

The Tradition of the Scribe

– Introduction –

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This section of *Oriens Extremus* consists of four papers which were originally put together as a panel for the EACS conference held in Moscow 2002. All four articles address one aspect related to the tradition of the scribe in China. They are spread over a period which starts with the very beginnings of the scribal tradition and ends with the view which Liu Shippei conceived at about the time when imperial China stopped to exist.

Kai Vogelsang starts the section with an overview of what kind of scribes we encounter in the earliest texts of China: oracle and bronze inscriptions, and then the earliest specimens of Chinese historiography, *Zuo*zhuan and *Guoyu*. Vogelsang's findings are challenging indeed: in the first group of texts, scribes seem to have been concerned mainly with administrative or military business but never with the writing of history. Vogelsang reminds us of the fact that in the *Zuo*zhuan we can find about the scribes, apart from many other functions which they fulfilled, the task to write down events which took place at court but not the writing of history proper as defined in modern times. This element is only to be found in the *Guoyu*, a fact which, of course, gives rise to doubts whether this text should, as is usually done, really be dated to the same time as the *Zuo*zhuan. Vogelsang finally stresses the fact that *Guoyu* seems to be an exception: in many *Zhanguo* texts we find scribes doing all sorts of things which have nothing to do with the writing of history.

The next paper by Dorothee Schaab-Hanke deals with Chu Shaosun, an author which has been neglected by traditional Chinese scholarship as well as Western sinology because his contributions to Sima Tan's and Sima Qian's *Shiji* are said to be of inferior literary value. In fact this is the first article in any Western language which deals with this scribe. Schaab-Hanke asks what the reasons for the verdict against Chu Shaosun are, and she comes to the conclusion that he, who may have been closely related to Sima Qian's son-in-law, made things explicit which were left unsaid or only implied in the text itself. He may even have placed the Sima in the context of rebellious ideas: Schaab-Hanke suggests that the *Shiji* authors may have considered the ruling Liu family as illegitimate and that the regent Huo Guang who came to power at the end of Emperor Wu's reign may have been the candidate whom in Chu Shaosun's eyes Sima Qian would have liked to see as a new ruler. This is a most fascinating paper which asks the question of whether Chu Shaosun contributed to a tradition of the scribe – and it seems that we have to give a positive answer to this question.

We have to make a great leap forward to the time of the Song or the Ming in order to arrive at the subject of Achim Mittag's topic, namely the composition of the famous *Xinshi*, a collection of poems, which allegedly had been composed by Zheng Sixiao when the Southern Song dynasty was conquered by the Mongols. Mittag first elaborates on an

argumentation which had already been suggested by scholars from the Middle Qing period that the *Xinshi* is a fake of the Late Ming period. He adduces a great many of very convincing arguments that most features of this text fit the time of the later date much better than the one of the late Southern Song. Some doubts will of course remain forever since many of the topics discussed under the late Ming were relevant at the earlier period as well. Yet, what is important in the context of this whole section is that Mittag shows that the *Xinshi* very well fits the concept of the Scribe in the Wilderness (*ye shi*) which under the Ming led to the composition of so many unofficial histories which can be compared to the text he discusses.

Liu Shipai, whose concept of the scribe Jens Hürter discusses in the final paper, is one of the most understudied writers active at the beginning of the twentieth century. When Liu wrote on the subject of history he was, of course, reacting to the provocative articles of Liang Qichao who had said that China actually never had historiography (*shi*) at all. In a way Liu analyzed the situation the other way round: For him all traditional Chinese writing was the writing of scribes (*shi*). Yet, these *shi*-texts included all sorts of different texts. What they had in common was, according to Liu, that they had been written by one very limited class. Whereas Liang Qichao called for a new historiography, Liu Shipai even more radically demanded that China should free itself from the tradition of the scribe at all.