

EAST ASIA

MICHAEL NYLAN and GRIET VANKEERBERGHEN (eds):

Chang'an 26 BCE. An Augustan Age in China.

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For many years historians have studied the Han period through temporal and spatial categories that represented the greatest common denominators, such as bureaucratic “empire”, Western versus Eastern Han “dynasties”, centre versus periphery, etc. The essays in this rich volume represent an attempt to understand Han at a more granular level. It is the first major volume in a European language to examine Western Han through the lens of one locality – Chang’an and its surroundings – as it thrived during one particular reign period, namely the three decades of its tenth emperor, Chengdi (the date of 26 BCE in the title alludes to the moment the imperial library project began). As Nylan submits in her introduction and afterword, the intellectual, material and administrative footprint of Chengdi’s reign may well outweigh that of Han Wudi, who still tends to be presented as Western Han’s chief architect.

The volume contains 19 essays (including three by Michael Loewe) clustered around three themes: archaeology and the built environment, socio-political transformations, and leading figures. The essays in Part 1 present a vivid account of the cultural and physical ecology of the capital region, its topography (canals, parks, gardens, lakes and ponds) and its materiality. Structural comparisons with Rome do not appear to be straightforward (Carlos Noreña). We learn that Chang’an’s palaces preceded its walls and that the city was architecturally in constant motion (Tang Xiaofeng). Nylan analyses the city’s transport, food and water supply drawing on the most up-to-date textual and archaeological record. Next come a study of the capital’s residential wards (Zhang Jihai) and essays on the distribution and funerary culture of elite and imperial tombs, as well as the labour force mobilized for their construction (Arlen Lian, Loewe, Huang Yijun).

Part 2 sets out to demonstrate how transformational Chengdi’s reign was socially and politically. Loewe surveys the differing viewpoints of Chengdi’s complex character. The complexities of power at the imperial court are then taken up in a corrective offered by Luke Habberstad, who proposes to conceive of the late Western Han capital as a “vast court society” (p. 254) rather than look at court and capital as the apex of state bureaucracy. How different forces and influences all drew on and into Chang’an is also seen in the geographic concentration of imperial rituals and sacrifices to the capital area (discussed by Tian Tan). The role and views of key officials (most notably Gu Yong) and their memorials at court pass the review (Loewe, Liu Tseng-kuei); as are the politics and rhetoric of intensive omen reporting and interpretation across Chengdi’s reign (Shao-yun Wang) in what many believed to be the inevitable end of a fixed cosmic cycle. Griet Vankeerberghen discusses the evolving relationship between the imperial court and the kingdoms Chengdi had inherited.

In Part 3, a comparison of the intellectual positions taken by father and son Liu Xiang and Liu Xin prompts Loewe to speculate that Liu Xin may well have found peace with the prospect that Wang Mang was the inevitable and sole way forward for the empire. David Knechtges decodes the ways in which a rhapsody (*Sui chu fu*) by Liu Xin alludes to his fall from grace at the imperial court and how Liu accepts his reversal of fate while being promoted away to a frontier post in Inner Mongolia.

Jurij Kroll explores the career, demotion and execution of Yang Yun, Sima Qian's grandson and promotor of the *Shiji*. Several chapters zoom in or touch on Liu Xiang and Liu Xin's bibliographical activities and their impact. Miranda Brown argues that it was not until the late second century CE that the arts of healing and medicine were inscribed into a historical narrative or seen as a freestanding tradition, with the classical turn under Chengdi and Liu Xin's *Qilie* (*Seven Summaries*) serving as the genealogical impetus for this. Mark Csikszentmihalyi's piece underscores the centrality of the *Annals* (*Chunqiu*) and associated works in the political discourse of late Western Han, in particular with reference to Liu Xin's attempts to control omen interpretation and the use of these texts to evaluate issues of political legitimacy. Hans van Ess studies the additions made by Chu Shaosun to ten *Shiji* chapters and how these reflected Chu's stance on key issues of the time contra Sima Qian, including his trust in the power of divination, his favourable depictions of Han Wudi, and his support for the continued legitimacy of the Liu clan.

Although the direct link with Chang'an is stronger in the case of some chapters than others, by having authors dig at their subjects through the frame of Chang'an and Chengdi's court, the resulting volume, almost kaleidoscopically, brings out new perspectives on empire-wide late Western Han China. The editors have produced a combined narrative that adds to the merit of individual chapters. The quality of the maps, line drawings and images are excellent, and an index of nearly 40 pages facilitates targeted browsing. As is inevitable in collective volumes of this kind, there are chapters that take a primarily argumentative stand and essays of a more descriptive nature, with several authors drawing on longstanding personal research agendas and previous work. The overall editorial tone in the volume's introduction, afterword and some of the notes is one of a candid confidence in the belief that China historians have yet to discover some of the creativity that has befallen the study of ancient Rome. If that is the case, Chang'an, a city nearly three times the size of Rome, can be grateful for the micro-historical treatment it has received in this volume.

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BENJAMIN A. ELMAN (ed.):

Antiquarianism, Language, and Medical Philology: From Early Modern to Modern Sino-Japanese Medical Discourses.

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Over the past few decades, scholars of East Asia working with new transnational frames, have been remapping the territory of medical history. Elman's edited volume represents a bold attempt to do medical history within that newly mapped terrain, working on the interpretation of ancient texts across time and place, from the ground up, and from the relationship between texts, practitioners and practices. This is the second edited volume to emerge from a series of research seminars at Princeton University. The Series "East Asia and the Early Modern World: Fresh Perspectives on Intellectual and Cultural History, 1550–1800", ran from 2009–2012 and aimed to de-centre the old dichotomies between science and non-science which locate authoritative medicine in a modern West, and also to throw light on