

fortably with the latter, such as his suggestions that people were Arab or Sogdian, with an “identité ethnique et sociale” and leaders of a “communauté ethnique” when there is little evidence that people identified themselves thus (see, e.g., p. 48; also p. 249). Conversions are handled somewhat sketchily as well, although, admittedly, this is a difficult subject to tackle. Karev makes references to “conversion très superficielle” of members of the local royal house of Bukhara, the Bukhārākhudāt (in a “culture encore très païenne”), in the year 750, which he supposes was a local response to “motivations idéologiques” of Abū Muslim’s troops (p. 89). Statements that “L’exécution du *bukhārākhudāt* fut un acte d’intimidation, un message clair adressé à ceux qui prenaient la conversion à la légère” (p. 90) and that, at this time, “le processus d’islamisation du Māwarā’annahr n’atteignait pas encore la même ampleur qu’au Khurāsān central” (p. 50, also p. 92) lack diachronic data to support them. Karev makes similar attempts at tackling Islamization in Shāsh and Ferghana in the early ninth century (pp. 267–69). Urban-rural relations feature in Karev’s study of al-Muqanna’s insurrection, for example, but again these distinctions are treated without further definition and as factors that contributed to military and politico-military actions rather than as topics in their own right (e.g., pp. 207–213).

In sum, Karev has produced a meticulous and informative study of early Abbasid Transoxania, the result of painstaking work about the people, places, and political and military events described in the medieval literary and archaeological records. Despite a few cavils, the relevance of his study extends beyond this book, as he has produced a reference work for studying a little-understood region and time in its full historical context.

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Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China: A History of Early Muzhiming. By TIMOTHY M. DAVIS. Studies in the History of Chinese Texts, vol. 6. Leiden: BRILL, 2015. Pp. xiv + 414. €125, \$162.

Entombed epigraphs (*muzhiming*) are square slabs of stone buried in Chinese tombs inscribed with “a biographical prose preface followed by a rhymed elegy commemorating the life of a deceased member of the elite class” (p. 4). From the fifth century CE on, they became commonly and widely used, valued for their literary qualities and refined aesthetic sensibilities as well as commemorative and religious functions. Over the past two decades, they have become one of the most important new sources for the study of medieval China, valued for their portrayal of individuals and topics that might otherwise be unknown or for offering additional, and at times contradictory, perspectives on famous personages and events.

This monograph is the first English-language work to study the entombed epitaph across the early medieval period (200–600 CE). Drawing upon a substantial corpus of research written in multiple languages, Davis’ study explores early medieval Chinese *muzhiming* along various lines of inquiry: their social (chapter 1) and religious (chapter 2) functions, their early history and development (chapter 3) and later maturation (chapter 4), their commemorative value vis-à-vis other genres (e.g., biography) used to construct memory (chapter 5), and how they developed into a mature aesthetic and literary form by the Tang dynasty (chapter 6). The volume also contains a lengthy introduction, in which Davis defines the three main categories and characteristics of early medieval entombed epitaph (simple “records of internment,” tomb interred epitaphs, and “standard” *muzhiming*), a conclusion, and two appendices listing entombed epitaphs from the Western and Eastern Jin Dynasties (Appendix 1) and the Northern Wei prior to 494 CE (Appendix 2).

In the first chapter, “The Social Functions of Early Medieval *Muzhiming*,” Davis argues that entombed epitaphs developed as early medieval Chinese elites responded to changing social and cultural realities in which power and influence became increasingly dependent upon marriage alliances and office-holding. Through close readings of two entombed epitaphs—those of Liu Huaimin (410–

463) and Ming Tanxi (444–474), both translated in full—Davis persuasively demonstrates how, as “durable narratives” weaving together records of genealogy, office holding, marriages to prominent families, and moral character, entombed epitaphs functioned as an important means by which families could define their shared identity and establish intergenerational collective memory. The chapter addresses a number of additional issues, including how the entombed epitaph’s diction and rhetoric demonstrated a family’s learning and literary talents, evidence for the circulation of entombed epitaphs in manuscript form (pp. 79–88), and how entombed epigraphy differed from other available genres of commemorative writing in placing greater emphasis on affinal kin and marriage alliances (p. 49), and allowing families tighter control over how legacies would be narrated (p. 89).

The second chapter, “The Religious Functions of Entombed Epigraphy,” links entombed epigraphy to two antecedent traditions of epigraphic objects used in commemorative rituals: first, the “canonically sanctioned conventions of elite commemoration” associated with ancestral sacrifice, exemplified by text-inscribed metal (bronzes and bells) and stone (steles and coffins) objects (pp. 92–126); second, common Han dynasty and medieval religious mortuary practices, in particular the burying of text-inscribed objects—burial plot purchase contracts, tomb-stabilizing writs, and tomb inventory lists—within tombs to serve both commemorative and apotropaic functions (pp. 126–45). These traditions, Davis argues, provided textual models (structure, themes, and diction) and functional antecedents (construction and maintenance of family identity across generations, protections for and from the dead) later incorporated into the *muzhiming*. Davis supports this contention through translation and analysis of the entombed stele for Cheng Huang (d. 291), which demonstrates “the complex interactions between canonical and common modes of commemoration that mutually influenced each other during the third century when tomb epitaph inscriptions were beginning to take place” (p. 145).

In the third chapter, “Mortuary Epigraphy Moves Underground,” Davis addresses the political and cultural motivations for placing commemorative inscriptions within tombs. His chapter challenges conventional beliefs regarding the origin of entombed epigraphy, namely that it developed in response to imperial sanctions against lavish burials and aboveground monumental stelae instituted in the century following the fall of the Han. Instead, Davis argues, elite families developed a repertoire of entombed commemorative inscriptions as a means to preserve the identities of their dead under circumstances of broad social and economic disorder, large-scale migration, and the abandonment of graveside shrines. Davis devotes the greater part of the chapter to an analysis of six forms of entombed inscription within this repertoire—pillar inscriptions, lintel inscriptions, texts accompanying pictorial images, and texts carved in walls, on bricks, and on independent or freestanding stone slabs. He further explores how these anticipated the development of standard *muzhiming*.

In the fourth chapter, “Entombed Epigraphy in an Era of Political Instability,” Davis analyzes a number of “non-standard entombed epitaphs” (those lacking biographies, rhymed elegies, and/or titles) produced before the fifth century. He argues that these texts typically were used for burials in which the tomb was, or was expected to be, relocated or physically altered—temporary interment away from the lineage homelands, relocation because of tomb damage or to obtain a more auspicious environment, or modification to accommodate a joint burial—or in conjunction with “prestige burials,” in which the state honored individuals or families by interring the deceased in close proximity to the imperial mausolea. Davis further discusses additional functions of entombed epitaphs: to identify discrete corpses in the tomb (in instances of multiple joint burial), to communicate to the underworld significant decisions made by families regarding lineage authority and choice or alteration of burial sites, and to seek the blessings of deceased ancestors.

Davis’ fifth chapter, “Historiographical Biography and Commemorative Biography,” examines the construction of identity in entombed epigraphy and the biographies of official histories. He argues that while both were polemical literary forms that made use of “rhetorical techniques and aesthetic features” to construct “convincing narratives” of their subjects, their “contrasting priorities. . . sometimes resulted in radically different portraits of the same individual” (pp. 254, 258). He illustrates his argument by comparing the portrayals of Guo Huai (d. 296) and Wang Jun (253–314) in mortuary inscriptions and in biographies in the standard history *Jin shu*. He attributes differences in their portrayals to the discrete aims of the respective genres: whereas official biographies sought to establish

“models of propriety and virtue” and to demonstrate to an elite, court-centered audience “the negative consequences of impropriety and vice” (pp. 257, 262), entombed epigraphy served immediate ritual and commemorative needs of the family. Davis concludes the chapter by briefly discussing entombed epigraphy produced before and after the relocation of the Northern Wei capital to Luoyang. He views the subsequent practice of composing standard *muzhiming* by Xianbei elite as evidence for their ongoing acculturation.

In the sixth chapter, “The Rise of *Muzhiming* as a Literary Genre,” Davis argues that the elevation of the entombed epitaph to the “commemorative genre *par excellence*” following the fifth century “largely came about because the genre’s versatility allowed it to fulfill several complementary religious, social, and aesthetic needs that medieval elites considered essential for honoring the dead” (p. 321). Its elevation, he suggests, was further stimulated by three additional factors: the growing significance of literary virtuosity to literati identity since the western Han, imperial patronage of and participation in *muzhiming* composition, and the greater demand for proper remembrance of deceased elites during a period of frequent and violent regime changes. The inclusion of one entombed epitaph in the most famous medieval anthology, the sixth-century anthology *Wen xuan*, as well as excerpts from the elegies of forty-four other epitaphs in the seventh-century *Yiwen leiju* further cemented the genre’s *belles lettres* status. Particularly noteworthy in this chapter is Davis’ observations that the rhymed elegy seemed to have been the most highly regarded part of the epitaph composition. This portion is often ignored by contemporary scholars interested primarily in mining prose introductions for names and dates.

Davis is to be commended for the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of his research. I can think of no other study of *muzhiming* that is as sensitive to such a broad range of factors—social, historical, regional, material, religious, literary, visual—that influenced the form and content of entombed epigraphy. His holistic and multi-disciplinary approach allows him to make several contributions to contemporary understanding of these materials, not the least of which is a convincing new argument for the origin of the genre.

At the same time, Davis also highlights many of the difficulties in working with these materials, including issues of forgery (pp. 293–94), “skewed representation” due to funding policies and the vagaries of chance and salvage archaeology (p. 201), and the fact that archaeological sources can, in the same way as transmitted sources, be biased or incomplete (p. 200).

In any scholarly undertaking as ambitious as this one, not everything can be covered in equal depth. Several topics discussed by Davis—distinctions in calligraphy used for different mortuary goods, how memory making is distributed across different genres used by families for commemorative purposes, or the relationship between duplicated texts within tombs and the materials on which those texts were inscribed—are discussed only briefly and no doubt will constitute fruitful avenues for his future research.

In conclusion, this monograph represents a valuable and substantial contribution on an important topic for the study of early medieval China. It will be of interest to anyone interested in this period or more broadly in mortuary practices, epigraphy, or the construction of memory.

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