

are further considered by Ekaterina Nechaeva in a fascinating account which stresses how vital it was for nomadic leaders like Atilla to be able to acquire not only luxury gifts but to be visited by ambassadors of appropriate rank. Without these outward and visible signs of prestige, he would not have been able to sustain the social infrastructure that made the Huns such a formidable force.

Another theme to emerge from the book is the way the networks of connectivity facilitated, indeed encouraged, the spread of cultural values over huge territories. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this is the expansion of Christianity and Buddhism to Central Asia and China, the first outlined by Scott Johnson, the second by Max Deeg. Johnson explains how Christianity was introduced through the medium of Syriac, a language which (together with Sogdian) became a *lingua franca* of communication and exchange. The spread of Buddhism to China took with it the monastic ideal and also began to influence painting and sculpture there as early as the Northern Wei period. As

Buddhist texts began to reach China in growing numbers, the need for translators also had a significant cultural impact. A rather different example of cultural appropriation is presented in Sören Stark's consideration of the eclectic range of representations, incorporated in elite Türkic monuments, drawn from China, the Iranian borders, and even Byzantium.

It is difficult in a brief review to do justice to such a rich variety of contributions, but enough has been said to give a flavor of the riches before us. This is an inspiring book. It establishes Eurasian Late Antiquity as a cohesive area of study at the same time as it demonstrates the sheer excitement of the subject. The editors have done us a great service in bringing together such a thought-provoking volume.

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*Violence, Kinship and the Early Chinese State: The Shang and their World*. Roderick Campbell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 358 pp., 36 b&w illus., 4 maps. Hardcover US \$100, ISBN 978-1-107-19761-9.

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The monograph under review describes itself as an up-to-date synthesis of Shang China. The first two of its eight chapters, "Being, Society and World: Toward an Inter-Ontic Approach" and "Cities, States and Civilizations," are reviews of earlier scholarship. Chapter 3, "Central Plains Civilization from Erlitou to Anyang," describes the major phases of the early Bronze Age in north China. It includes a review of evidence for war and sacrifice and a quantitative analysis of burials. The next four chapters focus on the Anyang site and period. Chapter 4 is "The Great Settlement Shang [i.e., Anyang] and its Polity: Networks, Boundaries and the Social

Economy." It uses oracle-bone inscriptions to characterize the polity, discussing its exercise of authority and networks of power. Chapter 5, "Kinship, Place and Social Order," argues that the fundamental unit of Shang society was the lineage, the king being the apex lineage leader. Chapter 6, "Violence and Shang Civilization," finds that the conduct of war and sacrifice changed from ad hoc to systematic over the course of the Anyang period. Chapter 7, "Constructing the Ancestors: The Social Economy of Burial," interprets a shift in mortuary practice, from lavish expenditure to economy, as a deliberate change from material to symbolic

expression of social status. The last chapter, “Technologies of Pacification and the World of the Great Settlement Shang,” is a recapitulation. It is followed by three table appendices on the topics of: (A) Shang political geography as seen in oracle-bone inscriptions; (B) chronology based on archaeology and transmitted texts; and (C) Anyang burial data.

The author states the aims of his book in the preface. In the hope that “what is gained in synthetic juxtaposition and the perspective thus derived outweighs what is lost in lack of specialization,” he combines “oracle-bones, an abandoned eleventh-century (BCE) city and Bourdieu” (p. xix). The book begins with two chapters of critique devoted to a select group of scholars who have written studies of Shang or comparative studies that involve it: K. C. Chang, David Keightley, Norman Yoffee, John Baines, Bruce Trigger, Liu Li and Chen Xingcan, Robert Bagley, and Sarah Allan. In the author’s judgment, all have failed to understand the nature of Shang civilization, and one reason for their failure is a confusion they all share about definitions of “civilization” and “the state.” The way out of this confusion, he believes, is to put terminology aside and focus on specifics. He seeks to explain “the actual mechanisms mediating between power, belief and social practices” (p. 4), “flesh out the articulation between material conditions, practices and discourse to get to a more fully contextual approach” (p. 10), investigate “the relations between specific institutions, technologies, social practices and ideas” (p. 19), understand “the particular social economy” (p. 23), “build an understanding of the relationship between land, urban center, and people from the specifics of Shang evidence” (p. 32), and obtain concrete knowledge “about second millennium BCE economic organization in North China” (p. 39) and “the actual mechanisms of expansion, the specifics of exchange, the particular relationships of power” (p. 40). In short, he promises to show us, concretely and specifically, “how Shang society worked” (p. 28).

As he begins to describe the material record in chapter 3, we learn that specificity, at least as the author understands it, is not

possible until the Anyang period. For the first phase of his “Central Plains Metropolitan Tradition,” the Erlitou period, “the present state of information makes it extremely difficult to do more than speculate about the social practices, attitudes and networks of exchange in which they were produced, exchanged and consumed” (p. 57). Since “the data presently available . . . is far from sufficient to do much more than speculate” (p. 58), “the political organization of the polity centered at Erlitou is unclear” (p. 59). For the succeeding Erligang period, “without the blanks filled in by neo-evolutionary state theory or anachronistic projections from later China, the particulars of Erligang period institutions and interactions are all but unknown” (pp. 65–66; on p. 98 they are “far from clear”). For the recently defined Xiaoshuangqiao–Huanbei period the political landscape “is doubly unclear” (p. 67).

These statements will do little to persuade readers that Chinese archaeology is an exciting field, but for the author’s argument they serve the important function of justifying a focus on Anyang at the expense of earlier periods. The Anyang period offers “a much fuller range of data” (p. 70). The Anyang site is larger than earlier centers, its architecture and ritual practices are unprecedented in distribution and homogeneity, and its bronze industry is unprecedented in organization, scale, and sophistication (p. 70). In fact Anyang is unique, we are told, because it has important new features unknown at Erlitou and Zhengzhou: horse-drawn chariots, the royal hunt, and writing (pp. 73–74). The horse-drawn chariot is indeed new, on present evidence, though the suggestion that it came from the west is not, yet the author does not cite Chinese scholars who have argued for western origins (cf. Wang 2002 for references). As to the origin of writing, the author follows Adam Smith’s view (p. 73), argued earlier by William Boltz, that writing was a more or less overnight invention made at the Anyang court in response to the needs of divination. The reasoning is that if we have no writing by anyone other than court diviners, nor any example of pre-Anyang writing, then none existed. The author disregards conflicting evidence (e.g., inscribed sherds from the

Xiaoshuangqiao site at Zhengzhou) and arguments founded on comparisons with other early writing systems (Bagley 2004; Wang 2014) on the ground that writing systems had an “extremely limited distribution in the Anyang period” and “the fluidity of graphic composition in the early periods of the oracle-bone script” (p. 73) imply that it was a recent invention. He acknowledges that “the likelihood of writing on perishable materials like bamboo slips is also great,” but says that “this does not guarantee that this medium of writing was prior to the oracle-bone inscriptions as opposed to contemporaneous” (p. 112n23). His concession that writing contemporary with the oracle bones might have existed on perishable materials undercuts his claim that writing was used only by diviners and had an “extremely limited distribution;” perhaps it was only the practice of carving inscriptions on divination bones that had a limited distribution. Absence of evidence to the contrary is his only argument that the royal hunt was an Anyang innovation, since we are told that nothing like the assemblage of wild animals from Anyang has been found at earlier “mega-centers” (p. 54) that have been “relatively thoroughly investigated” (p. 74n18). However, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Nor has Zhengzhou, the greatest of the “mega-centers” before Anyang, been “relatively thoroughly investigated.” Far from it, as the author well knows.

The author’s willingness to make himself a prisoner of the accidents of discovery in order to prove a negative is hard to understand in someone who has participated in field work in China and witnessed at first hand its “breath-taking” pace of discovery (p. xxiii). Anyang has a fuller range of data than Erlitou and Zhengzhou because it has been excavated almost continuously for almost a century. Systematic excavation in Zhengzhou is simply out of the question because nearly ten million people live there today. Even so it is abundantly clear that administrative writing, royal tombs, the animal hunt, large-scale bronze foundries, and large-scale human sacrifice did not originate at Anyang, and that the likelihood of discoveries throwing new light on them is very great. On the

subject of human sacrifice, for example, two recent finds have an important bearing. One is at Zhengzhou, at the Xiaoshuangqiao site noted above for its sherds with early writing. The author mentions the discovery there of a sacrificial area with many pits containing animal and human remains (p. 83n28), but the numbers he quotes are from the preliminary report (6 pits containing human remains). The final report, published in 2012 but not cited in his book, gives much larger numbers (33 pits containing human remains, one of which has at least 32 individuals). A second discovery is the Shimao site in northern Shaanxi, which is at least half a millennium earlier than Anyang (for overview in English, see Jaang et al. 2018). Among the many unexpected finds at Shimao are numerous pits with heads of decapitated victims. The author mentions the site (p. 75), but not as a location of human sacrifice, even though the preliminary report on the pits was published in 2013 (the latest reference in his book is 2015).

Like so many important discoveries in Chinese archaeology, Xiaoshuangqiao and Shimao were found by accident, not by archaeological survey. Our ideas are regularly reshaped and sometimes overturned by sites that archaeologists did not know to search for. The haphazard nature of the archaeological sample is occasionally acknowledged by the author (p. 78), but it is always immediately dismissed by the ubiquitous use of “nevertheless” (seven times in pp. 80–84—three times in two successive paragraphs on p. 81—making it exceedingly difficult to ascertain his stance on any issue). In chapter 3, to support his contention that radical changes in the practice of war and sacrifice occurred at Anyang, the author carries out a statistical analysis of burials from the entire Bronze Age (pp. 74–99), an exercise that requires him to disregard the unrepresentativeness of the archaeological sample. For trustful readers, his tables and scatter plots of  $z$ -scores no doubt have the appearance of scientific objectivity, but the caveats he enters about the numbers he uses are by themselves enough to raise doubts about the meaningfulness of his statistics: “I have chosen to use tomb volume rather than area in the Anyang case because it is a more accurate indicator of effort expended

in the construction of the tomb than area. In the Erlitou, Zhengzhou and Taixi cases, tomb depth was either not available or unreliable due to damage to the stratum in which the tomb was located caused by later activity” (p. 93n35). Even if we close our eyes to the defects of the archaeological sample and accept the inferences the author draws from it, we might wonder whether his conclusions are worth the effort that produced them: “the remainder (with the lowest differentiation scores), are tombs with primarily ceramics or no grave goods at all and suggest that the basic distinction between tombs equipped only with ceramics and those with bronze or jade artifacts is a valid one” (p. 90); “this pattern suggests that, in tombs without bronze vessels, ceramic vessels played a role analogous to that of ritual bronzes, while in tombs with metal vessels, they played another, subsidiary role” (p. 220). The author tries to distance himself from processual archaeology (p. 15), but when we encounter statements like these it is hard not to be reminded of Paul Courbin’s (1988) critique of processualism as comprising “Mickey Mouse Laws,” transparently obvious generalities arrived at by heroic analytical labors.

Whether the materials examined are burials or oracle inscriptions, statistics permeate chapters 4 through 7 and the two appendices that are constantly referred to in the text. We are presented with k-means cluster analyses of tribute and political affiliations, tabulations of all sorts (royal consort names and place names, recipients and offerings of sacrifices, spatial arrangements of burial goods and human victims), and more. But the fundamental difficulty faced by the would-be statistician of Shang China is that good numbers are rarely available. In the case of the oracle bones, for example, we have no idea how representative our sample is (for some kings many bones have been found, for others very few); only a minority of the excavated bones are inscribed (what did the *uninscribed* bones divine about?); and most of the bones are fragments (numbers change when oracle-bone scholars succeed in piecing fragments together). The author claims his study to have shown that “the relationships between

political affiliation, material culture tradition and orientation toward the Shang king’s discursive hegemony were much more complicated than is generally recognized” (p. 253). The conclusion seems safe. It is probably always safe to say that the past was more complicated than is generally recognized, but statistical analysis does not prove it to be so. Statistical analysis of epigraphic and archaeological materials requires reducing them to numbers. If the sample is rich in detail but biased, reducing it to numbers risks losing everything except the bias. Relevant here is Michael Billig’s (2013) critique of statistical research in the social sciences: the procedures required to convert rich but not easily quantifiable research into statistically manipulable data, and then into charts and graphs, drain it of information. Statistical analysis is meaningful only when the sample is large and representative and the information of interest in it is of a kind that can be faithfully represented in numbers.

In chapter 5, the author accepts Zhu Fenghan’s thesis that Shang society was “fundamentally organized in kinship terms” (pp. 154–156). Stating that “the strongest evidence . . . comes from archaeological work done at Anyang” (p. 156), Campbell cites Tang Jigen’s (2004) study of cemetery formation at Anyang. Tang distinguishes three levels of burial clustering, the highest of which he takes to represent the lineage. The author agrees with Tang that the presence of the same clan sign “on bronzes found in clusters of tombs of different generations lends support to the hypothesis that many of these graphs were descent group signifiers” and that, “given the importance of ancestor veneration, analogy from royal practice, the presence of sacrificial pits in some of the non-royal cemeteries, and later traditions of kin-based burial grounds, it seems likely that these discrete, hierarchical communities of burial were also kinship based” (pp. 158–159). Tang is probably right that his burial grounds are lineage-based, but while it is a time-honored practice in Anyang archaeology to interpret the “clan-sign” emblems on bronzes as the names of lineages, a study just published by a Beida archaeologist has called this interpretation seriously into question (Cao Dazhi

2018). Analyzing the same three clusters distinguished by Tang, Cao (2018:116–117) found that in no cluster did more than three tombs—the three richest—share the same clan sign, the remainder having no inscribed bronzes or no bronzes at all. If the sign signified a lineage, why were only the two or three richest lineage members permitted to display it? Tombs that contain bronze vessels, even tombs with only the most basic set (a *gu* beaker 觚 and a *jue* pitcher 爵), can hardly have belonged to commoners denied the use of the lineage name. Cao presents strong arguments of several kinds—one is based on a model statistical study—that the graphs we have been calling “clan signs” are in most cases not lineage emblems but the names of government offices and that when the name of an office appears in a bronze inscription, it is a title signifying the office-holder, the individual who commissioned the bronze. In this interpretation, tomb occupants who do not display emblems are likely to have been low-level elites who never obtained an official post at court. Offices probably went only to the most senior member of a lineage and were inherited by one of his descendants, hence the occurrence of the same title in different generations and the short distance between tombs with bronzes bearing the title. The signs Cao interprets as names of offices and the contexts in which they occur in the oracle inscriptions intimate a fairly centralized bureaucracy (for a brief summary in English see Wang 2016). The seventy or so titles he has thus far identified involve the administration of the military, finance, construction, communication, and internal management of the royal palace. Central and local offices were staffed with chiefs and deputies. Some branches, particularly the military, seem to have had minute duty divisions (Cao 2018:115). If Cao is right, and he is very persuasive, the implications for Campbell’s picture of Anyang administration are considerable.

New light on Shang bureaucracy has also come from recent archaeological work. Yan Shengdong’s systematic surveys and excavations near the modern coast of northern Shandong have been eye-opening, winning a place on the national “top ten discoveries” list

for 2008 (Wang 2015:150–153; Yan 2013). Working in scorching sun and unbearable humidity, Yan located over 200 seasonal camps for making salt from underground brine. The camps were operated by thousands of workers who were in turn supported by a network of settlements. The settlements have a clear three-tier pattern, and their material culture is unmistakably that of Anyang 1000 km away. Each year hundreds of tons of salt must have been extracted and shipped to Anyang, while thousands of tons of grain and large quantities of meat and timber were shipped in the other direction to the salt-making bases. Yan has been able to establish the scale and reconstruct the traffic patterns of salt production with remarkable clarity and exactness. His work is not mentioned in the book under review, which instead laments that “the nature of the networks, their participants and facilitators or even the routes remain all but unknown” (p. 73).

Even synthetic works need concrete examples. For professionals and laypeople alike, the appeal of epigraphy and archaeology, I venture to guess, lies in their tangibility, in the feeling they give of direct contact with ancient voices and realities. Little of this immediacy is felt in the book under review; tangible evidence is not a strong presence. In chapter 7, devoted to the social economy of burial, the author illustrates only one burial and does not discuss or even describe its use of space and burial goods (Fig. 7.12, p. 245, actually a model of the famous Wuguancun M1). The book contains a total of twelve photographs—seven of sacrificial burials, three of jade and bronze blades, and two of inscribed objects—but has little to say about them. The photograph of a sacrificial pit at Handan is cited only once in a passage that has nothing to do with it (Fig. 3.5, p. 71). This casual treatment of visual materials is a missed opportunity, as other mortuary studies show. Zhang Chi’s (2015) recent book on social power as inferred from mortuary practice is replete with concrete analyses of excavation photographs, line drawings of graves, and plans of cemeteries from the entire Neolithic. By contrast, though it devotes a section to “The Logic of Sacrifice” (pp. 194–211), the present book does not analyze the sacrificial

remains in the palace-temple precinct or the royal cemetery, an omission that will not easily be understood by anyone who has looked thoughtfully at the gruesome photographs. The kneeling posture of the many sacrificed guards cannot have been easy to maintain. It had to be constructed, as did the neat arrangements of the countless beheaded victims (Figs. 6.6–6.7). This conscious manipulation of human and animal corpses to materialize and eternalize the ritual action and its product is very striking. It immediately invites comparisons with large-scale human sacrifice in other cultures, from the Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Teotihuacan to the Templo Mayor at Tenochtitlan to the recent discovery of mass sacrifice of children at the Chimú capital of Chan Chan. Though the author means his book to be “both case study and theoretical contribution to the anthropological archaeological debates concerning early complex polities” (p. xxiii), he makes no comparisons with other polities himself, yet they might illuminate the polity that interests him.

Perhaps because of the author’s early training in oracle-bone studies, his book has some felicitous passages when it deals with scholarship in that field, especially in its assessment and criticism of eminent epigraphers such as Ding Shan, Qiu Xigui, Zhu Fenghan, Li Xueqin, and Lin Yun (pp. 146 ff). But even in these passages one feels that what the author criticizes is often not very different from what he himself writes (the same could be said of the views he criticizes in his first two chapters). He questions the validity of Zhu Fenghan’s use of the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 [Zuo Tradition] for its late date and “obvious proscriptive [*sic*] intent” (p. 171), but twenty pages later he quotes approvingly its most relentlessly quoted passage—“the great affairs of the polity are sacrifice and war”—adding that “it would probably be more accurate to say that for the Shang people, sacrifice and war were the great affairs of the *lineage*” (p. 191, his italics). In emphasis, at least, his idea of “how Shang society worked” seems not to differ from the *Zuozhuan*’s.

Methods and arguments aside, many sentences in the book try the patience of a reader who wishes to know what the author thinks: “For if Underhill (2002) has cogently

argued that the long east coast tradition of burying ritual drinking sets with the dead has something to do with status competition, and this is still true for its Central Plains Metropolitan Tradition descendants, there are a myriad ways in which mortuary capital, status and political power might be articulated within that framework” (p. 60). The first half of the sentence gives us the gist of Underhill’s idea, but the second half does not reveal what the author wishes to add to it. In passages devoted to theorizing, opaque sentences abound: “I advocated an ‘inter-ontic’ approach to translocal investigations based on a socio-phenomenological and relational ontological revision of the staple anthropological distinction between emic and etic” (p. 248). Typographical errors, random commas, missing words, and other infelicities are too numerous to be listed here.

In his preface, the author proposed to write an updated synthesis of Shang based on the oracle bones, the Anyang site, and Bourdieu, a synthesis that would displace the scholarship reviewed in his first two chapters. How much of this program has been realized? Readers are likely to come away feeling that what the book offers is only a low-resolution picture of the late Shang political landscape based on traditional understandings, translations of 90 brief inscriptions, and a great many statistics taken from texts and archaeological reports. It is moreover a picture that ignores decades of revelatory discoveries outside “the Shang polity.” The book’s subtitle tells us to expect a study of “*The Shang and Their World*,” but the author has reduced the early Bronze Age to the Anyang site, an equation that is half a century out of date. As to his treatment of this much reduced world, the first chapters reject the theorizing that surrounds the words “civilization” and “state” in favor of studying specifics, but the study of specifics does not in practice seem to involve much hands-on engagement with archaeological materials and the author has certainly not emancipated himself from theories. Yet to fill the voids in the archaeological evidence with Bourdieu and “modern anthropological theory” is at best to rely on secondhand cross-cultural comparison, secondhand because the theory digests the particulars of many societies into a generic model, eliminating all the local details

that might stimulate thought or help a researcher judge the limits of comparison. In the end, we still do not know “how Shang society worked.” More attention to the concrete and the specific might have produced a more compelling account.

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*Silk, Slaves, and Stupas: Material Culture of the Silk Road*. Susan Whitfield. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018. 376 pp., 8 photos, 10 maps. Hardback US \$85, £66, ISBN 978-0-520-28177-6; Paperback and eBook US \$30, £24, ISBN 978-0-520-28178-3.

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Susan Whitfield's new book can best be described in one word: kaleidoscopic. It is full of diverse and fascinating details of selected aspects of material culture from the “silk road,” which here means Central Asia from the first century B.C.E. to today. The book is a pleasure to explore and will delight readers

from a wide sphere despite occasional stylistic detours into academese. However, a coherent scientific agenda or historical narrative built from the kaleidoscope's glittering fragments proves elusive; this project is designed to inspire interest rather than push forward new explanations of the past.