

Driving Out the Frog-Miasma

A hill shrine in Fujian, the spring of 975, and one document read whole

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Before We Begin

A visitor's map to the Xu brothers, and to the corpus this document sits in.

The trouble with the Xu brothers begins with the library.

Their cult gathered, over five centuries, a small mountain of texts — anthologies, temple records, stele inscriptions, ritual material. But the Daoist canon shelves its holdings by **kind of book**, not by subject. So the brothers' anthology sits with other anthologies; the record of their cult sits with other records; the human-authored collection sits somewhere else again.

A reader looking for “the Xu brothers” finds them scattered across the library's wings, in different rooms, with no obvious through-line. Add the standard catalog — Boltz's Survey of Taoist Literature, which describes each volume in turn, by entry — and the result is a parts-list rather than a story. The pieces are honestly named. The assembly is left to the reader.

This book concerns one document out of that mountain. What follows is enough of the assembly to know where the document stands.

When

945	The kingdom of Min falls. The founding tradition places the brothers' arrival in this year — entering Min at the king's request, clearing routed troops from Áo Fēng, and dying the year after. Villagers cut thatch for a hut and set up a wooden censer.
975	The three dispatches. Second month, third month, and one undated between them. The oldest layer of the corpus.

983	Rain-prayers prove efficacious; a flood wrecks the Dragon-Pool shrine. Fāng Jué rebuilds at Zhīyǔ , carrying over the original censer. The Zhiyu Ancestral Shrine.
1008	A second altar-temple at Qingpu.
1117	The incense divided; the temple relocated. What becomes the Lingji Palace.
1295 · 1305	The anthology edited and colophoned — a fourteen-chapter manuscript, with illustrations.
Yongle (1403–24)	Imperial recognition; the cult's books enter the canon. A Fāng compiles the record of the cult.
1607	Printed in the Wanli supplement to the Daoist canon. The illustrations do not survive the printing.

Four hundred and fifty years from a thatched hut to the imperial canon, with the same family's name at nearly every stage.

What

Three books, shelved apart, describing one cult.

Title	Canon number	What it is
徐仙翰藻 — Xú Xiān Hàn Zǎo	HY 1456 = CT/DZ 1468	Fourteen chapters. The god's own writings — the anthology that contains our document.
贊靈集 — Zàn Líng Jí	CT 1469	The human-authored material: steles, memorials, prefaces, poems.
徐仙真錄 — Xú Xiān Zhēn Lù	CT 1470	The record of the cult. Compiled by 方文照 in the Yongle reign.

The first two were probably edited together and split into two volumes on one principle: **what the god wrote in one, what men wrote in the other.**

A note on the numbers. Two systems index the Daoist canon — the 1925 Harvard-Yenching index (HY) and Schipper's Concordance (CT, sometimes DZ). They run on different principles and diverge; the anthology is 1456 in one and 1468 in the other. Neither is wrong. Both are given here on first mention.

Where

Áo Fēng 鰲峰 — the Turtle Peak, ninety li south of Fuzhou, near Qingpu in Minhou county. A hill above wet coastal country, on the land side of a maritime coast.

Not to be confused with the northern Áo Fēng: Wū Shí Shān, one of Fuzhou's three city mountains, which carries the same name in some local sources. The documents in this book belong to the southern hill.

A note on the two graphs. The hill is written 鰲峰 in the outside sources and 鰲峰 in the shrine's own documents — the great sea-turtle in the first, the freshwater soft-shell in the second. These are two different words, not one graph miswritten, and they name one hill. The people who lived under it had a single name for it; the choice between turtles belongs to the writing rather than to the speaking. One possible pattern, offered as no more than that: the soft-shell for the hill as its own people had it, the sea-turtle for the hill written up. This book uses **Áo Fēng** for the place, which is the form the outside sources carry, and renders the signature as the corpus prints it — **the Old Man of Biē Fēng**.

Fuzhou — the river city, three mountains around a central plain, capital of the fallen kingdom of Min.

The Min River — upstream to Wuyi and the tea country and the passes into Jiangxi; downstream to the estuary and the sea lanes.

Who

Xú Zhīzhèng and **Xú Zhī'è**, brothers, by their own tradition descended from Xú Yǎn-wáng of the Western Zhou; in period terms, of the Southern Tang adoptive line. Worshipped in life as local heroes and after death as transcendents.

The documents in this book are signed 鰲峰老人 — Biē Fēng lǎo rén, the Old Man of Biē Fēng — the elder brother, apotheosized, speaking in the first person.

The Fāng of Zhīyǔ — the family that built, rebuilt, petitioned, enlarged, and eventually compiled. They are in the record at every stage from 983 to the fifteenth century.

How the texts were made

By **spirit-writing**. A medium at the sand-tray, a stylus, a scribe taking down what the stylus makes, and the whole attributed to the god of the shrine. The anthology's own tradition puts it plainly: the Hàn Zǎo is entirely a record of the god's own brush.

Which is worth carrying into the reading. Several hands are involved at the tray and several more after it, and how much was prepared in advance cannot be known from the text.

Where to find the argument

The document read in this book is 驅蝦蟆瘴文 — Qū háma zhàng wén, the text for driving out the frog-miasma: Xú Xiān Hàn Zǎo, juǎn 4, piece 8. Third month of 975.

Its two companions — the pestilence dispatch and the drought dispatch — are pieces 6 and 7 of the same chapter, and appear here where they sharpen a point.

The complete Chinese and a working English are at the back.

One • The Ground

Enough to read the document by. Where it was written, when, by what kind of institution, and what sits beside it.

The coast, and what it was thought to breathe

The country between Fuzhou and the sea is wet. The river braids toward its estuary; the coastal plain is low, tidal in places, cut by creeks. Rice grows in standing water.

To a northern official all of this was the edge of the world. Lingnan and the Min coast were where men were sent when the capital had finished with them — hot, wet, unintelligible in speech, and understood to breathe out sickness. The word for what it breathed out is 瘴 — zhàng — a vapor rising from the ground in low southern country. The graph carries the sickness radical. It is a disease-word, and the disease it names is a disease of **place**.

That is the view from the capital, and it is not the view from the hill. The Min coast in the tenth century was a maritime economy with its own kingdom and its own trade running out to the south seas. The two views sit on top of one another, and the shrine at Áo Fēng operated in both: it addressed itself in the vocabulary of the metropolitan bureaucracy while standing on a coast that bureaucracy considered malarial.

Neither view had the mosquito. The writer of this document connects the sickness to standing water and the creatures in it, and about the water he is right; the conditions he describes are the conditions in which the fevers of that coast arose. What he had was the pond, the season, and the noise, and the pond is where the frogs are. The rest is the last chapter of this book.

The hill

Áo Fēng — Áo Fēng, the Turtle Peak — ninety li south of Fuzhou, near Qingpu in Minhou county. In the older sources it is written 鰲峰 or 鰲峰, the great sea-turtle and the freshwater soft-shell, and the shrine's documents are signed 鰲峰老人 — Biē Fēng Lǎo Rén — the Old Man of Biē Fēng.

Not to be confused with the northern Áo Fēng: Wū Shí Shān, one of Fuzhou's three city mountains, which carries the same name in some local sources. The documents in this book belong to the southern hill.

The shrine

A hill shrine, run by a family.

Its own tradition dates its founding to 945, when the kingdom of Min fell and two brothers named Xú 徐 — Southern Tang men, said to have held a garrison at Jinling — came through Qingpu with troops and cleared routed soldiers off the hill. Villagers cut thatch for a hut, painted images of the two, and set a wooden censer before them. The brothers died the next year and descended in spirit 降神 jiàng shén at the shrine.

How much of that happened is not settled and probably cannot be. The names are Southern Tang names; the intervention has been doubted; the account we have was written down in 1424 by a provincial official who got it from an eighty-year-old villager.¹ What the tradition establishes is not a history but a self-description: this shrine dates itself to the year the coast lost its state, and to men from the conquering side.

By 983 a local family, the Fāng 方 of Zhīyǔ 芝嶼, had rebuilt it after a flood and carried over the original censer. They and their descendants ran it, petitioned for it, enlarged it, and four centuries later were still compiling its books.²

¹徐仙真錄 (CT 1470), preface, dated 大明永樂甲辰 = 1424; the informant is named 黃恆 and given as eighty years old. Edward Davis holds that there is no evidence the brothers were ever in Fujian, and reports that returning to the material after more than a decade left him more convinced than before of their absence from it; his account is that two disinherited Southern Tang princes became the focus of the aspirations of the landowners of rural Min county during the years when Fuzhou was being fought over and absorbed into the Southern Tang. The claim concerns their presence, not their existence: Davis treats them throughout as historical princes, and writes of them dying “purportedly at Aofeng.” “Arms and the Dao, 2: The Xu Brothers in Tea Country,” in Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth, eds., *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 149–164, at 151 and 155.

²北宋太平興國八年 = 983; 方珏 rebuilt at 芝嶼 after a flood, carrying over the original 木爐. The family's later involvement, and the cult's institutional history through the Yuan and Ming, are set out in 張超然, 〈躋身仙班：元代民間神祇的道教化 — 以靈濟真人信仰為例〉, 《漢學研究》42.4 (Dec 2024): 63–119. Davis independently reads 方珏 as the founder of the ancestral temple and the family as the organizers of the cult's expansion, citing 徐仙真錄 1.6 and 徐仙翰藻 1.2a, 1.6b (Davis 2002, 153).

It was not a monastery and not a licensed abbey. It was a family's hill shrine with a god who wrote.

A god who writes

The Áo Fēng corpus is spirit-writing. A medium at the sand-tray, a stylus, a scribe taking down what the stylus makes, and the whole attributed to the god of the shrine. The anthology's own preface says as much: it is entirely a record of the god's own brush 皆錄神之筆也.³

Which bears on how the text was made. Several hands are involved at the tray and several more after it — an editor, a compiler in 1305, a canon printer in 1607. How much was prepared in advance cannot be known from the text; these dispatches may have been sketched, or drafted, or worked up from earlier material, and the session may have been performance rather than composition.

What can be said is that the finished thing passed through many hands, beginning at production. Its irregularities are consistent with a repertoire being deployed rather than a manuscript being copied — and that is the frame this book uses when the text turns out to quote the Mencius without its qualifying clause, or to name an office and lose the word beside it.

975

Now the year.

Southern Tang fell in 975. Song armies took the pass-city of Jinlíng 金陵 in the second month of Kāibǎo 8; the siege closed through the year; Li Yu surrendered and the state ended.⁴

The two dated dispatches from this shrine are dated to that spring. The pestilence dispatch: the second month of Kāibǎo 8 開寶八年, to the day, the month Jinling's pass-city was taken. The frog dispatch: the third month.

And the tradition places the Xu brothers at Jinling — a garrison held under the Five Dynasties, in the Southern Tang capital, the city that fell in the year these documents are dated to.

So the two dates bracketing this cult's early history are the year the brothers' state took Fujian, and the year the brothers' state was destroyed. In between: a hill shrine at Qingpu, a wooden censer, and a god who writes.

What to make of that is a question rather than a claim. The dispatches concern a sickness, a drought, and a frog; they say nothing about Song armies. The author may have

³徐仙真錄, preface: 及《徐仙翰藻》一書, 皆錄神之筆也。

⁴Song 開寶八年 = 975. Song forces took the 金陵關城, the pass-city, in the second month; the city itself was broken on the twenty-seventh day of the eleventh month, when Li Yu surrendered and the state ended. 李燾, 《續資治通鑑長編》卷16, 太祖開寶八年十一月. On the calendar: the eleventh month of Kāibǎo 8 falls at the turn of 975 and 976 by Western reckoning, so the year given here is the Chinese one and the surrender sits on the boundary.

dated them where he did because that is when they were written. An editor or a compiler may have supplied the date later, and chosen it. Both may be true.

But the date is what it is, and it is precise to the day. A shrine whose gods were princes of a dynasty issued documents in that dynasty's last spring, in the god's own voice, on a coast that would change hands three years afterward.⁵

Where the document sits

The frog dispatch is the eighth of nine pieces in the fourth chapter of a fourteen-chapter anthology, the *Xú Xiān Hàn Zǎo*.⁶

The chapter has a shape, and it is worth setting out in order:

1	喜雨頌	Hymn of Joyful Rain
2	修東井文	On Repairing the East Well
3	塞井文	On Sealing a Well
4	修廟難文	On the Difficulty of Repairing the Temple
5	告成序	Preface on Reporting Completion
6	驅癘鬼文	Driving Out the Pestilence-Demon
7	驅旱魃文	Driving Out the Drought-Demon
8	驅蝦蟆瘴文	Driving Out the Frog-Miasma
9	臯殺賦	Rhapsody on the Crime of Killing

Water first: rain celebrated, one well repaired, another sealed. Then the building — a temple repair and the report of its completion. Then the three expulsions, consecutive. Then a rhapsody on the crime of killing.

A reading, offered as one: the water pieces make standing water, and standing water is where frogs are. The habitat is managed into being across pieces 1 to 5 and its tenants evicted across 6 to 8. Whether the compiler saw that is not knowable. What is on the page is that the sequence runs from making water to clearing what water brings — and that a chapter which could have ended on three successful expulsions ends instead on the crime of killing.

Most of the anthology is later, Yuan-period planchette writing. These three dispatches are the oldest thing in it.⁷ The arrangement is not theirs. It belongs to a compiler — and the manuscript behind the printed canon was colophoned in 1305 by an academy director.⁸

⁵Fujian — the Qingyuan/Pinghai command — submitted to Song in 978. [verify.]

⁶HY 1456 = CT/DZ 1468. Printed in the Wanli supplement to the Daoist canon, 1607, from a manuscript colophoned in 1305. See *Before We Begin* for the corpus and the two canon numbering systems.

⁷Zhang, n.31, citing 徐仙翰藻 4:7b–13a. Davis cites the same block as 徐仙翰藻 4.7b–14b (Davis 2002, 158) — an independent citation, close to Zhang's but not identical. [verify: the folio numbers against the canon edition.]

⁸陳夢根, 山長. See Zhang, 63–119.

The two companions

They will come up, so here they are in a paragraph each.

The pestilence dispatch, second month, one month before the frog, is the argumentative one. It cites the Zuo zhuan, then Han Yu and Liu Yuxi by name, and then argues against demonic causation: demons have no form and no voice, so how could they sicken anyone? Disease comes from unregulated eating, unregulated senses, unregulated feeling. Only when medicine and moxibustion fail does it concede that these demons must be 冥頑不可化, dark and obstinate and not to be transformed. Then it invokes a legal code, pronounces mass beheading, and immediately suspends the sentence because an amnesty is in force, prescribing the recitation of a couplet by Du Fu instead.

The drought dispatch carries no date of its own and sits between the two that do. It is the genealogical one. It addresses the demon directly, traces its descent from the Flame Emperor, and rebukes it as an unworthy descendant of a noble house — the gateway of the house has not yet faded from view, so how is it that you are unworthy? It walks the demon's career through four canonical episodes, offers it a cup of clear water, and orders it home to a country the Shanhaijing put on the map.

The frog dispatch is longer than both together. It is the only one of the three in which the accused answers back.

Two · Reading It Through

Here is the document, entire, in English.

It runs about eleven hundred graphs — longer than the pestilence and drought dispatches together — and it moves through twelve stages, which are marked below. Nothing is abridged. The section headings are mine; everything else is the text.

The Chinese is at the back, for readers who want it.

Two things worth knowing before it starts. It is spoken throughout in the first person by the god of a hill shrine, whose signature is at the end of the manuscript: the Old Man of Biē Fēng. And it is addressed, from a certain point onward, directly to the frogs.

The claim of office

Locusts do not enter the borders; tigers grab their cubs and hurry away.

This is due to the spiritual efficacy of the duties of the guardian of the territory 守土之靈 shǒu tǔ zhī líng; these are examples of how he removes harm on behalf of the people.

The naming

The present round of miasmic vapor 瘴氣 zhàng qì is called háma 蝦蟆 (the frog-toad), and now I compose this text to drive it out.

The case in evidence

I once read in the Southern Histories 南史 of a man named Qiū Jié 丘傑, who became ill from eating raw vegetables.

More than a year later, he dreamed of his mother, who appeared and told him: “This is frog-toad poison; I am leaving you three medicinal pills, which you may eat.”

And as a result he passed several pints of tadpoles. So as for the frog-toad’s capacity to harm the people — is it not to be believed?

The accused

Now as for the water creatures, each has three hundred and sixty types.

This stupid frog-toad — between heaven and earth — is the thing most fit to be discarded.

Its form and appearance are bumpy and lumpy; its hands and feet scrape the sand. Its belly is bloated and swollen; its neck is like a shriveled scallion.

Its color blends with mud and slime; it eats garbage and shit.

It hops around on top of the well-rim, and retreats to rest in the cracked rocky cliffs.

Its dwelling is this filthy; its visage is this base; morning and evening it croaks — it is indeed in the service of demons.

Heaven has instilled virtue in me; so what can the frog-toad do?

The escalation

Some also say: the seminal essence of the frog-toad is a demonic influence upon creatures.

When the moon is full, it props up its guts and pillars its belly; it opens its layered croaking jaws; and in this wild and unruly way, it achieves its goals.

It hops about the blue depths of the sky and eats the seminal light of the moon.

It disturbs the cosmic order and ruins Heaven’s things.

A creature as stupid as this — Heaven itself is unable to reach it, so how then can a human?

The sickness

So what crime have the commoners committed today, that they should be among those afflicted with this horrible ailment?

It begins at the tips of the hair; it breaks out at the joints — that is its onset.

There are bouts of dizziness and hallucinations, with little improvement.

The body rebels and the tendons tire; the waist is heavy, and the head spins.

Snot flows like rain; the throat produces smoke; the mouth spits, the chest heaves.

Dry within and parched without; thirsty yet not thirsty — and then the bitter fever arises.

The single-prescription of the Soot Poison; the fire-disaster of Huílù — they burn the head and char the brow, as if one were seated in a fire-pit.

Though one would mount the Great Numen, raise the handle of the Dipper, scoop up the waters of the Bo Hai Sea, and pour and sprinkle them about — it would still not be sufficient to provide relief.

On some days, sweat is produced and then ceases. On others, once the bitter fever has retreated, the dry cough comes on again.

Day after day sunken and stagnant; it worsens, and there is no cure.

The inquiry

I trace its origins — to whom is it due?

Could it be that autumn is following the commands of summer — that yin and yang are not properly regulated?

Or that the five flavors delight the palate — that there is no regulation of eating and drinking?

That the eyes view improper sights, that the ears strain to hear lewd sounds — that there is no regulation of sounds and colors.

The four who fail

Why is it that the physician cannot cure it with medicine? That the moxibustion-specialist cannot attend to it with his moxa-stove?

The rolling thunder of the curse-master's teeth; the back-and-forth of the talisman-technician's brush and knife; the heart labors and the eyes are clumsy; the work is futile, and the effect long-delayed.

Taking all of this into consideration: it is all due to the frog-toad.

The sentence

I receive the Supreme Emperor's 上帝 command — to guard this land, to govern this people.

And yet the frog-toad defiantly refuses to die. The gulches and ditches produce ghosts, chief-demons, mountain-marsh demons, and water-and-rock demons.

It crouches at the side in the dark shadows; treacherous and crooked, vicious and depraved, arrogant and cruel — it has no remorse.

The mystery of the short-fox shooting shadows; the venom of the locust-snake gnawing grass — even those do not equal the depth of your harm.

Your crimes overflow the heavens; the people of the kingdom all say: “It may be killed.”

Today I make a contract with the frog-toad: within one full day, lead all of your various kinds, and migrate 徙 xǐ together to the east of the Lake Waters of Ten-Thousand Mountains 萬山湖水.

Live discreetly, lodge your fate there — but do not bring harm upon my people.

If not — then this means the frog-toad is dark, stubborn, and not numinous 冥頑不靈 míng wán bù líng, as though it neither hears nor knows.

The execution

I will commission the Frog-Officer 蝸氏 guō shì specifically to burn its mighty form, ash-pickling it.

Then we will cut off its head, split open its belly, mince its flesh, and tear and eat it together with the people of the kingdom.

We must extinguish its species in order to satisfy my people's wishes.

The reply

The frog-toads, upon hearing these words, are startled and afraid; each one puts on green clothing 綠衣 lǜ yī and takes a knee in the courtyard below.

They beg me for their lives, saying: “The willow-cart is already prepared; the straw-rations are already packed; we accept demotion and submission willingly; this very day we depart — may the King forgive our crimes.”

The chant

And so I compose this text to hurry them along, saying:

Among the intelligent there are the upright — that is what makes me divine. Heaven's mandate rests with the virtuous — and so it considers the people below.

These stupid frog-toads — demonic essences among creatures. They delight in calamity and rejoice at misfortune — how can they be so unbenevolent?

They violate the laws of Heaven — cold and heat proceed out of order. The people's breath does not flow — collapsing on the road, they fall and tumble.

Lú and Biǎn are alarmed and at a loss — they work to no avail with ginseng and fúlíng. The shamans suck and chew their charms — and yet matters drag on into murky dark.

What crime have the common people committed — that this suffering comes on again and again? These stupid frog-toads — their crimes and evils are overflowing.

Where the multitude's grievances gather — grievance settles on your name. We would gnaw your bones — chop and pickle your bodies.

My wrath blazes — like thunder, like lightning. I commission the Frog-Officer specifically — to apply the canonical penalty in clear and proper form.

Knees bent in the courtyard — the situation is truly pitiful. For one moment they cry out begging for life — one chance to live in ten-thousand deaths.

You stupid frog-toads — if indeed you have any numen 靈 at all, listen clearly to my words — reform your faults and renew yourselves.

Ten-Thousand Mountains — steep and rising; the lake's water — clear and still. There lies your peaceful dwelling — settle in that place, and rest in tranquility.

Go deep, go far, lie hidden — flee from the near, sink your form. Begone, begone — swiftly, swiftly, as the law commands.

What the document does with its ending is discussed in the two chapters that follow. It is worth noticing here only that the prose ends in dismemberment and a communal meal, and the verse ends in clear water and a place to rest, and that these are four lines apart.

Three • What Was Borrowed

The dispatch says where it got things. I once read in the Nan shi — a claim about a library, made in the god's own first person, and the rest of the document bears it out.

What follows sets the borrowings beside their sources. Most of them are quotation, and quotation can be checked. Where the point is that particular graphs are identical, the graphs are given; otherwise the English carries it.

A word about the direction of flow

It is easy, and inaccurate, to read what follows as a shrine helping itself to Han Yu.

The shrine's own account is more careful. Its pestilence dispatch, written a month

before this one, opens by naming a lineage for what it is about to do — and it names three stages. First the Zuo zhuan, where a Marquis of Jin falls ill, dreams of a bear, and takes it for a pestilence-demon. Then Han Yu and Liu Yuxi, who also have their compositions on the fever-demon. Then itself.⁹

Han Yu is the middle term. He is not the origin, and the shrine does not claim he is.

Nor could he be. Expelling harm by naming it is older than the Zuo zhuan passage he is cited beside. The Zhou li has offices for it, one of which this dispatch commissions. The sealing formula the chant closes on is Han administrative language. The statute the shrine's other two dispatches judge under is a Six Dynasties code, three centuries before Han Yu and reaching the coast by a channel that has nothing to do with him. And whatever was going on at a hill shrine south of Fuzhou — spirit-writing, offerings, the removal of things that did not belong — was going on in some form long before a Tang official was posted to Chaozhou and wrote to the crocodiles.

What Han Yu supplied was **the literary instance**. He took an old operation and wrote the versions that got read: five texts, in high classical prose and verse, by a man who became one of the most studied writers in the language. A shrine assembling a dispatch a century and a half later reached for his phrasing the way one reaches for the best-known formulation of a thing everybody already does.

So the flow runs through him rather than from him. What follows tracks the phrases, because the phrases are checkable — but the apparatus they belong to is older than the man they are quoted from.

Han Yu

Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) wrote five texts in which something is named, charged, and disposed of: a biography of a writing brush 毛穎傳, a poem on shooting an owl 射訓狐, a formal notice served on the crocodiles of a river he had been posted beside 祭鱷魚文, a poem rebuking the fever-demon 譴瘧鬼, and a piece sending off five poverties 送窮文.¹⁰ Four of the five turn up in the shrine's documents.

The authority-formula

Han Yu's prefect opens: the Prefect has received the command of the Son of Heaven — to guard this soil, to govern this people.

The shrine's god opens: I bear the command of the Supreme Emperor — to guard this soil, to govern this people.

Five graphs are identical — 守此土，治此民 — and the frame around them is altered by exactly one term. 天子, the Son of Heaven, becomes 上帝, the Supreme Emperor. A

⁹驅瘧鬼文, juǎn 4 piece 6: 《傳》曰：晉侯有疾，夢熊，以為瘧鬼。而後韓退之，劉禹錫諸人...亦有瘧鬼之說。或作文以逐之，或

¹⁰毛穎傳·射訓狐·祭鱷魚文·譴瘧鬼·送窮文。

prefect's commission from a human sovereign becomes a god's commission from a higher god.

The same five graphs appear in the pestilence and drought dispatches, in the same frame. It is the shrine's standing formula.

The finding

Han Yu, to the crocodiles: then it is that the crocodiles are dark and obstinate and without spirit-intelligence, and though the Prefect speaks, they neither hear nor know.

The shrine, to the frogs: then it is that the frog is dark and obstinate and without spirit-intelligence, as though it neither heard nor knew.

Four graphs verbatim — 冥頑不靈 — and the clause after them too. Han Yu's construction is a pincer: either the creature understands and defies, or it fails to understand at all, and either way it may be killed. The frog dispatch takes the whole apparatus.

The drought dispatch has it as well. The pestilence dispatch does not — it reads 冥頑不可化, not to be transformed, which is a different claim about a different kind of target.

The contract and the deadline

Han Yu gives the crocodiles a contract, a destination, and a collapsing ladder of days: within three; if not three, then five; if not five, then seven. Remove southward, to the sea.

The shrine gives the frogs a contract, a destination, and one day. Remove eastward, to the lake.

Same formula — 今與...約, now I make a contract with — and the same verb for the removal, 徙. The ladder is compressed.

The four practitioners

Han Yu's fever poem runs a roster: the physician applies a hundred poisons; the moxa-master sets his cones alight; the curse-master poisons mouth and teeth, his tongue making thunderclaps fly; the talisman-master plies knife and brush, cinnabar and ink sweeping crosswise.

The frog dispatch runs the same four, in the same order, with the same attributes — but as questions. Why can the physician not treat it with medicines? Why can the moxa-master not attend it with mugwort? The curse-master's thunderclap of tooth and mouth; the talisman-master's crosswise plying of knife and brush.

The four offices are identical: 醫師, 灸師, 詛師, 符師. But this is **not verbatim**. Declaratives become rhetorical questions and possessive phrases; 灸 is written 灸; the mugwort cones become a mugwort stove. It is not copying. It is a man who knows the passage

writing it out again in his own construction.

The structural borrowing

And then the thing that is not a phrase at all.

Han Yu's fever poem spends its first half abusing the demon — its unworthy descent, its filthy feeding, the four healers who cannot reach it. Then it turns, without announcement, on a line about deep clear river water, and spends its second half describing the home it is sending the demon back to: clear waves for a robe, white stones for a threshold, moonlight to breathe in, a lotus banner in the hand, the train of the Nine Songs.¹¹

The frog dispatch turns at the same point in the same way — prosecution in prose, release in verse — and closes on the Ten Thousand Mountains steep and rising, the lake water clear and still.

Han Yu turns on clear river water. The dispatch turns on clear lake water.

That is a borrowed **shape**, and it is the deepest thing the shrine took.

What this dispatch did not take, and its neighbors did

Two of Han Yu's five supply nothing here — but they supply the drought dispatch and the shrine's rhapsody, which is worth recording because it shows the reading was systematic.

The drought dispatch tells its demon to bring along its companions, lead its kind, and ride the dust and the wind, and reports that the grass cart is prepared and the dry rations packed — which is the send-off from Sending Off the Poverties, nearly to the graph. It also offers the demon a country that can be reached by setting out at dawn and arriving by dusk, which is what Han Yu offered the crocodiles. And the shrine's Rhapsody on Not-Being-a-Spirit calls the writing brush Master Brush-Awl, reaching for the biography that opens Han Yu's set.¹²

Four of Han Yu's five demon texts, distributed across the shrine's own documents.

Those five are treated at length elsewhere on this site, in The Han Yu Demon Texts — five essays with a complete rear apparatus, and a workbook for readers who want to work the Chinese themselves.¹³

¹¹ 譴瘡鬼: 湛湛江水清，歸居安汝妃。清波為裳衣，白石為門畿。呼吸明月光，手掉芙蓉旗。降集隨九歌，飲芳而食菲。

¹² 驅旱魃文 and 非神賦, both in 徐仙翰藻. The drought dispatch writes 駕塵擴風 where several witnesses of 送窮文 print only three graphs; a Song copyist evidently had four. Independent support for restoring 擴.

¹³ The Han Yu Demon Texts, at daveswavecave.com.

Mencius, shortened

The dispatch's verdict runs: your crimes overflow heaven; the people of the state all say it may be killed.

That last clause is from the Mencius 孟子, and it arrives here through Han Yu, who used it on the crocodiles.¹⁴

What Mencius wrote is longer, and the length is the point:

When those about you all say he may be killed, do not listen. When the officers all say he may be killed, do not listen. When the people of the state all say he may be killed — **then investigate; and when you see that he may be killed, then kill him.** Thus it is said: the people of the state killed him. Do this, and only then can you be father and mother to the people.

Mencius builds in two checks after unanimity: investigate, and see for yourself. The unanimous verdict is explicitly insufficient — that is the passage's whole argument, and the reward for doing it properly is to be father and mother to the people.

The frog dispatch has the clause, and four clauses later the execution.

The drought dispatch is more explicit still: whoever harms the people and creatures, the people of the state all say he may be killed — kill him.

The investigation is gone.

Whether that is deliberate compression or citation from memory cannot be decided from the text. What can be said is that the clause travelled twelve hundred years from the Mencius to Han Yu to a Fujian shrine, and the restraint that was its purpose did not travel with it.

The Zhou li

The sentence is delegated: I commission the Frog-Officer expressly.

蠃氏, the Frog-Officer, is an office from the Zhou li 周禮 — the ritual-administrative compendium that lays out the offices of an idealized bureaucracy. Its entry reads: the Frog Office is charged with removing frogs and toads; it burns male chrysanthemum, and sprinkling the ash kills them; and covering them with the smoke leaves all water-creatures without voice.¹⁵

Two duties, then, not one. Kill, and silence. And the dispatch's central grievance is the noise — morning and evening it croaks, the charge that carries the whole Nan shi satire. The shrine, having claimed jurisdiction over the soil, commissions a subordinate out of

¹⁴ 孟子·梁惠王下. Han Yu, 祭鱷魚文: 夫傲天子之命吏...與冥頑不靈而為民物害者, 皆可殺.

¹⁵ 周禮·秋官: 蠃氏: 掌去蛙黾, 焚牡鞠。以灰灑之, 則死。以其煙被之, 則凡水蟲無聲. The same section carries a run of removal offices — 庶氏, 翦氏, 赤发氏, 壺涿氏, 庭氏 — filing vermin control under the Ministry of Justice. [verify against a printed edition before press; the reading is not in doubt but the flag asks for the edition.]

the classics; and of the offices available it commissions the one whose second function is stopping the sound the accused is charged with making. It is a delegation, and the office it delegates to is one that exists on paper.

The graph following the office is damaged. What the witness prints will not construe; the clause is a verbatim citation of the Zhou li's recipe, and what has dropped out of it is the plant to be burned. The office survives; the frame survives; the botanical filler goes. So the exact quotation and the transmission slip are the same three graphs. That pattern is taken up below.

The Nan shi, twice

The document names this source, and takes two different things from it.

The case in evidence, from chapter 73: Qiu Jie 丘傑, who fell ill from raw greens and passed several pints of tadpoles after a dream. It sits in the section on the filial and righteous — an exemplum of a mother's care for her son, repurposed as clinical proof of causation.

And a satire, from chapter 72. Bian Bin 卞彬, an official of the Southern Qi, wrote rhapsodies on fleas, lice, and frogs to mock the bureaucracy. His frog rhapsody, in part:

Tadpoles, assenting-assenting; drifting in flocks on dark water; from morning on into evening; toiling like demons.

The Nan shi 南史 glosses it plainly: this satirizes the clerks.¹⁶

Now set that against the dispatch. Its sound-charge is that the frog goes yes, yes morning and evening — the same two elements recombined, written with the graphs Bian Bin used. It reports tadpoles where Bian Bin reports tadpoles. And it dresses the accused in green, the robe of a junior official, to kneel in a courtyard.

The dispatch never names Bian Bin. The shared vocabulary is verifiable in both texts; the borrowing is inference. But the inference is not far to travel: the writer says he read the Nan shi, and both passages are in it, four chapters apart.

Which changes what the frog is in this document. Bian Bin's tadpoles say yes because clerks say yes. The dispatch's frog says yes morning and evening, and then kneels in green as a junior functionary begging pardon of a king.

It is the same joke — run, this time, as an actual proceeding.

The moon

One charge in the escalation reads at first like invective and is in fact a citation.

¹⁶南史 juǎn 72, 卞彬傳: 比令史諳事. The rhapsody reads 蝌鬥唯唯, 群浮闇水, 唯朝繼夕, 聿役如鬼.

When the moon is full, it props up its guts and pillars its belly ... it hops about the blue depths of the sky and **eats the seminal light of the great yin.**

There has been a toad in the moon since at least the Warring States. The Huainanzi states the pair flatly — a crouching crow in the sun, a toad in the moon — and Wang Chong reports the scholars saying the moon holds a hare and a toad. How it got there is the famous story: Yi obtained the drug of deathlessness from the Queen Mother of the West; his wife stole it and fled; she lodged her body in the moon, became the toad, and became **the essence of the moon.**¹⁷

And it has a second office there. The Huainanzi says the moon lights all under heaven and is eaten by the 詹諸, and the Shuowen glosses that name plainly: the 詹諸 is the 蝦蟆 in the moon, and it eats the moon.¹⁸ That is the dispatch's own word for its defendant, in the dictionary, doing precisely what the dispatch charges it with.

So the escalation is not a flourish. It is the eclipse-toad, cited.

But notice what the citation does with what it cites. The toad is the essence of the moon; the dispatch charges it with eating the essence of the moon. The graph is the same one, and it turns three times in four lines — the creature's own essence, which the dispatch calls a 妖; the lunar essence it consumes; and, standing behind both, the tradition in which the creature is that essence.

The rest of the canonical toad is simply withheld. In the Han reliefs it pounds the elixir beside the jade hare, and a Han ballad has the hare kneeling to pound the toad-pill; Ge Hong files the myriad-year toad among the excrescences of immortality, to be eaten for long life.¹⁹ None of that appears. The dispatch takes the half of the lunar toad that indicts and leaves the half that deifies, and the result is a demotion carried out entirely with borrowed material: Chang'e's own body, the elixir-pounder, reclassified as a thief of lunar light and a demon among creatures.

There is a further symmetry, on the understanding that the document does not draw it. The toad's own story is a theft of what keeps people from dying, and the dispatch arraigns it for a disease. Whether the writer had that in view or reached only for the eclipse-gloss cannot be settled from the page.

One correction to the obvious reading, because the tradition is more particular than it looks. Liu Xiang's Wujing tongyi asks why the moon holds both a hare and a toad, and answers that the moon is yin and the toad is yang.²⁰ The toad is the essence of the great yin and the yang thing lodged inside it. Which sits well against this document rather

¹⁷ 淮南子·精神訓：日中有踰烏，而月中有蟾蜍。論衡·說日：儒者曰：日中有三足烏，月中有兔、蟾蜍。For Chang'e, the older text of the 淮南子 as quoted in 初學記：羿請不死之藥於西王母，羿妻姮娥竊之奔月，託身於月，是為蟾蜍，而為張衡《靈憲》，preserved in the commentary to 後漢書·天文志：姮娥遂託身於月，是為蟾蜍。[verify each at point of use; the 初學記 and 靈憲 readings are quoted rather than direct.]

¹⁸ 淮南子：月照天下，蝕於詹諸。許慎《說文解字》：詹諸，月中蝦蟆，食月。[verify the 說文 entry in a printed edition; the wording here comes from a secondary quotation.]

¹⁹ 抱朴子·仙藥：肉芝者，謂萬歲蟾蜍。The toad-pill is the 蝦蟆丸 of the Han 相和歌辭·董逃行：白兔長跪搗藥蝦蟆丸。The moon-toad with a sprig of the immortality herb in its mouth appears on the T-shaped banner from Mawangdui tomb 1, beside a leaping hare. [verify.]

²⁰ 劉向《五經通義》：月中有兔與蟾蜍何？月，陰也；蟾蜍，陽也。而與兔並明，陰系於陽也。[verify.]

than awkwardly: a yang creature in the yin, eating the yin's light, and producing out of wet ground a sickness whose signature symptom is 苦熱, the bitter fever.

What the pattern shows

Set the borrowings out together and something becomes visible about how they were used.

The **formulas** come through verbatim: five graphs, four graphs, three. Short, portable, load-bearing.

The **longer passages** come through recast: the four practitioners rebuilt into new syntax, the Nan shi case retold rather than quoted.

And the **damaged places** are damaged in a particular way. The Frog-Officer keeps his office and loses the plant beside it. The Mencian clause keeps the sanction and loses the safeguard. In both, the structural element survives and the filling drops.

That is what citation from memory looks like. A repertoire was being deployed, at speed, to be effective — which is the right frame for the variants, and it is the subject of the last chapter.

Four · Naming, Station, Displacement

The shrine faced a practical difficulty in the spring of 975. People were sick, and the sickness was understood as 瘴氣 — zhàng qì — a vapor rising off wet ground, a condition of place rather than a creature.

It would be easy, and wrong, to say that such a thing cannot be addressed. The shrine's own pestilence dispatch, one month earlier, addresses one directly. It states that these demons are without form and without voice, asks how they could sicken anyone at all — and then, a page later, speaks to them: demons, if you have any 靈, then go quickly; quickly go; quickly, quickly go; and if in an instant you do not, face the Axe of Heaven.²¹

Formless things are commanded, hurried, and threatened. Nothing in this cosmology is out of reach of speech. 氣 is the medium everything is made of, and things made of 氣 answer to each other; that is what resonance means.

So the naming does not make the miasma reachable. It was reachable.

What it does is something narrower, and the two dispatches show it side by side.

²¹ 驅癘鬼文, juǎn 4 piece 6.

What naming does

This round of miasma is named “frog.”

Not is caused by. Named.

Compare, then, what each of the two documents is able to do.

The pestilence dispatch commands, threatens, and refers upward. It invokes a statute, pronounces beheadings by the thousand and severings by the ten thousand — and then suspends the sentence, because an amnesty is in force, and substitutes the recitation of a couplet by Du Fu. It ends by handing the matter to the Axe of Heaven.

The frog dispatch commands and then lays hands on. It commissions an officer of the Zhou li by name, and prescribes what he is to do: cut off the head, split the belly, mince the flesh, and tear and eat it together with the people of the state.

You can order a formless thing to leave. You cannot behead it, and you certainly cannot eat it with your neighbors.

That is what the naming buys — not reach, but grip. It moves the target out of the class of things that can only be commanded and into the class of things that can be seized. And the document supplies, immediately and at length, exactly what a seizable thing has and a vapor does not: a body with a form and limbs, a dwelling, a diet, a descent, a voice, and a place to be moved to.

Which is also why the two dispatches that name a statute are the two that do not carry out a sentence, and the one that names a creature is the one that does.

What a station is

The document’s word for its own position is 靈, and it is not a word that sorts the world in two.

Across these four texts it appears at four levels. The god of the shrine is 守土之靈, the numen who guards this soil. 巨靈, the Great Numen, is a being one might mount in order to raise the handle of the Dipper. And in the pestilence dispatch, 人為萬物之靈 — humans are the 靈 among the myriad things. Then the demons, of whom it is asked each time whether they have any: 鬼其有靈, 若果有靈, and the finding 冥頑不靈.

Gods have it. Men have it. Demons may have it. What differs is degree and reliability, not presence and absence.

Which changes what the finding is. 冥頑不靈 is not a ruling that the creature belongs to a class without 靈. It is a ruling that this one, on this occasion, showed none — a verdict on conduct. The chant reopens it four lines later, and the reopening only makes sense on that reading: if you do after all have 靈, hear my words and reform.

Which is what a station consists of: a potency, and a post. The Chinese has one word for the second of those and it does double duty — 命 is a command, an appointment,

a mandate, and a fate. I bear the command of the Supreme Emperor is a commission received; 命 elsewhere in the corpus is what a life is allotted. The office and the fate are not distinguished.

A potency with a post is an office. A potency without one is loose in the order, which is roughly what a demon is. The document claims both in its first two lines and acts on the strength of them.

And it names the grounds on which it claims them. The credential in the chant arrives as a couplet, and both halves are working: intelligent and upright — that is what makes me divine, and beside it Heaven's mandate rests with the virtuous — and so it considers the people below.²² The first line says what a spirit is. The second says why the appointment falls where it falls. 天命有德 — the mandate goes to virtue — and the evidence of virtue is attention to those below.

Which is what the document has been doing since its opening sentence. Locusts do not enter the borders; tigers grab their cubs and hurry away. Those are the signs of a virtuous administrator, not of a strong one. What follows them is 當為民除害, harm removed on the people's behalf. The prohibition laid on the frogs is 勿為吾民害, do not harm my people. The reason given for extermination is 以快吾民之所欲, to satisfy my people's wishes. And the Mencius passage the verdict is lifted from closes by making the reward for killing properly 為民父母 — to be father and mother to the people.

So the station claimed is not office in general. It is the office of a benevolent ruler, held on the classical grounds and evidenced by the classical signs.

And here the shrine differs from the man it quotes.

Han Yu was a prefect. When he wrote to the crocodiles his authority was an actual office with actual men behind it: the Prefect has received the command of the Son of Heaven. He never cites a code, because he does not need one. He is the jurisdiction, and the whole dispatch refers to him in the third person as 刺史, the office speaking.

A shrine on a hill has no such warrant. Whatever standing it has, it has to assert. So the frog dispatch opens by claiming the merit-signs of a well-governed territory and naming itself the thing answerable for them — and then, in the chant, supplies the credential from the Zuo zhuan: intelligent and upright — that is why I am a spirit.

The borrowed language gives the document the form of a dispatch. The self-naming gives it the standing to issue one.

That difference is not a late innovation either. A shrine has always had to say who is speaking; what is available to it in 975 is a vocabulary that had been worked into literary shape by a famous official, and it uses that vocabulary to do what shrines do. The apparatus is old. The phrasing is Tang. The claim of office is the shrine's own.

The two companion dispatches do this differently, and the difference is worth record-

²²天命有德兮，念此下民，paired in the chant with 聰明正直兮，吾所以神。聰明正直 is from 左傳·莊公三十二年 (神，聰明正直而壹者也); 天命有德 appears to be the 尚書·皋陶謨 phrase 天命有德，五服五章哉. [verify the 尚書 locus at point of use.] For 為民父母, see 孟子·梁惠王下, quoted in chapter 3.

ing. Both the pestilence and the drought documents name a statute they judge under — 女青玄律, the Nüqing code — and neither is carrying out the sentence itself: the pestilence dispatch suspends execution under an amnesty and refers the matter to the Axe of Heaven, and the drought dispatch closes with Heaven's punishment reaching the demon's body. The frog dispatch cites no statute, and it is the one that acts — commissioning its own officer and prescribing the meal. Where the punishment is referred upward, the code is named. Where the shrine acts, it is not.²³

Why the offense is a place-offense

Read the charges again and notice what the frog is actually accused of being.

Leaping about on the well-rim. Resting in cracked cliff-rock. The gulches and ditches breeding sprites. Wells, gutters, fissures — the seams of things.

The creature is charged with occupying the interstices. And the charges beside those are of the same kind: disturbing the ordering of Heaven, and in the chant, cold and heat proceeding out of sequence. Time out of order, alongside place out of order.

Which is why the sentence takes the form it does.

共徙於萬山湖水之東

Remove together to the east of the Lake Waters of the Ten Thousand Mountains.

徙 — remove, migrate. The same verb Han Yu used on the crocodiles: 其率醜類南徙於海. The same verb the drought dispatch uses, sending its demon to a country the Shanhai-jing had put on the map and calling it 汝之故都 — Rǔ zhī gù dū, your former capital.

Not extermination. Relocation. And the destination is always specified, because the thing being corrected is a matter of position.

A creature in the wrong place is a disorder. The same creature in the right place is a frog in a lake.

The pond

There is one more thing to say, and it is not a criticism of the document.

The writer was correct about the water. Wet ground, standing water, warm air, a long season — these are the conditions under which the fevers of the southern coast arose, and he identified them. The pestilence dispatch had already reasoned toward regulation of season and diet and sense; the frog dispatch raises the same three and discards

²³女青玄律 — the Nüqing statutes, cited by both companion dispatches and not by this one. The code itself survives in the canon as 女青鬼律, whose instrument throughout is the knowing of demons' names: 一知鬼名, 邪不敢前, 三呼其鬼名, 鬼炁即絕. Its penalties fall on the practitioner, never on the demon. Whether the shrine's citation matches what the code contains is a question for a separate study.

them for something in the pond.

He was looking in exactly the right place.

What was in the pond, and what the tradition had catalogued as thoroughly as it catalogued anything, was also the mosquito. Its larvae are described in the natural-history literature with complete accuracy — 孑孓 — Jié jié, born in foul standing water, flexing on the surface, swimming off when a person approaches, and after a while sloughing to become mosquitoes.²⁴ Everything was seen. What was never made was the connection between the insect and the fever, and it was not made in China for another nine hundred years.

So the sorting went to the frog, and it went there for reasons that were sound within the frame available.

The frog transforms spectacularly and visibly — eggs in strings, tadpoles, legs, the tail absorbed — and 化, transformation, was the operative category. The mosquito's origin, by contrast, was reported three or four incompatible ways in the same sources: from larvae, from grass, from a rotting fruit, from the mouth of a bird that vomited them by the pint. A creature with four origins is hard to charge.

The mosquito's harm was also too well understood. It bites; you strike it; the blood is there. It sat under 害物蟲, harmful bug, and was satirized in the poetry as a corrupt official — a blood-sucker at court.²⁵ Explained things do not need demons.

The frog was the opposite: everywhere, loud, associated with exactly the ground where the sickness rose, and doing nothing to anyone. All that presence and no visible offense.

And the frog could be caught, and watched to change, and eaten.

與國人共裂而食之 — Yǔ guó rén gòng liè ér shí zhī — torn apart and eaten together with the people of the state. You cannot execute a mosquito communally. There is nothing to serve.

The name was wrong. The procedure was sound. And the procedure is the thing this document is actually a specimen of.

The fevers did not stop. 瘴 goes on being the word for what that coast breathes for centuries afterward — in the gazetteers, in the medical literature, and in the complaints of men posted south. Whatever the spring of 975 accomplished, it did not accomplish that.

²⁴李時珍, quoted in 古今圖書集成·禽蟲典: 江南有孑孓生洿水中, 好屈伸水上, 見人泳去, 久則蛻為蚊, 此蟲化也. [verify: locate in the 本草綱目 itself at point of use.]

²⁵Song rhapsodies on the mosquito — 虞允文's 殺蚊, 王邁's 蚊賦, 姚勉's 嫉蚊賦 — use the insect to figure the depredations of the ruling elite. [verify: cite a study rather than the poems directly; there is a Sino-Platonic Papers monograph on the Chinese mosquito.]

What the document is

An institution with no office claimed one, in two lines, using a magistrate's vocabulary.

It took a condition of place — a disordered 氣, reachable by speech but not by hand — gave it a name, and thereby gave it a body: something with a form, a dwelling, a diet, a descent, and a neck.

It assembled a case from a read library, at speed, and the assembly shows: formulas verbatim, longer passages recast, a plant name lost while the office it belonged to survived, a sanction from the Mencius arriving without the investigation clause that was its entire purpose.

It tried the defendant, found that on this occasion it had shown no 靈, and sentenced it to be torn apart and eaten by the community that had pronounced the verdict.

And then it changed register, looked at the accused kneeling in the courtyard, said 情實可憐 — the situation is truly pitiable — reopened the question of whether the creature had any spirit-intelligence after all, and offered it clear water and steep mountains and a place to rest.²⁶

That is not a change of heart. A ruler holding the mandate on the grounds this one claimed has the heart that cannot bear the suffering of others; he punishes, and he leaves the door open to reform. The prose is the magistrate. The verse is the father and mother of the people. They are the same office, and the second half was owed from the first two lines.

汝之安宅 — your peaceful dwelling.

The document opened on a territory so well governed that pests do not enter it and predators carry off their young and go. It closes by offering that territory's frogs a home somewhere else.

Named, given a station, and moved.

The Text

驅蝦蟆瘴文 — A Text for Driving Out the Frog-Miasma

²⁶Another community answered the same creature with the opposite instrument, and it is worth setting beside this ending. 蒲松齡, 《聊齋志異》 juǎn 11, 〈青蛙神〉, opens: 江漢之間, 俗事蛙神最虔。祠中蛙不知幾百千萬, 有大如籠者。或犯神怒, 家中輒有異兆; 蛙遊几榻, 甚或攀緣滑壁, 其狀不一, 此家 — between the Yangtze and the Han they serve the frog god most devoutly; frogs wandering the tables and climbing the walls are the god's displeasure, and the household sacrifices to appease him. The god then marries his daughter to a mortal, and refusal proves impossible: the polite decline fails, a rival engagement collapses, and a clean sacrifice comes back with maggots risen in the wine. What resolves the matter is affinity — a daughter-in-law, mutual accommodation, and eventually a lineage the neighbors call 薛蛙子家, the Frog-Xues. Where Áo Fēng answers an ineradicable creature with jurisdiction, the Han valley answers with kinship; and this dispatch, having pronounced dismemberment, closes four lines later on terms and a dwelling. The tale is Qing and from Hubei, so the comparison is one of instruments rather than of transmission.

Xú Xiān Hàn Zǎo (HY 1456 = CT/DZ 1468), juǎn 4, piece 8. Third month, Kāibǎo 8 — March 975. Signed 鰲峰老人, the Old Man of Áo Fēng.

The Chinese entire, in traditional graphs, for readers who want it. The English is in chapter 2, and the translation is Dave Alexander's — English smoothed, philological choices preserved.

On the title. The body text and the chapter heading give 驅蝦蟆瘴文, with 瘴, the miasma-graph, which carries the sickness radical. The table of contents at two witnesses prints 驅蝦蟆瘴文, with 蝦 for 蟆; the body's reading is followed here. Miasma, not malaria: 瘴 is what the document says, and it names an affliction of place. The modern diagnosis is ours, and the gap between the two is discussed in chapter 4.

蝗不入境，虎抱子而趨。

此守土之靈之責，此當為民除害也。

今番瘴氣，名曰蝦蟆，今作文逐之矣。

予嘗讀《南史》，聞有丘傑者，以啖生菜得疾。

餘歲，夢其母告之曰：「此蝦蟆毒也，吾遺子藥三丸，可餌之。」

果而下料斗子數升。然則蝦蟆之為害也，信乎。

夫水族之蟲，各有三百六十種。

類蠹茲蝦蟆，於天地間，最為棄物。

形貌疥磊，手腳爬沙。其腹彭亨，其頸蹙蹙。

色混泥塗，食殘糞壤。

跳梁乎井幹之上，入休乎缺罅之崖。

所居如彼其污，所見如彼其陋，朝夕唯唯，聿役于鬼。

天生德於予，蝦蟆何為哉。

或者又曰：蝦蟆之精，為物之妖。

月于望，則撐腸柱腹，張層哆嘴，猖狂而得志焉。

綠青冥而雀躍，食太陰之精光。

淑擾天紀，暴殄天物。

如此癡馭，天且不達，況于人乎。

今也百姓何辜，罹其疾苦中之者。

起于毛端，發于骨節，其始也。

昏潰馮塞，眩瞽熒惑，其少進也。

體反筋倦，腰重頭旋。

鼻涕流雨，喉咽生煙，喙唾胸嘔。

內燥外乾，似渴不渴，而後苦熱作焉。
單方煤毒，回祿嗣災，焦頭爛額，如坐火坑。
雖欲騎巨靈，舉斗杓，束取渤海之水，灑而擢之，不足為快。
或祖辰戌，汗出乃止。或苦熱既退，乾嗽復然。
連日沉滯，有加而不廖。
我推其端，其誰之由。
夫豈秋行夏令，陰陽之不節歟。
五味適口，飲食之不節歟。
目視玄黃，耳務淫哇，聲色之不節。
何醫師不能加之以藥劑，何灸師不能施之以艾灶。
詛師口牙之霹靂，符師刀筆之縱橫，心勞而目拙，功罔而效遲。
眾想咸至，蝦蟆是尤。
吾奉上帝命，守此土，治此民。
而蝦蟆悍然不死，溝壑為鬼，為魁，為魑魅，為魍魎。
幽陰跪側，奸險邪癖，傲虐是作，罔有恢心。
短狐射影之妖，蝗蛇齧草之毒，亦不如汝為害之甚也。
汝罪滔天，國人皆曰可殺。
今與蝦蟆約，盡率一日，其率種類，共徙於萬山湖水之東。
偷生寄命，勿為吾民害。
不然，則是蝦蟆冥頑不靈，若罔聞知。
吾專委蠃氏焚壯範，以灰酒之。
然後斷其首，剖其腹，膾其肉，與國人共裂而食之。
必須滅其種類，以快吾民之所欲。
蝦蟆聞斯語，驚且懼，各穿綠衣，屈膝庭下。
乞貸命于予，曰：「柳車已備，草糧已裝，自甘黜伏，即日啟程，願王赦其罪。」
於是作文而促之曰：
聰明正直兮，吾所以神。天命有德兮，念此下民。
蠢茲蝦蟆兮，物之妖精。幸災樂禍兮，胡為不仁。
上干天憲兮，寒暑錯行。民氣不舒兮，僵路顛傾。
盧扁愴惶兮，功罔參苓。巫覡吮咀兮，事涉冥冥。
下民何辜兮，疾苦頻仍。蠢茲蝦蟆兮，罪惡貫盈。
眾怨所萃兮，怨汝之名。欲齧汝骨兮，俎醢其身。

我怒斯赫兮，如雷如霆。專委蠲氏兮，明正典刑。
屈膝于庭兮，情實可憐。一辰號乞命兮，萬死一生。
蠹茲蝦蟆兮，若果有靈。明聽予言兮，改過自新。
萬山峻拔兮，湖水澄清。汝之安宅兮，啟處遑寧。
深逝遠伏兮，遁邇潛形。速去速去，急急如律令。

Textual notes

The document was composed at a spirit-writing tray, live, and then passed through a medium, a scribe, an editor, a compiler in 1305, a canon printer in 1607, and a digitizer. The irregularities begin at production, not downstream. What follows records what is visible in the witness. A variant is flagged where it changes what the document is doing; the rest is noted and passed over.

Damage, where the structure survives and the filling drops

焚壯範 will not construe. Almost certainly 焚牡鞠, naming a plant used in the burning. The office (蠲氏) survives, the frame survives, the botanical term drops. The fingerprint of citation from memory.

蚪斗子 for 蝌蚪子, tadpoles. 卞彬's frog rhapsody in the Nan shi writes 蚪鬥; the standard modern form is 蝌蚪. The witness has lost both radicals.

聿役于鬼 — the first graph is uncertain in this witness.

Ordinary transmission slips in the guoxuemi text

Noted so that a reader comparing witnesses is not misled into taking them for readings: 問有丘傑 for 聞有 · 名曰 for 名曰 · 或者又曰 for 又曰 · 暴珍 for 暴殄 · 生烟 for 生煙 · 草紅 for 草糧 · 乞貸命于予曰 for 曰 · 巫現 for 巫覡 · 俎醢 for 俎醢 · 上于天憲 for 上干 · 缺聲 for 缺罄.

Readings adopted, with the alternative on the record

瘴 over 章 in the title. 瘴 carries the sickness radical and is a disease-word; 章 is its phonetic without the radical. The body's 今番瘴氣 settles it. Grounds: internal.

蝦 over 暇 in the title. The body uses 蝦 throughout; only the tables of contents print 暇. Grounds: internal.

Places where the English is provisional

此守土之靈之責 — rendered in chapter 2 as “the spiritual efficacy of the duties of the guardian of the territory.” Chapter 4 argues for a different reading: 靈 as the guardian

himself, a numen holding a post, and 責 as the charge he is answerable for. The charge of the numen who guards this soil.

類蠹茲蝦蟆 — 類 is not carried into the English. Standing immediately after 水族...三百六十種, it is probably taxonomic: of that class.

其少進也 — rendered “with little improvement.” It is the parallel of 其始也 and is a stage-marker: that is its slight advance.

或祖辰戌 — rendered “on some days, sweat is produced and then ceases.” 祖 in this position will not construe as it stands, and the phrase may bear a more specific sense — a cycling through the chén and xū hours, which would make it a statement about the periodicity of the fever rather than about days in general. Open.

聰明正直兮，吾所以神 — rendered “Among the intelligent there are the upright.” 聰明正直 is a four-graph set phrase from 左傳·莊公三十二年, where it defines what a spirit is: 神，聰明正直而壹者也. The line reads: intelligent and upright — that is why I am a spirit.

天生德於予 — the English is correct; the allusion is unmarked. 論語 7.23, Confucius threatened by Huan Tui.

盧扁 — 盧 and 扁, i.e. 扁鵲 of Lu, the archetypal physician; taken here as a single figure rather than two. 參苓 are ginseng and fúlíng.