From the "**Rhapsody of the Two Capitals**" [*Liangdu fu*]

written by Ban Gu (32-92) in the first century AD.

*[This passage describes a part of the imperial hunt in the great Shanglin Park outside Chang'an during Former Han.]*

And then the Sharpshooters and the Guards of the Gates,

Each with sharp swords and whistling arrows,

Running from their vantage points and hastening in pursuit.

- Birds are frightened and fly into silk,
- Beasts in their panic run upon spears.
- No bolt from a cross-bow fires in vain,
- No bowstring draws twice to the mark.
- The arrows do not kill singly
- But pierce and hit two at a time.

Confusion of movement, a medley of chaos,

- Arrows with marker-strings crossing in flight.
- A wind of feathers and a rain of blood
- Poured on the ground and spread in the sky.
- … Snaring lions and leopards,
- Roping boars and dragons,
- Dragging buffalo and oxen,
- Beating down elephants and bear.
- Leaping ravines and gullies,
- Crossing cliffs and crags,
- Striding hill-sides and mountains.
- Great boulders overthrown, Pines and cedars uprooted,
- Woods and forests destroyed.

Nothing remains of the grass and the trees,
The birds and the animals have all been killed.

The whole of Liangdu fu has been translated by David R Knechtges, Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature, volume 1, Princeton University Press 1982.

Note that the genre of the fu encourages exaggeration, and Ban Gu emphasises the brutality of Former Han to make contrast with the elegant virtues and restraint of his own dynasty of Later Han, described in the second section of the piece. One suspects, however, that this is what the Chinese really like to hear and to read about.

**Poem of the Seven Sorrows** [Qiai shī]

by Wang Can (177-217)

describing his departure from Chang'an about 194

The Western Capital is ruined and in chaos,
Jackals and tigers roam amidst disaster.
Again I flee the lands of central China
And go for refuge among the barbarians of the south.
My kinsfolk mourn to see me go,
My friends together seek to hold me back;
Outside the gate there is nothing to be seen
But white bones scattered on the plain.
By the road-side a woman is starving.
She hugs her child then lays him in the grass.
She turns her heard and hears his cries of weeping,
But she wipes aside her tears and walks away alone.
"I do not know the place where I shall died,
"So how can two together hope to live?"
I spur my horse to flee away from this,
I cannot bear the sounds of words like these.
South and I climb the Baling ridge,
Turn back my head to see far-off Chang'an.
Now I can understand the poet of the "Falling Stream,"
And my sighs of sadness cut me to the heart.
"The Falling Stream" is a lament for the ancient capital of the Zhou dynasty in the first millennium BC, preserved in the Confucian Classic of Poetry.
Jieshi: a poem by Cao Cao (155-220)
written during his campaign against the Wuhuan in the northwest in 207

I East I climb the Jieshi crag
To look on the sweep of the sea.
How tossed and troubled the waters,
How tall and stark the mountain peaks.
The trees grow crowded together,
Every plant flourishing and green.
The autumn wind sighs and sings
And the great waves break and surge.
The courses of the sun and moon
Seem to rise from the waves;
The Milky Way in splendour and brilliance
Seems to rise from the sea.
Fortune indeed is come
And singing expresses our hopes.

II East I climb the Jieshi crag
The tenth month, the first of winter,
The winds from the north come in gusts;
The air of Heaven is biting cold,
Heavy frosts and driving sleet.
The cocks of the wilderness crow to the dawn,
The wild geese fly to the north,
The vultures have gone into hiding
And the bears are settled in their caves.
The work of spades and hoes is ended,
The farmers have harvested and beaten the grain.
The inn-keepers set up their tables
To welcome travellers and merchants.
Fortune indeed is come
And singing expresses our hopes.
III The lands and houses are not the same,
North of the River it is fiercely cold.
Ice drifts float down the streams
And boats find it hard to go on.
The ground is harder than a spade,
Weeds are set in the fields,
The water is gone and flows no longer
And the ice is firm enough to walk.
Scholars are in hiding and distress,
Bravos care little for the laws;
Always in my heart are sighing and sorrow,
Many griefs, and sympathy for their plight.
Fortune indeed is come
And singing expresses our hopes.

IV The sacred tortoise had a very long life,
But he still reached the end of his days;
The soaring dragon can ride on the mists,
But he ends as dust and ashes.
The swift steed in old age rests in his stable,
But he still thinks of a thousand li;
When a brave man comes to his evening years,
Strong heart is yet the same.
The times of life and death
Are not only in the hands of Heaven.
If a man is in harmony with himself
He will live for long years.
Fortune indeed is come
And singing expresses our hopes.