
Milburn, Olivia: *Cherishing Antiquity. The Cultural Construction of an Ancient Chinese Kingdom.* Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press 2013. XII, 392 S. 8°. Hartbd. \$ 39,95. ISBN 978-0-674-72668-0

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A body of literature on early China has emerged in Western languages over the last half-century that takes as its frame of inquiry not ancient China in general, as embodied by the major dynastic traditions of Shang, Zhou, Qin, and Han, but instead the individual states that constituted the main players in early Chinese political discourse for the five hundred years before the rise of the First Emperor.¹ True to its name, Olivia Milburn's recent contribution to this trend, entitled *Cherishing Antiquity: The Cultural Construction of an Ancient Chinese Kingdom*, portrays the southern state of Wu not merely as a historical milieu – an

¹ Individual states besides Wu that have enjoyed dedicated treatments in English include Qin, Chu, Jin, Yan, and Yue. See Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation*, American Oriental Series, vol. 85, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000, which delves backward into the bronze inscriptions of the pre-imperial state of Qin; Yuri Pines, Lothar von Falkenhausen, Gideon Shelach, and Robin D. S. Yates, eds. *Birth of an Empire: The State of Qin Revisited*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2014; Heather Peters, "The Role of the State of Chu in Eastern Zhou Period China: A Study of Interaction and Exchange in the South," Ph. D. dissertation, Yale University, 1983; Constance Anne Cook, "Auspicious metals and southern spirits: An analysis of the Chu bronze inscriptions" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1990); Constance A. Cook and John S. Major, eds., *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999; Jae-hoon Shim, "The early development of the state of Jin: From its enfeoffment to the hegemony of Wen Gong (r. 636–628 B. C.)" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1998); Yan Sun, "Negotiating cultural and political control in North China: Art and mortuary ritual and practice of the Yan at Liulihe during the early Western Zhou period" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2001); and Ying Yong, "Ancient Chinese marriage and statecraft in a Zhou vassal state: Elite female burials of the Jin state" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2004). Erica Fox Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue: Perceptions and Identities on the Southern Frontier, c. 400 BCE–50 CE*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

impractical approach, given the limits of the various bodies of sources available – but also as a conceptual framework for the expression of productive tensions between central and peripheral, local and national, and secular and sacred upon which southern elites throughout the imperial period drew in defining and redefining their own identities. In this respect, *Cherishing Antiquity* contributes to this growing corpus not just an additional case study on Wu, but also a demonstration of the greater, ongoing relevance of such state histories to China studies writ large.

The first of *Cherishing Antiquity's* two main divisions, as Milburn points out herself, conducts the main exploration of the "cultural construction" of Wu based on early sources (342). As is often necessary for studies of the pre-Qin period, the focus of the section is not on the complete social milieu of the state of Wu, but on the ups and downs of the royal house (19). The first and second chapters divide the history of the Wu royal family between them. The first ("The Kingdom of Wu") concerns itself with the traditions of the establishment of Wu as a state, as well as with the tale of its most famous royal denizen, Prince Jizha, who became known as a genius exemplar of the key Confucian skill of interpreting cultural performances (30–50). Chapter 2 ("The Last Kings of Wu") focuses on the arguably more eventful second half of the Wu royal family's history (at least as portrayed in traditional sources), including the death of King Liao; the rivalries between Wu and the two states of Chu and Yue; the ferocious King Helü; and the famously dissipated King Fuchai. (2) Key to this portion of the history of Wu is the famous story of Wu Zixu, the virtuous and unappreciated minister whose legacy came to dominate much of the textual remembrance of the state, who by no means receives short shrift here (see "The Death of Wu Zixu," 86–93). In chapter 3 ("Reflections on the Royal House of Wu"), Milburn brings a range of near-contemporary sources to bear on this construct of Wu royal history, including received texts (mainly *Zuozhuan*; 116–121) as well as inscribed bronzes of the pre-Qin period (121–139) and mirrors of Eastern Han provenance (139–158).

One might call the latter division of *Cherishing Antiquity* a "cultural reconstruction," or a history of such, in that it documents efforts to claim the heritage of Wu through the exploration of and writing about sites of significance in its tumultuous history. The *huaigu* 懷古 phenomenon of reminiscence, from which the book takes its name (1), directs the organization of this second half, which spreads four case studies of the commemoration of key Wu personages and related sites across three chapters. Chapter 4 ("Commemorating Master Ji of Yanling") treats with three foci of the memory of the aforementioned Confucian

paragon Prince Jizha, namely his tomb (176–181); his cult buildings and by extension his cult itself, which survived Tang-era persecutions of heterodox traditions (181–193, esp. 182; 208–215); and the famed “Ten-Character Stele,” with which no less a personage than Confucius is said to have commemorated the prince (197–208). Chapter 5 (“The Tomb at Tiger Hill”) deals comprehensively with the purported burial site of King Helü (224–229) and its relationship with other nearby sites of differing character, both secular and sacred, with which it formed a milieu of tourism for erudites and other folk (224–238, esp. 230, 236). The eponymous topics of Chapter 6 (“Numinous Cliff and Gusu Tower”) were both linked in particular with the last king of Wu, despite their ephemerality, so to speak – the first was a real place reputed as the former location of significant, now-lost royal facilities, while the second endured only as a literary construct (or in the form of much-later namesakes) (278–280; 335–337). Assembled, the chapters comprise a thorough analysis of the implementation of multiple modes of the commemorative impulse – directed at an individual, a known site, a general area, and a lost site – as focused through the single cultural-historical lens of a particular ancient state.

Focusing on the southern state of Wu in particular means that *Cherishing Antiquity* can engage with a range of sources of extreme diversity in both date and type, including received texts of the classical period; Han Dynasty texts; inscriptions on bronze items of pre-Qin date, including both vessels and the famed southern swords, as well as the decorative registers of bronze mirrors produced in the south after the rise of the Han Dynasty; as well as erudite poetry and local gazetteers. The facility with which Milburn navigates the gaps in style between these materials impresses, not least given the constant and potentially challenging presence of poetry. Especially well integrated with the discussion are the various excerpts from early received texts concerned most directly with southern geopolitics, including the *Wu Yue chunqiu* and the *Yuejue shu*; the early portions of *Cherishing Antiquity* may be productively read as a companion volume to Milburn’s full translation of the latter.² Overall, Milburn approaches this diversity of material with admirable restraint, refraining from drawing unsupportable connections between the different sources; the result is a clear and conservative picture of the state of the sources offering many potential starting points for further research. The third chapter (“Reflections on the Royal House of Wu”), in particular, adeptly coaxes a thread of meaning out of the extremely patchy bronze records on

the subject, highlighting the ongoing, multivalent, and problematic nature of the incorporation of a local culture into the Central Plains cultural-historical model.

The connection between the first and second portions of the work – namely, that the construct of the kingdom of Wu in the classical texts directly informed imperial-era efforts of literati to engage Wu as a medium of self-expression – is admirably direct. Structurally speaking, certain portions of the book compromise the direct progression of that argument. The section on Eastern Han mirrors that closes the third chapter, for example (139–158), offers an early historical example of the commemoration of Wu as a point of cultural pride; but that venue of approach is somewhat lost in the later chapters, in which the iconography of Wu necessarily takes a backseat to its literary commemoration. A different choice of focal point for the case studies of the later chapters of the book, whether chronological or focusing on individual interests (Wang Ao, in particular, seemed ripe for further exploration), might perhaps have evoked the commemoration of Wu as a point of cultural pride more explicitly. The closing portion dedicated to Suzhou, while interesting in its own right, likewise interrupts the flow of the argument somewhat; though the relationship between Suzhou and the sites discussed in Part Two of the book is frequently mentioned, the vital role of the city itself in the commemoration of Wu is not made entirely clear. These two sections could perhaps more productively have been framed as appendices to what is otherwise a coherent, solidly structured work.

Cherishing Antiquity has painted an adept and engaging portrait of the Wu royal house as portrayed in the received textual tradition, as well as in bronze. There is some hope that further sources may eventually lend this portrait additional detail. Over the past several decades, a growing number of manuscripts have come to light that are known or assumed to derive from the early Chinese state of Chu, historically a regular military opponent of Wu (see Milburn, 23–25, 28, and Part One throughout).³ One might expect that the doings of Wu would be of

² Olivia Milburn, *The Glory of Yue: An Annotated Translation of the Yuejue shu*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010.

³ A full list of currently extant manuscripts of likely Warring States Chu origin is beyond the scope of this review; however, an English-language list of early Chinese manuscript finds as of the year 2000, of Warring States date and otherwise, can be found in Enno Giele, “Early Chinese Manuscripts: Including Addenda and Corrigenda to *New Sources of Early Chinese History: An Introduction to the Reading of Inscriptions and Manuscripts*,” *Early China* 23/24 (1998–1999), 247–337. The body of data contained therein as well as updates thereof can currently be accessed online at the website of the Center for Ancient Chinese Texts and Images, Institut für Sinologie, Heidelberg University currently: <http://projects.co.uni-heidelberg.de/manuscript/index.php> (accessed June 2015).

intrinsic interest to Chu authors, editors, and readers of the Warring States period, to which the earliest available manuscript sources probably date. Recent finds of Chu slips, both provenanced and unprovenanced, have indeed furnished texts concerned specifically with Wu, including material lacking a direct counterpart in the received textual record.⁴ Future work on such texts, as well as those concerned with the early history of Chu

and the Chinese South more generally, may improve the resolution of our image of the ancient state of Wu, albeit with filtering through the potentially limited lens of Warring States Chu sources. Scholars pursuing such work should be grateful to Milburn for providing a solid foundation of textual scholarship that is nonetheless sensitive to the culturally and historically contingent nature of its source material.

⁴ A group of badly damaged Warring States-era slip texts excavated in Cili county, Hunan, may contain material corresponding to the “Wu yu” chapter of the received *Guoyu*, among other received texts. On the discovery and contents of these slips, see Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo and Cili xian wenwu baohu guanli yanjiusuo, “Hunan Cili xian Shibancun 36 hao Zhanguo mu fajue jianbao,” *Wenwu* 1990.10, 37–47, 105, esp. 45; “Henan Cili xian Shibancun Zhanguo mu,” *Kaogu xuebao* 1995.2, 173–207, esp. 199–200; Zhang Chunlong, “Cili Chu jian gaishu,” in Ai Lan (Sarah Allan) and Xing Wen, eds., *Xin chu jianbo guoji xueshu yantao hui wenji* (*Xin chu jianbo yanjiu* 2004.12), Beijing: Wenwu, 2004, 4–11. For some recent discussions of their likely relationship to the received textual record, see Zhang Zheng, “Hunan Cili chutu Chu jian neirong bianxi,” *Qiusuo* 2007.6, 188, 212–213; Xia Dekao, “Lun Cili Chu jian de xingzhi,” *Kaili xueyuan xuebao* 29.2 (April 2011), 43–46; Wang Lianlong, “Cili Chu jian ‘Da wu’ xiaodu liuce,” *Kaogu* 2012.3, 70–73. The text from the unprovenanced Shanghai Museum manuscripts entitled “Wu ming” 吴命 contains material directly related to the received text of the *Guoyu*, as well as additional material not appearing anywhere in the received textual record; see Ma Chengyuan, ed., *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu jianshu*, vol. 7, Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2008, 133–144, 301–325, esp. 303.