

IMRE GALAMBOS:

Orthography of Early Chinese Writing: Evidence from Early Chinese Manuscripts.

(Budapest Monographs in East Asian Studies, 1.) viii, 184 pp.

Budapest: Department of East Asian Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, 2006. 963 463 811 2.

This new series under the direction of Imre Hamar has started with a publication that certainly deserves to garner widespread attention, and appears to bode well for the future. Imre Galambos and his work with early versions of the Chinese script have recently come to the notice of the general reading public, thanks to their appearance in the most recent work of the highly regarded American journalist and writer on Chinese culture Peter Hessler, *Oracle Bones: A Journey between China and the West* (London: John Murray, 2006), in which Hessler provides both a brief verbal sketch of Galambos himself and introduces the significance of his research for coming to grips with Chinese civilization. Unfortunately, at the time of writing his remarks, Hessler was only able to cite the 2002 doctoral dissertation that Galambos completed at Berkeley, and many of his readers will probably hesitate to go to such a source in order to learn more. Early Chinese palaeography is, after all, a ferociously technical area, and although anyone involved in Chinese studies will be vaguely aware that major advances have been made, thanks to the recovery over the past three decades or so of much more manuscript material, even those engaged in research in other periods of pre-modern China are generally content to leave this realm of knowledge to the experts.

Fortunately, this book can be thoroughly recommended as a major advance in making the knowledge recently accrued much more widely available. It will still not suit every reader of Peter Hessler, in that it assumes a basic knowledge of the Chinese script as used today, plus the rudiments of early Chinese history. But it will certainly find a place on the reading list of any introductory course in Sinology, and one hopes that all those outside the immediate field of “Early China” with a vague awareness of recent advances will also find the leisure to peruse it too, since much of what it has to say is not without relevance to later periods also. Basically Galambos turns his knowledge of early manuscripts to good purpose in questioning the history of the Chinese script enshrined in standard Han sources and introduces a much more nuanced account, questioning the extent to which Qin script reform managed to impose new norms on the early diversity of orthographic usage, and suggesting that their notion of a unity preceding this diversity was an ideological construct as powerful and as necessary as that which elevated to sage-hood the founding rulers of the Three Dynasties of pre-imperial times. That diversity was in fact inherent in the script even of Shang and early Zhou times emerges as a key point in the concluding chapter 7, and could perhaps have been demonstrated by some examples. But up to this final chapter – or at any rate, up to the final footnote of chapter 6, where again an example would have helped – the argument of the book is developed with very commendable clarity, neither adducing too much in the way of illustrative material nor too little, so that the reader is gently but firmly steered through what to many could be quite confusing materials in order to learn some very important lessons.

Doubtless there are some statements with which an expert might quibble, but if so I would argue that these are far outweighed by the overall success of

the strategy pursued, which manages to teach us something about Chinese writing in general – or rather forces us to unlearn some lessons subtly inculcated by centuries of standardized printed texts. One is almost persuaded that some of the arguments on this topic brought to bear by Elizabeth L. Eisenstein on European printing may have yet more force in China, though perhaps the impact of printing – which Galambos, writing outside his own area of expertise, only alludes to in somewhat general terms – would have been much less without the progressive intervention of the state. Thus though Galambos refers in passing (p. 94) to the printed Daoist and Buddhist canons as vehicles for enforcing standardization, Lewis Lancaster, in Susan Whitfield (ed), *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries* (London: The British Library, 2002), p. 223, points out that early printed editions of the Buddhist canon were not standardized until the Southern Song. This of course is an entirely separate area of research, though it is gratifying to learn from Peter Hessler that Galambos is learning Tangut, a little known language that can throw much light on early Buddhist xylography.

It must also be admitted that though the volume under review clearly deserves to reach a second printing on merit, one hopes that when this goal is achieved it will prove possible to carry out a little more standardization within this text, too. On p. 38, for example, the appearance of an “asterix” (*sic*) might almost have been deliberately engineered to illustrate the nature of orthographic variation in contemporary English, and certainly attests to the author’s breadth of reading in French. But on p. 78 almost a line of text has dropped out of the quotation, reducing it to nonsense, and one suspects that similar errors have marred one or two other passages as well. On p. 39 a wrong cross-reference to a table is certainly given. But taken as a whole, a rather complex work involving not only standard Chinese characters but also a whole array of manuscript forms has been produced with remarkably little mishap, and the layout is just as clear and attractive as the argument. To judge from this initial publication, both the author and the series can look forward to further successes.

T. H. Barrett

ENNO GIELE:

Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China: A Study of Cai Yong’s Duduan.

(Opera Sinologica.) x, 367 pp. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006. €68. 3 447 05334 8.

Enno Giele has given us a remarkable book about Cai Yong’s 蔡邕 (133–192) *Duduan* 獨斷 (usually rendered as *Solitary Decisions*, but possibly *Ministerial Decisions*, since the court’s three highest officers were dubbed “they who sit alone”). At one time or another, every scholar in the early China field consults *Duduan* to solve a particular problem of definition, but few have troubled to read it from cover to cover. I wager this is because they guess that Cai’s account must make for pretty dull reading, insofar as it concerns the “proper classification of documents that went in and out of the Han court” (p. 5) and a compilation of precedents. Giele’s approach is innovative, however: he uses Cai’s text as a medium through which to provide an “integrated review of the