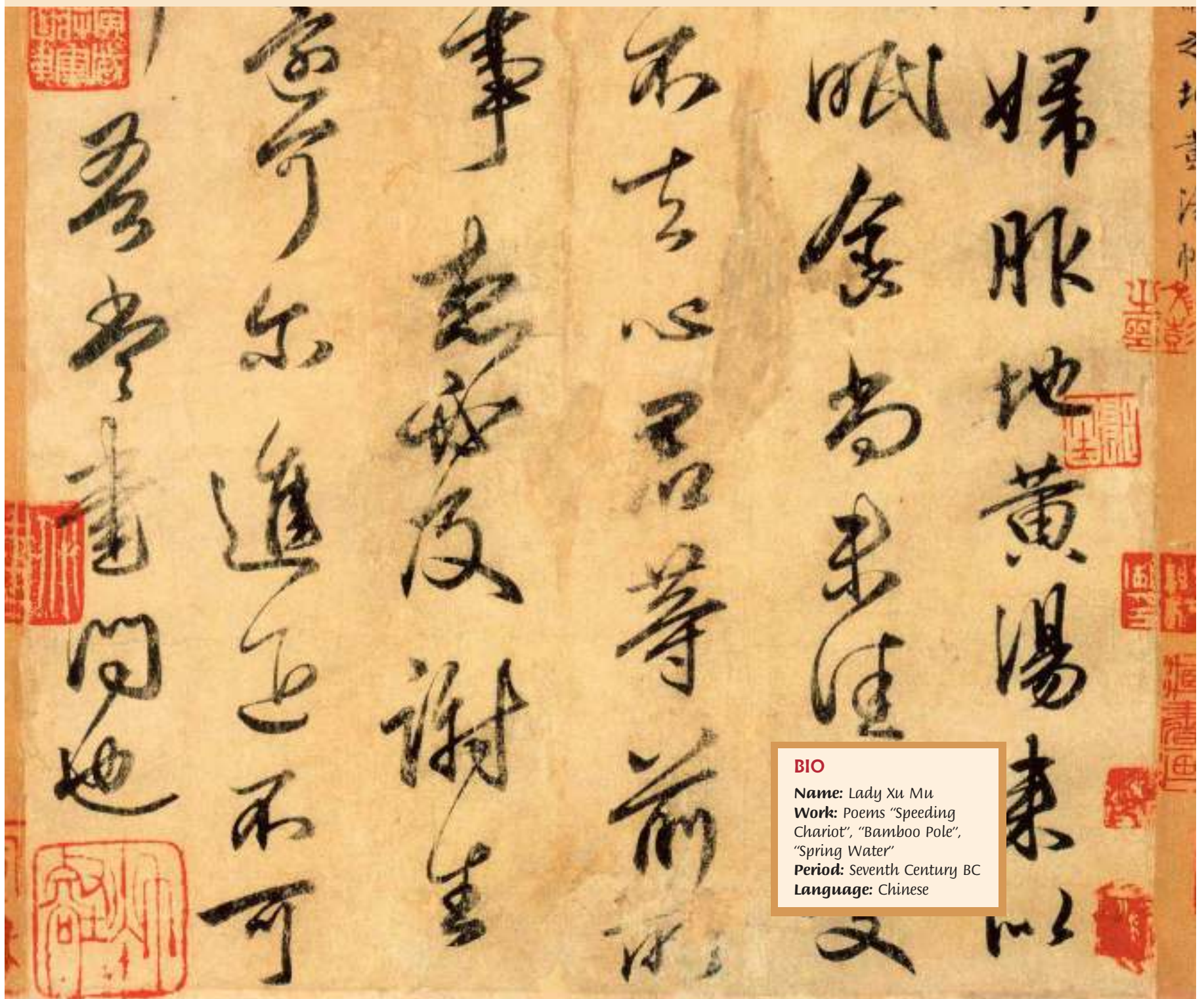


PAGES FROM THE PAST

Heart beats for homeland

The first recorded female Chinese poet, she was not just a writer but also a patriot. Her works express not just her flair with words but also her longing and love for her home, the State of Wey, which she left shortly after her wedding. And when her beloved State was invaded, she marched towards it in a chariot with emergency supplies, hoping to save it from destruction. This is the story of Lady Xu Mu

Anusha Parthasarathy

**BIO**

Name: Lady Xu Mu

Work: Poems "Speeding Chariot", "Bamboo Pole", "Spring Water"

Period: Seventh Century BC

Language: Chinese

About Lady Xu Mu

Lady Xu Mu was born to Wan, Count Zhao of Wey and his wife Xuan Jiang, with the clan name Ji. When she was older, she married Duke Mu of the neighbouring State of Xu and became known as Lady Xu Mu. She wasn't particularly thrilled about the marriage since she saw Xu as a weak State that wouldn't protect her homeland in times of need. But persuaded by the rich gifts of the Duke of Xu, her parents decided that he would be her husband. With that agreement forged, Xu Mu left her beloved homeland.

Her longing for home was expressed in the poems she wrote during her times in Xu. "Bamboo Pole" and "Spring Water" spoke of how much she missed home. These were the only two works of hers from that time that survived.

Her uncle, who took over Wey after her father, was an incompetent ruler who drained the coffers with his affinity for pet cranes. In fact, it is said he gave his pet cranes important places in his court. In 660 BC, when the northern Di nomads invaded Wey, the State was left defenceless and the capital was burnt and pillaged. After her uncle was killed, her brother took over the throne and he too died soon after. During this time, she realised it was her duty to help her homeland and drove on a chariot towards Wey, requesting help and supplies from neighbouring States. The Xu courtiers stopped her and persuaded her to return to Xu. It was at this time she wrote "Speeding Chariot", a scathing critique of bureaucracy.

The poem had a strong response, especially from the neighbouring Qi statesmen, who rode to Wey and solved its crisis. The State shifted its capital elsewhere and survived for another 400 years, thanks to its daughter Lady Xu Mu. Her poems were praised by her contemporaries and carried down the Wey State through generations.

Excerpt

Poetry was an art form that many cultivated women were trained to write, and when she moved to her husband's kingdom, Xu wrote "Bamboo Pole", soaked in nostalgia for her home.

*With a long and slender bamboo
I fished by the shores of Qi;
Can't help thinking of the river
And the land so far from me.
On the left, the fountain gushes,
On the right, the river flows.
Far away the girl has travelled
From parents, brothers and home.*

Did you know?

When Xu Mu's homeland was under siege, she approached her husband for help and asked him to send his forces. He refused and so she left Xu to go towards her homeland in search of help. Many called her rash and meddlesome but she was also appreciated for her strong and capable leadership during hardship.



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