of the intended epigraph for this stèle.

The manuscript for this stèle includes numerous marginal comments:

This is a memorable arrival, into the most ancient heart of China, so close to the cradle and the throne of the [Xia] 夏. The immense bulging gate with the horizontal dome. My solitary walk on the walls overlooking the Fen-he [汾河, tributary of the Yellow River] and the entire valley. Something beautiful to be found only in Imperial China! [*Ceci est une arrivée mémorable, dans le plus vieux cœur de la Chine, si près du berceau et du trône des 夏. L'immense porte ventrue au beau dôme horizontal. Ma promenade solitaire sur les murs dominant le Fen-ho et toute la vallée. Belle chose sous la Chine Impériale seulement!*]

To be revised and placed in the Steles by the Wayside. [*À reprendre, à poser dans les Stèles du Bord du chemin.*]

Revise and intensify the opposition between the gate and the emptiness of the content. [*Reprendre et exacerber l'opposition entre la porte et la vacuité du contenu.*]

The roofs are dented with crenellations. *Bricks and Tiles*.
[*Les faites se mâchurent de créneaux*. Br. et Tuiles.]

As one of the manuscript notes cited above indicates, the source for this stèle is Segalen's collection of unpublished travel writings *Bricks and Tiles* [*Briques et tuiles*]. A further note on the manuscript specifies the passage in question, dated 4 September 1909, in Piangyang fu, entitled "On a Town in Ruins" [*Sur une ville ruinée*]:

Through the countryside, full of green, full of yellow, ripe with crops; near the river and following its changing course and its shifting banks; protected by the mountain that restricts and pacifies my view, I walked towards the ancient town with its famous walls to find there a bit of its glory and to immerse myself in it.

The earth, raised up into an arch, crosses the hollow of the circular moats. The two lions do not stop me. A final leap, over the void beneath the wooden bridge about to collapse. . . . The Northern Gate, the whole thing bulging out, shaped like a mouth ready to receive me and devour me.

But as soon as it is passed, the path breaks off, doubles, and becomes circular. A long, disturbing passage, a curved corridor whose roof is dented with crenellations!

Then it opens, the inner courtyard, adorned with the ruined pagoda . . . a third gate dominates it, with a severe and classical roof, and the long walkway finally penetrates into the town . . .

The town . . . where is it then? . . . not a soul . . . you can't help but whisper . . . your legs stop, you don't dare move: the merchants sleep in their little shops or color their nails. The town is more silent than a tomb . . .

(Revise the opposition between the power of the ramparts, of the Gate, and the emptiness of the content . . .).

Par la campagne toute verte et toute jaune et toute mûre de moissons; près du fleuve et suivant son cours variable et ses rives changeantes; protégé par la montagne qui borne et apaise ma vue, j'ai marché vers la ville ancienne aux mu-

railles renommées, afin d'y retrouver un peu de sa gloire, et de m'y replonger.

La terre, qui s'exhausse sur une arche, franchit la creusée des fossés circulaires. Les deux lions ne m'arrêtent pas. Le dernier saut, à vide par-dessus le pont de bois tout prêt à rompre . . . La Porte du Nord, se bombant tout entière, se tend comme une bouche pour me recevoir et me dévorer.

Mais sitôt passé, la course se brise, se double et devient circulaire. Long corridor inquiétant, couloir courbé dont le faite se mâchure de créneaux! Et voici la seconde porte.

Qu'elle s'ouvre, la cour intérieure, ornée de la pagode qui se ruine. . . une troisième porte la domine, aux toits durs et classiques, et la longue allée pénètre enfin dans la ville . . . La ville, où donc est-elle? . . . personne . . . on parle bas malgré soi . . . les jambes s'arrêtent, on n'ose marcher: les marchands dorment dans leur boutiques ou se teignent les ongles. La ville est plus taciturne qu'un tombeau . . .

(Reprendre opposition entre puissance des remparts, de la Porte, et la vacuité du contenu . . .). (*OC* 1:872–73)

Segalen also wrote about this experience to his wife, in a letter of 7 September 1909:

No idea what day of the week it is. Here we are in the heart of ancient China, my most beloved Yvonne. We go from a very old town to a still older one, Piang-yang fu, where we slept two days ago, and which received the legendary emperor Yao four thousand years ago. There remains of him the memory, and a belt of ramparts that, while not going back to such an exaggerated date, are nonetheless very beautiful. The road rises toward the semicircular entry gate, which bulges toward those who approach. A demilune corridor, between two high crenellated walls, leads to two lateral openings. An interior court. A third gate and you are finally in the village. You can see that, as always, the layout is grandiose in China. Only the walls are second rate: bricks and earth. Inside, a dead, wholly dead town. It is the great grandmother who no longer can tell the stories of her youth. The few boutiques house only idle workers who sleep or

do their nails. Silence, an astonishing silence for a Chinese town. Few or no monuments. But the town is proud of its name and that its outer wall has the form of a tortoise shell.

Jour de la semaine entièrement ignoré. Nous voici au cœur de la très vieille Chine, Mavonne toute aimée. Nous allons d'une ville très vieille à une autre plus âgée encore, Piangyang-fou, où nous avons couché il y a deux jours, a reçu l'empereur légendaire Yao, il y a quatre mille ans. Il lui en reste le souvenir tout d'abord, et une enceinte de remparts qui, sans remonter à cette époque exagérée est cependant fort belle. La route monte vers la porte d'entrée, qui, semi-circulaire, se bombe vers l'arrivant. Un couloir en demilune, entre deux hautes murailles crénelées, mène aux deux baies latérales. Cour intérieure. Troisième porte, et l'on est enfin dans la ville. Tu peux voir que, comme toujours, le plan est grandiose en Chine. Seulement les murs sont en toc: terre et briques. Au-dedans, ville morte, entièrement morte. C'est la grande aïeule qui ne sait même plus dire les histoires de son enfance. Les rares boutiques ne logent que des marchands désœuvrés qui dorment, ou se font les ongles. Silence, un silence étonnant pour une ville chinoise. Peu ou pas de monuments. Mais la ville est fière de son nom, et de ce que son enceinte a la forme d'une écaille de tortue. (*Lettres de Chine*, 157–158)

Segalen uses the word *génie* (and sometimes also *démon*) to refer to the *shen* 神, a whole host of minor Chinese deities both good and bad that intrigued Segalen as a figure. For other references to *shen* 神, see S08, S23, S49, S51, and especially S55, and also the notes to S60 and S02 (“Abyss”), all in VOL. 1.

S68 “Dead Stones” (PIERRES MORTES)

There is no indication of the intended epigraph for this stèle.

Like many of the stèles in this section, this one seems based primarily on Segalen's travels in China rather than on a specific textual source. A comment on the manuscript reads: “After a walk, made a wonderful discovery with P. Richard. Beneath a

gray, low, and heavy sky we saw, straddling the southern wall of the Temple of Agriculture, dismal and heavy antiquated monuments: niches of rivers, mountains, surrounded by a frame of black tiles” [*Après une promenade, une découverte admirable, faite avec P. Richard. Enjambant le mur sud du Temple de l’Agriculture, nous avons vu sous un ciel lourd, gris et bas, les mornes et lourds monuments désuets: niches des fleuves, des montagnes, entourées du carré des tuiles noires*].

The Temple of Agriculture [*Xiannong tan* 先農壇] is on the Western side of the entrance to the Chinese district or Outer City of Beijing. In a note on the initial publication of this stèle in *Création*, Demiéville provides the following gloss: “In this architectural grouping are sculpted niches where sacrifices are made to the sacred Five Mountains, the cosmic Four Seas, etc. I think that Segalen was struck by the abandonment of these monuments (the walls’ gates are covered with black tiles) while visiting them on a day with bad weather and imagined an emperor who would have decreed them defunct” [*Il y a dans cet ensemble architectural des niches sculptées où l’on sacrifiait aux Cinq Montagnes sacrées, aux Quatre Mers cosmiques, etc. Je pense que Segalen a été frappé de l’abandon de ces monuments (les portes de l’enceinte sont recouvertes de tuiles noires) lors d’une visite par mauvais temps et a imaginé un empereur qui les aurait décrétés désuets*] (quoted from Bien, 1973, 22).

Segalen’s manuscript shows that he had also considered the alternative title: “According to Our Will” [*A notre vouloir*].

S69 “Lodestone” (PIERRE-AIMANTE) *cí shí* 慈石

Although Segalen left no notes on the manuscript for an epigraph, nevertheless, since the entire stèle is conceived on the punning bilingual wordplay between the French and Chinese words for “magnet,” both of which carry the sense of “loving,” it seems very likely to us that Segalen would have signaled this wordplay in the epigraph that we have chosen: *cí shí* 慈石, a lodestone or magnet, literally “compassion stone.” The double sense of the French word for magnet, *aimant*, is nicely stressed in the title with the adjectival form of *pierre aimante*, “loving stone,” perhaps also with a hint of *aimanté*, “magnetized.” The title and

conjectured epigraph would thus both bear a close resemblance to S29 (“Pierre musicale” / 樂石).

In a commentary on the manuscript, Segalen writes: “Metaphors not followed through enough. Play of ideas, of the magnetized needle with a large immobile stele. Play of feelings—these inexpressible” [*Métaphores trop peu suivies. Jeu d’idées, de l’aiguille aimantée à une grosse stèle immobile. Jeux de sentiments, ceux-là inexprimables*]. In the phrase “I can no longer designate the South with my finger,” Segalen is also playing with a comparison between a compass with a magnetized needle and the famous ancient Chinese pointing chariots which had a little wooden pointing figure that was connected to the wheels through a series of gears so that it would always indicate south no matter which way the vehicle turned. See also S63.

A note later added to the second manuscript draft reads: “for the Steles by the Wayside” [*pour les Stèles du bord du chemin*].

S70 “Two Brushes, One Heart” (DEUX PINCEAUX,
UN CŒUR)

yuán bái mèng hún xián bēi huā xià 元白夢魂銜杯花下

Although the epigraph for this stèle cannot be known with absolute certainty, it is extremely likely that Segalen was planning to use the Chinese phrase that he copied onto his manuscript draft along with his own translation and a brief note (paraphrased from Corentin Pétilion’s collection of literary allusions; see below), as follows:

元白夢魂銜杯花下 “Yuan-zhen and Bai Ju-yi were dreaming, the cup at their lips, beneath blossoming bushes.” These two mandarin poets were so attached to one another that when the one would compose verses about their private conversations, the other would feel himself inspired to take up his brush to describe the same feelings. Lit[erary] Allus[ions] I. 22.

“Yuen-tchen et Pei Kiu-yi rêvaient, la coupe aux lèvres, sous les arbustes en fleurs.” Ces deux mandarins poètes étaient si attachés l’un à l’autre que lorsque l’un composait

des vers sur leurs entretiens intimes l'autre se sentait inspiré de prendre le pinceau pour décrire les mêmes sentiments. Allus. Litt. I. 2.

A more literal translation of the Chinese would be: “Yuan and Bai dreamed they were drinking together in a grove.”

Segalen wrote the place of composition on the manuscript draft as [Tianjin] “天津” along with the date 4 October 1911. Another manuscript note states: “could serve as dedication to Louis Laloy—was set aside as a bit thin, a bit formulaic” [*pourrait servir de dédicace à Louis Laloy—a été réservée comme un peu menue, un peu verbale*]. In addition to being an opium enthusiast who wrote *The Book of Smoke*, Segalen's friend Louis Laloy (1874–1944) was an important music critic who wrote the first biography of Debussy and a study of *La musique chinoise*.

Segalen's manuscript indicates the source of this stèle to be the following entry from Corentin Pétillon's reference work on Chinese literary allusions and set phrases, *Allusions littéraires*:

元白夢魂銜杯花下. The spirits of Yuan and Bai dreamed that they were drinking together (biting the cup) in a grove in bloom. These two friends, the one a Minister and the other a President's Minister, would sometimes go for walks in the gardens of the monastery [*Zi'en si*] 茲恩寺. Then one day, Bai Ju-yi [白]居易 suddenly seized by the thought of Yuan Zhen [元]楨 who had just left for [*Liang zhou*] 梁州, composed some verses on these intimate conversations. At that moment, an analogous inspiration befell Bai [*sic*] and dictated to him the same poetic memory. This fact proves that despite distance, the hearts of friends are always in unison. (孟榮本事詩). [Note: for Bai read Yuan.] (Pétillon, classif. 10, p. 16)

元白夢魂銜杯花下. L'esprit de Yuen et Pé rêva qu'ils buvaient ensemble (mordaient la coupe) sous les bosquets fleuris. Ces deux amis, l'un Ministre et l'autre Président de Ministère, allaient parfois se promener dans les jardins de la bonzerie 茲恩寺. Or, un jour Pé Kiu-i 居易, saisi subitement de la pensée de Yuen Tchen 楨 qui venait de partir

pour 梁州, composa des vers sur ces entretiens intimes. A cet instant aussi une inspiration analogue s'emparait de Pé [sic] et lui dictait le même souvenir poétique. Ce fait prouve que malgré les distances, les cœurs des amis sont toujours à l'unisson. (孟榮本事詩).

The Chinese names seem to have been deliberately invented for the stèle, but without knowing the specific Chinese characters for them (Segalen made no such notations on his manuscript) it is extremely difficult to guess what they might suggest, except in the last case. “Mi-yuan” is undoubtedly *miyuan* 秘園 (Secret Garden), a private term for sincere or intimate friendship that Segalen used as the epigraph for S20 “To the One” and also considered using for a personal seal. (See the note to S20 in VOL. 1.) None of our conjectures for the first two names is entirely satisfactory.

S71 “I Entrust Myself to You, Shadows” (JE ME
CONFIE EN VOUS, TÉNÈBRES)

There is no indication of the intended epigraph for this stèle. On the manuscript a line is drawn through the stèle with the word “unfinished” [*inachevé*] written at the bottom. Another manuscript note reads: “Too much of a lived experience to be written down” [*Trop vécu pour être écrit*].

The projected stèle was to be based on a text originally written for the 11 September 1909 entry in *Briques et tuiles* written at Huayin miao 華陰廟 (Huayin temple):

I entrust myself to you, Shadows . . .

So slowly that I will arrive first, the night moves. It conquers the Sky. But I know that its route is long, and I put my hopes in these belated reflections on the clouds, echoes of the day and the Sun's lingering scent.

Then, suddenly, my route dropped into the earth, my vast route rounded only by the circle of the horizon: it digs its way into these fields, fields open to the labor of eternal passers-by: their steps and their wheels dig into it a wake that grows deeper every day.

There, there is another night, no longer delayed, but heavy, dense, very low and very dense. To the right, to the left, to the touch of my outstretched fingers, two walls protect the defile. The invisible footpath no longer extends before me but rises straight up toward the vertical sky; it lifts my lost gaze, whirling in the void of a closed eye, and returns to fall back on itself in another night, the terrestrial Shadow.

I cannot resign myself to this: my useless eyes blink at false visions: my enervated hands grope and grasp with fruitless gestures . . . my ears gather endless murmurs. My progress becomes an indecisive stumbling . . . I am afraid. (I cannot break away from these phantoms . . .)

But they fade away and it is night at last: I exist in the Shadow: in me or outside of me, there is no longer anything but the same (darkness) . . . I deny the leas of the day, renounce the use of my eyes and forcefully, without confusion or zeal, I abandon myself to the great darkness.

Then everything changes: my steps land lightly: the fatigue of the day lessens, flees, and dissolves into the black air; my ears hear what has not been spoken; my wide open eyes gape beneath this brow, which no longer fears, moves straight and sure across the entirety of the night: I entrust myself to you, Shadows!

Je me confie en vous, Ténèbres . . .

Si lente, que j'arriverai d'abord, la nuit marche. Elle conquiert le Ciel. Mais je sais que sa route est longue, et j'espère en ces reflets attardés sur les nues, échos du jour et parfums de Soleil.

Or, tout à coup, ma route a plongé dans la terre, ma route vaste, cernée seulement du cercle horizontal: elle creuse sa voie dans ces champs ouverts au labour des passants éternels: et leurs pas et leurs roues la creusent d'un sillon que chaque jour approfondit.

Là, c'est une autre nuit, non plus suspendue, mais lourde, serrée, très basse et très dense. A droite, à gauche, à toucher mes doigts étendus, deux murailles gardent le défilé. La sente invisible n'est plus étalée devant moi, mais dressée

droite vers le ciel vertical, elle relance mon regard qui se perd, tournoie dans un vide d'œil clos et revient tomber sur lui-même dans l'autre nuit, la Ténèbre terrestre.

Je ne puis m'y résigner: mes yeux inutiles clignotent sur de fausses visions: mes mains énervées tâtonnent et bégaient des gestes sans profit . . . mes oreilles recueillent des murmures sans but. Mon avancée devient un piétinement indécis . . . J'ai peur: (Je ne puis m'affranchir de ces fantômes . . .)

Mais il s'éteignent, et la nuit est enfin: j'existe dans la Ténèbre: il n'est plus, en moi ou hors de moi qu'une même (obscurité) . . . Je répudie les relents du jour, je renie l'usage de mes yeux, et fortement, sans vertige ni fièvre, je m'abandonne à la grande obscurité.

Alors tout change: mes pas se posent avec élasticité: ma fatigue diurne s'allège, s'évade, se dissout dans l'air tout noir; mes oreilles entendent ce qui ne se dit pas; mes yeux grands ouverts s'étirent sous ce front, qui ne craint plus, va droit et sûr enfin à travers toute la nuit: je me confie en vous, Ténèbres! (*OC* 2:874–875)

. . . *defile*—a technical military term for a narrow walled passageway, especially one that protects the entrance to a fortification.

S72 “Square Stele” (STÈLE QUADRANGULAIRE)

While we cannot be absolutely certain what the epigraph for this stèle would have been, Segalen wrote the two characters *fengshui* “風水” in the upper corner of an early draft along with the working title “Feng-shui / Winds and Water” [*Fong-choue / Vents et eaux*], which makes that term an extremely likely candidate for the epigraph. Segalen nowhere else in the collection explicitly discusses *fengshui*—the Chinese science of “geomancy,” which had been a topic of interest for Claudel—but the importance of spatial organization is obviously of great significance in *Stèles*. Beginning in 1917, however, Segalen made notes toward a project to be called *Sites* (*OC* 2:715–732), which was meant poetically to evoke the qualities of various places in China in terms of *fengshui*—one of the many projects left unfinished by his untimely death.

A note on the manuscript draft reads:

It is a hymn to Beijing, where my senses—(some of them truly, sight and a sense of the cardinal directions are happy)—My Feng-shui exists and is happy in Beijing. Take up again. Extend. Do the Feng-shui of different cities: Bei[jīng], Tianj[in], Xi'an, Chengdu [*C'est un hymne à Péking, où mes sens—(quelques-uns, vraiment, vue et sens des courants cardinaux, sont heureux)*],—*Mon Fong-chouei existe et est heureux à Péking. Reprendre. Etendre. Faire le Fong-chouei de différents villes: Pek, Tients, Si-gnan, Tchen-tou*].

A note added to the first manuscript draft reads: “don't slip into unanimism!” [*ne pas verser dans l'unanimism!*!]*—*a reference to the literary movement founded by Jules Romains around 1908.

We have incorporated Segalen's interlinear revisions in our transcription of the stèle, including the following substitutions on the draft: “geomancers” [*géomanciens*] for “priests of the Dao” [*prêtres du Tao*]; “Reroute” [*Détournez*] for “Determine” [*Déterminez*]; and “existence” [*existence*] for “direction” [*direction*].

A passage copied onto the second manuscript draft indicates a possible source in Edouard Chavannes's edition of Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記 (I, 50):

A text of Guo-Yu said that the Chiefs of the Four Mountains were four in number. These chiefs are in a close relation with the four gates of the capital or the four Sides of the empire and they appear to be the guardians of the four cardinal points. One must not take away from these old legends their mathematical symmetry under the pretext of giving them greater realism.

Un texte de Kouo-Yu dit que les Chefs de Quatre montagnes étaient au nombre de quatre. Ces chefs sont dans une étroite relation avec les quatre portes de la capitale ou les quatre Côtés de l'empire et paraissent être les surveillants des quatre points cardinaux.—Il ne faut pas enlever à ces vieilles lé-

gendes leur symétrie mathématique sous le prétexte de leur donner plus de vraisemblance.

S73 “Field Armed with Lances” (LE CHAMP ARMÉ
DE LANCES)

There is no indication of the intended epigraph for this stèle.

There are five manuscript versions of this stèle, showing considerable variation including the phrase “Do not choose” [*Ne chois pas*] for “Chose” [*Choisis*].

The stèle is based on a passage from Henri D’Ollone’s *Les Derniers Barbares* (1911; translated into English in 1912 as *In Forbidden China: The D’Ollone Mission 1906–1909; China—Tibet—Mongolia*), an account of d’Ollone’s 1906–1909 mission in China:

The valley of Jian-Chang, which we follow steadily, is one of the richest among all those found in the mountains of China. In addition to rice and grains, it produced silk and vegetable wax, and holds metals in abundance, notably “white copper,” a metal highly prized by the Chinese and worthy of being prized by Europeans. But the most essential characteristic of this valley is that it is the only Chinese domain among mountains populated by Lolos [Yizu 彝族, the Yi people of western China]. To the extent that one advances toward the north, they become more numerous and more aggressive, and the Chinese are truly under siege in their valley. Increasingly all we hear about is the exploits of these bandits who, from high in their mountains, rob travelers and pillage the inhabitants. All the villages are fortified and the farmers’ posts, armed with pikes, tridents, sabers, and sometimes poor-quality rifles, are permanently set up along the route; it is an impressive sight to see shimmering in the fields the lances which the workers have planted in the earth while they steer around them the plow and the harrow.

La vallée du Kien-Tch’ang, qu’on suit constamment, est une des plus riches parmi toutes celles qu’on trouve dans les montagnes de la Chine. Outre le riz et les céréales, elle

produit la soie, la cire végétale, et contient des métaux en abondance, notamment le ‘cuivre blanc’, métal très prisé des Chinois et qui mérite de l’être par les Européens. Mais la caractéristique de cette vallée, c’est qu’elle est l’unique domaine des Chinois entre des montagnes peuplées de Lolos. A mesure qu’on s’avance vers le nord, ceux-ci deviennent plus nombreux, plus agressifs, et les chinois sont véritablement assiégés dans leur vallée. Nous n’entendons plus parler que des exploits de ces brigands qui, du haut de leurs montagnes, fondent sur la vallée, détoussent les voyageurs et pillent les habitants. Tous les villages sont fortifiés, et des postes de paysans armés de pieux, de tridents, de sabres, quelquefois de mauvais fusils, sont en permanence sur la route; et c’est un impressionnant spectacle que de voir dans les champs briller les lances que les laboureurs ont fichées en terre pendant qu’ils conduisent autour d’elles la charrue ou la herse. (18)

S74 “Abolished Measure” (TOISE ABOLIE)

There is no indication of the intended epigraph for this stèle.

A note later added to the manuscript draft reads: “more brevity and simplicity” [*plus de brièveté et de simplicité*].

Guan Di 關帝 a.k.a. Guan Yu 關羽 (160–219; also known by a number of other names) was a historical Chinese general who was eventually popularized in fiction (notably in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) and ultimately deified.

No source text has been identified for this stèle.

S75 “On a Prison Wall” [SUR LE MUR
D’UNE PRISON]

There is no indication of the intended epigraph for this stèle, which was written in March of 1912 in Zhangde fu 漳德府 while Segalen was serving as personal physician to Yuan Shikai’s son.

A note later added in the margin of the manuscript reads: “Take up again more symbolically the prison of the skull with the sensation I had” [*repandre plus symboliquement la prison du crâne avec la sensation que j’ai eue*].

A note on the manuscript indicates “Chavannes.” Bien was the first to identify this source as a passage from Sima Qian’s letter to Ren An in Chavannes’ edition of Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記:

When the fierce tiger inhabits the depths of the mountains, he is the fear of all the animals; but when he has fallen in a pit and is captured in a cage, he twitches his tail to ask for food; it is thus that over time and gradually one’s pride is subdued. Thus men of valor having only a line drawn in the earth for a prison do not cross it; if they have a piece of cut wood to represent the sentence of a judge they do not answer it. . . . Now your feet and hands are bound; the cangue and the chain are imposed on you; your flesh and your skin are tortured; you are beaten with a staff; you are locked up in a dungeon. Someone who finds themselves in such a situation lies down with his head against the ground as soon as he sees the prison warden; when he sees a guard, his heart is seized with fear and weakness; what is the cause of this? It is that over time his pride has been subdued as well.

Quand le tigre féroce habite les profondeurs des montagnes, il est l’effroi de tous les animaux; mais quand il est tombé dans la fosse et qu’il est pris dans la cage, il agite la queue pour demander à manger; c’est ainsi qu’à la longue et graduellement on a maté sa fierté. Ainsi les hommes de valeur n’avaient pour prison qu’un dessin fait sur la terre et n’y entraient donc pas; ils avaient une pièce de bois taillée pour représenter la sentence du juge et ne lui répondaient donc pas . . . Maintenant cependant on vous lie les pieds et les mains; on vous impose la cangue et la chaîne; on vous martyrise la chair et la peau; on vous inflige des coups de bâton; on vous enferme dans un cachot, celui qui se trouve dans une telle situation se prosterne la tête contre terre dès qu’il voit un magistrat de la prison; aperçoit-il un valet, son cœur est saisi de crainte et défaille; quelle en est la cause? c’est qu’à la longue on a aussi maté sa fierté. (1:ccxxxiv)

For more on the Sima Qian letter, see the note for S21.

S76 “Direction” [DIRECTION]

There is no indication of the intended epigraph for this stèle, which is usually assumed to be merely a fragment, but which may have been intended just as it now reads, with a text that is as abruptly truncated as the disappearance of the inscription in the sunken stèle. Consider the alternate titles on the manuscript draft:

Fallen, broken stele.
On a prone stele
On an overturned stele.
The Way of the Golden Ox

Direction
Stèle tombée —faussée.
Sur une Stèle gisante.
Sur une Stèle renversée.
La Route du Bœuf d’or

A marginal note reads: “To figure in an archeological museum”
[*Pour figurer dans un musée archéologique*]

S77 “Devotion” [DÉVOUEMENT]

This fragment was clearly more in the planning than in the execution.

A note on the manuscript suggests its theme: “What there is to know about heroism: accept an act of devotion or a suicide: the frozen feet of Scott’s companion. Or again the letter of [Sima Qian] 司馬遷 and Ren An to dissuade him from suicide.” [Sur l’heroisme qu’il y a à savoir accepter un dévouement ou un suicide: les pieds gelés du compagnon de Scott. Ou encore la lettre de 司馬遷 et Jen-Ngan pour lui déconseiller le suicide.] On Sima Qian’s letter to Ren An, see the note for S21.

Bien explains Segalen’s manuscript note as a reference to the trip into the British Antarctic by Captain Oates and Robert Falcon Scott, as recorded in Scott’s diary. After reaching the South Pole in January of 1912, Scott and his companions discovered

they had been beaten to the pole by Ronald Amundsen. On their return journey the men encountered great difficulties. After becoming too ill to travel, Oates sacrificed himself by walking out into the blizzard, but Scott and the rest of the group died in the cold anyway.

S78 “Stele of Imperial Labor” [STÈLE DU
LABEUR IMPÉRIAL]

In his dissertation on *Stèles* and *Odes*, Michael Taylor reports that this stèle, dated 10 July 1911, Beijing, was found in the manuscript of *Odes* along with two drafts of “Chant du Labeur Impérial” (520). A marginal note on the manuscript reports that the stèle was “Written at the Temple of Agriculture, in full sunlight, on a summer morning, on the terrace strewn with hay, straw, rakes, and seeds” [*Écrit au Temple de l’Agriculture, par grand soleil, un matin d’été, sur la terrasse jonchée de foin, de paille, de rateaux et de graines*]. A further commentary by Segalen adds: “Composing this surrounded by ears of wheat and the ripe field, on the very Terrace of the Temple of Agriculture, I wept, then took refuge in the immense building broken down like a shed and as noble as a palace, in order to write it, seated on debris and grey rubble” [*Composant ceci au plein milieu des épis et du champ mûr, sur la Terrasse même du Temple de l’Agriculture, j’ai pleuré, puis me suis réfugié dans l’immense bâtiment delabré comme un hangar et noble à l’égal d’un palais, pour l’écrire, assis sur des décombres et des plâtras gris*].