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Introduction

THIS BOOK takes the reader on a journey along the Silk Roads and Steppe Roads of Eastern Eurasia in the sixth through eighth centuries. Originally delivered as the Rostovtzeff Lectures at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW) in spring 2016, the journey involves sojourns at three locations to explore tombs and their contents, including paper documents, epitaphs on stone, and burial goods of mainly the Sui (581–618) and early Tang (618–907) dynasties. At each stop, evidence gleaned from tomb construction, texts on paper and stone, and funerary artifacts captures glimpses of people, rituals, and objects that were in motion on the Silk and Steppe Roads until being laid to rest over a millennium ago. The lectures were inspired by the proliferating tomb excavations in China over the past several decades fueled by rapid economic development. Archaeologists have plucked discoveries from tombs faster than scholars have been able to digest them. The book highlights how some of these tomb finds can expand our knowledge of medieval history and cross-cultural exchanges between China, Mongolia, and Central Asia. The four chapters collectively argue that Eurasian peoples, who perceived their societies to be unique, spun overlapping and entangled webs of culture. The major transit hubs of Silk and Steppe Roads were particularly active sites of cultural contestation, experimentation, and mutual influence that had an impact on the historical development of China and Eurasia. Keeping in mind that scholars have barely begun to unlock the potential of these finds, another purpose of the book is to explore the prospects and problems for interdisciplinary analysis of the tombs and their contents.

The term Steppe Roads in the title of the book may be new to some readers, but I chose it deliberately to complement the more familiar Silk Roads. When the geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen popularized the German geographic term *Seidenstrasse*, or Silk Road, in the late nineteenth century, he narrowly conceived it as an east–west route transmitting trade goods between the Roman Empire (146 BCE–476 CE) and Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) China via oases of Central Asia. The term grew in popularity over the course

of the twentieth century and was translated into many different languages—including English, French, Chinese, and Japanese—perhaps because it captivated the imagination by conjuring up romantic visions of caravans laded with exotic silks.[1] As the term gained global acceptance, scholars and popular authors have expanded the spatial and temporal parameters of von Richthofen's original conception. Today when most narrowly conceived, "Silk Roads" refers to the caravan routes that ran through oasis cities of the desert regions of Central Asia linking the densely populated agricultural societies of East, South, and West Asia from approximately 100 BCE during the Roman and Han Empires.[2] More loosely defined, "Silk Roads" expands temporally, with origins in the third millennium BCE during the Bronze Age, and spatially to include all routes across Afro-Eurasia on land and sea, where many other goods besides silk have been traded.[3] The lack of consensus on a definition and the term's prominence in popular publications has prompted some scholars to call for its rejection.[4] Nevertheless, most academic authors seem to consider the term to be indispensable because of its universal appeal.

Recognizing the need for more precision, the historian David Christian has proposed "Steppe Roads" as a concept with the symbolic power to complement "Silk Roads."[5] Christian was reacting against the typical focus on agricultural societies of the narrowly defined Silk Roads and attempting to be more precise about the types of exchanges involved in the looser

1. Chin 2013; Mertens 2019; Waugh 2007b; Whitfield 2020. Mertens's article convincingly argues that von Richthofen did not coin *Seidenstrasse* but rather popularized an expression that had been developing in German geographic scholarship earlier in the nineteenth century. Von Richthofen elaborated on the concept of *Seidenstrasse* in lectures and books that inspired the first translations of the term into English and French. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this valuable reference. Chin and Whitfield mention the translations of the term into Chinese and Japanese in the early twentieth century.

2. Hansen 2012, 6–8, plates 2–3; Waugh 2007b. Hansen adopts this definition.

3. For example, the Silk Road Research Series (Zhou 1993) includes books on the oasis, steppe, sea, and southeast Asia land routes throughout Afro-Eurasia starting in the Bronze Age. Christopher I. Beckwith (2009) and E. E. Kuzmina (2008) conceive of the Silk Roads as originating chronologically in the Bronze Age and geographically including the steppe. Liu Xinru (2010) and Susan Whitfield (2018) begin later chronologically with the Han dynasty. Both authors include the steppe, but Whitfield expands geographically to encompass Europe, the Indian Ocean, and East Africa.

4. Whitfield 2020, 24.

5. Christian (2000) provides the fullest justification of the Steppe Roads concept and its significance but seems to have been unaware of earlier Japanese and Chinese scholarship that had distinguished between steppe, oasis, and sea routes; see Matsuda and Fujieda 1957, 5–10; and Zhou 1993.

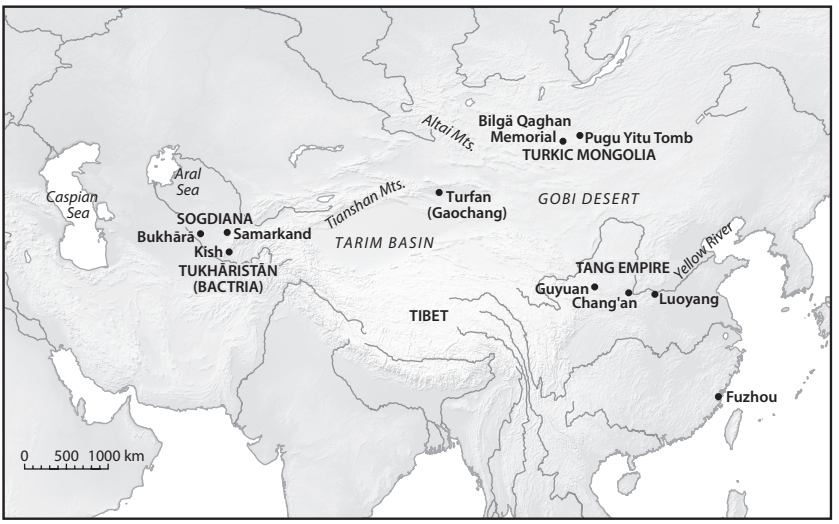
definitions. He defines steppe routes as the band of grassland stretching across Eurasia from Manchuria in the east to Hungary in the west, with ramifying branches connecting to agricultural societies to the south and Siberian forest dwellers to the north. "Steppe Roads" valuably calls attention to the frequently overlooked economic and cultural impacts of pastoral nomadic societies on Eurasia. On the Steppe Roads, trade was driven by transecological exchanges of the goods of pastoral nomadic peoples, such as livestock and their products, for agricultural goods, such as grain and textiles to the south, and forest products, such as furs, to the north. Christian points out that important technologies, such as the wheel, chariot, and horse-riding gear, were transmitted through the steppe zone, while others, such as paper, were better suited to transmission along the oasis routes. From the perspective of China's history, the concept of the "Silk Roads" and "Steppe Roads" valuably distinguishes between cultural impacts coming from the oasis zone to the west and steppe zone to the north. It also serves to remind us that silk was far from the only item traded on these routes.

The book reader's journey along "Silk Roads" and "Steppe Roads" includes three stops that provide case studies illustrating the geographic diversity and cultural dynamism of the silk and steppe routes of medieval Eastern Eurasia. Turfan in modern Xinjiang Uighur "Autonomous" Region, the location of the first chapter, was an important Silk Road oasis stop in the desert on the "middle route" that ran through Central Asia between West Asia and China (see map 0.1). Turfan also had a smaller branch route running northward through the Tianshan Mountains that connected to the steppe. The second and third chapters are devoted to Guyuan 固原 in Ningxia Hui "Autonomous" Region, located 1,950 kilometers (1,200 miles) southeast of Turfan, in a borderland agro-pastoral area strategically located at the intersection of major silk and steppe routes.[6] From Guyuan, travelers could follow the Silk Road farther southeast to the Sui-Tang capital of Chang'an 長安 (modern Xi'an) or go north on the Steppe Roads to Inner Mongolia and Mongolia.[7] The fourth chapter follows the Steppe Roads north to the sparsely populated plains of central Mongolia—about 1,700 kilometers (1,050 miles) from Guyuan—where two Tang-style tombs are the final destination of the journey.

Each stop on this journey was chosen based on the availability of published excavation reports of Sui-Tang–style tombs, where artifacts and textual sources

6. The book adopts the convention of referring to Guyuan by its modern name to avoid confusion. During medieval times, it underwent several name changes under succeeding ruling dynasties (Luo F. 1996, 5).

7. Chang'an was renamed Daxingcheng (大興城) during the Sui dynasty, but I adopt the convention of referring to it as Chang'an throughout the book to avoid confusion.



MAP 0.1. Overview of Major Sites

in Chinese have been discovered that provide strong signs of intercultural exchanges. My goal was to carry out an experiment in interdisciplinary methodology because textual and material evidence of tombs are studied together relatively rarely. More frequently, texts are considered the realm of historians, and material culture the domain of archaeologists and art historians. Intent on breaking new ground rather than repackaging my previous publications, I feverishly carried out research at the British Museum in summer 2015 and at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW) from fall 2015 to spring 2016. During my journey through published reports on these tombs and contents, I encountered many unexpected twists, turns, and dead ends, some of which are described at the end of this introduction. Of the four talks that I originally proposed when invited to give the lectures, only one has made it to print, albeit comprising chapters 2 and 3 of the book. Perhaps this is to be expected when attempting to dive into tombs seeking historical evidence. In the end, it proved difficult to identify three parallel cases with balanced textual and material evidence. Nevertheless, I believe that all three cases provide illuminating historical insights and lessons on interdisciplinary research.

The first chapter, "A Slave Road? Slaves and Slavers at Turfan," introduces the Silk and Steppe Roads through a case study of slaves and their owners, including foreign merchants and Tang and local elites at the oasis city of

Turfan in the fifth through eighth centuries (see map 0.1). The sources are paper documents preserved in tombs dug into the desert. Information on slavery survives in contracts for slave sales and travel permits of caravans in which slaves constituted a substantial proportion of travelers. The chapter also provides a sense of the social and economic changes occurring in Turfan as it was transformed into a major Silk Road transit station under first the Gaochang 高昌 Kingdom (442–640) and later the Tang Empire (640–ca. 780). The chapter challenges the idealized stereotypes of the Silk Roads by providing evidence that enslaved humans were one of the luxury "goods" traded over long distances, and that silk was not always the "currency" used to make purchases.

The second and third chapters, "Sogdians or Borderlanders? Part I: Lives Revealed in Epitaphs" and "Part II: Death Rituals Revealed in Tombs," investigate two lineages of immigrants with the same surname of Shi 史 who settled at Guyuan. Both lineages produced locally powerful elites who served successive North China–based dynasties as military officers, imperial bodyguards, horse breeders, and translators in the sixth and seventh centuries. Their existence literally came to light when archaeologists excavated six tombs in the southern outskirts of Guyuan in the 1980s and 1990s containing burial goods and seven engraved stone epitaphs written in Chinese. A scholarly consensus has developed that both lineages had origins in Sogdiana in Central Asia. The chapter challenges and complicates this conclusion by demonstrating that only one lineage had Sogdian ancestry, but both nevertheless had much in common culturally because of their residence in Guyuan and service over several generations to the Tang and preceding dynasties.

The final chapter, "A Tang Dynasty Ally in Ritual and War: The Tomb of Pugu Yitu (635–678) in Mongolia," takes readers along the Steppe Roads from North China to Mongolia to investigate two recently discovered tombs that were constructed according to early Tang design. One tomb contained a Chinese-language epitaph of a Turkic chief, Pugu Yitu 僕固乙突, which throws light on the little-known history of Mongolia between the First Türk (552–630) and Second Türk (682–742) Empires, when the Tang dynasty exerted suzerainty over the region through vassal rulers. Ties between the Tang Empire and Pugu chiefs were knit and reknit through war alliances and diplomatic rituals. The ritual relationship detailed in the epitaph is confirmed in the tomb of Pugu Yitu and in another one without an epitaph nearby at Bayannuur because Tang artisans certainly were involved in constructing and furnishing the two tombs. Despite pretensions of Tang dominance expressed in the imperially commissioned epitaph and tomb designs, the burials did not represent wholehearted surrender to Tang culture because both contain signs of Turkic funerary rituals and material culture.

Interdisciplinary Methodology

Since the book also seeks to experiment with interdisciplinary methodology, each chapter moves beyond conventional received historical sources written in Chinese to include texts and artifacts discovered in tombs. Historians of medieval China conventionally have relied on received Chinese-language dynastic and annalistic histories and central governmental documents, which reflect the elite, court-centered perspectives of the authors, the literati-Confucian officials stationed in the capitals. Tomb excavations potentially expand the scope of research materials and topics available to these historians because tombs are exciting depositories full of surprises missing in the received sources.

Tomb archaeology has become perhaps the largest subfield of Chinese archaeology.[8] The proliferation of tomb excavations can be traced to two sources. One is the academic orientation of Chinese scholarship, which has traditionally emphasized elite culture and spectacular artifacts and texts found in large tombs.[9] The other, even more important in recent decades, is the need to carry out rescue excavations at sites endangered by rapid economic development and the shadowy tomb robbery industry. The downside of rapid expansion of rescue archaeology is that it reduces opportunities to carry out carefully planned excavations and fully analyze artifacts and texts that have been extracted. As a consequence, the majority of excavations remain unpublished, and the quality of archaeological technique, record keeping, preservation, and publications vary.[10]

Although historians of medieval China, including me, have been carrying out research on tomb finds since the 1990s, the field has developed slowly because of the continued mainstream focus of historical research in received textual sources, the difficulty accessing information on unpublished tomb excavations and artifacts, and the different types of specialized training needed to analyze the epitaphs, documents, and material culture excavated from the tombs. The emergency nature of excavations in China further limits opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. In an ideal world of well-resourced scholarship, the study of the tombs in this book would have involved teams of archaeologists, art historians, historians, paleographers, numismatists, historians of technology, and scientists who could apply their specialized knowledge to collaboratively analyze the tombs, artifacts, epitaphs, documents, and

8. Dong X. 2005; Wu H. 2010, 10.

9. Falkenhausen 1993, 847; Selbitschka 2018b, 57–59.

10. Dien 2007, vii; Selbitschka 2018b.

bones and other organic remains.[11] In the real world of limited funding for the humanities and social sciences, "dream teams" of interdisciplinary researchers are rarely assembled. Consequently, interdisciplinary scholarship on medieval Chinese tombs typically is the work of individual archaeologists, art historians, or historians, who are willing to push beyond disciplinary boundaries. The adventurous scholar who is willing to deal with these frustrations may find some richly rewarding research material.

For methodological inspiration on marrying analysis of texts and artifacts, I have looked to the work of historical archaeologists of Europe and the ancient Near East. As in the case of China, scholars of Europe and the Near East traditionally valued information from received and excavated texts more than from the material culture.[12] By the late twentieth century, some historical archaeologists began to advocate for a contextual approach, in which "archaeological and textual data interact synergistically, with each data set revealing more about the significance of the other than could be learned by studying only one type of source."[13] These advocates for interdisciplinary research point out that material culture is particularly useful for learning about topics that tend to be covered cursorily in ancient and medieval textual sources, such as trade, economy, agriculture, and technology. Moreover, material culture can give voice to the illiterate, who composed the vast majority of the world's population in premodern times.[14] In keeping with these findings, this book shows the value of an interdisciplinary approach to topics that command little attention in the received Chinese-language sources, including trade, cultural exchanges, and the lives of people of diverse backgrounds and status, including slaves, common people, and officials of middle and lower ranks who lived on the frontiers of the Tang Empire and beyond.

The book also draws inspiration from scholars of historical material culture, including art historians, archaeologists, and historians, who have been developing approaches over the past several decades to understanding the relationships between humans and things. Historical study of Chinese material culture recently has been characterized as "a diverse emergent field" in contrast to the more developed scholarship on American and European

11. Andrén 1998, 180.

12. For the case of China, see Falkenhausen 1993; and Selbitschka 2018b. For European and classical historical archaeology, see Andrén 1998, 113–26; Moreland 2001, 10; 2006; and Morris 1994, 28; 2000, 24–29.

13. Trigger 2006, 505; see also Andrén 1998, 146–78; Moreland 2001, 97; 2006, 143–45; and Morris 2000, 22–24.

14. Andrén 1998, 124–26; Gaskell and Carter 2020a, 4–5; Moreland 2001; 2006, 137; Morris 1994, 45–46.

material culture.[15] Summarizing the established scholarship, the archaeologist Ann Brower Stahl describes three main approaches to using material culture to study human history. One, focused on consumption, seeks to trace the "biographies" of objects as they circulate and oftentimes find novel uses in the hands of new owners.[16] An example from chapters 3 and 4 are Sasanian and Byzantine coins that were minted as currency; traveled eastward on the Silk and Steppe Roads, where they were transformed into decorations, jewelry, or amulets; and found their final resting places in tombs in the northwestern Sui-Tang empires and Mongolia. A related insight is that tomb documents and epitaphs can be analyzed as objects with biographies produced by "artisan" scribes, calligraphers, or engravers, who give words and ideas material form. The choices of writing material and characteristics of calligraphy or engraving can provide clues to the social and economic context of composition. The "biography" of a tomb artifact or text ends with its placement underground, but it can gain a second act if excavated and exhibited in a museum.[17] A second approach, focused on production, seeks to trace "genealogies" defined as "reproduction and transformation of practice in time."[18] Pamela H. Smith describes this as changes in "material complexes" as the "people, materials, techniques, theories, and ideas move across time and space."[19] An example from chapters 3 and 4 are the imitation Byzantine gold coins and bracteates that were created at unknown locations along the Silk and Steppe Roads. Initially inspired by the originals, the imitations were likely produced to be used purely as decorations, jewelry, or amulets rather than as currency. The third approach, depositional studies, seeks to understand the relationship between the artifacts that people have left behind and human societies and identities.[20] Studies of the artifacts placed in tombs are normally the purview of archaeologists, who have been debating for over a century about the degree to which the deposited objects correspond to past human social groups.[21] Most relevant to

15. Ko 2019, 191n3. The recently published *The Oxford Handbook of History and Material Culture* is dominated by studies of American and European material culture. Of the two chapters on China, one is by a modern historian, and the other is by an art historian of textiles (Gaskell and Carter 2020b).

16. Stahl 2018, 155; see also Ko 2019, 193; Burke 2020, 627; and Whitfield 2018, 1. For an example of this approach applied to a Chinese tomb, see Guo Jue 2019.

17. Andrén 1998, 146–49; Whitfield 2018, 2. For an example of this approach applied to Turfan and Dunhuang documents, see Fu 2015; and Whitfield 2018, 219–49.

18. Stahl 2018, 156–60.

19. P. H. Smith 2019, 8. Whitfield (2018, 4–6) also encourages this approach.

20. Stahl 2018, 156.

21. Trigger 2006, chs. 6 and 8.

this book is the debate surrounding the relationship between the archaeological record and social, religious, and ethnic signifiers that are known from written sources. For example, some historical archaeologists of Europe and the Near East maintain that ethnic identities can be positively associated with graves.[22] Others are more skeptical that ethnic labels mentioned in historical sources can readily be discerned in the archaeological record.[23] Chapters 2 through 4 of this book demonstrate the value of adding epitaphs to depositional studies, but also the limitations of analyzing artifacts and texts together because Sui-Tang mortuary conventions tend to at least partially obscure identities of tomb occupants, even in undisturbed tombs.

Archaeological Sites

The three locations that are the subjects of the four chapters exhibit the promise and pitfalls of the interdisciplinary study of tombs. Turfan, the site of chapter 1, is a case where excavated texts have garnered far more scholarly attention than artifacts. Western and Chinese explorers and archaeologists began excavating the tombs mainly in the elite Astana (Asitana 阿斯塔那) and Karakhoja (Halahezhuo 哈拉和卓) cemeteries near the ruins of the ancient city of Gaochang in the early twentieth century. Subsequently, the excavated artifacts and documents were scattered among various museums and archives in Russia, Germany, Japan, Finland, England, India, and China. Archaeologists based in Xinjiang have been excavating since 1959, initially at the high-elite burial grounds of Astana and Karakhoja, and since the early 2000s, at several lower-elite cemeteries. Over three thousand tombs have been identified, and more than six hundred were excavated from 1959 to 2007. Despite extensive fieldwork, archaeologists in China have published only "preliminary" articles and reports on representative tombs and artifacts but no comprehensive publications. In contrast, Chinese scholars have given far more attention to paper documents and epitaphs on stone excavated from the tombs. The epitaphs discovered during twentieth-century excavations were published in a two-volume compilation.[24] The paper documents have been published comprehensively for excavations occurring between 1959 and 2007, with photographs,

22. Curta 2011; S. T. Smith 2003, 40–50, 130–61.

23. Kamp and Yoffee 1980; Pohl 2010. Recent studies of early medieval graveyards in Germany and Britain, which compare material culture with the DNA and isotopic analysis of the skeletal remains, demonstrate the perils of associating types of material culture with ethnicity (Fleming 2021, 157–75).

24. *TCZJ*.

transcriptions, and cursory information on the tombs of origin.[25] The Turfan documents have stimulated a vibrant subfield of scholarship, mainly in China and Japan, involving paleographic analysis to decipher calligraphy and character variations, and to piece together scattered document fragments. Scholars like me can then carry out historical analysis to synthesize information in the documents related to the local society, religion, economy, and government.

Attempts at interdisciplinary studies combining material culture and documents of Turfan have been relatively rare. The most ambitious effort was the Silk Road Project in 1996, which took an interdisciplinary team of scholars to Turfan, including me. Subsequent publications by Albert E. Dien, Valerie Hansen, and Angela Sheng, as well as my own, represented successful efforts to marry evidence from texts and artifacts extracted from the tombs.[26] It has been difficult to replicate these early successes, however, because comprehensive excavation reports have never been published, and unpublished artifacts—scattered among museums and archives in China, Japan, and Europe often, without records of find spots—are difficult to access and contextualize.[27] After running into a dead end in research on three recently excavated burial grounds of immigrants at Turfan, I focused chapter 1 on tombs at Turfan containing documents that proved to be more fruitful sources of insights into slavery, trade, and local society. Even though chapter 1 is mainly dependent on tomb texts, it demonstrates the value of treating the texts as material objects with "biographies." The find spots and paleographic evidence of excavated documents can provide clues about the social contexts of their composition and deposition in tombs. The payoff for this attention to the archaeological context of documents is a deeper understanding of contemporary local society.

The tombs that are the subjects of chapters 2 through 4 are more suited to balanced depositional studies of excavated artifacts and texts. Guyuan, the

25. For an introduction to Turfan's history and Turfan studies, see Hansen 1998a, 2012, 93–94; Rong 2010; Song 2003; Tang Z. 1982; and Zhang G. and Rong 1998. Hansen (1998a, 1–2) reports that over 3,000 tombs had been surveyed and 465 excavated between 1959 and 1998. Between 2000 and 2007, over 150 more tombs were excavated, but illegal looting and expanded irrigation networks were posing severe threats to buried documents. Some of the most recently published Turfan documents were "turned over" to the police (*XTCWX* 1:3–10). The paper documents have been published in the two editions of *Documents Excavated at Turfan* and, more recently, in *Documents Newly Excavated at Turfan* (see *TCWS*, *TCWS*-plates, and *XTCWX*). The latter also includes longer epitaphs discovered during the early twenty-first-century excavations.

26. Dien 2002; Hansen 1998b; Sheng 1998; Skaff 1998a.

27. For special permissions needed to access artifacts, see Dien 2002, 183; and Hansen 1998b, 47n25. For examples of problems of access and record keeping, see Skaff 1998a, 71–77.

focus of chapters 2 and 3, was chosen as a case study because Ningxia archaeologists have been exemplary in their publication of fieldwork. Although the quality of excavations varies from carefully planned and executed investigations of single tombs to rushed emergency rescues of entire cemeteries, the tombs, artifacts, and epitaphs are published with full documentation, drawings, and photos. Moreover, the driving force behind the excavations, archaeologist Luo Feng, a native of Guyuan, is well versed in medieval Chinese historical texts and has published interdisciplinary analyses of the tomb excavations, artifacts, and epitaphs that provide a foundation for chapters 2 and 3.[28] In addition, the two Tang tombs in Mongolia that are the subjects of chapter 4 have published excavation reports. Since these were not available in the United States, I traveled to Mongolia to obtain the publications, visit museums where the artifacts are displayed, and meet with the archaeologists. The discovery of Tang tombs in Mongolia, including one that was unlooted, has stimulated excitement and publications from historians interested in the Chinese-language epitaph from Pugu Yitu's tomb, and from art historians who are attracted to the colorful mural paintings and a hoard of precious metals in the second undisturbed tomb. Despite the relatively plentiful evidence, the depositional studies that are the main focus of chapters 2 through 3 teach us to exercise caution when attempting to interpret identities of occupants of Tang shaft-tunnel-style tombs. Epitaph texts and funerary artifacts were produced according to Sui-Tang conventions. Close readings of both are necessary to glean hints about identities and religious beliefs, but none of these readily corresponds to our expectations of ethnic labels such as "Sogdian" or "Turk."

Mortuary Culture and Its Contexts

Although the objects and texts discovered at these sites were in Sui-Tang–style tombs, this book stresses the necessity of a broadly comparative approach that considers contexts of mortuary culture locally at each site, regionally in North China, across the Silk Roads to Central Asia, and on the Steppe Roads to Mongolia. The far-ranging cultural exchanges involving the Silk and Steppe Roads present a methodological challenge because of yawning gaps in an evidentiary trail that involves publications in Chinese, Russian, Mongolian, and various Turkic languages.[29] Partly due to the large territorial expanses and balkanization of research languages, Eastern Eurasian archaeology lags behind

28. Luo F. 1996.

29. Smith 2019, 22; Whitfield 2018, 3.

the medieval European and pre-Columbian fields in publishing large-scale distribution-frequency studies to detect patterns in circulations of objects and people over time and space.[30] The most valuable compendium and analysis of discoveries from medieval China that I have found is Albert Dien's book on the material culture of the Six Dynasties period (220–589), which is relevant because the Sui and early Tang northwestern elite began their rise during the preceding Western Wei (535–556) and Northern Zhou (557–581) dynasties and inherited their mortuary culture. Dien's book combines qualitative and quantitative data, with the latter derived from a database on approximately 1,800 tombs with published excavation reports through the early 2000s. Dien in turn mentions the limitations of his study when he estimates that five or even ten times as many contemporary tombs were excavated between 1949 and 2000 but not included in the database due to lack of access to unpublished excavation reports.[31]

In the case of Sui-Tang tombs within modern China, studies of regional and temporal patterns of tomb designs, funerary artifacts, and epitaphs are still at nascent stages, mainly focusing on the dual capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang, which provide only partial context for study of Silk and Steppe Roads tombs.[32] Consequently, this book utilizes an ad hoc comparative framework drawing on pertinent published excavations. Most of the high-elite tombs of Chang'an under the Northern Zhou, Sui, and Tang have been heavily looted, so relatively few are available for comparison of grave goods.[33] The most thoroughly studied unlooted tomb belonged to Li Chui 李倕 (711–736)—a great-great-granddaughter of the Tang founder—who was married to a relatively low-ranked official.[34] Even more important for context are two published excavations of entire cemeteries in North China that demonstrate variations in burials

30. For examples of debates on interpretation of distribution frequencies in medieval Europe, see Quast 2009. Pre-Columbian archaeologists have pioneered several competing analytic methods to detect market exchanges of goods, including computer-generated distributional frequencies; see Garraty 2010. A rare example of a distribution study of artifacts from across the steppe region is Ursula Brosseder's (2011) excellent analysis of belt plaques from the second century BCE to the first century CE.

31. Dien 2007, vii. Other valuable examples of synthesis are focused on later periods. Dieter Kuhn (1996) studies regional and social patterns in Song dynasty tomb types, and Nicolas Tackett (2017, 211–45, 291–93) makes a statistical comparison of Northern Song and Khitan tomb structure and contents based on a database of over one thousand tombs excavated through 2010.

32. Cheng Yi 2012; Dong X. 2005; Niu 2011; Qi 2006; Su 1995. Laudable analyses of regional patterns in epitaphs are Xu M. 2017; and Yang Yi 2019, ch. 2.

33. Yun 1993a, 1993b.

34. Filip 2014; Filip et al. 2014; Ma 2014, 35–37, 40–51, 57–67.

based on the gender, status, and cultural orientation of tomb occupants. One is the Tang lower-elite Fengxiang 鳳翔 South Cemetery, with 102 tombs at Chang'an (appendix II). The other is the Xingyuan 杏園 Cemetery at Luoyang, with 64 mostly undisturbed tombs of mid-ranking civil officials, probably the best-documented and analyzed burial ground of the Tang Empire.[35] For context of Silk and Steppe Roads influences, specific attention is given to Northern Zhou tombs of three elites excavated in Guyuan and three others of Sogdians at Chang'an.[36] If the evidence of the mortuary culture of North China seems relatively scattershot, it is necessitated by centuries of tomb robbery and the slow pace of archaeological publications and synthetic studies. Consequently, my attempts to contextualize the tombs and their contents in the following chapters must be considered preliminary and incomplete.

Sui-Tang Tombs and Mortuary Rituals

Tomb design is the best known aspect of Sui-Tang mortuary culture because grave robbers could do relatively little damage to the structures. The most common tomb for burial of the Sui-Tang political elite of North China was the shaft-tunnel type that was developed in northwest China in the third century and subsequently adopted at the Northern Wei (386–534) capitals of Pingcheng (modern Datong, Shanxi) and Luoyang, and at the Northern Zhou capital of Chang'an. Early designs consisted of an inclined ramp leading to a burial chamber, which required all the soil above the ramp to be excavated. Over time it became more common to construct large tombs by tunneling on an incline, with progressively longer vertical shafts dug above the tunnel to provide light and air. The new technique vastly reduced the volume of soil that had to be excavated and backfilled after burial. Smaller tombs continued to be built with only a ramp and chamber.[37] I adopt Sui-Tang–style tombs as a shorthand reference to this type of shaft-tunnel construction throughout the book, but acknowledge that the design had origins earlier in history.

The tomb of Shih Suoyan at Guyuan is a typical early Tang example (fig. 0.1).[38] The long inclined tunnel—in this case running south to north underground—led to an antechamber connected to a brick chamber. Chambers with earthen walls and floors are also common. Shih Suoyan's tunnel has

35. Ye Wa 2005; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 2001.

36. On probable Sogdian tombs, see the discussion below. On the Northern Zhou Guyuan tombs, see chapter 3, note 1.

37. Dien 2007, 80–95.

38. The nonconventional spelling of Shih has been adopted to distinguish it from another Shi lineage at Guyuan; see chapter 2.

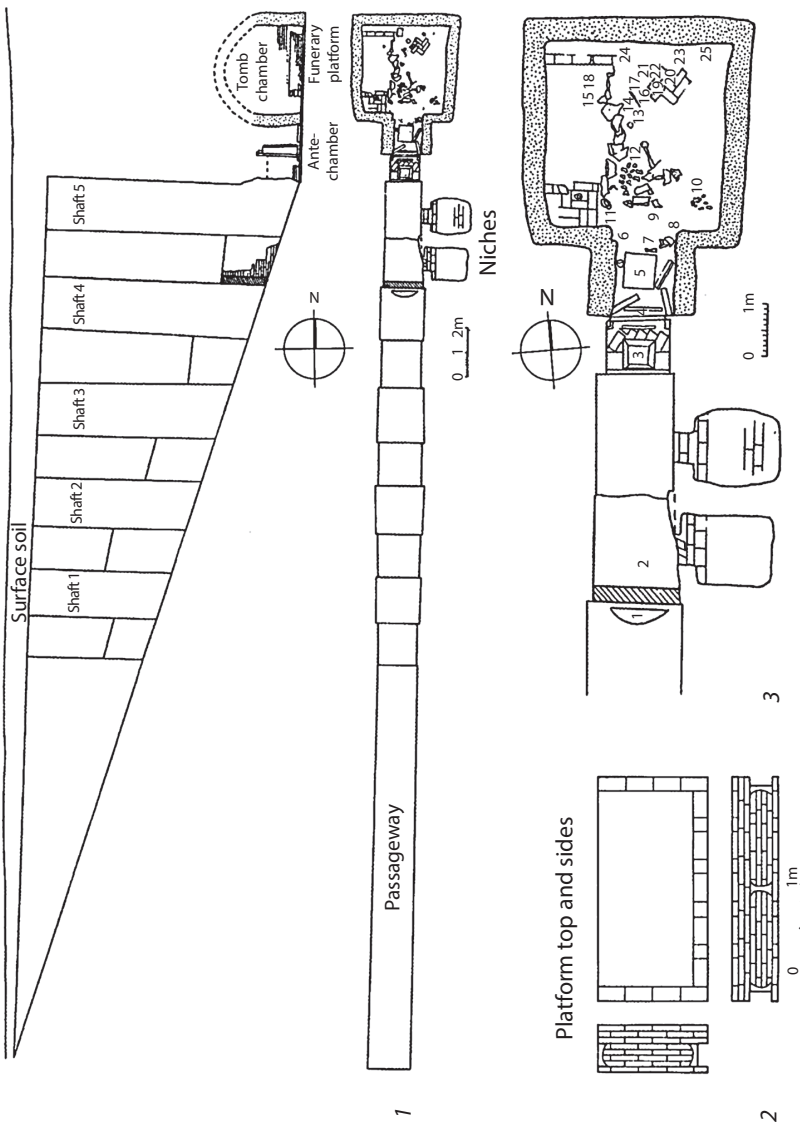


FIG. 0.1. Diagram of Shih Suoyan's Tomb at Guyuan, courtesy of Patrick Wertmann.

two side niches. More elaborate tombs might include additional niches in the tunnel and antechamber, while less elaborate ones might not have any. Chambers typically were sealed with bricks or a door of wood or stone. The shape of chambers varied. At Guyuan and Turfan, they were square or trapezoidal and topped with a dome. Inside the chambers were platforms of various materials on which the coffined bodies of the deceased were placed.[39] Colorful murals typically decorated the interior walls of the tunnels and chambers, perhaps more frequently in North China, particularly in the Chang'an region. The subject matter was usually mythical creatures or idealized scenes from the life or perhaps afterlife of the deceased.[40] The chamber contained funerary goods—including ceramic or earthenware vessels filled with food and sometimes a stone epitaph placed on the floor. Smaller and more personal items, such as jewelry, and metal tools and eating utensils were frequently placed in the coffins for preparation of the corpse and the comfort of the deceased in the afterlife.[41]

On ground level, workers built a tumulus made of rammed earth, a material as strong as concrete. The layers of compressed dirt are visible in the photo of a partially destroyed tumulus at Guyuan (fig. 0.2).[42] The area around the tumulus was transformed into a small park where family members could visit to pay respects. High-ranking officials were eligible to embellish the park with steles and processional paths flanked by stone statues of humans, mythical beasts, and animals.[43]

Constructing and furnishing an elite tomb was an expensive undertaking that required a large labor force. Laborers excavated the tomb, refilled it after burial, and piled and pounded many layers of soil to create a hard tumulus on ground level. Specialized artisans lined the chamber with brick and/or plaster, painted plastered walls, made figurines, and built coffins of wood or stone. Stone carvers hewed the epitaph stones, and engravers incised them with images and calligraphy. Contemporary records of cost are not extant, but the

39. Ye 2005, 111–19.

40. Cheng Yi 2012, 185–232; Niu 2011; Zhang H. 1995. The walls were coated with a layer of mud mixed with straw, then a layer of white clay, and finally a finish of lime plaster that served as the ground for the pigments (Eckfeld 2005, 39). Murals painted on plaster were not feasible in South China because of the damp climate (Dien 2007, 114). At the Xingyuan Cemetery outside Luoyang, only one tomb had signs of plaster that once served as a base for a mural (Ye 2005, 118).

41. Kieser 2015, 72–79; Ye 2005, 155–56, 168–70.

42. Rammed earth was an ancient Chinese construction method also used to build strong walls and foundations (Liu Xujie 2002, 19–22).

43. *THY* 38:596; Niu 2011, 144; Ye 2005, 148n27, 296–99.

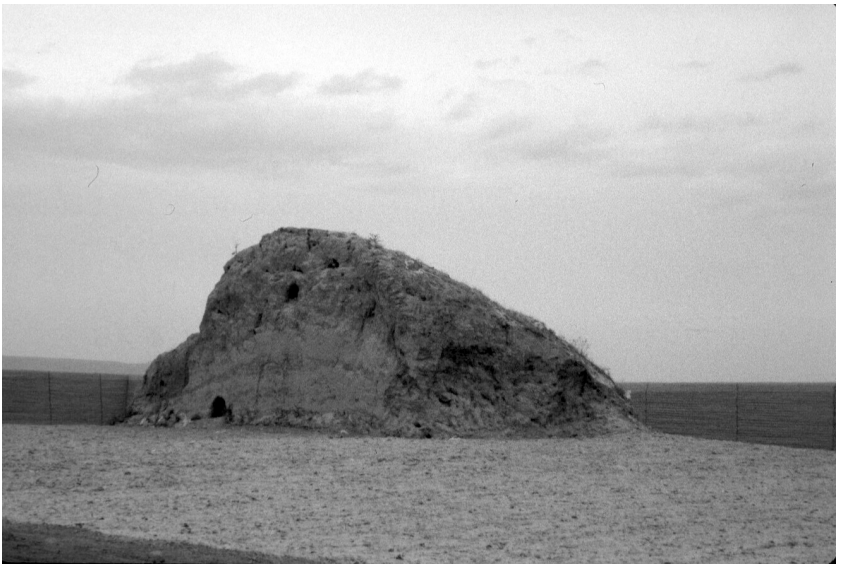


FIG. 0.2. Remains of the Tumulus of Shi Hedan, with Layering Visible, at Guyuan, courtesy of Annette Juliano.

amounts must have been considerable.[44] The funeral ritual involved a public procession in which the casket and burial objects were displayed on carts. In some cases, families arranged elaborate entertainment.[45]

The identity and cultural orientation of the deceased is not easy to discern in the material remains of Sui-Tang tombs because much was produced for burial according to convention. Many objects, such as the coins, mirrors, and ceramic vessels, are common in Sui-Tang burials. Some objects were *mingqi* (明器), "spirit articles," that were specifically manufactured for placement in tombs. Tang government workshops produced *mingqi* for the imperial family and especially meritorious officials.[46] In other cases, artisans produced *mingqi* according to contemporary local traditions and variations on imperial fashions. A family's choices of particular types of *mingqi* for the deceased may provide clues about its cultural preferences. Other hints may come from the personal possessions of the deceased (*shengqi* 生器) that family members inserted into tombs, most frequently in the coffin.[47] These personal goods are

44. Ditter 2014, 25–31; Eckfeld 2005, 58–60; Tackett 2008, 108.
45. Eckfeld 2005, 77; McMullen 1999, 185–88; Ye 2005, 220.
46. *TLD* 23:18b; *TD* 86:2328; Qi 2006, 68.
47. Ye 2005, 9.

more likely to provide indication of religious, cultural, or professional identity, studied in the chapters of this book.

The reasons that family members were motivated to invest considerable effort and resources to construct and furnish a large Sui-Tang tomb are not fully understood because contemporary explanations are scarce. Modern scholars, who have investigated the meanings of the tombs by researching epitaphs and tomb contents, generally argue that tombs represent expressions of religious belief and social or political status. In terms of Sui-Tang popular religion, early medieval epitaphs provide evidence that some individuals believed a tomb was "a permanent home for the spirit of the particular individual," protected "the deceased," and consequently became the site of ancestor worship.[48] Most feared were demonic spirits (*sha* 煞) that were attracted to the corpse after death and were capable of harming it.[49] To assure safe and permanent repose of the spirit, divination was carried out to determine an auspicious place and time of burial.[50] Objects placed in tombs were believed to make the tomb occupant comfortable in the afterlife and protect against demonic attacks. For example, food and drink were placed in vessels to feed the deceased in the afterlife, while figurines and wall murals depicting guardians and servants were believed to assist the deceased and protect the tomb from evil spirits.[51]

Regardless of the spiritual beliefs of the deceased, funerals also boosted the social standing of surviving family members through displays of filial piety, frugality, or material wealth. Some families chose to exhibit their moral rectitude with frugal burials and sincere mourning.[52] For example, the late sixth-century official Yan Zhitui instructed his family to give him a simple funeral without a tumulus and funerary goods because he had not been able to give his parents proper burials during the turbulent end of the Southern Liang dynasty (502–557).[53] Likewise, at the Xingyuan Cemetery near Luoyang, some lineages of civil official displayed their deference to family hierarchy by burying their dead on a south–north axis, with the progenitor in the south and progressively junior lineage members to the north. Tombs grow progressively smaller and less lavish in later generations, even when the junior lineage

48. Davis 2008, 166–78, 283. Also see Eckfeld 2005, 72–74. On ancestor worship, see Choo 2022, 38–45.

49. Ebrey 1993b.

50. See discussion in chapter 3.

51. Eckfeld 2005, 68–74; Fong 1991; Wu H. 2010, 87–88, 100; Ye 2005, 271.

52. Choo 2015, 3; Ye 2005, 213–15.

53. Dien 1995.

members held higher ranks than their ancestors.[54] These lineages also displayed their frugality by abstaining from including figurines or valuable funerary goods.[55] An antithetical approach to boosting social standing was to use tombs and funerals as public exhibitions of conspicuous consumption honoring the deceased without regard to ritual propriety or Tang sumptuary regulations. Funerary objects—including figurines, vessels filled with food and drink, and elaborately carved epitaphs on limestone—were publicly displayed before the ceremony and then transported on carts to the tomb.[56] The tension between morality and materialism is demonstrated by memorials to the Tang emperors complaining that families of deceased government officials were carrying out extravagant funerals to flaunt their wealth publicly without sincerely performing death rituals.[57] Although the morals of frugal and extravagant families might seem diametrically opposed, they shared a belief that funerary rituals were forums to enhance social standing.

In addition to social standing, tombs were a means to promote the political status of the deceased and family. Tang government policy encouraged a hierarchy of tombs by establishing sumptuary regulations and condolence payments commensurate with rank. The functional purpose of state-regulated and subsidized funerals was to ensure that the imperial family and government officials had burial ceremonies more grandiose than common people, and therefore to symbolically project the power of the state. Tang sumptuary rules regulated public aspects of the tomb and contents displayed in the funeral procession according to the rank of the deceased, including "the number and size of the figurines," as well as the "size of the grave plot, the height of tumuli and above-ground features such as stele and stone animals" that remained visible after burial.[58] Going beyond the restraints imposed by regulations, Tang policy provided positive incentives to construct tombs according to the official status hierarchy by stipulating condolence gifts to survivors that escalated with rank.[59] Perhaps an unintended consequence of the government's graduated condolence subsidies was to provide resources to families of

54. Ye 2005, 76–79.

55. Ye 2005, 70–79, 213–15.

56. *TD* 139:3539; Ye 2005, 220, 258.

57. Qi 2006, 75; Ye 2005, 284–87. This was a long-standing tension in Chinese mortuary history (Kuhn 1996, 6–11).

58. Ye 2005, 296. An exception to this generalization is the regulation forbidding stone coffins and houses in tombs; see Niida 1933, 828–29.

59. *TD* 86:2333; Niida 1933, 814; Qi 2006, 67. According to administrative regulations, officials of the third rank or higher received additional gifts and workers (Niida 1933, 812; Qi 2006, 67–68).

officials that enabled them to build tombs that exceeded legal limits. An edict of Emperor Xuanzong in the early eighth century complained that government officials were not enforcing sumptuary regulations and ordered renewed vigilance. Similar edicts of later emperors demonstrate that these problems continued to exist.[60] Chinese archaeologists have studied the effect of sumptuary regulations and subsidies on tomb construction. Some argue that Tang sumptuary regulations were enforced in the first half of the dynasty, but their data are mainly derived from tombs at the capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang.[61] Exceptions are also known, such as the above-mentioned tombs at Xingyuan Cemetery that used generational standing to determine tomb size.[62] Chapter 3 also provides some evidence that Tang tombs at Guyuan did not necessarily adhere to sumptuary regulations. Determining the degree to which the state actually enforced sumptuary standards throughout the empire will require more comprehensive studies. Likewise, much more work is needed to fully document local and regional variations in mortuary culture throughout the empire.

Steppe Roads Funerary Culture

The Steppe Roads tombs and funerary rituals of Mongolia deserve attention here, not only because chapter 4 studies two Tang-style tombs in Mongolia, but also because tombs at Guyuan discussed in chapter 3 sometimes contain signs of steppe rituals. Evidence on Turkic death rituals of Mongolia and Inner Mongolia can be gleaned from Tang historical accounts and modern archaeological excavations. Both provide evidence that cremations and inhumations were practiced. Cremation is at the center of Tang accounts of Türk death rituals. These sources describe a ceremony in which the corpse of a Türk was laid in a tent after death. In front of the entrance, each family member sacrificed a horse or sheep and then took turns riding a horse around the tent seven times. After each circuit, the riders stopped in front of the entryway and used a knife to slash their faces to allow blood to flow with tears as a sign of intense mourning. Thereafter, on a day chosen by divination (*zeri* 擇日), the deceased and the riding horse and everyday

60. QTW 21:6a-b; Choo 2022, 50–51.

61. Qi 2006; Su 1995.

62. Ye Wa (2005, 76–79) notes that some families ignored rank to construct tombs in descending size in each generation as acts of filial piety. Tang imperial cemeteries were special types of status-based burials that rewarded service to the throne without necessarily considering rank. The size of tomb and proximity to the emperor's burial place reflected the degree of imperial favor, which frequently overrode sumptuary standards (Eckfeld 2005, 50–59).

possessions of the deceased were cremated together. The burned remains were then stored for burial in the following fall or spring, when family members again sacrificed livestock, galloped on horses in circles, and slashed their faces. After burial, a wooden post was erected over the grave to hang the skulls of sacrificed sheep and horses. The Tang historians likely gave detailed attention to these rituals because of their exoticism.[63] The practices of slashing the face and cremating bones differs from mainstream Tang norms of lachrymose mourning and inhumation of clothed corpses.[64]

Tang historical records tersely mention that inhumations were practiced among the Tiele, a confederation of Turkic tribes in the seventh century discussed in detail in chapter 4. A more elaborate mid-sixth-century description of the funerary rituals of the High Carts (Gaoche 高車)—the tribal confederation often viewed as the predecessors of the Tiele—claims that the corpse was placed in a pit in a sitting position with arms stretched drawing a bow, sword worn at waist, and long lance clasped under the arm. The pit was left open without being filled while the tribespeople held a ceremony, like the Türks, that included family members galloping horses in circles around the grave, sacrificing livestock, and then burning the animal bones on a pyre.[65]

The relatively few excavated and published Turkic burial sites, which do not distinguish between Türk and Tiele, complicate the reports in Tang histories. Inhumations of prone corpses seem to have been most common. The sites are marked by stone mounds placed over backfilled pit graves that vary in size and contents according to gender and status. Most contain a human

63. *ZS* 50:910; *SS* 84:1864; *BS* 99:3288; Ecsedy 1984, 280. All three of these accounts had a great deal of overlap because they were included in dynastic histories written in the early seventh century under the Tang, but there are a few key differences. The account in the *History of the Sui* (*SS*) deviates from the other two in stating that the corpse was placed on the back of a horse when cremated and in not mentioning any delay in burying the remains. The *History of the Sui* and the *History of the Northern Dynasties* (*BS*) say that a mausoleum was erected at the grave that included pictures of the deceased in full battle gear. This seems to refer to memorial complexes with statues and steles that were built for deceased nobility, but human remains have never been found at these sites (see discussion in chapter 4). All three sources claim that stones were erected on the site for each victim whom the deceased had slain in battle. This may refer to lines of small stone pillars at the memorial sites rather than at graves (Jisl 1997, 61–71), though Mongolian and Turkish archaeologists argue that the stones represent each tribe attending the funeral (Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma Ajansı 2005, 137–38; Turbat Tsagaan, pers. comm., June 26, 2016).

64. Only some Buddhist monks and devout lay believers were cremated during the Tang; see chapter 1, note 50.

65. *WS* 103:2308; *BS* 98:3271; Pulleyblank 1990, 25. For the relationship between the High Carts and Tiele, see chapter 4, note 18.

corpse buried parallel to one or two horses with full or partial skeletons. The human heads generally point east and the horses to the west. Sheep, goat, and dog bones sometimes appear in the pit or fill. Male burial items include drinking vessels, belt pieces, silk textiles, jewelry, ornaments, bows, birch-bark quivers, arrows, saddles, and other horse gear.[66] Female burials include not only conventionally feminine goods, such as spindle whorls, hair combs, and mirrors of bronze and iron, but also daggers, saddles, and other horse gear.[67] A rare published elite Turkic inhumation with intact burial goods was excavated at the Balyk-Sook I cemetery of the Russian Altai and has been dated to the eighth or ninth century. Located beneath an elliptical stone kurgan twelve meters long and eight meters wide, a pit included four horses and a headless male. In addition to the unusually large number of horses, signs of the elite status of the deceased included a unique suit of iron lamellar and chainmail armor, a large gold earring with two pearls, a silver cup, footwear with hasps and strap tips of silver decorated with inlaid gemstones, and a silver belt set with a large buckle and over twenty plaques. The deceased was wearing some items, and others were placed near his body.[68]

Compared to inhumations, excavated Turkic cremation burials are relatively rare, with only a few discovered. One example is a grave in northern Mongolia, carbon dated to the mid-twelfth to mid-thirteenth centuries, which underwent careful bone analysis in a laboratory. The archaeologists concluded that the burned bones of one human were originally placed in a bag or circular box under a small mound of stones only 1.5 meters wide. A lack of horse bones or charcoal demonstrates that the bones of the deceased were separated from

66. Bayarkhuu 2015; Erdélyi 1966; Erdélyi et al. 1967, 347–56; Jisl 1997, 55–56; Kubarev and Kubarev 2003; C. Törbat and Odbaatar 2012. Another type of burial occurred in caves in the Altai. One that is carbon dated to the eighth or ninth century lacks a horse but contains most other common funerary goods. A unique item was a horse-head fiddle (C. Törbat et al. 2012; T. Törbat et al. 2009).

67. Crubézy and Martin 1996; Kubarev et al. 2009, 429; Törbat and Odbaatar 2012, 143. Crubézy and Martin's article analyzes a lower-elite burial of an adult female with a carbon dating of the eighth to tenth centuries in northern Mongolia. A tumulus of stones, approximately six meters in diameter, was originally topped with a horse skull. The bones of a horse and sheep or goat were mixed in the fill underneath. The pit bottom contained a full female human skeleton, partial horse skeleton, two spindle whorls, two iron objects, and a seven-toothed bone comb that was originally placed in her hair. The archaeologists interpret the horse and goat bones in the pit and fill as remains of a ritual feast.

68. The dating is based on the typology of artifacts. Kubarev and Kubarev 2003; Kubarev 2012, 129–31.

the ashes of the pyre and buried in the grave.[69] Two other known cremations in larger graves are discussed in chapter 4.

In sum, although Turkic mortuary culture seems clearly distinguished from the Sui and Tang's, there were some areas of overlap. Both shared traditions that involved underground inhumations with funerary goods and surface mounds above. Only the form of Turkic pits differed from Sui-Tang shaft-tunnel tombs. Funerary goods had areas of overlap and distinction. Both commonly included textiles, jewelry, ornaments, vessels, belts, combs, and mirrors. Turkic burials were culturally distinctive in the inclusion of bones of livestock and heavy emphasis on weapons of men and women. The shared aspects of mortuary culture probably explain why steppe people in some cases readily accepted burials in the Sui-Tang shaft-tunnel-type tombs.

Silk and Steppe Roads Mortuary Culture of Sogdians

Death rituals of Sogdians in Central Asia and China are relevant to the occupants of the tombs discussed in chapters 2 and 3, which have conventionally been identified as Sogdian. Their homeland, Sogdiana, was located in modern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where they spoke an Iranian language. They began to emigrate by the fourth century CE and settle in cities and towns on the trade routes of Central, South, and East Asia.[70]

The dominant religious beliefs and death rituals of Sogdiana developed from the same "Iranian religious 'pool' of myths, deities, symbols, and rituals," as the Zoroastrianism of Sasanian Iran.[71] Compared to the state-supported Sasanian religious orthodoxy, however, Sogdian spiritual notions were far more syncretic and diverse, with variations from city to city.[72] Zoroastrians in Iran and Sogdiana did not practice inhumation or cremation because of the belief that corpses polluted the sacred elements of earth and fire. Instead, the body was exposed in large amphitheaters, with the flesh being consumed by vultures, dogs, or other animals.[73] The bones of the deceased were deposited in clay or stone ossuaries that were placed in homes, rock caves or family mausoleums made from adobe brick.[74] Minority religious traditions also

69. A half pound (250 grams) of burnt bones without signs of charcoal were buried in a circular box or bag that had disintegrated (Crubézy et al. 2006, 901).

70. De la Vaissière 2005.

71. Foltz 2010, 28.

72. Shenkar 2017.

73. Lerner 2011, 19–20; Russell 2000.

74. The mausoleums were not known in Iran but appeared first in Samarkand in the fourth or fifth century (Lerner 2001b, 225–27; Wertmann 2015, 27–28).

existed in Sogdiana, including Buddhism, Christianity, and Turkic Shamanism. Christian and Turkic burials have been discovered in which the body was inhumed in the earth.[75] Buddhists may have cremated their dead and have not left any known remains. To the east, some Zoroastrian migrants seem to have preserved their native funerary rituals at the oases of Turfan, Kucha, and Beshbalik (see map 1.1), where a total of five ossuaries have been discovered. Kageyama Etsuko has plausibly identified them as Sogdian Zoroastrian based on their design and size.[76] Nevertheless, without inscriptional evidence, it is not possible to determine whether the deceased were definitely Sogdian rather than from elsewhere in the wider Iranian-Zoroastrian cultural sphere.

Other Sogdians who emigrated from their homeland showed signs of assimilation to funerary rituals of adopted places. In putative settlements of Sogdians bordering the southern edge of the steppe in modern Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, syncretic practices appeared. In some cases, mausoleums contained ossuaries with bones, but sometimes full skeletons were laid out side by side on platforms. In a few instances, skeletons of entire horses were placed in mausoleums along with the human bones, a practice that is generally believed to represent steppe influence.[77]

Problems and Prospects of Identifying Sogdians and Other Foreigners in Sui-Tang Tombs

When Sogdian and Turkic elites emigrated to the Sinophone world, most who served in government seem to have assimilated to the tradition of burial in ramped shaft-tunnel tombs. Sogdians make a good case study for the general problems involved in identifying foreigners in Sui-Tang texts and burials. Recent discoveries of unusual Sogdian tombs have stimulated a great deal of scholarly enthusiasm and interest, resulting in many conferences and publications. Discoveries of burials of people of other origins seem to receive less sustained attention and fewer publications. In some cases Sogdian tomb occupants have been identified based on Chinese-language epitaphs with transliterated Sogdian names. In other cases, attempts have been made to identify Sogdians based mainly on depositional studies. Some of these identifications have been dubious however, because the young field has yet to develop a commonly accepted methodology to analyze texts and artifacts effectively. One

75. Grenet 2000; Hansen 2012, 123.

76. Kageyama 2005, 365–67.

77. These finds are at Krasnaya Rechka in northern Kyrgyzstan (de la Vaissière 2005, 202) and Kostobe in southern Kazakhstan (Bajpakov 1992).

problem is that the cultural orientations and identities of tomb occupants tend to be obscured by the conventions of Sui-Tang epitaph writing and mortuary culture. Another complication is the dynamic nature of culture, particularly when people of different backgrounds come into contact with each other. Immigrants experienced changes in cultural norms and identity as they assimilated to life at different times and locations in the Sui-Tang empires. The nature of cultural changes among Sogdians is a matter of debate. Three schools of interpretation have emerged. The prominent and influential scholars Rong Xinjiang and Étienne de la Vaissière interpret Sogdians as immigrants who, despite a degree of assimilation, retained their collective identity and continued to collaborate with each other in the economic and political spheres until the late eighth century or later.[78] In contrast, a sinicization school views Sogdians as fully assimilated into Chinese culture by the Tang dynasty based on their use of Chinese tombs and epitaphs.[79] Finally, in the middle ground are Annette L. Juliano, Judith A. Lerner, and me, who have stressed a combination of assimilation and cultural differentiation.[80] In these chapters, based on careful comparisons of tombs, material culture, and epitaphs, I push the bounds of my previous conclusions to argue that cultural changes were more complicated and creative than we previously imagined.

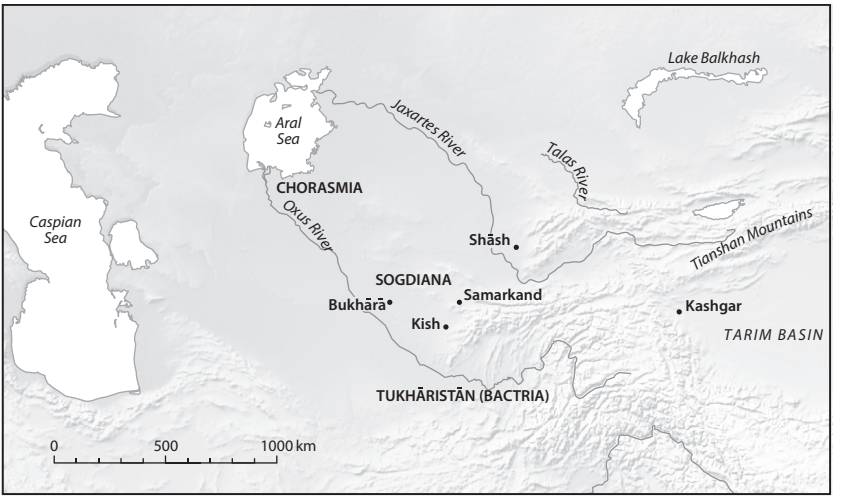
How can we identify people who were Sogdian in origin or identity? Surnames have become key indicators. Unlike Chinese speakers, Iranian peoples, including Sogdians, and speakers of Semitic and Altaic languages did not have surnames. In the Sinophone world, it became standard practice to transliterate a foreigner's given name into Chinese characters and use the person's native place as the surname.[81] Thus, the homeland of foreigners or descendants of foreigners can often be readily recognized. Seven surnames are most frequently used by Sogdians in China: Kang 康 (Samarkand), An 安 (Bukhārā), Shí 石 (Shāsh), Shi 史 (Kish), Mi 米 (Maimargh), Cao 曹 (Kabūdhanjakath), and He 何 (Kushānīyah) (see map 0.2). There is ample evidence that Sogdians adopted these surnames and even began to use them in Sogdian-language

78. De la Vaissière 2005, 152–57; Rong 2012. Both view Sogdians with an enduring collective identity as a driving force behind the rebellion of the infamous Turko-Sogdian general An Lushan (Sogdian: Rokhshan "Bright One") from 755-62. For de la Vaissière, Sogdians began to fully assimilate into Tang China in the late eighth century because of persecution after the rebellion and lack of fresh immigration from their homeland due to the Arab conquests (de la Vaissière 2005, 322–25). Rong (2000, 152; 2001, 109–10) sees Sogdians continuing as important historical actors into the tenth century.

79. Li X. 2010; Zhang M. 2010.

80. Juliano and Lerner 2001; Lerner 2005; Skaff 2005.

81. Wen 2016b.



MAP 0.2. Central Asia

documents in the sixth through eighth centuries.[82] Sogdians may have readily adopted surnames based on native place because the concept of using one's native town, region, or country as an identifying moniker was common among speakers of Semitic and Iranian languages.[83]

Nevertheless, "Sogdian" surnames in isolation cannot verify a person's origins or ancestry in Sogdiana because the surnames were used by other foreigners and native Chinese too. Moreover, Sogdian identity and customs in the diaspora did not remain static, as immigrants and their descendants intermarried and assimilated into the local culture.[84] To identify Sogdians in epitaphs

82. Pulleyblank 1952, 320–21; Yoshida 2003b; Zhang G. 2012. The pinyin transliteration of Shí (Shāsh) with an acute accent mark is adopted to distinguish it from the homophonous Shi (Kish). On the use of the seven Chinese surnames in Sogdian documents, see Sims-Williams 1996, 58–59. Recently, a bilingual tomb epitaph has revealed another Sogdian surname, You 遊 (Bo et al. 2017).

83. See, for example, Sogdian-language inscriptions in the Upper Indus Valley that use personal names in combination with native place, such as "native of Kish" (Sims-Williams 1992, 35–36, 43, 54; 1996, 55). In addition to native place, Sogdians were identified by patronymic references, colorful nicknames, or other identifiers (Sims-Williams 1992, 34–36; 1996, 53–55, 58). Excellent examples are the names of the witnesses in a Sogdian-language slave-sale contract of 639, discussed in chapter 1. Each witness is identified with a patronymic and toponymic reference.

84. Skaff 2003, 479; 2005.

and other textual sources, a prudent approach is to examine the given name and context to ascertain the probability that a person with one of these surnames had Sogdian origin and identity. The highest level of certainty is direct reference to birth or ancestry in a particular Sogdian city.[85] Another solid method is to use philological analysis to identify Sogdian given names transliterated into Chinese, but this type of scholarship is only at its formative stages.[86] Next, one of the Sogdian surnames in combination with a transliterated foreign name of unknown derivation can be considered possibly Sogdian, but careful attention to the context is necessary because other origins are possible. For example, some Türk elites, such as Shi Dazai 史大奈, adopted Shi as an abbreviated form of the royal surname Ashina 阿史那.[87] Finally, least definite is the combination of a "Sogdian" surname and a Chinese given name. If the context of the person's life is unknown, the name might belong to someone who is native Chinese, Sogdian, or a different background. Even for a person of Sogdian ancestry, a Chinese given names raises questions about the degree to which the individual might have identified as Sogdian.

Examples of the differing degrees of certainty in identifying Sogdians with these surnames come from the inhumations at Chang'an dated to the late sixth century. They have been discovered in large shaft-tunnel-type tombs with epitaphs. The two most safely identified are Wirkak (Master Shi 史 in Chinese)—who had a bilingual epitaph in Sogdian and Chinese—and Kang Ye 康業. Both served the Northern Zhou dynasty, had Sogdian surnames, and explicitly claimed Sogdian ancestry. Wirkak's epitaphs confirm that he had a Sogdian given name and used the Chinese-language surname Shi.[88] Kang Ye's single-syllable given name is ambiguous, but his command of the Sogdian language is confirmed by his epitaph, in which two of his three sons have Sogdian given names.[89] The bodies of Wirkak and his wife were placed in a house-shaped sarcophagus, while Kang Ye was laid on a stone couch with screens on three sides. Lerner's plausible hypothesis is that the body or bones of the deceased were placed on the stone couches or sarcophagi to protect

85. Skaff 2003, 479–81.

86. The linguist Yoshida Yutaka has made the most important contributions in this regard (Yoshida 1989, 2005; Yoshida and Kageyama 2005).

87. Zhang Qun 1986, 403. In addition to Türks, members of the Qay people of Manchuria adopted Shi as a surname; see *YHXZ* 5:574, 6:822–27; and *JTS* 181:4685.

88. Wertmann 2015, 54–81. For excavation reports on Shi Wirkak and Kang Ye, see Cheng L. et al. 2008; Xi'an Shi wenwu baohu kaogusuo 2004, 2005, 2008; and Yang Junkai and Xi'an Shi wenwu baohu kaogu yanjiuyuan 2014. On the epitaph of Master Shi/Wirkak, see chapter 2, note 49.

89. Bo et al. 2017, 9n9.

against the taboo earth, just as ossuaries did in their homeland.[90] The stone tomb furniture of Kang Ye and Shi Wirkak is generally interpreted to represent their Sogdian identities and spiritual beliefs. Stone tomb beds and houses appeared earlier in fifth-century tombs at the Northern Wei capitals of Pingcheng and Luoyang.[91] Couches and sarcophagi with Central Asian motifs form a distinctive subclass decorated with carved reliefs, which most scholars conventionally interpret as scenes from the lives and afterlives of the deceased engaged in trade, hunting, and feasting. The latter two symbolized elite status in the Iranian world. The religious imagery tends to be less uniform and is most commonly interpreted as Sogdian Zoroastrian, Manichaean, or Buddhist in origin. The artwork on Wirkak's sarcophagus is representative. Zoroastrian motifs predominate, such as the Chinvat Bridge that the soul is believed to cross to enter heaven, but in keeping with the syncretism typical of Sogdian religion, deities and symbols borrowed from the Manichaean, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions are evident.[92] Wirkak's epitaph and sarcophagus demonstrate that he identified himself as Sogdian and retained Sogdian Zoroastrian beliefs about the afterlife, but his inhumation in a tomb had assimilated to contemporary elite norms of North China.

An example of a tomb that can be identified as Sogdian with a lower degree of certainty is that of An Jia 安伽, who does not claim ancestry from Anguo 安國 (Bukhārā) or Sogdiana and has an ambiguous foreign given name. His Chinese-language epitaph claims he was a descendant of the Yellow Emperor. While he probably was a Sogdian, the possibility remains that his ancestors came from elsewhere in the Iranian-Zoroastrian cultural zone of West and Central Asia. His identification as a Sogdian or Central Asian rests on his (1) typical Sogdian surname and single-character given name, which was frequently used to transliterate foreign syllables; (2) official title of *sabao* 薩保, which was given to leaders of Central Asian communities, including Wirkak, in the sixth century; (3) ancestry from the Silk Road city of Guzang 姑藏 in Gansu; (4) funerary couch with images depicting short-haired people in Central Asian garments and hats interacting with long-haired Türks; (5) images in relief on the stone tympanum over the chamber door of birdmen wearing masks and tending fires in the manner of Zoroastrian priests; and (6)

90. Lerner 2005, 8–9; 2011.

91. Dien 2007, 198–201; Müller 2019. Müller argues that the earliest Northern Wei stone beds reflected Buddhist influence, but such stone houses may be the result of interactions of people of diverse origins and traditions.

92. Grenet 2007; Grenet et al. 2004; Juliano and Lerner 2001, 304–9; Lerner 2005, 15–32, table 2; 2011; P. Riboud 2007; Rong 2003; Wertmann 2015, 65–77, 194–95; Xu J. 2021. De la Vaissière (2015) argues that the religious imagery is primarily Manichaean.

skeleton's identification as Caucasoid.[93] Despite these identifying features, his funerary ritual also points to a different spiritual orientation than Kang Ye and Shi Wirkak. An Jia's tomb was not looted, and his stone couch was empty, so a human skull and femur had to have been placed intentionally in the unusual location of the brick antechamber floor behind the epitaph stone. The remnants of bones on the tomb floor are unorthodox in Sogdian and North China traditions but perhaps are evidence that his body had been exposed according to Zoroastrian ritual. Other unusual aspects were burn marks on the femur and soot residue on the antechamber walls, ceiling, floor, and epitaph stone. This would have been antithetical to orthodox Zoroastrianism because fire rituals normally occurred outdoors, and the bones of the deceased were not exposed to the flames.[94] If An Jia was a Sogdian, there is much that we do not understand about their religion. The ritual syncretism visible in his tomb perhaps reflects cultural creativity resulting from interactions with people of diverse backgrounds in North China or on the Silk and Steppe Roads.

Another tomb with an epitaph and funerary couch discovered in Taiyuan, Shanxi, merits attention because it demonstrates the perils of identifying tomb occupants based solely on depositional studies. The tomb occupant, Yu Hong 虞弘 (532–592), did not have a Sogdian surname, but some scholars identify him as a Sogdian based on the couch iconography, which includes Zoroastrian and Buddhist imagery and scenes of hunting and feasting.[95] Closer attention to the epitaph leads to more ambiguous conclusions because it conveys vague notions of ancestry from a mobile and cosmopolitan family. Yu Hong's grandfather was a "tribal chief" (*qiuzhang* 酋長) of the unknown Fish Kingdom (Yuguo 魚國), which the epitaph associates with the Western Regions (Xiyu 西域), most likely somewhere in Central Asia. Yu Hong's father served the Turkic Rouran 柔然 state of Mongolia (ca. 414–552) as a diplomat dispatched to the dynasties ruling North China. Yu Hong also served the Rouran as a diplomat sent to Persia, the Tuyuhun nomadic state of Qinghai, and the Northern Qi of northeastern China. After the Northern Qi detained Yu Hong, he served the dynasty in various offices. When the Northern Zhou conquered the Northern Qi, and then the Sui dynasty overthrew the Northern Zhou, he served each new ruling power. Under the Sui, he commanded local militia and

93. Linduff and Wu 2006; Rong 2003; Shaanxi Sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 2001b, 2003. For a discussion of the *sabao* title, see chapter 2. Guzang was called Liangzhou during the Tang dynasty.

94. Shaanxi Sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 2003, 11–16, pl. 9, 92–102. Lerner (2005) notes the unorthodox aspects of this tomb. On the fire ritual, see Lerner 1995; and P. Riboud 2019, 106–14.

95. Lerner 2005, 3–4, 30nn4, 77; Wu H. 2001, part 1.

served concurrently as *sabao*.[96] DNA analysis of his bones reveals that he was Caucasoid, while his wife had a combination of Caucasoid and Asian genetic characteristics, reinforcing the ambiguity of family origins.[97] Although the pictorial display on the couch indicates that Yu Hong was a believer in elements of Iranian-Zoroastrian religion, his obscure heritage seems more likely to have been associated with a region of Central Asia with an Iranian language and nomadic elite in the fifth century, such as Tukhāristān under the Hephthalites, where the native language of Bactrian was written in Greek script and remained the language of administration under nomadic rule (map 0.2). Supporting a hypothesis that Yu Hong's family had origins in Tukhāristān rather than Sogdiana, the Hephthalites were composed of mixed Hunnic and Iranian pastoral nomads, and some scholars argue the Hephthalites formed the western wing of the Rouran state, which might explain the service of Yu Hong and his father to the Rouran.[98] Even if my hypothesis is incorrect, the alternative that he was Sogdian has even less supporting evidence, and we need to entertain new hypotheses. Taking the full context of the epitaph and imagery into account demonstrates that scholars should not assume that every immigrant to North China from Central Asia who carried the title of *sabao* and was entombed with this type of stone furniture was Sogdian. The example of Yu Hong also demonstrates that Central Asians from various parts of the Central Asian Iranian-Zoroastrian cultural sphere likely lived in immigrant communities that should not necessarily be characterized as Sogdian.[99] Like An Jia's unusual funerary ritual involving fire, Yu Hong's epitaph and sarcophagus demonstrate that there is much we still do not understand about these communities.

A final example of problems involved in depositional studies of Sogdians is drawn from my preliminary research for the first Rostovtzeff lecture. Since my home institution does not have any Chinese-language databases, I began

96. Zhang Qingjie 2001. Yu Taishan's (2004) argument that Yu Hong was Sogdian based on the epitaph's claim that his ancestors migrated from the Western Regions is rather strained.

97. Shanxi Sheng kaogu yanjiusuo et al. 2005, 47, 204–7.

98. The original Hephthalite language likely was proto-Mongolic because Chinese historical sources mention that it could be understood by the Tuyuhun. After conquering Tukhāristān, they had adopted the indigenous Bactrian-Iranian language written in Greek script. If Yu Hong spoke the proto-Mongolic and Bactrian languages of the Hephthalites, it also might explain why the Rouran chose him to make diplomatic visits to Persia and the Tuyuhun. On the Bactrian language, see chapter 1, note 64. On the Hephthalites, see Golden 1992, 79–83.

99. Evidence that merchants from Tukhāristān and Sogdiana congregated together in caravans and at the market in Turfan can be found in discussions of documents in chapter 1, tables 1.2 and 1.5.

my stay at ISAW excitedly downloading journal articles on recently published cemetery excavations at Turfan that included tombs of people with the Sogdian Kang surname and the Bai 白 surname, typical of immigrants from Kucha. I hoped that new excavation reports would solve the above-mentioned problems of depositional research at Turfan caused by twentieth-century publications that had not comprehensively documented the tombs and the objects they contained. The Badamu 巴達木 1 Cemetery, with eighteen tombs on the eastern side of the oasis, had two tombs with short epitaphs of men with the Bai surname who had died in the seventh century. All tombs had sloped tunnels opening to the east. Immediately adjacent to the south, at Badumu 2 Cemetery, were sixty tombs all with ramps opening to the south. Five had epitaphs with the Kang surname, and two others had Chinese surnames. The cemetery dates to the late sixth to late seventh century based on epitaphs and paper documents.[100] At both burial sites, the tombs seemingly conformed to the local norms of design and grave goods. Despite the seeming promise of these cemeteries, the Chinese-language epitaphs were so laconic and the tombs so thoroughly looted that it was impossible to draw conclusions about any cultural differences between the Kang and Bai tombs and others at Turfan. In this case, the lesson is that sometimes there is not enough evidence available for effective depositional studies.

I also investigated another so-called Kang family cemetery of thirty-three tombs excavated at Gouxi 溝西, near Jiaohe 交河 (Yarkhoto), about forty kilometers west of Badamu. Interestingly enough, the ramps opened to the east, similar to the Bai tombs at Badamu, but differing from the Kang tombs there.[101] Obviously, there was no correlation between Kang ancestry or identity and tomb orientation at the two locations. More problematic was the archaeologists' identification of Gouxi as a family cemetery of the Kang even though material evidence also had been disturbed by centuries of looting, and epigraphic evidence was limited. Four Kang tombs in the first two of five rows of the cemetery had laconic epitaphs dating to the late sixth century. Despite a dearth of epitaphs in other tombs, archaeologists assumed that the entire cemetery belonged to one family because it was surrounded on three sides by a

100. The two Bai tombs at Badamu 1 are M107 and M114. The five Kang tombs at Badumu 2 are M201, M202, M212, M234, and M246. See *XTCWX* 1:97–98, 101; 2:380–82; Tulufan diqu wenwuju 2006a, 64–71, figs. 18–23; Wang Q. 2012, 808; and Wang Su 2000, 81. A possible sixth tomb (M245) at Badumu 2 may be a Kang because of its proximity to M234 and M246 (*XTCWX* 1:101; Tulufan diqu wenwuju 2006a, 71, fig. 17.8).

101. The other four sloped Kang tombs were M4, M5, M6, and M11. The burials of M4, M5, and M6 occurred in the 590s, and M11 was in 640 (*XTCWX* 2:375–78; Li X. 2010; Tulufan diqu wenwuju 2006b, 24).

(continued...)

INDEX WITH CHINESE CHARACTER GLOSSARY