

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...

*Xi'an, previously, Chan'gan, Central China, 25 March 1996,
Annunciation in Christian terms,
i.e. New Year of medieval Europe*

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Chang'an, One Slip of Moon...
Li Bai (Li Tai Po [1], Tang poet, 701–762)

Xi'an (Western Peace, formerly, *Chang'an*, Eternal Peace) was imperial China's historical capital for more than 1,000 years, from the days of the first emperor Qin Shihuang Di's, at the time when Hannibal battered the Roman republic till well into the 10th century AD and the end of the glorious Tang era (618–906). Kyoto and Nara were modeled after this famous place which probably has no equal on earth other than Jerusalem. Today's city walls date back to early Ming (1368–1644) times and are almost 14 km long and about 15 m high [2]. Cycling on top of the 13 m wide crest of these ramparts is a singular experience, a temptation, the writer could not possibly resist. The Big and the Little Goose Pagoda, The Ming Bell and Drum Towers, above all, the subterranean army of terracotta soldiers from the said emperor's tomb add to the unforgettable sights.

The modern city of Xi'an has a population of more than 3 million and in area far exceeds the quadrangle of historical murals. Air pollution in the city is rampant but progress is undeniable. China has made tremendous efforts in promoting tourism. The Xi'an Hyatt where I stayed is as flawless as a 5-star hotel could be anywhere. Xi'an University has two affiliated hospitals plus an extra Dermatology Hospital. The knowledge of English of the younger staff and residents is reasonable, their knowledge of current research activities is abreast with what can be gleaned from the pages of the

JID or the Archives despite the paucity of periodicals and textbooks. The foreign visitor meets keen interest in his own research activities and there is a great desire to establish links with the outside world, to attend meetings abroad, to spend time overseas and learn, learn. Unfortunately the ubiquitous lack of funds prevents most such efforts. I hope I will be able to mediate the coming of one or other young researcher to Vienna and the domains of Klaus Wolff and Georg Stingl. A rich reservoir of talents waits to be tapped. Enchanted by the historical remnants and by the colleagues' warm hospitality, I concluded my 3-day visit, unsuccessful in but one point, namely, to spot a verse of an early medieval poetess, so much desired because of its cultural relevance to my skin phototype research. Li Po and Tu Fu (712–770), the beloved two heroes of Tang poetry in the city [3], were of no help in this regard.

- 1 Li Po; in: Watson B (ed and transl): *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry*. New York, Columbia Univ Press, 1984.
- 2 Xi'an: China's Ancient Capital; in Holledge S (ed): *Passport Books*. Lincolnwood, NTC Publishing, 1993.
- 3 Li Po, Tu Fu: *Poems* (selected and transl by Arthur Cooper). London, Penguin, 1973.