

HYANGGA. “NATIVE LAND’S SONGS”

(New Interpretations with Comments)

Hyangga is an archaic genre of poetry written in the Korean language via Idu script. The name “Hyangga” has a literal meaning “Native land’s song”. The poems written in this genre were popular during United Silla (VII-X centuries), but they were preserved in the records of Koryeo dynasty. In total there are 25 hyanggas known today, 11 of them belong to a major Buddhist figure Kyunyeo (917-973). They were recorded in the middle of the 10th century and represent the first extant collection of poetry in Korean. The other 14 hyanggas, among which there are both author's and folk ones, were written down in the 13th century by the monk Iryeon and were included in his work “An Unofficial History of the Three States” (“Samguk Yusa”). Hyanggas were very popular among the people: they were chanted to heal from diseases. Hyangga texts were also hung on walls to ward off evil spirits. Some hyanggas were performed during Buddhist ceremonies, where they replaced Chinese texts.

Deciphering hyangga texts is a very hard and not always rewarding business. The Japanese were the first to pay attention to the hyangga (Kono Rokuro and others). However, the fundamental work of the Korean professor Yang Chu Dong “Study of Ancient Songs”, which became the basis for all further works (Kim Wan Chin and others), devoted to ancient Korean poetry, should be considered a real breakthrough in the field of reading them. In Russia, the study of hyangga was started by M.I. Nikitina. Subsequently, other works on this issue appeared. Hyangga also became the subject of special consideration in the works of foreign researchers. However, despite the extensive material and large literature concerning the interpretations and readings of the hyangga, many reconstructions still remain rather strained and not completely convincing. This leaves the question of the final restoration of the hyangga largely open.