

CHINESE HISTORY III: IMPERIAL ERA EPIGRAPHIC SOURCES

There are a variety of important and incidental epigraphic sources for Chinese historical studies. Among the most important are oracle bone divinations, central to all Shang studies, ritual bronze dedicatory inscriptions, which are our primary source for reliable information on the Western Chou, and stele inscriptions, which form important sources for Imperial era biographical information and also preserve some early texts. While epigraphy in the strictest sense refers only to inscriptions engraved on hard media, such as bones, shells, or stone, the field of epigraphy in Chinese Studies has grown to include sources that are inscribed in ink; for example, Han and pre-Han written texts preserved on silk, bamboo, or wooden slips are often treated together with epigraphic sources because they share the common methodological challenge of deciphering ancient scripts. This section includes some information on these sources, along with sources of numismatic scholarship (reference works concerning coins and their cast inscriptions).

This section of C511 materials is organized according to the following topic areas:

- A. Early bamboo, silk, and wooden texts
- B. Ch'in "Stone Drum" and Imperial stone texts and Han period stone classics
- C. Inscriptional resources for Imperial China
- D. Numismatic resources

A. Early bamboo, silk, and wooden texts

☞ Consult Wilkinson 2000, pp. 791-800.

The variety of media on which texts were preserved during the ancient period, and the forms that those texts took, have been surveyed in:

T. H. Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962)

In recent decades, archaeologists in China have excavated Han tombs and other sites that have yielded a rich store of preserved texts. These texts are in ink, and written on bamboo strips (*chu-chien* 竹簡), silk (*po-shu* 帛書), and wooden strips (known as *Han-chien* 漢簡 when dating from the Han period, and more generally as *chien-tu* 簡牘, a more general term that has come to be applied principally to such materials). The most famous of these finds are widely known by their site names: Ma-wang-tui 馬王堆, Shui-hu-ti 睡虎地, Yin-ch'üeh-shan 銀雀山, Chü-yen, and so forth. A good summary of the earlier and larger wave of such finds may be found in:

Michael Loewe, "Manuscripts Found recently in China: A Preliminary Survey," in *T'oung Pao* 63.2-3 (1977), 99-136

Some of these finds, particularly those at Ma-wang-tui, have had greatest impact on the fields of religion and thought. Though such fields are, of course, included within the larger field of cultural history, to keep this section manageable, will focus here only on finds that bear on issues of institutional history, specifically those at Shui-hu-ti and Chü-yen.

Shui-hu-ti Ch'in-mu chu-chien 睡虎地秦墓竹簡 (Peking: Wen-wu ch'u-pan-she, 1978)

The Shui-hu-ti finds from Hu-pei are best noted for the sets of pre-dynastic Ch'in legal codes that we buried along with the occupant of the tomb (although other materials of historical interest, including chronicles, were also found). These bamboo strips have substantially revised our view of the "Legalist" nature of the Ch'in. They have been translated into English, with extensive commentary, in:

A. F. P. Hulséwé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985)

Lao Kan 勞幹, *Chü-yen Han-chien* 居延漢簡, 2 vols. (Taipei: 1960) [Oversize O.C. PL 2448 .L28]

In the 1930s, Swedish archaeologists discovered a rich cache of wooden slips near Chü-yen in Kansu, where the Han had established a remote garrison. This find yielded extensive information on Han military and civilian administration. Lao's transcription of these (in vol. 1 of this work) created the opportunity to employ them for historical research; they formed the basis of Loewe's study, listed below. A more recently uncovered cache of Chü-yen documents, available in the following publication, is the basis of Nagata's more comprehensive study.

Chü-yen hsin-chien 居延新簡 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1994) [O.C. PL 2448 .C488 1994]

Michael Loewe, *Records of Han Administration*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) [DS 748 .L64]

Nagata Hidemasa 永田英正, *Kyoen Han-ken no kenkyū* 居延漢簡の研究 (Tokyo: 1989) [O.J. PL 2457 .C488 N33 1988]

The field of bamboo and silk texts has been explosively changed since the early 1990s by a series of high profile archaeological findings, such as the Pao-shan 包山 and Kuo-tien 郭店 excavations, and by the appearance on the Hong Kong black market of extensive caches of pre-Qin bamboo texts clearly robbed from graves in Hubei Province (purchased and published by the Shanghai museum in a series of lavishly presented volumes – six to date). The texts date from approximately 300 BCE, and this represent the earliest known ink texts in China. Publications of these texts has produced a small industry of secondary commentary, much generated by scholarly websites based in the PRC. Information on these pre-Imperial sources is found in materials Section 4: Philological Studies, Paleography, and Etymology.

B. "Stone Drum" texts and Han period stone classics

This category covers some unique early epigraphic sources which, though generally of little direct importance for historical studies, are so famous that it seems worthwhile to note them here as items of general cultural significance.

The “Stone Drum” inscriptions (*shih-ku-wen* 石鼓文) is a set of pre-Imperial Ch'in poems inscribed on drum shaped stones (these should not be confused with the monumental stelae erected by Ch'in Shih-huang, the inscriptions of which are preserved in the *Shih-chi*). During the T'ang, these inscriptions became famous antiquities, though their nature was little understood. They were studied and commented on by famous literati, such as the poet-politician Han Yü 韓愈. The stones are currently housed in the Ku-kung Museum in Beijing. A comprehensive study of the *shih-ku-wen* is:

Na Chih-liang 那志良 *Shih-ku t'ung-k'ao* 石鼓通考 (Taipei: 1958) [O.C. PL 1244 .N12]

More important historically (but somewhat less studied because of the less problematic nature of the script in which they were carved) are a series of texts that were composed at the order of the First Ch'in Emperor and inscribed on high rock faces of major mountains. These texts are recorded in the *Shih-chi* (*ch.* 6), and some fragments of the original carvings remain visible and are preserved in published rubbings. For a study of these, see:

Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000)

The other unique resource is known as the “stone classics” (*shih-ching* 石經). During the Later Han, the importance of the Confucian classical corpus became so great that in A.D. 175 Ling Ti ordered that an accurate (that is, New text) version of the classics be carved on stelae at the capital. Major fragments of these versions of the classics still survive, and form a significant resource for textual studies of the Confucian canon. Rubbings and transcriptions of the extant fragments may be found in:

Ma Heng 馬衡, *Han shih-ching chi-ts'un* 漢石經集存, 2 vols (Peking: K'o-hsueh ch'u-pan-she, 1957) [Oversize O.C. PL 2459 .A5]

C. Stone inscriptions in Imperial China

This broad field covers stelae and other inscriptions from the Ch'in on. The resources are enormous, because stelae have a tendency to stick around, and because tens of thousands of touring literati over the centuries made it their business to transcribe and collect stele inscriptions. This enormous mass of written records might seem, at first thought, to promise the possibility of detailed accounts of local and personal events on a scale far finer than could be provided by textual sources. But unfortunately the dedicatory contexts of stelae severely limit their usefulness. They are more often celebrations than biographical or historical accounts.

Nevertheless, patient mining of these epigraphic sources can yield considerable amounts of information not available elsewhere, and the inscriptions do form a significant source, particularly for biographical work on relatively obscure figures.

Two recent works in English together constitute an excellent introduction to the nature of such sources: the first focuses on free-standing inscribed stones (stelae or steles), the second on

inscriptions carved directly into rock face.

Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2004) [DS 719 .W65 2004]

Robert Harrist, *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008) [GN 799 .P4 H3345 2008]

☞ Consult also, Wilkinson 2000, pp. 804 (Han stone inscriptions), 816 (Six Dynasties), 838-39 (Sui, T'ang, Five Dynasties), 855 (Sung), 963-64 (Ming, Ch'ing)

There are two primary types of resources: large collections of reprinted stele texts, and indexes to these collections. The most important of these indexes is:

Yang Tien-hsun 楊殿珣, *Shih-k'o t'i-pa so-yin* 石刻題跋索引 (1941, enlarged ed., Shanghai: Commercial Press 1941, 1957) [O.R. Z 3108 .I59 Y22]

Yang's index is the principal means of finding one's way around collections covering the period from the Han to the Yuan (Ming and Ch'ing inscriptions are too numerous to include). The index is arranged according to inscription genre, and within each genre, chronologically by dynasty and reign period. A four-corner index at the back allows one to locate individuals mentioned in inscription titles. Inscription titles are followed by notation of sources where rubbings or transcriptions may be found; these sources are listed at the front of the index.

The following are collections of inscriptions either as rubbings or as transcriptions.

Chao Wan-li 趙萬里, *Han Wei Nan-Pei-ch'ao mu-chih chi-shih* 漢魏南北朝墓誌集釋 (Peking: K'o-hsueh ch'u-pan-she, 1956) [Oversize O.C. PL 2456 .C46]

Mao Kuang-han 毛光漢, *T'ang-tai mu-chih-ming hui-pien fu k'ao* 唐代墓誌銘彙編附考, 5 vols. (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1984) [O.C. CS 1162 .M36 1984]

Ch'en Nai-ch'ien 陳乃乾, *Ch'ing-tai pei-chuan-wen t'ung-chien* 清代碑傳文通檢 (Shanghai: 1959; Taipei, 1977) [O.C. DS 734 .C475; O.C. DS 761 .C32 v. 400]

Shih-k'o shih-liao ts'ung-shu 石刻史料叢書, 470 vol. in 60 cases (Taipei: Yi-wen 1966) [O.C PL 2448 .S5]

This is a very large compendium of collections of transcriptions, some in themselves very extensive. Included are many of the collections that are indexed individually in Yang Tien-hsun's reference source, listed above.

Shih-k'o shih-liao hsin-pien 石刻史料新編 (Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng) *ch'u-chi* 初輯, 30 vols. (1977;

1982); *ti-erh chi* 第二輯, 20 vols. (1979); *ti-san chi* 第三輯, 40 vols. (1986) [O.C. PL 2448 .S555 1986 (3d series only)]

The IU collection includes only the third of these massive *ts'ung-shu* series, but that in itself constitutes a very substantial resource, almost as extensive as the previous item.

The following indexes and studies can be used to help wade through the mass of Late Imperial inscriptional materials.

Dieter Kuhn and Helga Stahl, *Annotated Bibliography to the Shike shiliao xinbian* (Würzburg: Würzburger Sinologische Schriften, 1991) [PL 2448 .K79 1991]

This bibliography analyzes the collections in the previous item. It can be used to learn what collections not available in the IU Library may be found in the first two series of that *ts'ung-shu*.

Mao Kuang-han 毛光漢, *Li-tai mu-chih-ming t'o-p'ien mu-lu* 歷代墓誌銘拓片目錄 (Taipei: Academia Sinica Institute of History and Philology, 1985) [O.C. CS 1162 .C53 1985]

Li Hui 李慧 et al., *Shan-hsi shih-k'o wen-hsien mu-lu chi-ts'un* 陝西石刻文獻目錄集存 (Hsi-an: San-Ch'in ch'u-pan-she, 1990) [O.C. PL 2448 .S48 1990]

In addition, there is one final item that you should be aware of as a general resource for the study of all types of inscriptional and calligraphic traditional materials:

Shoseki meihin sōkan 書迹名品叢刊, 208 vols. (Tokyo: Nigensha, 1958-81) [O.J. Z 44 .S55]

This very unusual collection is composed of small, very well printed volumes including reproductions (rubblings, photocopies) and limited annotations or essays on a very wide variety of materials, including epigraphic sources. There appears to be no general index; the items are listed individually in the card catalogue. A survey of the materials on the shelf could provide new and interesting resources.

Numismatics

Numismatics, the study of coins and their inscriptions, forms a sub-branch of epigraphy with obvious implications for economic history. Although numismatics has long been recognized as a very important branch of historical studies for the ancient Near East, it is an under-developed area of Chinese studies. However, archaeological studies provide increasing numismatic data related to the multi-state framework of late Zhou China, and the study of coinage in Imperial China has generated a considerable bibliography.

Reference works

Chung-kuo ch'ien-pi ta tz'u-tien 中國錢幣大辭典 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 2001-) [O.R. CJ 3495 .Z466 2001 -]

IU holds only a part of this massive reference work, which is projected to include nine different texts, some multi-volume. Current holdings include:

Ko-ming ken-chü ti 革命根據地 (2001)

T'ang Wu-tai Shih-kuo 唐五代十國 (2003)

Pei-Sung Nan-Sung Liao Hsi-Hsia Chin 北宋南宋遼西夏金 (2005, 3 v.)

K'ao-ku tzu-liao 考古資料 (2006)

Ch'üan-jen chu-shu 泉人著述 [works by numismatists] (2007)

Ch'ing 清 (2008)

Min-kuo 民國 (2009)

T'ang Shih-fu 唐石父, *Chung-kuo ch'ien-pi-hsueh tz'u-tien* 中國錢幣學辭典, 2 vols. (Beijing: Pei-ching ch'u-pan-she, 2000); cd included

Coverage is from the pre-Ch'in era to the early Republic. Volume 1 is a substantial (425 pp.) dictionary of terms, persons, texts, inscription formulae, etc. It is arranged by four-corner number with a stroke-count index preceding the dictionary and a full list of entries indexed at the back of vol. 2. Volume 2 primarily consists of illustrations of coins (pp. 426-742), each with an index number; the order is according to the four-corner number of the first character in the coin's inscription. A list of these transcribed transcriptions is provided on pp. 755-768.

Ting Fu-pao 丁福保, *Ku-ch'ien ta-tz'u-tien* 古錢大辭典, 5 vols. (1938-1939; reprint, Taipei: 1962) (T&B 50) [O.R. CJ 3495 .T58]

This is a very comprehensive resource by the king of cut-and-paste-style dictionaries. A survey of its contents suggests, however, that it is quite difficult to use. The following more recent item may be a better starting point:

Chu Huo 朱活, *Ku-ch'ien hsin-tien* 古錢新典, 2 vols. (Hsi-an: San-Ch'in ch'u-pan-she, 1991) [O.C. CJ 3496 .C4812 1991]

Ma Fei-hai 馬飛海, et al., ed., *Chung-kuo li-tai huo-pi ta-hsi* 中國歷代貨幣大系, 11 vols. to date (Shanghai: various publishers, 1988 -) [O.C HG 1282 .Z4645 2002]

This is a lavishly produced, oversize compendium of photographs and illustrations with detailed annotations. IU Libraries holds vols. 2 (Ch'in, Han, Six Dynasties), 3 (Sui-T'ang), 6-8 (Ch'ing), 9-10 (Republican era).

Shang Ch'eng-tso 商承祚 et al., *Hsien-Ch'in huo-pi-wen pien* 先秦貨幣文編 (Peking: 1983)

[O.C. PL 2448 .S52 1983]

This is simply a character-form table for coin inscriptions.

Studies

Nancy Lee Swann, *Food and Money in Ancient China" The Earliest Economic History of China to A.D. 25, Han shu 24, With Related Texts, Han shu 91 and Shih-chi 129* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950)

Swann's very fine study of the *Han-shu's Shih-huo chih* monograph includes a brief section on the history of currency. It is a good place to begin if you are curious about the origins of coinage in China.

Wang Yü-ch'üan, *Early Chinese Coinage* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1951)