

GENERALS OF THE SOUTH
**The foundation and early history of the Three Kingdoms state
of Wu**

Rafe de Crespigny
Internet edition 2004

Dedicated to the memory of George William Symes 1896-1980,
soldier and scholar

NOTE: This document contains the text of a work which was originally published in 1990 as No. 16 of the Asian Studies Monographs: New Series of the Faculty of Asian Studies at The Australian National University.

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FOREWORD
to the Internet edition 2004

Since the hard-copy of *Generals of the South* is now out of print, and is easily available only through specialist libraries, it seems appropriate to offer the text in electronic form to those who may be interested in the history of the Three Kingdoms, perhaps the most tumultuous and romantic of all Chinese history. Other works in this field are at <http://www.anu.edu.au/asianstudies/decrespigny/>.

In the presentation below, the original English-language of the 1990 edition has been preserved, with a few minor corrections, but there are some changes in format.

Firstly, no characters are included. There are, however, detailed references to Chinese works, and those wish to do further research and checking should have no difficulty in identifying the relevant texts. Given the convenience of searching electronic documents, moreover, I have not included a full general Index.

The Bibliography is largely the same as in 1990, though I have added a few references to later works, including my own. I have also appended a list of early works discussed in the text and the notes, which was formerly a section of the Index.

Finally, rather than incorporating the Maps into the body of the document relating to each chapter, I have collected them into a single, separate portfolio.

Subject to these alterations, following the Preface immediately after this Foreword the present document gives the original text of the 1990 publication.

Rafe de Crespigny
Canberra
March 2004

PREFACE
to the 1990 edition
AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I began to study the history of the Three Kingdoms some thirty years ago, and I benefited greatly from the guidance of Hans Bielenstein, Gören Malmqvist, Fang Chao-ying, Liu Ts'un-yan, Donald Leslie, Patrick Fitzgerald, Wang Gungwu, Hsü Cho-yün, Miyazaki Ichisada and Miyakawa Hisayuki.

One of the pleasant features of work in this field has been the steady development of scholarly information and debate. In the early 1960s there was little material in Western languages apart from the massive translations from *Zizhi tongjian* by Achilles Fang the brilliant essays of Etienne/Stephan Balazs, and the studies by Donald Holzman. Since then, largely as a development of Han studies, including the work of Hans Bielenstein, the publications of the Han Project at Seattle edited by Jack Dull, and the recent appearance of the first volume of the Cambridge History of China, there is a far great quantity of established material on the nature of the first Chinese imperial state and, as a result, on the pressures which brought its disintegration at the end of the second century AD.

I would make special mention of the late Carl Leban, whose thesis on the rise of Cao Cao, and a brilliant essay on the abdication debate of 220, showed an incisive scholarship that gives additional cause to regret his early death.

Many other colleagues have been kind enough to read through all or parts of this work and give me their advice and comments. I am grateful to Hans Bielenstein, Donald Holzman, Yves Hervouet and Michelle Perazolli-t'Serstevens of Paris, Burchard Mansvelt Beck of Leiden, Bill Nienhauser of Wisconsin, Hans Stumpfelt of Hamburg, Michael Loewe of Cambridge, Clayton Bredt of Queensland and, in Canberra, Bill Jenner, Mark Elvin, Igor de Rachewiltz and, particularly, Ken Gardiner and Greg Young.

Though one often takes their services for granted, I do offer most sincere thanks to Y.S. Chan and the Asian Studies librarians of the Australian National University: they have compiled and maintain a splendid collection, and my work would be all but impossible without it.

In the preparation of the book itself, I have been fortunate to have the assistance of Winifred Mumford, who prepared the maps, and May Wang, who has drawn the characters. Both of them have been

tolerant, patient, extremely conscientious, and very generous with their time and attention.

Rafe de Crespigny
Canberra, June 1990

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INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Later Han dynasty marked the end of the first period of Chinese unification. With a brief interregnum, the house of Liu had reigned over the empire for almost four hundred years, but when the central government at Luoyang collapsed in 189 the immediate chaos was succeeded by four hundred years of division. Except for some thirty years under Western Jin, the cultural world of China was divided between two or more rival states until its reunification by Sui at the end of the sixth century.

One could generalise almost indefinitely on the significance of this Period of Division. In the traditional Chinese view, the era of disunity was long regarded as a time when internecine warfare brought political weakness and allowed the invasion of barbarians into the heart-land of east Asian civilisation; and earlier Western scholars tended to follow that political line, and look upon the period as comparable to the Dark Ages of Europe. More recently, Chinese and foreigners have begun to explore the history in more detail, and have recognised the value of the achievements of that time, not only in the heritage of literature, philosophy and art which was left for the future, but also in terms of the energy and the interest of the age itself. Among other notable developments, the centuries which followed the fall of Han saw the adaptation of Chinese thought to absorb and comprehend the teachings of Buddhism, notable changes in the racial and social structure of the Chinese people and a great expansion of colonisation over the south.

And besides this legitimate historical interest, the first years of division, the period of the "Three Kingdoms," is the great age of romance in Chinese literature, comparable to that of the Arthurian legend in Britain or the cycle which gathered about Charlemagne in France and Germany. For more than a thousand years the story and drama cycles, culminating in the celebrated novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, have entertained and inspired the scholars, the poets and the common people of China.

The present volume is concerned with one aspect of that great tradition: the history of the development of the state of Wu, under the control of the Sun family, in the territory south of the Yangzi. The establishment of this separate state, and its maintenance for the best part of a hundred years, was a critical factor for the centuries

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that followed. On the one hand, the independence of Wu prevented Cao Cao, victor of the civil war in the north, from restoring the unity which had been lost by the last emperors of Han. At the same time, however, by confirming and developing the Chinese presence in that frontier territory, the generals of Wu established the conditions not just for their own short-lived political survival, but also for the dynasties which took refuge there after the overthrow of Western Jin at the beginning of the third century, and which maintained their cultural heritage through the next three hundred years.

So the history of the state of Wu has broad implications for the whole history of medieval China. The viewpoint of the present work, however, is deliberately more restricted. It is necessary, of course, to consider the general pattern of events at the time, but I have sought to analyse them in terms of the interests of the Sun family and their associates, and from the perspective of the lands of the south.

This is the story of how one family in one region rose to local military power, and the time scale itself is very short. Sun Quan was born in 182 as the second son of an assistant county prefect, and he placed his claim to the title of emperor less than fifty years later.

Such remarkable fortune was based firstly upon the brave career of Sun Quan's father Sun Jian, who rose from obscurity to second-rank command in the civil war, and then upon the achievement of Sun Quan's brother Sun Ce, who was compelled to build rather upon the reputation of his father than upon any substantial inheritance, but who conquered the territory south of the Yangzi and left it for the benefit of his brother. For his own part, Sun Quan is remembered as the leader of a remarkable group of strategists and fighting men, and it was his personality and his statesmanship, less easy to assess, that gave authority to the work of his most celebrated commanders, Zhou Yu, Lu Su, Lü Meng and Lu Xun.

These matters of personality, politics and war were played out in a particular physical and social environment. Firstly, the preconditions for a viable separate state had been established by the steady Chinese colonisation and development of the south during Han; and then, in more general terms, the prospects of success and survival in the civil war depended to a considerable degree upon questions of family and status.

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The first great warlords, men such as Yuan Shao, Yuan Shu and Liu Biao, came of distinguished official lineage and substantial landed property. Some of their spectacular but short-lived rivals, Dong Zhuo, Lü Bu and Gongsun Zan, sought unsuccessfully to establish a high position without the authority which such social rank could give them, but they were never able to maintain themselves in long-term rivalry against the weight and prestige of the men of great family. Though Cao Cao, founder of Wei, came of notable family, it has been well argued that the edge which gave him success may be found in the fact that his father had been adopted by a eunuch at court, and the high rank and prosperity he could claim were thus in more need of energy and aggression to defend them.¹

Elsewhere, in the long term of the civil war, the successful survivors were men, literally, on the margin: the Gongsun family of Liaodong in present-day Manchuria, the Shi of the far south, and the Sun family of the lower Yangzi. Each of these leaders had sufficient local prestige to establish a government, and they were also far enough away from north China not to be swamped in the maelstrom of that central conflict. And one must also admire the achievement of Liu Bei, who came from the northeast of the empire, who claimed with limited justification to represent the old imperial clan, but who found acceptance and survival in the west.

It was the state of Wu, however, founded and governed by an undistinguished family from a frontier of the Chinese world, which outlived its rivals and established an empire in the lands beyond the Yangzi. The government of Sun Quan and his successors defied the power of the north for most of a century, controlling the best part of three provinces of Han, and developing that territory into a prosperity and culture which made the fortune of south China for the future. In some respects this achievement compares less well with the lost grandeur of Han, the splendour of Wei and the arrogance of Shu-Han, but in the context of the time, the place and the structure of society, limited success, rather than extravagant failure, was a triumph in the art of the possible.

In later times, the value and importance of the history of Wu was overshadowed by the romantic tradition, which found its chief tension and interest in the struggle between the "usurping" power of

¹ See, for example, Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers*, 446 and 537-40, and de Crespigny, *Man from the Margin* [also on Internet publication].

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Cao Cao and his state of Wei and the "legitimate" heroes of Liu Bei and his band of brothers in Shu-Han. In this great contest, which owes as much to the dramatic arts as to those of the historian, the position of the men of Wu has been reduced to that of bit players, frequently with no more than walk-on parts, and sometimes, sadly, as foils and buffoons against whom the major heroes can display their wisdom, courage and skill.

Like most others, I was first introduced to the story of the Three Kingdoms by means of the novel and the dramas, and it was that splendid fiction which led me to investigate the history behind it all. Repeatedly, however, there is contradiction and confusion between the romantic tradition and the historical one, and the conflict is made all the more confusing by the fact that the tales told to us by Chen Shou and his rivals, collected in the commentary of Pei Songzhi, are themselves a mixture of fact and fiction. In disconcerting fashion, the history presented by *Sanguo zhi* often differs from the fiction of *Sanguo yanyi* rather as an alternative form of romance than as a neat contrast of truth with falsehood. Pei Songzhi remarked upon the problem, and throughout the present work I have been faced with a kaleidoscope of possible stories. In a concluding chapter I discuss the historiography of the period, and in this respect, unlike the major school of modern criticism, which concentrates largely upon the later version of the stories as expressed in the story cycles, drama and the novel, I give first consideration to the earliest chroniclers of that age. For this viewpoint, the later development of romance is no more than a supplement to the basic question of how it really was.

To deal with that basic question, I have largely used a narrative form. The first chapter discusses the situation in south China at the end of Han, and the eighth considers the nature of government, society and economy in the third-century state of Wu. A central part of the work, however, offers an account of the development of the state, with particular attention to time and place, and with concentration upon the chieftains of the Sun family and the men and women who supported and served them.

I take this approach quite deliberately, for I strongly believe that if we are to understand any period of Chinese history we must have a clear picture of time and place. There is a general tendency in modern Sinology to present broad judgements on general themes,

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but such argument can be supported only on a firm basis of fact. As a first step to analysing and assessing the course of events, we need to know what those events were, and in the case of the Three Kingdoms there are many incidents which every schoolboy knows of, but which did not happen in the way they are commonly told.

So the purpose of this work is to give a picture of the period which saw the fall of Han and the establishment of an independent state in south China. Such a picture must represent social, political and economic factors of the age, it must also include the time, the place, and the personal perceptions of the people concerned. Moreover, it is important who those people were: it was critical to Sun Jian's career that he came of obscure and distant background in a society which was dominated by gentry landowners and their clients; it is remarkable that Sun Ce achieved so much success before he reached his mid-twenties; it was vital for the fortunes of the family enterprise that Sun Quan was of sufficient age and authority to receive the allegiance of the various commanders who had served his elder brother, and it was significant for the state that he lived to rule it for so long. In such brittle dynasties, personality and individual relations played a very large role, too often neglected in the search for more general themes.

And after all, if the achievements of these people set a pattern for the future and caught the imagination of those who came after them, it is only fair to look for the facts which served as basis for the legend. Even after such a length of time and behind such a refraction of romance, however blurred the view of history may be, the "third kingdom" of Wu still presents a heroism of its own.

CHRONOLOGY
of the history of the Sun family and of the state of Wu
155-229

This table is concerned primarily with the history of the Sun family and the state of Wu; it does not offer a full survey of the history of China at the time. Some major events, not immediately relevant to the fortunes of the Sun family, are indicated in *italics*.

Dates are given in terms of Western years AD. There is, of course, always some uncertainty and the possibility of confusion, notably because of the overlap at the end of the Chinese year and the beginning of the Western year.

- 155** birth of Sun Jian
- 172-174 Sun Jian on campaign against the rebellion of Xu Chang in Kuaiji; he receives commissioned appointment as an assistant county magistrate
- 175** birth of Sun Ce
- 182 birth of Sun Quan
- 184 Sun Jian on campaign against the Yellow Turban rebels in Nanyang commandery and the storming of Wan city
- 185-186 Sun Jian on campaign against the rebels in Liang province
- 187-189 Sun Jian as Grand Administrator of Changsha
- 189 *death of Emperor Ling and regency of the He family; attempted coup by the eunuchs and death of He Jin; Dong Zhuo seizes power and places Liu Xie, Emperor Xian, on the throne*
- 190 Sun Jian joins Yuan Shu in the alliance against Dong Zhuo; *Shi Xie holds power in Jiao province*
- 191** Sun Jian captures Luoyang from Dong Zhuo; Sun Jian attacks Liu Biao and Huang Zu in Xiangyang; death of Sun Jian
- 192 *Dong Zhuo killed in Chang'an*
- 193 Yuan Shu defeated by Cao Cao and retreats to Yang province; Sun Ce calls upon Yuan Shu; *Tao Qian attacked by Cao Cao in Xu province*
- 194 Sun Ce joins Yuan Shu at Shouchun; *Liu Yao appointed Inspector of Yang province*; Sun Ce attacks Lu Kang in Lujiang for Yuan Shu

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- 195 Sun Ce attacks Liu Yao south of the Yangzi; Liu Yao retreats to Yuzhang; Sun Ce seizes Danyang and Wu commanderies; *Emperor Xian escapes from Chang'an*
- 196 Sun Ce defeats Wang Lang and captures Kuaiji commandery; *Emperor Xian comes to Cao Cao at Xu city*
- 197 Yuan Shu proclaims himself Emperor; Sun Ce renounces his allegiance to Yuan Shu and allies himself with the Han court under Cao Cao
- 198 *Lü Bu and Cao Cao defeat Yuan Shu*; Sun Ce defeats Taishi Ci and Zu Lang in western Danyang; *death of Liu Yao in Yuzhang*
- 199 *death of Yuan Shu*; Sun Ce defeats Liu Xun and captures Lujiang
- 200** Sun Ce defeats Huang Zu and captures Yuzhang from Hua Xin; death of Sun Ce, succeeded by Sun Quan; *Cao Cao defeats Yuan Shao at Guandu*
- 201 *Liu Fu appointed as Cao Cao's Inspector of Yang province at Hefei*
- 202 *death of Yuan Shao in north China*
- 203 Sun Quan attacks Huang Zu in Jiangxia and destroys his fleet
- 204 mutiny in Danyang, put down; operations in Poyang; *Cao Cao defeats Yuan Shang and captures Ye city*
- 205 conquest of Poyang; He Qi confirms control of the Min River valley in present-day Fujian
- 206 Zhou Yu attacks Mo and Bao encampments in Jing province; operations against Huang Zu
- 207 operations against Huang Zu; *Cao Cao defeats the Wuhuan at White Wolf Mountain*
- 208 defeat and death of Huang Zu; *death of Liu Biao*; *Cao Cao takes Jing province*; *Liu Bei is defeated at the Chang Slope and flees to Xiakou*; Cao Cao is defeated at the Red Cliffs by the army of Sun Quan, commanded by Zhou Yu, in alliance with Liu Bei and Liu Qi; Sun Quan attacks Hefei without success

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- 209 Cao Cao demonstrates in strength at Hefei; He Qi establishes Xindu commandery south of the Huang Shan; Zhou Yu captures Jiangling city in Nan commandery
- 210 death of Zhou Yu, succeeded by Lu Su; first settlement of Jing province with Liu Bei; appointment of Bu Zhi as Inspector of Jiao province
- 211 Sun Quan shifts his capital to Jianye; *Cao Cao defeats the warlords of the northwest; Liu Zhang invites Liu Bei into Yi province*
- 212 Sun Quan fortifies Jianye and establishes the base at Ruxu
- 213 Cao Cao attacks Ruxu, then withdraws
- 214 Sun Quan captures Huan city in Lujiang; *Liu Bei takes over the government of Yi province*
- 215 the second settlement of Jing province with Liu Bei; *Zhang Lu surrenders Hanzhong commandery to Cao Cao*; Sun Quan attacks Hefei without success
- 216 *Cao Cao takes the title King of Wei*
- 217 Cao Cao attacks Ruxu, Sun Quan makes a formal surrender, and Cao Cao withdraws; death of Lu Su, succeeded by Lü Meng; Lu Xun campaigns against the hills people from Danyang to Kuaiji
- 218
- 219 *Liu Bei defeats Xiahou Yuan and captures Hanzhong commandery from Cao Cao; Liu Bei proclaims himself King of Hanzhong; Guan Yu attacks Cao Ren in Nanyang commandery and besieges Fan city; Lü Meng attacks and destroys Guan Yu; Sun Quan takes control of Jing province*
- 220** *Cao Cao dies; Cao Pi succeeds as ruler of Wei; Bu Zhi is replaced in the south by Lü Dai; 10th month: Han abdicates to Wei and Cao Pi takes the imperial title; Sun Quan sends tribute to Wei*

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- 221 *Liu Bei proclaims himself emperor in succession to Han and in rivalry to Wei*; Sun Quan establishes his capital at Wuchang in Jing province; Liu Bei embarks on campaign against Sun Quan; Sun Quan declares himself subject to Wei and is granted title as King of Wu
- 222 Lu Xun defeats Liu Bei and destroys his army; Sun Quan breaks with Wei; Cao Pi sends armies against Sun Quan's positions on the middle and the lower Yangzi; Sun Quan restores the alliance with Shu
- 223 *death of Liu Bei*; *Zhuge Liang acts as regent in Shu*; Cao Pi withdraws from the attack against Wu; Wu capture Qichun commandery
- 224 Cao Pi attacks the lower Yangzi, then withdraws
- 225 Cao Pi constructs the Canal to Smash the Caitiffs and again attacks the lower Yangzi, again withdraws; *Zhuge Liang conquers the southwest for Shu-Han*
- 226 *Cao Pi dies, succeeded by Cao Rui under a regency including Sima Yi*; unsuccessful attacks by Wu against Jiangxia and Xiangyang; death of Shi Xie, Lü Dai destroys the Shi family and takes all Jiao province for Wu; Quan Zong brings hills people south of Danyang under control
- 227 Meng Da in Xincheng seeks to turn against Wei, but is destroyed by Sima Yi before Shu or Wu can assist him
- 228 *Zhuge Liang campaigns in the Wei valley*; Wu forces ambush and defeat Cao Xiu of Wei in Lujiang; *Gongsun Yuan takes control in the northeast*; Sun Quan seeks alliance with Gongsun Yuan
- 229 Sun Quan proclaims himself emperor; renewed treaty of alliance with Shu-Han