

jewelry, a belt, and three slashes representing a face are found in the Altai region, while the more famous examples wrapped in highly stylized stag images are found in Mongolia. In the early Iron Age, rock art appears to be strongly influenced by the schematic, unrealistic style of carvings in bone and wood. Depictions of stags become larger and less naturalistic, sometimes taking on the physical characteristics of the wolf—and, in becoming hybrid animals, they also assume an identity as liminal beings.

By the period of the early nomads—also called the Scythian period—in the first millennium B.C.E., the boundary between worlds is marked by scenes of a predator (usually a feline, wolf, or bird) attacking its prey (often a stag), resulting in a transformation. At the fourth- to third-century B.C.E. site of Pazyryk in the Altai Republic, horses were interred wearing antlered masks that transformed them into stags. Through the intentional grouping and conflating of animals, the author argues, “the horse became in effect the vehicle for the expression of an axis as a pivot of life and death, the point around which life was transformed by a series of processes: the predation symbolized by the feline or wolf, the transmutation of the flesh symbolized by the raptor, and the appearance of new life, symbolized by the stag, the ibex, or the argali” (p. 296). This imagery laid the basis for the so-called “Animal Style” that became pervasive throughout China, North Asia, and Central Asia in the early Iron Age.

Toward the end of the book, the author takes an unexpected sidestep to discuss ethnography as a means of reinforcing her observations about the diminution of the female role in beliefs about life and death in the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age. Specifically, she examines the male and female figures in the pre-Shamanic mythology of the Ket (Paleo-Siberian peoples who live in the Yenisei Basin) and the Evenk (Tungusic peoples who originated west of Lake Baikal and spread across Siberia), remarking that in the earliest preserved tales, “the deer women are the center of a life-giving universe and the source of life itself,” while in later periods, the shaman takes on the power previously assigned to deities—many of them female (p. 341). Although this chapter is compelling in its presentation of a different methodological approach, it ultimately feels somewhat out of step with the rest of the book.

Jacobson-Tepfer concludes her investigation with a brief foray into later developments including the unprovenanced Siberian Treasure of Peter the Great and the belt plaques of Xiongnu burials in Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. The latter show an interest in predation scenes and often preserve stylistic details of earlier Siberian materials, such as the flipped hindquarters of a hybrid animal tattooed on the male occupant of Burial 2 at Pazyryk. Among the varied works in the Siberian Treasure, a pair of plaques picturing a woman with a blocky headdress seated beneath a tree, cradling the head of a fallen warrior holds special interest. Jacobson-Tepfer notes the parallels between this scene and one that is repeated on the felt hanging from Burial 5 at Pazyryk, which shows a rider before a woman who holds a tree and wears a similar headdress. The resemblance leads the author to speculate that this woman is the final form of the Animal Mother from the earliest South Siberian rock art, and that in this context she serves a related function as the guardian of the road to the land of the dead.

Jacobson-Tepfer suggests that by the first millennium C.E., many motifs and animal images stagnated and became stylized to the point that they were stripped of their earlier meaning. I am less inclined to view the Xiongnu and later Siberian works as representative of decline—for me, they are indicative of a moment in which animal and tree imagery takes on new life, often in the form of metalwork ornaments placed on the body at the time of burial. Regardless of our different frames of reference though, Jacobson-Tepfer’s meticulous and compelling book has offered me a fresh new perspective on the sources of the beliefs that are embodied in the archaeology of North Asia.

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Excavating the Afterlife: The Archaeology of Early Chinese Religion. By GUOLONG LAI. Seattle: UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS, 2015. Pp. xi + 297. \$65.

In his highly anticipated book *Excavating the Afterlife: The Archaeology of Early Chinese Religion*, Lai Guolong aims to “provide a synthetic account of the changing religious beliefs and ritual practices

beginning with the Warring States period and extending to the Qin and Han periods” (p. 11). What this exactly means is already stated in the title of the volume: the author intends to uncover early Chinese notions of the afterlife. Apart from presenting an overview of his main arguments, Lai spends the remainder of the introductory chapter expounding his methodology. Contrary to previous studies that championed received literature of largely political and philosophical contents or focused on selective archaeological data, Lai claims to be “following new trends in the archaeology of religions” (p. 12) by combining various kinds of sources. Primacy is given to archaeological, paleographical, and art historical sources over transmitted texts. As a result, an analysis of so-called elite tombs of the Chu culture is at the heart of the *Afterlife*. Since differences in finds and features are mainly quantitative and not qualitative in nature, generalizations beyond the confines of the highest social strata are legitimate. A similar rationale governed the decision to focus on well-preserved burials of the Chu cultural sphere, given that it was “quite influential and important in the formation of mainstream Chinese conceptions of religion, cosmology, and the afterlife” (p. 21).

Chapter 1 deals with the changing attitude towards ancestors during the Warring States. Sacrifices recorded on manuscripts yielded by several Chu tombs offer insights into a hitherto unknown pantheon of deities. Usually sacrifices were addressed to one’s own ancestors. The excavated documents, however, reveal the names of transcendental entities that refer not to the personal relation with the sacrificer, but to the ways the former died. Those who died without progeny (*jue wu hou zhe* 絕無後者), by violent deaths (*qiang si* 強死), or by weapons (*bing si* 兵死) would not become ancestors. They instead had the potential to turn into harmful ghosts. At the root of the development lay the lineage struggles of the Spring and Autumn period, which fostered the emergence of “a clearly articulated, written, and collective version of the afterlife” (p. 43) during the Warring States period. For the first time, this collective version was expressed in the *Zuozhuan*. The well-known passage features Boyou, who haunts the living as a vengeful ghost, and Zichan, who formulates “an elite view of the afterlife” (p. 44): the *hunpo* 魂魄 of victims of violent deaths might transform into malicious ghosts. Tombs, therefore, were places in which they could find peace. The changed perception of ancestors had an impact on burial goods as well. Spring and Autumn burial assemblages were dominated by bronze ritual items that implied that the deceased continued to worship their ancestors in the hereafter. In addition, they reflected the social status of tomb occupants. In turn, Warring States tombs contained so-called “luminous objects” (*mingqi* 明器), i.e., replicas of real artifacts without practical functions, in addition to new and old personal belongings. No longer rigidly tied to status representation, so Lai argues, the purpose of the two new categories of grave goods was to negotiate prestige through public display during the funerary rituals; they also were thought to clearly demarcate the line between the living and the dead.

Chapter 2 explains the transformation from vertical pit tombs to “horizontal chamber-style tombs” (p. 55). In contrast to earlier scholarship that either emphasized the structural connection to catacomb tombs, the use of different materials (wood vs. stone and bricks), or the need for more space to store the increased numbers of *mingqi* and personal burial goods, *Afterlife* suggests three alternative reasons for the change. First, joint burials of husbands and wives superseded single burials as the primary mode of interment. Tomb architecture, therefore, needed to facilitate the reopening of the monuments without causing damage to their core structure. Second, while the central justification for vertical pits had been to hide the corpses of the deceased, the increasingly performative mortuary ceremonies demanded that tombs be more accessible. The horizontal layout enabled audiences (and not just the actual undertaker) to enter the sites and admire the exhibited burial goods. Third, the horizontal design allowed the bereaved to conduct sacrifices inside the chamber and thus pacify the ghost of the deceased. The dead themselves were no longer regarded as sacrificers to their own ancestors, but as the recipients of sacrifices.

Afterlife also discusses various ways tombs were conceptualized: as houses, palaces, chariots, way stations, and microcosms. The author, however, cautions readers that “the idea of the tomb as an inhabitable space should not be overstated” (p. 75); vertical pit tombs were “simply too cramped to be suitable for residential use” (p. 76). In short, the latter two conceptualizations—tombs as way stations and as microcosms—are more salient than the initial three. Tombs provided, as way stations, “a tame, familiar, comfortable space for the deceased” (p. 77) that boasted all the amenities the occupants enjoyed in real life until they proceeded to their final destinations. That the dead indeed took a journey

to a different location is illustrated by inventory lists discovered in Baoshan 包山 Tomb No. 2 (dated 317 B.C.E.), Hubei province. The manuscripts identify a large number of the personal items of the deceased as travel paraphernalia. To conceive of tombs as microcosms was yet another method to create two distinct realms of existence. The dead were content in their tame world and would have no reason to bother the living.

Chapter 3 introduces different approaches to portray “the invisible” (p. 99). Lai argues that during the Shang period the highest elite did not have to resort to images of the ancestors as they were either represented by their written names or impersonators (*shi* 尸). Anthropomorphic depictions, in turn, were reserved for “people who held minor or negative positions in society.” He associates this “image taboo” of members from the upper echelons of society with “a kind of black magic” (p. 103). The elite used supernatural powers as a means to control the portrayed subjects. The emergence and spread of anthropomorphic figurines during the Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn periods was “an extension of the earlier practice of ‘image magic’” (p. 105), as the miniatures served as substitutions for human sacrifices, and figurines and human sacrifices comprised persons of lower social status. By the Warring States period, the scope of social roles illustrated by figurines widened as attendants, guards, musicians, dancers, and even enemies were depicted. This way, “lower-status individuals, who previously would have been neither entitled to nor able to afford this degree of mortuary treatment” were able “to imitate their betters” (p. 109). Moreover, “through the power of magic” the bodies of absent people were “made present” (p. 115). With the advent of anthropomorphic paintings on silk cloths, the focus of image magic shifted towards the deceased themselves. Pictures of the tomb occupants were supposed to preserve the social personae of the tomb occupants. Comparable to such personal items as burial goods, these paintings were intended to identify, soothe, and ultimately guide the soul to the netherworld.

Chapter 4 analyzes how excavated manuscripts, which Lai calls “a noteworthy feature of elite burial practice” (p. 138), reflected changes in conceptions of the afterlife. According to the *Yili* 儀禮, lists of funerary objects that recorded either personal belongings or donations occasioned by the funeral were read aloud during the burial ceremonies. On the one hand, this was to assure the deceased that all the necessities for their journeys had been provided, and on the other to vie for prestige among the guests who were present at the grave. At first, the lists were extensions of sumptuary rules imposed on grave goods. Publicly announcing their contents was a means to control whether the appropriate amount of objects had been deposited in the tomb. Later on, the idea of sumptuary “bookkeeping” was replaced by the notion that the lists were “a symbolic, magico-religious instrument of substitution” (p. 144). This relates to the fact that, so far, the actual artifacts recovered from one particular tomb have never been entirely matched by the records on respective lists. Noting the names of objects on bamboo slips apparently sufficed to evoke a sense that a given physical thing was actually there. A second kind of excavated texts were “documents addressed to the underworld authorities (*gaodishu* 告地書) of the Qin and Han periods” (p. 146), which were drafted in official administrative language. Despite their formal similarities to real documents, Lai denies them genuine legal status. For one thing, they were written in the voice of the deceased, i.e., after their demise, and for another, they were addressed to an underworld bureaucracy. The records rather acted as travel documents of magico-religious function, which transferred the legal privileges of the dead into the afterlife. Yet another type of manuscript dealt with prior convictions of two tomb occupants. Such writings, so the author argues, should clear the names of the interred person and thus protect the living from what could have been evil ghosts. In general, the underworld bureaucracy that surfaces from the excavated documents was still in its infancy, but this is not the main reason why Lai does not believe that it mirrored the real life administration of the time. To his mind it was much more important that “the ideals of this world were suspended, and its social evils—nepotism, corruption, and even human sacrifice—became natural and normal” (p. 155). Lai stresses that past scholarship has failed to realize the significance of the people who read and wrote such manuscripts: local officials, scribes, and ritual specialists were crucial elements in the formation of a bureaucratic underworld.

Chapter 5 traces changes in the “ideas about the cosmology and geography of the afterlife” (p. 161) during the transitional phase between the Warring States period and the Qin and Han empires. Knowledge of hitherto unknown places was a corollary of the territorial expansions of the imperial age. This

was fertile ground for the development of a new notion of the abode of the dead. An incantation from Tomb No. 56 at Jiudian 九店, Hebei province, explains that the war dead resided at Mt. Fu in the wilds of Buzhou 不周 in the northwest of the universe. The geographical distance between the burial site and the final destination suggests that the tomb itself indeed was not a location for the soul to dwell permanently, but a tame space that offered the soul respite along its journey. Based on the fact that Tomb No. 56 also contained so-called day books (*rishu* 日書) that deal extensively with travel, while some other burials yielded silk banners depicting traveling tomb occupants, *Afterlife* contends that by the end of the Warring States period, contemporaries believed that all of the deceased eventually embarked on a journey from the tomb to the terminal station in the northwest. Documents such as the Jiudian day books or maps yielded by other burials served as guides for the soul. In addition, the assemblages of novel personal items that accompanied the tomb occupants mainly consisted of travel paraphernalia. These were mundane objects that acquired religious meaning. Lamps, for instance, were sources of light in the barren darkness of the northwest and thus had apotropaic functions in addition to their guiding qualities.

All in all, whether *Afterlife* offers new insights depends entirely on its audience. Readers who are unfamiliar with early Chinese funerary data or Lai Guolong's previous publications will become acquainted with a wide variety of archaeological finds, a few archaeological features, and associated concepts. In this respect, the author surely succeeds in providing a synthetic account of changes in ritual practices. Readers who have an intimate knowledge of the archaeological evidence and related scholarship, on the other hand, might find a number of flaws in the arguments of the book. *Afterlife's* biggest shortcoming is its methodology. Despite the fact that the author initially distances himself from approaches that read excavated evidence on the basis of received literature (pp. 12–13), more often than not that is exactly what he does. He might see it as providing “cultural context” to the finds and features at hand, but this is just whitewashing the core problem. The following statement sums up *Afterlife's* attitude towards transmitted texts: “Here, texts, especially contemporaneous texts, are employed to investigate the cultural consensus about the meaning and function of a sign” (p. 15). Two claims are being made: written sources contemporaneous with the archaeological data under review are consulted in order to establish a baseline of shared ideas about any given subject. Reading through the book one soon discovers that by “contemporaneous” Lai does not mean contemporaneous to the actual find or feature he is discussing at any given point, but to the overarching time frame of his study in general (Shang period through Western Han). Since all of the received texts *Afterlife* uses were compiled sometime during this vast period, one can only assume that this is the reason why it rarely provides dates for the texts it applies to the archaeological material. Moreover, the fact that many of the books in question are rather prescriptive than descriptive is addressed only on limited occasions (e.g., pp. 58, 65, 71, 120, 142). Yet, disregarding the chronological and ideological relation between transmitted texts and any particular archaeological “sign” inevitably weakens the argument itself. For example, take the assertion that during the Warring States “grandiose burial mounds were erected as ostentatious displays of power and wealth” (pp. 65–66). Lai justifies this statement by a reference to *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals*, which he dates to the late third century B.C.E. Aiming to establish a coherent sense of cultural consensus or context would have required consulting other writings as well. One could have easily detected that the *Shiji* 史記, for instance, a text only marginally younger than *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals*, maintains that tumuli marked the location of a tomb (*Shiji* 49.1985–86; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959). Another passage in the same book shows that the landmark character of mounds rendered them locations of worship (*Shiji* 47.1945–46). Such views on tumuli might sound trivial to us today, but we cannot brush away the fact that there was not necessarily a consensus on the meanings of tangible things and abstract issues in ancient times. The cultural climate among intellectuals of the late Warring States and early Western Han periods, that is to say the people who produced the textual corpus at our disposal, was far more multifarious than Lai would have us believe. Thus, relying on anecdotal evidence, be it textual or archaeological, clearly leads to overstating one's case.

More importantly, this particular point of criticism also translates to a general level. *Afterlife's* contention that analyzing a relatively small number of elite burials of the Chu cultural realm suffices to illustrate religious beliefs in all social strata of early Chinese society is hardly convincing. To be sure,

late pre-imperial and early imperial tombs across the Chinese mainland share many archaeological finds and features. Nevertheless, contrary to the author's insistence, we can detect numerous qualitative differences in addition to quantitative ones. A fitting example would be the custom of putting lacquered boxes over the heads of the deceased in a number of late Western Han and early Eastern Han tombs around Yangzhou 揚州, Jiangsu province (see, for instance, Gao Wei 高偉 and Gao Haiyan 高海燕, "Han dai qi mianzhao tanyuan" 漢代漆面罩探源, *Dongnan wenhua* 東南文化 1997.4). Such are by no means insignificant observations as they were obviously linked to social and/or religious practices and specific to certain regions of the Chinese heartland. Not only do qualitative differences need to be acknowledged; they need to be explained. Furthermore, taking into account *Afterlife's* nonchalant understanding of the social categories "elite" and "commoner(s)" reveals that the social range of tombs reviewed in the monograph is inadequate to warrant sweeping generalizations. The introduction of the book declares that "the commoners' tombs at Shaogou in Luoyang City, Henan" (p. 17) are part of the study. In reality, the site appears only two more times throughout the subsequent pages (pp. 95, 210 n. 23). Besides, as highly complex vaulted brick chamber structures, these were anything but small-scale or simple tombs. The same is true for Shuihudi 睡虎地 Tomb No. 11 (dated 217 BCE) and similar discoveries. Although the author recognized that the man buried in Tomb No. 11 was a local official, he does not regard his modest tomb as an elite burial (p. 19). Yet, however low the occupant's rank may have been, he was still a member of the imperial administration. As one of roughly 130,000 highly trained officials that governed a population of perhaps fifty to sixty million people (Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed China* [Leiden: Brill, 2004], 70, 113), the deceased was certainly not a commoner. Rendering the distinction between elite and commoner(s) analytically meaningful would have called for a thorough discussion of both concepts on the one hand, and an analysis of a much bigger and socially wider set of mortuary data on the other. Except for the succinct statement that, during the Warring States period, "the higher and lower elites became more distinct, and the latter merged with the commoner class" (p. 19), the author failed to provide either.

Keeping its methodological limitations in mind, *Afterlife* makes for rewarding reading. It touches on a number of interesting finds and features that have not yet been examined in detail. The discussion of the relationship between so-called tomb guardian figurines (*zhenmushou* 鎮墓獸) and the depiction of the fecundity god is particularly intriguing (pp. 122–29). As far as general surveys of late pre-imperial and early imperial mortuary archaeology are concerned, this is the best monograph available at the moment.

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The Scholar and the State: Fiction as Political Discourse in Late Imperial China. By LIANGYAN GE.
Seattle: UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS, 2015. Pp. xi + 279. \$50.

Liangyan Ge's new book deals with a topic of great significance and urgency. As the blurb announces, this is the first book-length study that seriously engages with the political dimension of traditional Chinese fiction by situating the novels under discussion in a "very specific political context" (as Margaret Wan remarked). Taking as its central concern what Ge calls the "rugged partnership" between the intellectual elite and the imperial power (the "scholar" *shi* 士 and the "state" *shi* 勢 of the title, respectively), the book revisits several landmark works of Ming and Qing vernacular fiction such as *Three Kingdoms*, *The Scholars*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as well as a few lesser-known erotic works.

The ambitious scope and overall narrative framework of the book are laid out in the introduction and the first chapter, where Ge paints in broad strokes the evolution of the scholar-state relationship and the emergence of vernacular fiction in the late imperial period. According to this largely familiar narrative, late imperial China witnessed a growing alienation between the literati class and state power, not