

early modern world. The publisher is also to be commended for what I believe to be a new development in the use of Manchu script in the digital era: the inclusion of a few bits of in-line Manchu text in a book otherwise in English.

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MORITZ HUBER:

*Lives of Sogdians in Medieval China.*

(Asiatische Forschungen 160.) xvi, 350 pp. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2020. €78. ISBN 978 3 447 11380 9.

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Despite growing awareness of the historic Sogdian people among contemporary audiences, the number of related scholarly monographs remains comparatively low. Moritz Huber has offered here a sizeable addition; moreover, this book, as a published PhD thesis, differs from some recent monographs in that it is not a collection of articles but instead purposed to be one cohesive work. The work critiques interpretations of Chinese sources (from the fourth to ninth centuries) that do “not accurately represent the situation of Sogdians in China” (p. 301). For Chinese scholarship, Huber specifically faults Marxist theory and reproduction of dynastic perspectives in interpreting the Sogdians as another ethnic minority (*shaoshuminzu* 少数民族) within China and for emphasizing descriptors such as “assimilated” (*ronghe* 融合) or “sinicized” (*hanhua* 漢化 or *huahua* 華化) within historical narratives. Instead, Huber suggests the Sogdians intentionally performed as both “outsider” and “insider” to protect the privileges they derived from being cultural brokers, and that the state-sponsored *Sabao* institution “may . . . have paradoxically reduced inclusion” (p. 304).

Regarding Japanese and Western scholarship, Huber critiques the use of categories derived from Western thought (i.e. politics, economics, society, religion, and arts) as being problematic, especially for the evaluation of mercantile activities and religious affiliation. In the case of religion, Huber believes that the Western concept, implicitly laden with monotheistic and exclusivist meanings, is not appropriate for an ancient Chinese context and instead suggests “a functionalistic study of rituals”. Despite these criticisms, the book continues to employ similar modern analytical concepts like “economic factors”.

To avoid anachronisms and achieve a clearer view of the Sogdians, the book champions psychiatrist Viktor Frankl’s (1905–97) Dimensional Ontology. I found the corresponding explanation insufficient to grasp satisfactorily the full implication of Frankl’s concept for the book. As regards possible pitfalls from using Frankl’s approach, the reader is simply told, without supporting evidence, “it is . . . entirely possible to search to know for the sources of error”. Chapter 1 exhaustively provides the extant Chinese sources on the Sogdian homeland. Huber has built his analysis on the recurrent categories found in these etic accounts which, he argues, are comparatively far less removed from the object of study.

Chapter 2 looks at accounts of Sogdians within China and provides the author’s most original contribution, an engaging narrative derived from the epigraphic evidence. The author’s enthusiasm for these sources is palpable; moreover, laudably, Huber has done his own transcriptions from the facsimiles, which has resulted in

improvements on the previous readings. From the small sample of analysed epitaphs, the author also highlights the longevity of these interred Sogdians. Section 2.4 acknowledges its indebtedness to Rong Xinjiang's 荣新江 seminal work on Sogdian settlements within China.

Chapter 3 synthesizes primary source passages from chapters 1 and 2 and also presents additional passages. In supporting Albert Dien that *xian* 祆 and *tian* 天 were once homonymous, Huber intriguingly references the existence of a pun in a fourteenth-century gazette (*Zhishun Zhenjiang zhi* 至順鎮江志) but without actually stating the pun or its exact location. Of Sogdian beliefs and practices, only Zoroastrianism receives a detailed treatment, even though Huber concludes there is insufficient evidence to establish that the majority of Sogdians practised Zoroastrianism. In chapter 4, the conclusion, Huber proposes five ideas, the fifth being that epitaphs and grave constructions supplied narratives that could increase social capital for the deceased's family; further details attesting to the extent of circulation for these narratives would have been helpful in supporting this idea.

In what I believe is its most significant contribution, the book assembles a very impressive, comprehensive corpus of Chinese primary sources on the Sogdians, accompanied by English translations; for many of these less-quoted passages, Huber has offered his own translation. The rest of the English renderings are from well-respected scholars, though Huber occasionally disagrees with parts of their translations and offers an alternative. Moreover, the book has increased the accessibility (for non-Chinese specialists) of lesser-known works like the *Shazhou dudufu tujing* 沙洲都督府圖經.

Unfortunately, the book has many typographical errors. The "poor English style and formulations" (p. xxi) acknowledged by the author in the introduction made for an exhausting read, along with the occasional ambiguity in meaning. Although Huber's new English translations from the Chinese (or occasionally made from Chavannes' French) are a welcomed addition, I found the book's English renderings at times rather awkward (e.g. "left over carcasses" *yizi* 遺骸, p. 64). There are "dead end" footnote directives: on p. 295 n. 336, the reader is misdirected to p. 270 instead of pp. 251–2, and a similar error occurs on p. 298 n. 362. On p. 116, Sui Emperor Yang's death is incorrectly listed as 522 CE instead of 618 CE. Also, the lack of any delineation (e.g. capital letters) for bureaucratic titles meant that these were often not immediately recognizable in the text as official titles. An entire second volume (appendices) is available online and contains an impressively large collection of images referenced in the text. I was disappointed the book itself contained no images except a few simple tables. Similarly, an index was inexplicably missing.

I found Huber's commitment to rethinking problematic categories and hermeneutical approaches refreshing, and from his obvious familiarity with a wide range of primary and secondary sources, there is a treasure-trove of citations. However, the book's offering a different interpretive course was rather inconsistent. In the introduction, the author candidly states that publication of the thesis was rushed; however, the author also explicitly says, "The driving force behind this thesis was never to publish, but simply to engage in fascinating research" (p. xi). Thus, it is regrettable that insufficient time was given to polishing this promising work *before* publishing.

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