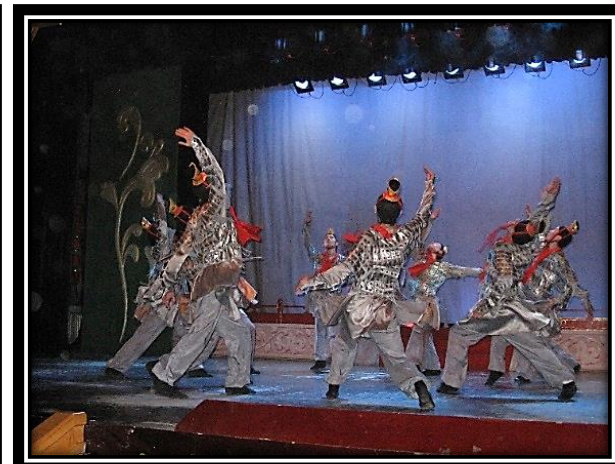


08 TANG DYNASTY ENCHANTMENT



Yes, dear gentle reader, Xian was special. The focus on beauty, gentleness, romance, and history enraptured me. Nowhere was that more evident than in the traditional Tang Dynasty dancing and singing that we saw there. A private company had commissioned a special official performance of Chinese Tang Dynasty entertainment, and our guide secured permission for us to purchase tickets to attend. The dancing and costumes are authentic from 1300 years ago.

I know I have gone way overboard in this post displaying photos of that performance, dear reader, but I cannot help it! That was the night we enjoyed the 17-Dumpling Dinner, about which we have already spoken, and I swear those dumplings did not make me nearly swoon that night – it was the dancing and singing!











When the famous Thousand Arms Dance began, symbolizing reaching out to all peoples of the earth, I wanted to leap out of my seat and wave my arms in the air right along with the dancers!



As the dancers performed the stately and measured moves, lighting technicians kept us awash in a swirl of colors. It was magical!





My favorite move was the graceful sinking into a kneeling position and then rising. Myrtle ruined the moment just a wee bit when she whispered, 'Jeez, I wish I could do that!' But I knew what she meant, and I forgave her.



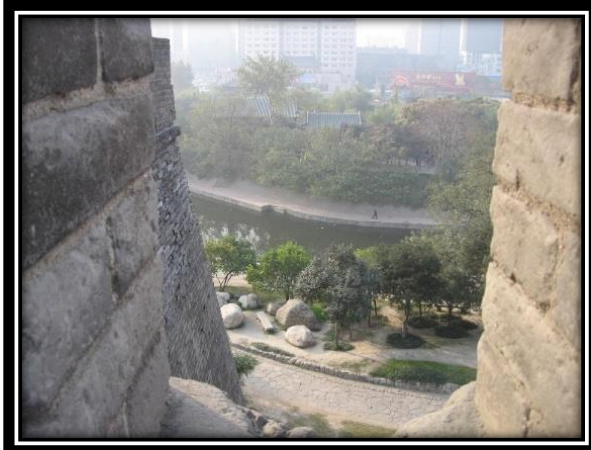
When she saw this final pose, my dear Myrtle just sighed, and I knew she was beyond jealous of that dancer hoisted on high and allowing her long silken scarves to unfurl gracefully from her hands.

We were all quite silent on the way back to the hotel, a bit overwhelmed, I think, by the gorgeous spectacle we had just witnessed.

The next day we were scheduled to visit the old city wall. Unfortunately, six out of our group of ten had developed colds and upper respiratory problems, probably from the smog in the air. Myrtle and I were blessedly not among that group. "It's that wine I drink every night, JoJo," Myrtle whispered to me. I guess her wine had magic long-distance capabilities, because I was spared even though I did not drink her wine. Our guide graciously offered to cancel our outdoor excursion due to the illnesses, but there was unanimous agreement that the show must go on, so on we went.



By 8:15 am we were at the south gate of the old city wall, which is nine miles long and has four main gates. "The moat was built first and the excavated dirt used for the interior of the wall, with bricks on the outside," said our guide. We climbed the stairs to the top of the wall and imagined being soldiers guarding the city from on top of that wall. "Horses and chariots could ride on top of the wall," continued our guide. "This wall is 600 years old and is the only well-preserved original city wall in all of China. Each of 98 districts is responsible for maintaining a section of the wall."

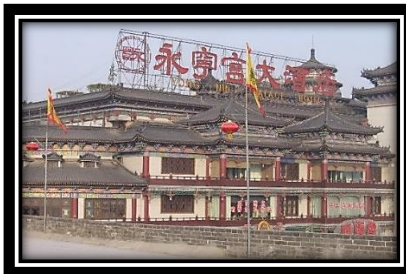
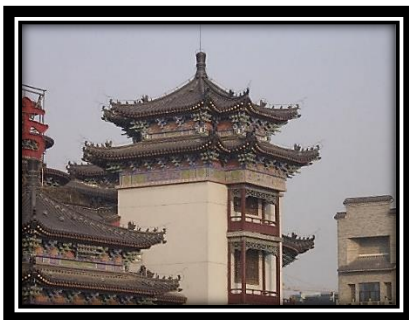


The views on top of the wall were marred somewhat by the smoggy air. Some in our group started coughing anew, giving rise to a snide remark from my Myrtle, sotto voce of course, "The murky air has reminded them they are supposed to be coughing." I still found the views enchanting, and I pretended I was a long-ago soldier preparing to launch an arrow from this arrow slit aperture in the wall. Our guide had told us that the shooting distance through the soldier's holes is just beyond the moat when shooting by crossbow.



Myrtle seemed to read my mind then and said, sort of snottily, “JoJo, I thought you were a pacifist.” Uncanny how she can read my mind like that! When we spotted this interesting thing, one of the women exclaimed, “Oh, look, an iron pineapple!” And of course a man quickly smirked, “Yep, they launched iron pineapples down on the enemy.” The guide smiled and said patiently, “These receptacles held extra ammunition for the soldiers.” I was impressed that here in Xian even such a base item as a barrel holding extra ammunition was deemed worthy of decoration.

The rickshaw riders were all lined up ready for the day’s business. Please note how they are dressed, dear reader! I called them the Tuxedo Taxi. And look at the architecture on this guardhouse! I will admit straight up that I quite adore Tang Dynasty architecture. All those smiling upturned eaves on the rooftops, all those dragons and bulls and dogs and other animals perched perkily up there guarding and watching over everything – what is not to love about that? (P.S. Did you like the alliteration, my reader?)



When we came down from the wall, an entertainment treat was waiting for us, to be performed outdoors on a giant red rug. I was so mesmerized by the size of that rug and trying to figure out how it had been moved to this place, that I lost our guide’s explanation of the actions of the theater. Myrtle was not too helpful either. All she said, impatiently, was, “It’s a traditional performance of Tang Dynasty Theater featuring a romantic folk tale in which a lovely young ribbon dancer and her court win the heart of the Emperor and save the day.” Hmm. I wonder if she just made that up.



Did you ever see such colorful soldier's uniforms? They were dazzling, and quite a bit more interesting than the gowns the girls wore, actually, although I did like the girls' headresses. The ribbon dancer's costume made me shiver. But she was amazing. I think her ribbons were 15-20 feet long! What talent!



After the show, we were showered by confetti and invited to go onto the red rug to talk with the performers. Myrtle went immediately to one of the young soldiers, presumably to manifest her charms, and I went to the ribbon dancer to congratulate her. But she had so many goosebumps on her arms that I felt chilled myself. By this time Myrtle and her chosen soldier were engaged in such an animated spectacle of bowing and smiling and Nihowing that some of the Chinese performers were watching them with interest. To me they just looked like drunken ducks, but I did refrain from informing Myrtle of my opinion after I finally got her dragged away from her soldier.

Soon we were on our way back to the hotel to prepare our departure from this captivating city. Oh Xian, Xian, I shall miss you, smog and all.

To be continued . . .

