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978-0-521-47030-8 - The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.

Edited by Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy

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INTRODUCTION

Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy

In their general introduction to the first volume of the *Cambridge History of China* (*The Ch'in and Han Empires*), John K. Fairbank and Denis Twitchett, general editors of the series, explained why, when they were planning the series in the 1960s, they had felt obliged to start their coverage with the first empires, omitting earlier developments. After noting the transformation brought about by archaeological discoveries, they wrote:¹

This flood of new information has changed our view of history repeatedly, and there is not yet any generally accepted synthesis of this new evidence and the traditional written record. In spite of repeated efforts to plan and produce a volume or volumes that would summarize the present state of our knowledge of early China, it has so far proved impossible to do so.

However, by the time that first volume was published (1986), some twenty years after Fairbank and Twitchett had initiated the *Cambridge History of China* project, the “flood of new information” that they mentioned had already revitalized the study of ancient China. A large number of scholars, both in East Asia and in the West, had been drawn to consider the new archaeological evidence and, in its light, to reconsider China’s traditional written record and many of the historiographical assumptions based thereon. In the light of these developments in the field, and with the active encouragement of Denis Twitchett, Cambridge University Press determined to repair the omission, the result being the present *Cambridge History of Ancient China*.

This title is intended to suggest that the volume can, and indeed should, be read as part of the larger, multivolume *Cambridge History of China*, but that at the same time it is independent of that series. This independence has

¹ *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. v.

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afforded us a measure of flexibility in organization and presentation that is welcome for two reasons. First, we cover a much longer period than any single volume in the *Cambridge History of China*, beginning with the Shang period (ca. 1570–1045 B.C.), when China's first written records appear, and extending until the Qin unification (221 B.C.) of the independent states of the Warring States period (480–221 B.C.), with other chapters providing transitions from and to earlier and later periods as well. Second, this measure of independence has freed us to treat the material culture of the period with the same degree of importance as the textual record. This enhanced focus on material culture is manifested in the design of the volume; unlike the volumes of *The Cambridge History of China*, which include no illustrations other than maps, this volume is illustrated with many of the recent archaeological discoveries that have transformed the field so markedly. But, of greater importance, in addition to requiring a different mode of presentation, the archaeological discoveries of ancient China have required a new approach to history, one that self-consciously seeks to integrate material and textual sources. This historiography now plays such an important role in the study of all aspects of ancient China, certainly including those that are treated in the fourteen chapters of the present volume, that we feel it is important to reflect upon its development, if only briefly.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL APPROACHES AND THE IMPACT OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CHINA

Two hundred years ago, when Joseph de Mailla wrote the first comprehensive history of China to appear in a Western language (*Histoire générale de la Chine ou annales de cet empire*, 1777–83),² he relied on, and indeed simply paraphrased, the *Tongjian gangmu* 通鑑綱目, a synthetic and secondary piece of writing that was compiled by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). By the nineteenth century, Western sinologists started going straight to the texts that had served as the primary sources used by Zhu Xi and other writers. There followed translations of early works such as the *Zhou li* 周禮 (Rituals of Zhou), in Édouard Biot's French version (*Le Tcheou-li ou rites des Tcheou*, 1851),³ and much of the rest of the Confucian canon, in James Legge's monumental work *The Chinese Classics* (originally published 1861–72).⁴ Such work culminated at the end of the century in Édouard Chavannes's translation of fifty-two

² *Histoire générale de la Chine ou annales de cet empire* (Paris: 1777–83).

³ *Le Tcheou-li ou rites des Tcheou*, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1851).

⁴ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vols. 1–3 (Hong Kong: At the author's; and London: Trübner, 1861–5); vols. 4–5 (Hong Kong: Lane Crawford; and London: Trübner, 1871–2; 2nd rev. ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893–4).

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chapters of the *Shi ji* 史記 (Records of the historian).⁵ At the end of the twentieth century many of these translations are still unsurpassed.

With Chavannes (1865–1918), the study of Chinese history entered a new era. Throughout the nineteenth century, Western historians had been extending the scope of their interests to include, first, archival sources and, later, also artifactual evidence. By the end of the century, sinologists – now often professional scholars – added expertise in traditional Chinese philology, as well as first-hand experience of living in China, to their training in the developing discipline of history. Chavannes put all of these advantages to good use. His translation of the *Shi ji* was initiated by an early interest in religion, particularly of the *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 rites said to have been performed upon the successful establishment of a new dynasty; his first scholarly publication was an annotated translation of the chapter that is devoted to these rites in the *Shi ji*.⁶ More than two decades later he returned to this topic, according it a much broader treatment. In his masterly study *Le T'ai chan: Essai de monographie d'un culte chinois*,⁷ which might be described as an ethno-archaeological history of the cult surrounding Mount Tai 泰 in Shandong, Chavannes not only traced mention of these rites throughout the Chinese historical record, demonstrating how they changed both in performance and in the significance that they had in the minds of Chinese scholars and statesmen, but he also cataloged the hundreds of steles erected all over the mountain by devout pilgrims, dating them, translating their inscriptions, and discussing their importance.

Chavannes's work could well be said to be modern Western sinology's first great original achievement. Its combination of historical awareness and archaeological sources anticipated what would be the main trend in the study of ancient China, both in the West and in China itself, throughout the succeeding century. It certainly characterized the approach of the sinological giants of the next generation, including Chavannes's own students, Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), Henri Maspero (1883–1945), Marcel Granet (1884–1940), and Paul Demiéville (1894–1979), as well as others outside France such as Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978) and Berthold Laufer (1874–1934).

This generation of scholars was fortunate to have matured just as archaeology, a discipline that was new to China, was beginning to exercise a profound influence on native Chinese scholarship. Two signal discoveries at the turn of the century announced the potential influence that this discipline

⁵ *Les mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien*, 5 vols. (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1895–1905; rpt., with vol. 6, Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1967).

⁶ "Le traité sur les sacrifices Fong et Chan de Se ma Ts'ien traduit en Français par Édouard Chavannes," *Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* (Peking: Typographie du Pei-T'ang, 1890), in-8: xxxi–95.

⁷ Édouard Chavannes, *Le T'ai chan: Essai de monographie d'un culte chinois* (Paris: Annales du Musée Guimet, 1910).

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would exert on the historiography of ancient China. The first of these was that of archaic Chinese characters inscribed on bones, the so-called oracle-bone inscriptions, that were ultimately traced to Anyang 安陽, in the present day province of Henan, the site of one capital of the Shang dynasty. This discovery, and the century of scholarship and further discovery that has been attendant upon it, is the topic of Chapter 4 in the present volume, and thus requires no discussion here; however, it can perhaps easily be appreciated how important the discovery of written material, hundreds of years earlier than any examples previously known, was to Chinese historians, steeped as they were in a supremely literate historical tradition.

Just a few years after the oracle bones were discovered, there came another momentous discovery on the other side of China. This was at Dunhuang 敦煌 (present day Gansu province), an oasis town that had been the site of an important Buddhist community in medieval China. The finds included a large cache of manuscripts, dating from the fifth through the tenth centuries A.D. This site and its finds are of principal concern to periods later than that to which the present volume is addressed.⁸ However, because the initial attention that they received came from Western scholars, notably Pelliot, the discovery did much to spark Western interest in the archaeological exploration of China. Subsequent achievements of archaeologists who worked in China included J. G. Andersson's excavations at Yangshao 仰韶 village in Mianchi 澠池 county, Henan, in 1920, where the first neolithic cultures were found, and some years later the discovery of Peking Man (*Sinanthropus pekinensis*) at Zhoukoudian 周口店 (southwest of Beijing) by a joint Chinese–European team. Both of these discoveries are discussed in Chapter 1 of the present volume.

Readiness to take full account of archaeology to reconsider the history of ancient China was by no means confined to Western scholars. Indeed, the first project of the newly established (1926) Academia Sinica's Institute of History and Philology was the excavation of Anyang. The explicit combination of history and archaeology to which this excavation attests continues to this day to inform the missions of the Institute of History and Philology in Taiwan and also its successor in the People's Republic of China, the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. This latter institution, in particular, has played the leading role in directing virtually all archaeological work in China over the last half century, and its publications are cited in every chapter of the present volume.

⁸ These documents have attracted a considerable output of scholarly effort; for a preliminary general appreciation, see *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 3: Sui and T'ang China, 589–906, Part 1*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 46–7. The discoveries are due to be treated in greater detail in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 4.

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The initial archaeological discoveries led textual historians as well to question and overturn many of the traditions that Chinese historians had accepted, more or less uncritically, for two millennia. Certainly the most prominent manifestation of this historiographical revolution was the series of articles that appeared in the series *Gu shi bian* 古史辨 (Discriminations on ancient history). Published between 1926 and 1941, and edited for the most part by Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980), *Gu shi bian* included contributions by most of the younger historians then active in China. Employing a methodology which, in a conscious borrowing from archaeology, he termed “stratigraphy,” Gu proposed that China’s traditional historical sources had come to be successively elaborated as they passed through time. By digging back through the accumulated textual layers, Gu argued, it should be possible to arrive back at the pristine origins of these historical sources. Furthermore, Gu and most of his collaborators believed that those origins would be far less grandiose than tradition held them to be; indeed, they argued that much of the work of that tradition had been engaged in fabricating sources that purported to be ancient. Thus, not only the sanctity but even the authenticity of parts of such classics as the *Yi jing* 易經 (Classic of changes) and the *Shu jing* 書經 (Classic of documents; also known as the *Shang shu* 尚書, Venerated documents) were called into question, as were many of the philosophical works traditionally held to have been written in the Warring States period. The iconoclasm of this new historiography found a ready welcome among Western sinologists, who, it is fair to say, were, at the time, inclined in any event to suspect any dogma, and certainly that of traditional China.

With the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, political considerations came to constrain most work of historical interpretation by Chinese scholars, and from 1966 to 1972, even archaeological reporting was curtailed. The frustration of John Fairbank and Denis Twitchett, who were formulating their plans for the *Cambridge History of China* just as the Cultural Revolution raged, can readily be appreciated. However, the resumption of academic publishing in 1972 brought a flood of archaeological discoveries to the attention of sinologists everywhere. The numerous unprecedented finds made during those years inform virtually every chapter of the present volume, and there is thus no need to anticipate those discussions here. It does however bear mentioning that when, in 1979, relaxed political conditions once again freed Chinese scholars to publish the results of original research, the archaeological discoveries of the previous decade or so provided them with ready, and abundant, new data. As a result, whereas until 1979 there had been just the three national journals, *Wenwu* 文物 (Cultural relics), *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology), and *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 (Archaeolog-

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ical research), whose publication had also been suspended during the Cultural Revolution, there are today over sixty journals devoted to various topics in archaeology, published mostly at the local level and dedicated to the archaeology of specific areas.⁹ Similarly, new monographs on particular subjects, which had hardly ever appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, are now forthcoming in such numbers that it is all but impossible to maintain bibliographical control.

The revival of Chinese historiography on ancient China was matched by a similar revival in the West. Just as mainland China was reopened to cultural contacts (beginning in the mid-1970s), a large number of young scholars who had benefited from extensive training first in Taiwan and then, more usually, on the mainland, turned their attention to the great archaeological discoveries of the early 1970s. For the first time in more than a generation, it now became possible to study and travel comparatively freely in China, to meet Chinese colleagues who were themselves traveling abroad to attend international conferences on scholarly topics, and, more recently, to engage in collaborative projects with Chinese scholars. The results of this scholarly communication will also be apparent in virtually every chapter of the present volume, where by far the greatest portion of the notes and bibliographic entries refer to scholarly results published in China over the past two decades. For their part Western scholars have been heartened by the readiness with which their Chinese colleagues have welcomed them to their institutions and been ready to consider and criticize their work. Plans are already in place to translate the present volume into Chinese, as has already been undertaken for some volumes of the *Cambridge History of China* both in the People's Republic and in Taiwan.

In addition to the unprecedented access to the active scholarly world of China that has become available to Western scholars, particularly in the past fifteen years, there must be added the great benefits that they have received from contacts with historians and archaeologists of Japan. Groups of Japanese archaeologists had indeed been engaged in investigating and excavating some of the sites in China from the beginning of the twentieth century and particularly during the 1940s, and the publication of whole series of Japanese monographs and journals has exerted an immense influence on all aspects of sinology. If one single work may be mentioned, the appearance of Morohashi Tetsuji's 諸橋徹次 (1883–1982) multivolume *Dai Kanwa jiten* 大漢和辭典 made an impact that was little less than dramatic, providing

⁹ For an overview of these journals, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Serials on Chinese Archaeology Published in the People's Republic of China: A Bibliographical Survey," *EC* 17 (1992): 247–95.

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researchers with immediate access to many unexplored riches of Chinese literature and to references to the scholarly output of the Qing period.¹⁰

THE SOURCES

In the view of the editors neither textual nor archaeological evidence is by itself necessarily of greater validity than the other. It is only by treating the two types of evidence as being complementary to each other, and with a full realization of the accidental circumstances of their survival, that either type can be handled with the criticism that is its due. If the written accounts can in no way be regarded as being comprehensive or free of bias, so must the excavated sites and materials be seen only as examples of much that may yet lie underground. Just as historians necessarily discriminate between archive and chronicle, or between contemporary documents and later statements, so too do archaeologists need to distinguish between contemporary products and heirlooms, or between local manufactures and imports. It would be as absurd for an archaeologist to dismiss documentary evidence as irrelevant as it would be for a historian to insist on the veracity of the written word in fundamentalist fashion. Just as the inferences drawn from archaeological evidence must always be subject to revision in the light of further discoveries and research, so are inferences that historians draw from their texts likewise ever open to reinterpretation.

Literary Sources

As with all historical studies, so here it is appropriate to consider the kinds of sources, both old and new, that are available and the ways in which they can be exploited. In the first place there are those works that have long been available: classics such as the *Yi jing*, *Shang shu*, *Shi jing* 詩經 (Classic of poetry), *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn [annals]) and *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Zuo's tradition), *Zhou li* (Rituals of Zhou), *Li ji* 禮記 (Records of ritual); philosophical essays such as the *Analects* of Confucius, writings of the "Hundred Schools" of the Warring States period, which begin with the *Mozi* 墨子 and extend to the *Han Feizi* 韓非子; and later, noncontemporary historical accounts of the ancient period such as can be found in the *Zhushu*

¹⁰ Morohashi Tetsuji, *Dai Kan Wa jiten* (Tokyo: Suzuki ippei, 1955–60). This work has now been complemented by two Chinese dictionaries that are of comparable scope and that draw attention among other things to the archaeological discoveries of the past thirty years: Xu Zhongshu, ed., *Han yu da zi dian*, vols. 1–7 and index (Chengdu: Sichuan cishu and Hubei cishu, 1986–90); and Luo Zhufeng, ed., *Han yu da ci dian*, vols. 1–12 and index (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu, 1986–93).

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jinian 竹書紀年 (Bamboo annals) and the *Shi ji*. We also possess unquestionably authentic records in the form of oracle-bone and bronze inscriptions that derive directly from the hands of scribes of the Shang or Western Zhou periods. In addition, excavations of recent years have yielded texts from the Warring States period, written either on bamboo or wooden strips or on silk, some of which are discussed in Chapter 12.

There are also native historiographical traditions that inevitably influence our view of Chinese history. All Western scholars who study ancient China owe an immense debt to China's traditional historians. Few Westerners – or modern Chinese, for that matter – can hope to emulate the feats of memory whereby they were able to cite from the wealth of Chinese literature in support of an argument. If the material evidence now available to us but not to them, or the types of questions that historians now ask but did not do so previously, call for a rejection or reassessment of parts of China's historical tradition, this is hardly reason to criticize historians of centuries past.

At times some scholars have been tempted to reject the authority of all the received literary sources, on the grounds that their editing, or even their composition, was not contemporary with the times that they treat. But severe as the hazards of transmission, and important as such reservations, are, they are not necessarily strong enough to support such an overall view. Fundamental questions about this traditional textual heritage indeed arise because of the way in which it has come into our hands, transmitted through the ages, copied and recopied, with errors, additions, or deletions, whether deliberate or accidental. In addition, there is a real concern that the traditional scholars and historians consciously chose to transmit only those texts that they perceived to contribute in some way to their view of what they claimed to be their own culture; there is more than a chance that they deliberately discarded many other texts, which reflected other aspects of ancient China's ways that were perhaps inconvenient or unsavory. For the available sources too, it remains essential to inquire into the motives that lay behind the production. The nature and extent of the material at our disposal is such that it would be perilous to claim that all such motives can be identified with certainty. The difficulty is compounded by the absence of material from external sources with which to counterbalance or control the evidence of our surviving documents, deriving as these mainly do from the members or heirs of a Zhou polity. Historians would dearly welcome the discovery of a set of annals that originated from a regime that was both antagonistic to Zhou and sufficiently sophisticated to produce its own literature.

These are legitimate concerns, of which the scholars who study these texts are well aware. Much work in China, Japan, and the West has been and is being devoted to the exacting study of textual history and the production of

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authoritative versions.¹¹ Other scholars, familiar both with the traditional texts and the newly discovered inscriptions on durable materials that have not suffered the vagaries of transmission above ground, have been able to compare the writings that derive from the two media, demonstrating how far the grammar and vocabulary of the received texts are consistent with the period to which they have been traditionally attributed. Two cases may serve as examples of this type of inquiry.

The “Pan Geng” 盤庚 chapter of the *Shang shu* is traditionally supposed to have been the text of a speech delivered by the Shang king Pan Geng (r. ca. 1250 B.C.). Pan Geng was the uncle of King Wu Ding 武丁 (d. ca. 1189 B.C.), the first king for whose reign we possess written records in the form of the oracle-bone inscriptions. The language of these oracle-bone inscriptions differs so starkly from that of the “Pan Geng” chapter that it is very unlikely that the latter could have been written during the Shang dynasty at all; for this reason it is not mentioned in the account of the Shang Dynasty in Chapter 4, below.

By contrast, the discovery of the oracle-bone inscriptions, as well as advances in the understanding of Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, have shown that the “Shi fu” 世俘 (Great capture) chapter of the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 (Remainder of the Zhou documents), an account of the Zhou conquest of Shang, is written for the most part in the language of the late Shang and early Western Zhou.¹² For this reason it is cited extensively in the account of the Zhou conquest given in Chapter 5, even though traditional Chinese historians largely ignored it because its description of bloody battles was anathema to their view of a pacifistic Zhou founding.

Comparisons of this type between traditional texts and epigraphic sources have been even more important in evaluating the literary heritage of the Late Warring States period. Texts such as the *Yu Liaozhi* 尉繚子 (also referred to as the *Wei Liaozhi*), *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子, and *Wenzi* 文子, long suspected of being forgeries of Han times or later, can now be shown, at least in part, to date from before the Han dynasty.¹³

No estimate can be made of the extent of the literary material that had been produced and was actively circulating during pre-imperial times. From the first of China’s bibliographical lists, a resumé of the catalog of works preserved in the imperial library at the end of the Former Han period, it may

¹¹ For the most recent views regarding most early Chinese texts, see Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993).

¹² Gu Jiegang, “*Yizhou shu* Shifu pian jiaozhu xieding yu pinglun,” *Wenshi* 2 (1962): 1–42; Edward L. Shaughnessy, “‘New’ Evidence on the Zhou Conquest,” *EC* 6 (1980–1): 57–79.

¹³ For a discussion of these texts, as well as a general argument for the authenticity of much of our received literature, see Li Xueqin, *Jianbo yi ji yu xueshu shi* (Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1994).

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be seen that we possess today no more than a small portion of the total of 677 titles that are named therein. But how far those works were available to China's traditional historians can only remain open to question. Certainly some texts, now long since lost, were read and cited by scholars of the Tang and Song periods, and it is to their comments that we owe what fragments that we have of a number of early works. As against this, copies of texts that have been brought to light from tombs in comparatively recent excavations, and which cannot necessarily be identified with items mentioned in that list, suggest that the imperial library contained no more than a part, and perhaps a very small part, of the texts that were in circulation by the third and second centuries B.C. These texts demonstrate the persistent habit whereby historical or other records (e.g., legal or astronomical writings) were being kept; many of them show how accurate those records often were. Taken together, these conclusions lend support to the validity of much of the surviving historical detail that is recorded for the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods in, for example, the chronological or genealogical tables of the *Shi ji*.

This archaeological verification of some received texts has given rise, especially in China, to a scholarly view which affirms the antiquity of most significant aspects of Chinese culture. This view is now referred to as that of the *Xingu pai* 信古派 (Believing in Antiquity School), in conscious distinction from the *Yigu pai* 疑古派 (Doubting in Antiquity School) which had contributed to the *Gu shi bian* series of the 1930s. In some of its expressions this belief in antiquity is doubtless exaggerated, owing as much to contemporary cultural chauvinism as to scholarly evidence; but such opinions are probably no more biased than those of many Western attempts to negate this view, and each of its proposals needs consideration on its own merits. Despite all these reservations, it is hard to deny the conclusion that the archaeological discoveries of the past generation have tended to authenticate, rather than to overturn, the traditional literary record of ancient China.

Material Sources

Historians of China are today fortunate in being able to call on a number of sources of material culture that are contemporary with the period under study, having been brought to light only recently. The importance of the ever expanding evidence of the sites of cities, buildings, and tombs, and of the vast number of artifacts that they included, cannot be overstated. The scholarly world has been thrilled by discoveries from all periods of ancient China and from many different geographical regions. For the Shang period, excavations have continued at Anyang, adding greater depth to our understand-