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THE PERFORMANCE OF WRITING IN WESTERN ZHOU CHINA

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I. *The Imperial Vision of Chinese Writing*

It is not difficult to find any number of utterances pointing to the superior cultural, social, and political status of writing in Chinese civilization. Toward the end of the first century BCE, two centuries after the establishment of the Chinese imperial state, writing began to assume a supreme status of cultural expression on various levels: it was seen as the most reliable form to transmit and interpret the traditional canon;¹ it became the medium to proclaim a normative version of the canon by carving it into large stone stelae that were then erected outside of the imperial academy or in other prominent locations;² it served the needs of the imperial bureaucracy and its class of court-appointed scholars who formed and guarded the textual heritage in the newly established imperial library,³ and it became interpreted as a manifestation of patterns of cosmic order.⁴

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¹ Apparently, the first to have claimed the superiority of the "ancient script" (*guwen* 古文) classics over their more recent "modern script" (*jinwen* 今文) counterparts was Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23). He considered the *guwen* texts more reliable than their *jinwen* counterparts because they had been received in writing and were not just recently transcribed from oral tradition; see *Hanshu* 1987, 36.1968-1971.

² The traditional ("Confucian") canon was first carved into stone (and erected outside the imperial academy) in the late second century CE and then repeatedly through later imperial dynasties; for a partial list of these occasions, see Nylan 2001, 48-49.

³ See Nylan 1999, 2000; Kern 2001.

⁴ In Eastern Han times (25-220), the key document expressing this idea is Xu Shen's 許慎 (c. 55-c. 149) postface to his dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字; see *Shuowen jiezi* 1988, chapter 15. For the development of the early mythology of the script as it culminated in Xu Shen's text, see Boltz 1994, 129-155; Lewis 1999, 241-287. While building especially on the "Appended Phrases" ("Xici" 繫辭), a late Warring States text associated with the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) that derives the formation of the divinatory trigrams and hexagrams from cosmic patterns, the *Shuowen* postface adds decidedly to this mythology by extending it to the writing system.

Moreover, ever since the Qin First Emperor's (r. 221–210 BCE) unification of the official script soon after founding the empire in 221 BCE, the Chinese writing system has been viewed as the key technology to administer and culturally unify an empire that in its vast expansion contained numerous varieties of the spoken Chinese language.⁵ At the same time, by virtue of the historical stability of the Chinese graphs, which in general are not affected by phonetic change (although occasional exceptions are documented), the writing system has largely obscured the continuous linguistic developments in lexicon, grammar, and sound over time.

As a whole, the corpus of written texts has thus created an illusion of linguistic stability that generated a formidable reality in its own right: a continuous literary tradition of two millennia where any newly written text could be enriched by expressions from various earlier written texts without necessarily giving the appearance of stylistic antiquarianism or phonetic incompatibility. In this vast imperial tradition of elite literary writing, the very concept of culture (*wen* 文) was collapsed into that of the written text (*wen* 文).⁶ This concept of *wen* gave continuous presence to the past. It generated a cultural history of the written text together with the institutions to sustain it—first and foremost the imperial bureaucracy and its civil examination system—that remained intact and in place throughout the rise and fall of succeeding imperial dynasties and contributed forcefully to the image (such as Hegel's) of the Chinese empire as frozen in time and incapable of historical change.⁷

⁵ See, e.g., Gernet 1999, 32–34. Note that the Chinese writing system was also adopted to the languages of Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese; on these historical developments, see Norman 1988, 74–82, and Ramsey 1987, 143–154.

⁶ See, e.g., Kern 2001.

⁷ One may note that the extreme graphocentrism of imperial China became a veritable impediment to Chinese interests in the Chinese *language*—not to mention interest in other languages. While in medieval times (ca. 200–900 CE), Buddhism enriched the Chinese dictionary by thousands of new words, discussion of this influence, or of that from other languages, remained marginal, compared to the discussion of the Chinese writing system. As Wolfgang Behr has pointed out to me, the best survey of the limited evidence of premodern Chinese interest in Sanskrit is still Gulik 1956. The first grammar of classical Chinese, that is, of the elite written koiné, appeared only in 1898 when Ma Jianzhong 馬建忠 (1845–1900) published his *Ma shi wentong* 馬氏文通 in an explicit response to the Indo-European grammatical tradition. By this time, European scholars had already produced grammars of classical Chinese for almost two centuries, culminating in Georg von der Gabelentz's (1840–1893) magisterial *Chinesische Grammatik mit Ausschluss des niederen Stiles und der heutigen Umgangssprache* of 1881. For Western dictionaries and grammars of Chinese, and for traditional Chinese discussions

The written tradition constituted its own sovereign realm, parallel and always superior to the reality of imperial rule,⁸ and ever since the first century CE, the literary text was explicitly imbued with the capacity to express not only human emotion and thought, but to reflect the nature and condition of social and cosmological order.⁹

In addition to the use of writing in these various contexts, the very art of writing Chinese graphs ruled supreme. Beginning in the second century CE, calligraphy is the first of the visual arts to have been discussed and evaluated systematically.¹⁰ Above and beyond painting, sculpture, or architecture, calligraphy has always retained its status as “the most venerated art form in China.”¹¹ Public inscriptions by recent political leaders amply testify to the lingering cultural status and political authority of the hand-written word—one may only think of Mao Zedong's calligraphy for the title of *People's Daily* as well as for the name of Peking University, written on the university's main gate, or of Deng Xiaoping's

of language, see Harbsmeier 1998, 8–26, 46–107. For an excellent analysis of the (altogether limited) premodern Chinese reflections on language change, see Behr 2005a.

⁸ As Lewis 1999, 4, has noted: “[T]he culminating role of writing in the [Warring States] period, and the key to its importance in imperial China, was the creation of parallel realities within texts that claimed to depict the entire world. Such worlds created in writing provided models for the unprecedented enterprise of founding a world empire, and they underwrote the claims of authority of those who composed, sponsored, or interpreted them. One version of these texts ultimately became the first state canon of imperial China, and in this capacity it served to perpetuate the dream and the reality of the imperial system across the centuries... [T]he Chinese empire, including its artistic and religious versions, was based on an imaginary realm created within texts. These texts, couched in an artificial language above the local world of spoken dialects, created a model of society against which actual institutions were measured.” I agree with two qualifications: first, the fact that texts maintained the same form over large geographic distances and several millennia certainly set them in contrast to the synchronic plurality of dialects and diachronic multiplicity of language change—but this does not mean that classical Chinese is an artificial language. Second, Lewis's emphasis on the written text is to some extent appropriate for imperial China from late Western Han times onward. However, for the earlier period—the actual focus of Lewis's book—it exerts considerable scholastic pressure in order to force a wide and diverse range of cultural phenomena under the single paradigm of the written text. For extensive reviews of Lewis's work, see Nylan 2000 and Kern 2000. A book that pursues a thesis similar to Lewis's is Connery 1998. Unfortunately, it lacks basic sinological competence.

⁹ For a compilation of the relevant early texts, see Guo Shaoyu 1988; cf. Liu 1975, Owen 1992.

¹⁰ Remarks about calligraphy begin to surface with Cui Huan 崔瑗 (77–142), Zhao Yi 趙壹 (f. 178), and more substantially, with Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192); see Zheng Xiaohua 1999, 46–60; Wang Zhenyuan 1996, 9–24; Nylan 1999a, 46–53.

¹¹ Bunnell and Fong 1999, 9.

writing of the name of the National Library of China that was inscribed onto the library's newly built home in 1987. In highly charged manifestations of writing like these, calligraphy has always been regarded as expressive of exemplary personality and virtuous rulership on the one hand, and as the public display of civilization and Chinese cultural identity on the other.¹² In such contexts, writing transcends its two basic functions of storing and circulating knowledge. Or more precisely, the knowledge that is stored in the public inscription, and that is circulated to the community in the form of public display, refers not merely to the meaning of its words but also to the person who inscribed them and to the cultural status and political authority of public calligraphy itself. Such calligraphy is an emblem of both culture and sovereignty. The sovereignty extends beyond the social into the natural realm: beginning with the Qin First Emperor's seven stone stelae that were erected on mountain tops during the first decade after the founding of the empire in 221 BCE, texts have been literally inscribed into landscapes, either on stelae or into the natural stone itself. In these locations, public calligraphy transforms a natural site into a site of civilization and human history. Here, as in the political inscriptions in the capital, the calligraphic text constitutes the site as what it now is (and has not been before) and connects it forever to the person of the inscriber.¹³

In the present essay, I examine such representation in the context of the early development of Chinese writing, discussing the specific political, social, and religious circumstances in which its function of public display emerged. While inscriptions of ostentatious display are already documented among the Late Shang (ca. 1200–ca. 1045 BCE) oracle bones,¹⁴ my particular focus is on the bronze inscriptions of the Western Zhou (ca. 1045–771 BCE), and here especially on those from the Middle Western Zhou period (beginning with the reign of King Mu 穆 [r. 956–918]) and after. These inscriptions not only show an increasingly accentuated use of calligraphy. They also, in a way the Shang oracle carvings and the very early Western Zhou bronze inscriptions do not, mention

¹² "Public display" is Michael Nylan's term; see Nylan 2005.

¹³ For the stele inscriptions of the First Emperor, see Kern 2000a. The most important study of landscape inscription is going to be Harrist, *forthcoming*. See also Owen 1986, 22–32.

¹⁴ This display character manifests itself in some instances of unusually large graphs, in a sometimes careful pigmentation of the incised writing, and in the commonly observed approximate symmetry of the text; see Keightley 1978, 46, 54, 56, 76–77, 83–84, 89.

certain officials in charge of formalized writing, and they give account of the presentation of written texts in contexts of social and political ritual. In a number of bronze inscriptions, furthermore, officials in charge of writing identify themselves with their titles and—implicitly or explicitly—display the exalted status of certain kinds of texts and their ritual presentation.

However, when referring to early writing as "public display," we need to keep in mind that oracle bone and bronze inscriptions were certainly not on display in the way modern inscriptions on monumental buildings are. For one, not only oracle bones but also bronze vessels are relatively small objects, and their inscriptions are visible only upon close and careful inspection. In fact, as has often been noted, they are cast on the inside of bronze vessels which means that during the sacrifices, they were covered with the sacrificial offerings and hence completely invisible.¹⁵ They cannot have been meant to be read during the sacrifices, and we do not have any records suggesting that they were displayed or read—as opposed to simply stored in the darkness of the ancestral temple—at other times. Furthermore, there was no "public" audience in early China as it existed, for example, in early Greece. All this, however, does not mean that objects and texts had no "public" representation or were devoid of any display function. The—however limited—"public" was the prominent lineage group of high status and its guests, in the case of the royal house also including high-ranking officials as well as diplomats from subordinate regions.¹⁶ This audience was an insider audience, but it comprised a cultural and political elite that did not need to inspect a bronze vessel and its inscription up close in order to know about and comprehend its representational nature. What counted, in general, was the sheer presence of the artifact. The same was probably still true even for the First Emperor's stele inscriptions on mountains—texts that were certainly monumental but at the same time also removed. We do not assume that large numbers of people actually climbed the mountains

¹⁵ See, e.g., Kane 1982–83. In Western Zhou times, the major exception to this are inscriptions on bells, which are placed on the bells' exterior. But even these inscriptions are too small to be visible from a distance, and their texts are often arranged in a rather irregular fashion—even running in different directions wherever there is space not occupied by ornament—across the body of the bell, including their backside.

¹⁶ I leave aside here the complex question of whether or not the bronze inscriptions were primarily directed not at the living humans (including their descendants) but at the ancestral spirits; cf. Falkenhausen 1993, 145–152 and Venture 2002.

and read the inscriptions. It was enough to know about the inscriptions, and this knowledge certainly existed among the limited “public” of the elite. It is in this specific sense that I refer to early bronze writing as a form of “public display.”

Yet in suggesting at all an early origin for the display aspect of Chinese writing, I also do not wish to contribute to the often-encountered sweeping claims that posit a general continuity in the nature, purposes and significance of the written text across three millennia. Quite to the contrary, I believe that in order to put the characteristic uses and specific prestige of early Chinese writing into focus, we need to first liberate ourselves from a cluster of later imperial concepts. In imperial times, the earlier ritual practice that accommodated the most exalted manifestation of the written text was but memory—indeed a memory scarcely invoked¹⁷—eclipsed by the expansive use and theorization of writing for a multiplicity of public purposes. Down to the present day, it has proven difficult to imagine the pre-imperial period as fundamentally different from later times in terms of the role and significance of writing.¹⁸ For example, the idea that the Zhou “were people who liked to write books,” first expressed almost seventy years ago, was only recently reiterated.¹⁹

¹⁷ The only passage explaining the rationale behind bronze inscriptions is a late passage—pre-imperial or from Han times—in the *Liji* 禮記 (*Liji* 1987, 49.378c–379a), retrospectively rationalizing a practice that by the time of the composition of the *Liji* had almost completely ceased to exist. According to this passage, “In an inscription (*ming*), one appreciates and expounds the virtue and excellence of one’s ancestors; one displays their achievements and brilliance, their efforts and toils, their honors and distinctions, and their fame and name (*ming*) to All under Heaven; and one deliberates all these in [inscribing] the sacrificial vessel. In doing so, one accomplishes one’s own name (*ming*) in order to sacrifice to one’s ancestors. One extols and glorifies the ancestors and by this venerates filial piety... Therefore, when a gentleman looks at an inscription (*ming*), he praises those who are commended there, and he praises the one who has made [the inscription].” (銘者，論譏其先祖之有德善，功烈勳勞慶賞聲名列於天下，而酌之祭器；自成其名焉，以祀其先祖者也。顯揚先祖，所以崇孝也。...是故君子之觀於銘也，既美其所稱，又美其所為。) It is not possible to date this passage even by a particular century. Therefore, one might speculate that its discussion of *ming* 銘 (“inscription”) and *ming* 名 (“name”) was, perhaps, still a genuine reflection of an early etymological figure, and not yet a mere paronomastic pun.

¹⁸ A truly splendid example of how Chinese writing is viewed entirely from the imperial perspective has been given in the exhibition (and its catalogue) “L’empire du trait” at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, March 16–June 20, 2004.

¹⁹ See Creel 1937, 255, as approvingly quoted by Shaughnessy 1997, 6. Shaughnessy has repeatedly expressed his belief in the general prevalence of writing in Western Zhou culture; see Shaughnessy 1997, 1–12; 1999, 297–299; 2003. For critiques of this approach to Western Zhou history and its sources, see Falkenhausen 1993, 139–195 and Schaberg 2001, 477–481.

However, the rhetoric about writing as the ultimate expression of culture, as we find it from the late first century BCE onward, is decidedly an imperial phenomenon. Over the entire first millennium for which we have evidence of the Chinese script, beginning in ca. 1200 BCE, such rhetoric is virtually absent. Across the actual abundance of pre-imperial texts, there are very few statements assigning particular significance to writing. The one text that most explicitly praises writing for its particular capacities to preserve and transmit knowledge is *Mozi* 墨子 (Master Mo), a diverse compendium of multiple layers that probably extend from the fourth through the second centuries BCE and thus postdate the Western Zhou period by several centuries.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, given the *Mozi*’s strong stand of antiritualism and frugality, the text never emphasizes what seem to have been among writing’s most prominent functions in Zhou times, namely, those of ritual display and representation of status.²¹

II. Who Were the Writers in the Early Period?

There is no single word in the early Chinese language to denote the functionaries of writing, and none of the several terms available distinguishes officials in charge of writing clearly from other court appointees such as ritual officers or high-level royal aides. The most common term for functionaries of writing is *shi* 史, but its wide occurrence throughout Chinese history has proven resistant to any single understanding. It is variously translated as “scribe” or “clerk,” “historian,” “historiographer,” or “archivist,” “ritualist,” or “astrologer.” Each of these terms is appropriate if used according to specific historical circumstances, although rarely does any of them exhaust the functions of a *shi* at any time in history.

²⁰ *Mozi* 1986, 2.62, 4.111, 5.119, 7.185–186, 7.196, 8.214–215, 9.250, 9.254, 12.407–408, 13.431.

²¹ While the present paper is concerned with the Western Zhou period, one may also mention the display function of writing as it figures prominently in certain Eastern Zhou texts. One example is the *Zhouli* where numerous officers are in charge of reading out loud various kinds of written texts on specific occasions. Among the officials in the Ministry of War (“Xia guan” 夏官), the Manager of Rewards (*si xun* 司勳) inscribes the names of meritorious persons onto the king’s great standard (*taichang* 太常). Among the officials in the Ministry of Justice (“Qiu guan” 秋官), the Chief Judge (*shi shi* 士師) suspends tablets inscribed with prohibitions from public gates, and the Enforcer of Agreements (*si yue* 司約) inscribes legal contracts into bronze vessels for use in the ancestral temple.

Archaeological and historical evidence shows that in late Warring States and early imperial times, large numbers of low-level clerks designated as *shi* were employed by local governments to keep legal, administrative, economic, and other records. Their activities match the definition of *shi* in the early character dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 of ca. 100 CE, where *shi* is glossed as “recorder of affairs” (*jishi zhe* 記事者).²² In the late third and early second centuries BCE, the position of the *shi* served as an entry-level appointment to the local administration. According to excavated documents from two separate tombs, such appointments were received at the age of sixteen and eighteen years, respectively.²³ An analysis of the word *shi* based on historical phonology indeed shows the act of writing as rooted in administrative purposes, with *shi*—like *shi* 士, *shi* 事, *shi* 使, *li* 吏, etc.—being closely related to *li* 理, “to mark.”²⁴ Such an interpretation of *shi* may tie the term to the actual practice of writing in its basic function (and to the late Warring States and early imperial evidence from excavated manuscripts). It further corresponds well to the considerable number of low-level clerks—a total of 1095—that are mentioned in the various sections of the *Zhouli* 周禮 (The ritual institutions of the Zhou), a work perhaps from the fourth or third century BCE that presents an idealized, cosmologically charged royal bureaucracy of the Zhou.²⁵ In the *Zhouli*, these clerks are unranked commoners and listed toward the bottom of the bureaucratic hierarchy, below the “storehouse keepers” (*fu* 府) and above only the “aides” (*xu* 胥) and “runners” (*tu* 徒).²⁶

However, despite circumstantial but incontrovertible evidence of archival and administrative writing at the Late Shang and Western Zhou royal courts,²⁷ the low-level governmental clerks do not appear in

²² *Shuowen jiezi* 1988, 3B.20b.

²³ The major archaeological evidence comes from the excavated tombs Shuihudi 睡虎地 (Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei) tomb no. 11 (sealed 217 BCE) and Zhangjiashan 張家山 (Jingzhou 荊州, Hubei 湖北) tomb no. 247 (sealed 186 BCE); see Zhangjiashan 2001, 203; Brashier 2003; Xu Fuchang 1993, 8–14, 358–360, 378–382; Hulśewé 1985, 1, 39n4, 87. For detailed discussion, see Kern 2003.

²⁴ See Behr 2005a, 15–18, also Kern 2003.

²⁵ New scholarship on the cosmological nature of the *Zhouli* is long overdue; for some concise remarks on how this text provides a comprehensive vision of “the state as a replica or image of the cosmos,” see Lewis 1999, 42–48.

²⁶ They are mentioned not in the actual descriptions of the various government offices but merely listed in the introductory summaries of the different ministries; see Kern 2003.

²⁷ For a treatment of these functions of early Chinese writing, see Bagley 2004.

Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. Equally absent are the “historians” or “archivists,” as the term *shi* was commonly used in imperial times. While there can be no doubt that the Western Zhou and their successors produced and kept historical records, no bronze inscription and no passage of the *Odes* (*Shi* 詩), *Documents* (*Shu* 書), or *Changes* (*Yi* 易)—our main sources of transmitted texts that presumably date in part from Western Zhou times—portrays a *shi* as “writing history” in any meaningful later sense of the word, or as a person responsible for “archiving” information.²⁸ Instead, we see a class of officials in charge and in control of the written word who ranked among the highest dignitaries at the Zhou royal court. To distinguish these officers from the menial “clerks” just mentioned, I will refer to them as “Secretaries” (with the capital “S” denoting the title, not the function).²⁹ In Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, the high-level Secretaries are involved in the ceremonial presenting of written texts during important court rituals. They are mentioned as *shi* but also repeatedly as *neishi* 內史 (Secretary of the Interior), *neishi yin* 內史尹 (Overseer of the Secretariate of the Interior), *waishi* 外史 (Secretary of the Exterior), *yushi* 御史 (Secretary in Royal Attendance), or *taishi* 大史 (Grand Secretary); in addition, a number of other epithets appear only once each before *shi*. Another designation for what appears to have been the same office is *zuoce* 作冊 (Maker of Records); there also are *zuoce yin* 作冊尹 (Overseer of the Makers of Records), or just *yin* 尹 (Overseer [of the *shi* and *zuoce*]).³⁰ In some inscriptions, two of these terms are combined into a single designation, as in *zuoce neishi* 作冊內史. According to the evidence from the bronze inscriptions, the Maker of Records was as high a ritual officer as the Secretary and by no

²⁸ Pace Shaughnessy 1991, 1, passim, and Cook 1995, 252–255, among others.

²⁹ The term was also proposed by Creel 1970, 110. Creel points out that in modern use, “secretary” refers not only to menial writing but is also used “to denote offices of great power and responsibility, as in Secretary of State,” and that the term “originally meant one entrusted with secrets and employed in confidential missions.” However, since Creel’s work, the term “secretary” seems to have been largely forgotten; the common English translation is now “scribe.” I consider this a regression, even though for the Western Zhou period, the relatively neutral “scribe” seems still better than “archivist,” “secretarial staff,” or “historiographer,” as one finds *shi* rendered in the other major English language outline of Western Zhou history and culture, that is, Hsu and Linduff 1988, 245–246, 254–255.

³⁰ See the discussion in Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu 1986, 26–36; Chen Hanping 1986, 119–129; Wong Yin-wai 1978, 128–137; Lai Changyang and Liu Xiang 1985; Cook 1995, 250–255; and, most extensively, Xi Hanjing 1983.

means confined to the clerical work that may be suggested by his designation; indeed, the two terms may have designated the same office.³¹

As will be discussed in greater detail below, the available Western Zhou bronze inscriptions show these functionaries of writing in two separate capacities: on the one hand as donors of their own sacrificial vessels, on the other hand as court officials that are mentioned in vessels of other donors.³² Among the many hundreds of Western Zhou bronze inscriptions documented and discussed in the monumental compilation prepared by Shirakawa Shizuka 白川靜,³³ twenty-two show Secretaries or Makers of Records as donors.³⁴ Fourteen of these inscriptions were cast with their vessels during the Early Western Zhou period ending with King Zhao 昭 (r. 977/75–957 BCE);³⁵ for ten of these, the donor is a Maker of Records;³⁶ for one, it is a Grand Secretary,³⁷ and for three, a Secretary.³⁸ Eight inscriptions with Makers of Records or Secretaries as donors were cast during the Middle Western Zhou (956–858 BCE) and Late Western Zhou (857–771 BCE) periods. Of these, only one is a Maker of Records,³⁹ while seven are Secretaries.⁴⁰ Thus, two thirds of the vessels cast for functionaries of writing come from the Early Western Zhou period, mostly with a Maker of Records as donor. During the

³¹ Wang Guowei 1975, 6.5a–6a, identifies the Secretary of the Interior as a top-level government official (fully supported by the analyses of Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu 1986, Xi Hanjing 1983, and Chen Hanping 1986, all of them based on a much larger corpus of inscriptions). According to Wang, *zuoce neishi* is yet another designation of the office that is otherwise called either *zuoce* or *neishi*. On the origin and function of the *zuoce*, the most comprehensive study is Shirakawa 1974.

³² Xi Hanjing 1973, 41–112, lists a total of 129 early scribes by name, 54 of which occurring in inscriptions, the others in much later received texts.

³³ Shirakawa 1962–84. In the following, I cite Shirakawa in the format “Volume.Pages (# Entry).”

³⁴ In addition, Shirakawa’s collection includes three post-Western Zhou vessels with Secretaries as donors; see 37.244–253 (# 207), 39.471–473 (# 221), and 39.523–524 (# 226).

³⁵ All dates of Zhou kings after Shaughnessy (1991).

³⁶ Shirakawa 4.167–172 (# 15), 5.236–244 (# 22), 5.245–247 (# 22a), 6.255–275 (# 24), 6.276–309 (# 25), 6.319–326 (# 26), 8.440–449 (# 42), 10.589–596 (# 58), 11.628–646 (# 60c), 13.744–745 (# 64a). Note that sometimes, identical inscriptions are cast on two or more vessels (or are repeated on the lid of a vessel). In all these cases, I count the inscription only once.

³⁷ Shirakawa 8.433–439 (# 41).

³⁸ Shirakawa 2.77–83 (# 6), 7.366–372 (# 33), 9.514–518 (# 50).

³⁹ Shirakawa 19.370–376 (# 105).

⁴⁰ Shirakawa 20.383–390 (# 107), 21.474–478 (# 115e), 21.484–490 (# 117), 24.174–186 (# 138), 24.186–187 (# 138a), 39.523–524 (# 226), 50.335–369 (*hd*-# 15).

Middle and Late Western Zhou periods, such inscriptions are significantly less frequent (especially considering that the overall number of inscriptions increased substantially during these periods), and they are now mostly cast for a Secretary. Considering the accidental and fragmentary nature of the archaeological record, we do not know to which extent the inscriptions compiled by Shirakawa (or those of any other collection)⁴¹ may serve as a representative cross section of the original totality of Western Zhou bronze texts. If anything, they indicate general tendencies; they do not lend themselves to statistically valid conclusions. Only with this caveat in mind, it can be instructive to consider the available inscriptions for what they show, and then to see how mutually independent sets of data from both excavated and transmitted sources converge toward a more or less coherent picture. It is in this spirit that the following observations and suggestions are delivered.

In Shirakawa’s corpus, inscriptions of other donors where *shi*, *nei-shi*, *taishi*, *zuoce*, or *yin* appear as actual functionaries of writing show the following distribution: in Early Western Zhou times, one finds one *zuoce*, one *taishi*, one *neishi*, and three *shi*. In inscriptions dating from the Middle and Late Western Zhou periods, there are one *zuoce*, three *taishi*, seventeen *shi*, twenty *neishi*, two *zuoce neishi*, eight *zuoce yin*, three *neishi yin*, and eight *yin*. Judging from the current archaeological record, inscriptions for other donors that mention functionaries of writing increase dramatically in Middle and Late Western Zhou times, the reason being a probably new type of ritual described on bronze vessels (see below). Furthermore, matching the survey of inscriptions with *shi* or *zuoce* as donors, it appears that from Middle Western Zhou times onward, occurrences of *shi* far outnumber those of *zuoce*. In particular, the title of the *neishi* appears in only one Early Western Zhou inscription⁴² but becomes the most prominent one in Middle and Late

⁴¹ After the publication of Shirakawa’s volumes, a significant number of inscribed vessels have been excavated and published in various venues. They do not, however, change the overall conclusions presented here.

⁴² Shirakawa 11.591–605 (# 59); for a translation of the inscription, see Dobson 1962, 194–195. The vessel, variously known as “Zhou gong-gui” 周公毀, “Zhou gong-yi” 周公彝, “Xing hou-gui” 邢侯毀, “Xing hou-yi” 邢侯彝, or “Rong zuo Zhou gong-gui” 榮作周公毀, carries an inscription that is unique in one important point: it mentions the king addressing the vessel donor Rong together with the Secretary of the Interior. It closes with Rong saying that he has now “used the bamboo-written royal charge to make this sacrificial vessel in honor of the Duke of Zhou” (*yong ce wang ling zuo Zhou gong yi* 用冊王令作周公彝). I thus take it as a very early, not yet codified representation of the ceremony that inscriptions from the Middle Western Zhou period onward describe.

Western Zhou bronze texts, further suggesting a historical development in the use of these official titles.⁴³ One reason for this might be that many of the Early Western Zhou Makers of Records seem to have been of Eastern, that is, Shang dynasty, descent.⁴⁴ Both the Secretaries and the Makers of Records appear as officers of divination in the Late Shang; especially the latter seem to have been recruited to serve also under the Western Zhou, with their hereditary title perhaps maintained from generation to generation.⁴⁵ Regardless of the specific designation, the high status of these royal officers of writing throughout Western Zhou times is evident from their impressive presence as donors of ritual vessels.

Focusing on the evidence from the bronze inscriptions, the *Odes*, and the *Documents*, numerous palaeographic interpretations of the ancient graph 史 have been advanced to determine the meaning of the word *shi*.⁴⁶ Building to some extent upon Wang Guowei's 王國維 (1877–1927) influential analysis (which in turn is based on the work of several Qing dynasty [1644–1912] scholars),⁴⁷ Shirakawa Shizuka has suggested that the early graph 史 seems to depict the offering of a basket of inscribed slips upward, namely, to the ancestral spirits. From this perspective, the function of the *shi*—if not the function of writing altogether—has often

both frequently and in a highly standardized format (see below). In the present inscription, the Secretary of the Interior is probably not a donor but the functionary who has presented the written royal charge to Rong.

⁴³ For this development, see also Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu 1986, 29–30, 34–36.

⁴⁴ While this is now widely assumed, Lothar von Falkenhausen has rightly reminded me of both the beautiful pre-dynastic (that is, pre-Shang conquest) Zhou oracle bone inscriptions and the fact that from the beginning, Western Zhou inscriptions differed appreciably from their Shang dynasty predecessors. Evidently, the practice of Chinese writing, and also of Shang ritual, was more broadly disseminated among the Zhou (and perhaps other neighboring peoples?) already before the fall of the Shang, and its general reception by the Zhou did not entirely depend on the conquest and the subsequent inheritance of Shang functionaries.

⁴⁵ See Shirakawa 1974; Xi Hanjing 1983, 20–29; Wong Yin-wai 1978, 100; Shaughnessy 1991, 166–168; Lau 1999, 59, 88. For the appearance of Secretaries and Makers of Records in Late Shang oracle bone inscriptions, see Chen Mengjia 1956, 517–521; Xi Hanjing 1983, 20–29. In Chen Mengjia's survey of Late Shang governmental offices, he groups the diviners together with the functionaries of writing, making it clear that both groups were concerned with divination and sacrifice. It is noteworthy that even a full millennium later, in a Zhangjiashan bamboo manuscript dated 186 BCE, the administrative clerk (*shi*) is discussed together with the invocator or priest (*zhu* 祝); see Zhangjiashan 2001, 203–204; Kern 2003.

⁴⁶ For a recent example in this tradition, see Kominami Ichirō 1999. Altogether, the literature on *shi* is vast; see the bibliographic information in Behr 2005a, 15, Cook 1995, 250–254, Gentz 2001, 9. A good range of graphic interpretations is included in Matsumaru and Takashima 1994, # 0004, 0024, 3371, 3425, 5881.

⁴⁷ For discussions preceding Wang Guowei's, see Xi Hanjing 1983, 12–17, 137–140.

been seen as having originated in a religious context.⁴⁸ However, the fallacy of interpreting *graphs* to literally “decipher” the meaning of the *words* they are writing has been pointed out repeatedly.⁴⁹

While the above-mentioned phonological analysis of the word *shi* puts into doubt (if not to rest) the speculations about the graph 史, it does not invalidate the conclusion by Wang Guowei, Shirakawa, and many others that the primary function of the Secretaries and Makers of Records that appear in Late Shang and Western Zhou inscriptions is religious, political, and ritualistic (and clerical only to the extent that writing is used to lend particular efficacy to ritual speech). In order to appreciate writing in this ritual context one does not need to suppose that it actually originated from this context, that it was largely confined to it, or that it in any way impeded the use of administrative writing.⁵⁰ Whatever manifestations of menial clerical writing there were in Western Zhou China have long since perished and do not surface in the representation of writing in our available sources. This is mainly due to the fact that the bronze inscriptions as well as the ritual hymns and speeches from the *Odes* and *Documents* are without exception of ritualistic nature and purpose. As such, they are focused on the particular ceremonial performance of the high-level Secretary, Maker of Records, and Overseer, exalting writing as a display of strictly codified political and religious expression in the contexts of the court audience and the ancestral sacrifice. In other words, of all its manifestations of writing during the Western Zhou period, the Chinese tradition has chosen to preserve only a very limited body of strictly ritualistic texts. Moreover, for writing, the Western Zhou elites themselves restricted the use of the precious, non-perishable material of bronze to texts that were to be presented in ceremonial (mostly religious) contexts—a fact that speaks eloquently to the significance of writing as ritual display.

⁴⁸ Wang Guowei 1975; Shirakawa 1974a; also the earlier Chinese discussion recapitulated by Xi Hanjing 1983.

⁴⁹ Important studies debunking this approach include Boltz 1994 and Takashima 2000; see also DeFrancis 1984 and Unger 2004.

⁵⁰ For the hypothesis that Chinese writing first developed in religious contexts and from there became extended to profane purposes, see also Lewis 1999, 28; for a brief critique, see Kern 2003; for an extensive discussion of early administrative writing, see Bagley 2004. I have changed my mind on this point, compared to Kern 1996 and 1997.

III. Western Zhou Writing in Early Received Sources

A review of the representation of writing in Western Zhou texts may begin with the small number of pertinent passages in the received literature. The core layer of the *Changes*, originally a divination handbook, does not include any references to writing. In the *Odes*, an anthology of 305 songs, references to writing appear only in a few ritual hymns that were performed at court banquets. In *Ode* 193, “Shi yue zhi jiao” 十月之交 (At the sun-moon conjunction in the tenth month), the Secretary of the Interior is mentioned among the highest dignitaries of the royal court.⁵¹ In *Ode* 220, “Bin zhi chu yan” 賓之初筵 (When the guests first sit down on their mats), an admonition against drunkenness, a *shi* serves as an assistant to an inspector who takes note of those who are drunk at a lavish court banquet.⁵² In *Ode* 168, “Chu ju” 出車 (We move the chariots out), soldiers express their fear of the “writing on bamboo slips” (*jianshu* 簡書), that is, the royal military charge they are obliged to fulfill.⁵³ It is impossible to historicize these poems precisely,⁵⁴ but the

⁵¹ Legge 1985a, 322; Karlgren 1950a, 139.

⁵² Legge 1985a, 399; Karlgren 1950a, 174. Here, *shi* might indicate a lower-level clerk.

⁵³ Legge 1985a, 264; Karlgren 1950a, 112.

⁵⁴ So far, efforts to do so have been impressionistic and methodologically deficient. For example, no song has to be contemporaneous with the historical situation it seems to speak about; any song—and any transmitted royal speech—can be a retrospective creation composed in part or completely of the *imagined* words of the original situation. Moreover, linguistic arguments may indicate general tendencies of development over the course of the Western Zhou period but have not been successful to determine specific dates of individual texts. Rhyme, for example, occurs already in the earliest bronze inscriptions (Behr 1996, 86, *pace* Shaughnessy 1983, 37), and so does—if still only to a limited extent nowhere near its frequency and regularity in the *Odes* (Behr 2005, 116)—the tetrasyllabic meter. Likewise, an attempt to establish the third-person possessive pronoun use of the word *qi* 其 as a linguistic phenomenon emerging only in mid-Western Zhou times—so that its occurrence in individual received texts may be taken as a *terminus post quem* for their composition (Shaughnessy 1997, 165–195)—is problematic on at least three accounts: first, the sample of texts is both too small and too homogeneous to be statistically meaningful. Second, as recently excavated manuscripts of ancient texts—especially the *Odes*—with transmitted counterparts show, grammatical particles (*xuci* 虛辭) like *qi* were particularly prone to change during the early course of transmission (Kern 2005). Third, the distinction between an earlier pre-verbal “modal” use of *qi* (expressing hope or expectation) and a later pronominal use is linguistically dubious. As noted by Ken’ichi Takashima (personal communication August 1, 2004), the two grammatical functions are “in origin the same thing. That is, *qi* as third-person possessive pronoun is the earliest and original, and the modal function of it is only an offshoot of its function... We cannot possibly derive the possessive pronominal *qi* from the modal particle.”

common division of the Western Zhou dynasty into Early, Middle, and Late periods remains useful. The three songs that mention the practice of writing are all in the “Minor elegantiae” (*xiaoya* 小雅) section of the *Odes* anthology and are hence commonly placed either toward the end of the Western Zhou or later. To phrase things the other way around: none of the sacrificial “Zhou eulogia” (*Zhou song* 周頌) that are believed to come from Early Western Zhou times and none of the “Major elegantiae” (*daya* 大雅) that may date from the Middle or Late period of the dynasty contain references to writing.⁵⁵

In the royal speeches that comprise the early layers of the *Documents*, Secretaries and writings on bamboo are mentioned in a number of chapters.⁵⁶ In “Jin teng” 金滕 (The metal-bound coffer), the Secretary initially presents the Duke of Zhou’s 周公 written prayer/invocation (*ce zhu* 冊祝); when the writing is later recovered, the Secretariate is consulted about its contents.⁵⁷ In “Jiu gao” 酒誥 (The announcement about alcohol), both the Grand Secretary and the Secretary of the Interior are mentioned among the high dignitaries, as the Grand Secretary is mentioned in “Li zheng” 立政 (The establishment of government)

⁵⁵ I do not include here the self-referential statements by which several *Odes* point to their own composition. There are altogether twelve instances of this: two in the “Airs of the states” (*guofeng* 國風), the section believed to be the latest of the anthology (*Odes* 107, 141; Legge 1985a, 164, 210; Karlgren 1950a, 69, 89); five in the “Minor elegantiae” (*Odes* 162, 191, 199, 200, 204; Legge 1985a, 249, 314, 346, 349, 359; Karlgren 1950a, 105, 134, 150, 152, 156); and five in the “Major elegantiae” (*Odes* 252, 253, 257, 259, 260; Legge 1985a, 495, 498, 527, 540, 545; Karlgren 1950a, 210, 212, 223, 228, 230). In no case does the self-referential statement refer to the *writing* of a song. The verb commonly used is *zuo* 作 (“to make”), and its object is “song” (*ge* 歌), “recitation” (*song* 誦), “ode” (*shi* 詩), “admonition” (*jian* 諫), or “satire” (*ci* 刺). Of these twelve songs, four refer to their composer by name. Two of these composers (a Jiafu 家父 in *Ode* 191 and a Mengzi 孟子 in *Ode* 200) are otherwise unknown, while *Odes* 259 and 260 (both “Major elegantiae”) mention a certain Jifu 吉甫 whom some scholars identify with a military commander of this name who served under King Xuan 宣 (827–782 BCE) and is mentioned both in *Ode* 177 and in several bronze inscriptions (Lau 1999, 130). As I will argue below, the production of written texts fits well into this Late Western Zhou reign, and it is entirely possible—but not at all certain—that the Jifu of *Odes* 259 and 260 is the commander mentioned elsewhere. It is worth noting, however, that in both *Odes*, Jifu “has made this recitation” (*zuo song* 作誦) which, if anything, points to the composition-qua-performance and not—at least not explicitly—to the writing of the song.

⁵⁶ The *Documents* chapters discussed here all belong to the authentic “modern text” version of the text, and within that version, they come from the earlier chapters.

⁵⁷ Legge 1985, 353, 359–360; Karlgren 1950, 35–36. Here and in the following, references to Legge and Karlgren are given for convenience; as will become clear below, I disagree with many of their translations.

and "Gu ming" 顧命 (The testamentary charge).⁵⁸ In "Shao gao" 召誥 (The announcement of the Duke of Shao), the Duke uses a written text (*shu* 書) during the court audience to give out charges.⁵⁹ In "Luo gao" 洛誥 (The announcement concerning Luo), the king first orders a Maker of Records to announce a written prayer/invocation and, later, a written charge.⁶⁰ In "Duo shi" 多士 (The many officers), the king mentions the bamboo documents (*ce* 冊) and statutes (*dian* 典) of the former dynasty.⁶¹ In "Gu ming," the late king's testamentary charge is first recorded on bamboo slips; later, in an elaborate ceremony, the Grand Secretary presents the recorded charge to the new king.⁶² In "Lü xing" 呂刑 (The punishments of Lü), the king refers to a written penal code (*xingshu* 刑書).⁶³ Most of these *Documents* chapters are assumed to date from Western Zhou times, with only "The metal-bound coffer" and "The punishments of Lü" being considered to postdate the period by some unspecifiable measure. Another text possibly of Western Zhou origin,⁶⁴ the *Yi Zhou Shu* 逸周書 (*Remnant Zhou Documents*) chapter "Shi fu" 世俘 (The great capture) that relates the Zhou conquest of the Shang, notes that the victorious Zhou King Wu 武 asked the Secretary to recite a document (*shu* 書—announcing the King's military success and establishment of the new dynasty?) to Heaven.⁶⁵

The evidence for dating the written composition of any of these texts seems thin and dubious. So far, there is no serious methodology or compelling factual evidence to bolster the traditional belief in very early dates of composition. Virtually no effort has been made to identify the institutional framework for the early performance, recording, and preservation of the royal speeches, and little has been thought about the purpose of such recording and preservation. It is adventurous to think of these exalted utterances as efforts to provide historical information to be archived for future generations. The speeches were not talking facts; delivering shared communal ideas in formulaic diction, they were creating legitimacy both for the speakers and their successors. The speeches' imposing and ritualistic rhetoric served to portray their royal

⁵⁸ Legge 1985, 410, 515, 557; Karlgren 1950, 45, 68, 71.

⁵⁹ Legge 1985, 424; Karlgren 1950, 48.

⁶⁰ Legge 1985, 451–452; Karlgren 1950, 55.

⁶¹ Legge 1985, 460; Karlgren 1950, 56.

⁶² Legge 1985, 549–551, 558; Karlgren 1950, 70–71.

⁶³ Legge 1985, 608; Karlgren 1950, 78.

⁶⁴ As argued by Shaughnessy 1980–81.

⁶⁵ Huang Huaixin et al. 1995, 464–465; Shaughnessy 1980–81, 59.

speakers as exemplary sovereigns in their defining moments of rulership. In other words, what the speeches provided, and for what they were preserved, was the memory of the early Western Zhou model rulers speaking in their own voices. It is perhaps not necessary to call them, in their totality, later inventions, although such an assumption would not be any more bold and dubitable than the idea that their transmitted texts are the authentic records of original royal statements. Assuming that the early Zhou kings in fact delivered such statements that were then remembered by their successors—and not merely invented in the same fashion as so many other speeches in early China⁶⁶—these words were almost certainly adjusted to the commemorative imagination of subsequent generations who will have perpetuated and performed them in the prime institution of such commemoration—where else?—that is, the ancestral sacrifice.⁶⁷ Below, it will be important to consider this ritual context when thinking about how writing is represented both in the speeches and in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions.

In virtually all passages from the *Odes*, the *Documents*, and the *Remnant Zhou Documents*, writing appears in the context of royal court ritual. It is related to matters of morality and etiquette, to legal and royal statutes, to charges issued by the king, or to prayers/invocations offered upward to the ancestral spirits. Secretaries are repeatedly included in royal speeches that address, and briefly list, the highest dignitaries at court; in only one instance—at the banquet described in *Ode* 220—a *shi*

⁶⁶ This is certainly true even for the larger number of *Documents* speeches that purport to be early but are clearly much later compositions (to say nothing of the imagined speeches in the inauthentic "ancient script" *Documents*). Moreover, the prominence of speech, and with it the practice of retrospectively inventing speech, is at the core of early Chinese historiography, as shown by Schaberg 2001 for the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Tradition*) and the *Guoyu* 國語 (*Discourses of the States*). Note that such invention included not just the speeches by political sovereigns but also the arguments submitted to them by their advisors as well as utterances by commoners, including ominous prophecies and songs. For the latter, see Schaberg 1999 and Kern 2004a.

⁶⁷ Pace Creel 1970, 449–455, Shaughnessy 1999, 292, *passim*. As argued in Kern 2004, I hence see the performances of the royal speeches during the ancestral sacrifice in a dialogical setting with the sacrificial hymns and bronze inscriptions that were directed toward the former kings. This conclusion implies a relatively late (not before Middle to Late Western Zhou) date of the received speeches attributed to the Early Western Zhou rulers. The first to propose that the early *Documents* speeches were meant for performance was Henri Maspero who in 1927 suggested to understand the speeches as "libretti" that accompanied and guided the dances performed during the sacrifices; see Maspero 1978, 174–276. One may consider in this context the possible relation between the *Documents* chapter "The testamentary charge" and several of the early *Odes*; see Wang Guowei 1975a, 2.15b–19a; Fu 1980, 1:204–233; Shaughnessy 1997, 165–195.

seems to be subordinate to an inspector who himself is of comparably low rank. A similar picture emerges from a survey of Warring States (476–221 BCE) period texts. Here, the figure or office of the Secretary appears overwhelmingly in the ritual compendia *Zhouli* (17 passages with altogether 29 instances of the word),⁶⁸ *Yili* 儀禮 (*Ceremonial Rites*; 10/23), and *Liji* 禮記 (*Records of Ritual*; 26/41), and in the vast historiographic narrative *Zuo zhuan*; 66/114).⁶⁹ A parallel pattern can be determined for the use of the word *shu* 書 (to write/writing). In sum, while textual references to written texts and functionaries of writing multiply in later centuries, the received literature presents us with very few passages, all of them extremely brief, that might possibly date from Western Zhou times.

This conclusion—concerning not the actual existence of writing but its representation and hence significance in terms of ritual display—is not at variance with the evidence from the bronze inscriptions. Compared to the received *Odes*, *Documents*, and *Changes*, all of which have reached us only through multiple layers of editorial activity, the thousands of Western Zhou inscriptions that are cast on the inside of bronze vessels (or, much less frequently, on the outside of bronze bells)⁷⁰ are particularly valuable for three reasons: they have not undergone any later textual corruption; they contain by far the largest corpus of references to the act of writing; and they represent writing not merely

⁶⁸ My count of “passages” follows their distinction in the Academia Sinica database. The numbers for the *Zhouli* refer to the mentioning of *shi* in specific offices and functions; they do not include the vast number of low-level clerks noted above.

⁶⁹ For a large collection of passages involving Secretaries and other functionaries of writing in Warring States texts, and for an analysis of their offices and functions, see Xi Hanjing 1983. The case of the *Zuo zhuan* is explicable on account of the overall length of the text but also, more importantly, by its very nature of scribal self-representation. As Schaberg 2001a, 257, 267, has noted, the *Zuo zhuan* authors “could not have failed to recognize what they had in common with the men whose deeds they were commemorating,” namely, the ministers and advisors versed in ritual propriety and textual learning, and “history writing is a weapon of justice wielded not by the possessors of power but by the distinct stratum that includes the scribes and the historiographers themselves.” While the *Zuo zhuan* is a textual monument dedicated to ritual propriety, it also elevates writing—and first of all, its own writing—to be itself a superior manifestation of such propriety, ultimately balancing the repeated failure of ritual in history with the perfectly appropriate historiographic account of that failure. This is precisely the rationale that the early tradition attributed to Confucius’s efforts in compiling the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) and that is then mirrored in the catechistic exegesis of this text in the *Gongyang Tradition* (*Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan* 春秋公羊傳); see Gentz 2001.

⁷⁰ Computing on the basis of several Chinese sources, Shaughnessy 2003 speaks of more than 13,000 known Shang and Zhou bronze inscriptions, estimating that at least half of them date from the Western Zhou.

through verbal reference but in its actual material manifestation. On the whole, they allow us to infer the implicit consciousness of the power of writing through an inspection of the unadulterated evidence of the original written artifacts themselves.

IV. Shi 史 (“Secretaries”) and Zuoce 作冊 (“Makers of Records”) in Western Zhou Bronze Inscriptions

The functionaries of writing who appear in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions serve in the same ritual capacities as their counterparts in the early *Documents* chapters. We thus recognize a consistent picture of high-ranking officials across the different textual “genres” of early ritual culture. Arguably, these men were “the most powerful ritualist[s] and minister[s] in the king’s service.”⁷¹ As donors of inscribed bronze vessels, they often refer to themselves not only by their name but also—in another indication of their elevated position—by their title.⁷² None of the inscriptions of a Secretary or Maker of Records, however, contains any mention of his actual scribal service.

In its simplest form, reference to a Secretary or Maker of Records as donor of a vessel is found in inscriptions that consist only of what Lothar von Falkenhausen has identified as the core of Western Zhou bronze texts, namely, a “statement of dedication.”⁷³ Thus, the following Early Western Zhou inscription consists of only nine characters, cast into a *yan* 甌 food steamer [III. 1a–b]:

[I.] the Grand Secretary You have made for [my] bright lord-ancestor [this] precious, honorable sacrificial vessel.⁷⁴

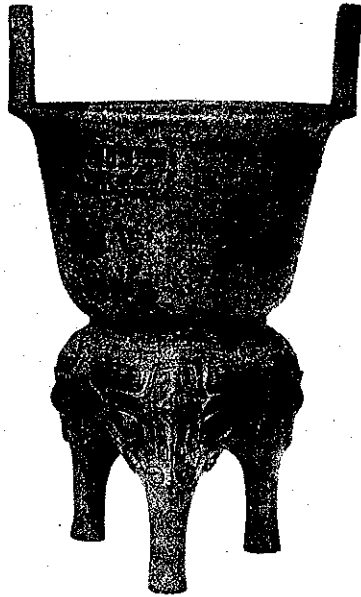
In the following, more elaborate Early Western Zhou example, the donor of a *you* 卣 wine vessel is a Maker of Records [III. 2a–b]:

⁷¹ Cook 1995, 250.

⁷² There is no question that in many other inscriptions, Secretaries or Makers of Records do not identify themselves by their title, but the actual number of these inscriptions is impossible to determine.

⁷³ See Falkenhausen 1993, 152–161. Falkenhausen 2004 has further refined his structural analysis of Western Zhou bronze inscriptions.

⁷⁴ Shirakawa 8.433–439 (# 41), “Taishi You-yan” 大史鬯友甌. Another possible interpretation is to read *you* 鬯 > 友 as 右 and thus as part of the title *taishi you* 大史右, that is “Assistant to (or Associate of) the Grand Secretary.” For this interpretation of the title *neishi you* 內史友 in the *Documents* chapter “Announcement about alcohol,” see Sun Xingyan 1986, 382. What I have translated as “my bright lord-ancestor” has also been interpreted as denoting the historical Duke of Shao; see the discussion in Shirakawa.



1a *You-yan*. After Rong Geng, *Haiwai jijin tulu* (Taipei: Tailian guofeng chubanshe, 1978), 39, plate 12.



1b *You-yan*, rubbing of inscription. After Luo Zhenyu, *Sandai jijin wencun* (N.p., 1936), 5.8b.



2a *Huan-you*. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:605, plate 31B.



2b *Huan-you*, rubbing of inscription. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:605, plate 31A.

It was the nineteenth year; the king was at Gan. Queen Jiang commanded [me.] the Maker of Records, Huan, to conciliate the Elders of Yi. The Elders of Yi visited [me.] Huan in audience, presenting [me] with cowries and cloth. [I, Huan] extol Queen Jiang's blessings and on account of this make for [my] Accomplished Deceased Father [of the] *gui* [day this] precious, honorable sacrificial vessel.⁷⁵

In addition to being cast into the wine vessel, the inscription is also repeated on the inside of its lid, in each location spreading the thirty-five characters over four orderly lines. Furthermore, a slightly shorter inscription by the same donor commemorating the same event is cast inside a separate vessel, a *zun* 尊 wine container, arranging a total of twenty-seven characters in four lines. (Here and in the following counts, characters accompanied by the reduplicative marker “=” are counted as two.) This inscription is decidedly more personal in tone, containing two forms of the first-person pronoun [Ill. 3a–b]:

At Gan, the Lady commanded me, the Maker of Records Huan, to conciliate the Elders of Yi. The Elders of Yi visited [me] in audience, using cowrie and cloth [as gifts]. On account of this, I make for my Accomplished Deceased Father of the *gui* day [this] distinguished, precious X.⁷⁶

A third vessel, this one a *gui* 鬲 (簋) food tureen inscribed with only eight characters, might be by the same donor [Ill. 4]:

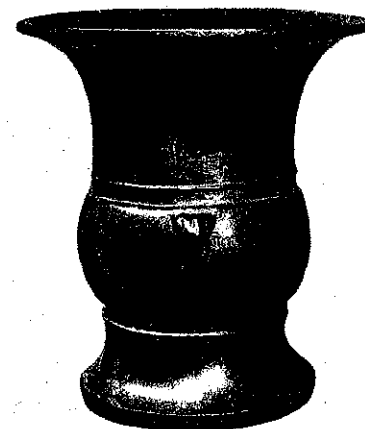
[I,] Huan made [this] precious tureen. May it forever be treasured and used.⁷⁷

In addition to the “statement of dedication,” the third inscription contains a “statement of purpose” (Falkenhausen), another commonly found element in Western Zhou bronze texts. It expresses the donor's

⁷⁵ Shirakawa 5.236–244 (# 22), “Zuoce Huan-you” 作冊鬯卣. For an earlier translation, see Shaughnessy 1991, 174–175. *Gui* 癸 day is the day within the sixty-day cycle on which the father receives sacrifices; some scholars, including Shirakawa, believe that such a designation is characteristic of Shang descendants. My translation differs from that by others in that I believe that Huan, as the royal representative, receives the Elders of Yi in his audience, to which they bring gifts, and not that he goes to their (“Elder Yi's”) audience. Note that the situation—and the syntax of the inscription—is parallel to that of the Shi Song-*gui* 史頌鬲 inscription translated below.

⁷⁶ Shirakawa 5.245–247 (# 22a), “Zuoce Huan-zun” 作冊鬯尊. According to Shirakawa, the last character is an undecipherable symbol for a sacrificial vessel known from a number of other inscriptions. Shaughnessy 1991, 175 takes it as a family emblem.

⁷⁷ Shirakawa 5.247 (# 22b), “Huan-*gui*” 鬯鬲. If indeed by the same donor, this inscription would be an example in which a Maker of Records does not identify himself by his title.



3a Huan-zun. After Huang Jun, *Zunguzhai suojian jijintu* (Beiping: Zunguzhai, 1936), 1.36a.



3b Huan-zun, rubbing of inscription. After Huang Jun, *Zunguzhai suojian jijintu* (Beiping: Zunguzhai, 1936), 1.36b.



4 *Huan-gui*, rubbing of inscription. After Wu Shifen, *Jungulu jinwen* (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1982?), 2A.27b.

wishes for the future, often in the form of a prayer.⁷⁸ By contrast, the first two inscriptions close with the “statement of dedication” which is, however, in each case preceded by a historical account of the donor’s accomplishment. In this “statement of merit,” the Maker of Records presents himself not as a writer but as a royal diplomat. What the three different inscriptions share is the “statement of dedication,” that is, the self-referential formula including both the donor and his ritual object. By contrast, the “historical” part of the “statement of merit” is dispensable. This is clear from the great number of short inscriptions in the format of the *Huan-gui* and the *Taishi You-yan* that do not include information on the situation that led to the casting of the vessel. Even more compellingly, the numerous uninscribed bronze vessels suggest that the production and possession of a vessel itself was of primary significance. While writing almost certainly enhanced the prestige of these ritual objects, it did not constitute them in their meaning, purpose, and functionality.

⁷⁸ See Xu Zhongshu 1936.

The comparison between the *Zuoce Huan-you* and the *Zuoce Huan-zun* further intimates that whatever historical information was related on a vessel could be put in different ways and significantly abbreviated. Thus, what seems to be the historical anchor of the *Zuoce Huan-you* inscription, namely, the initial statement “It was the nineteenth year; the king was at Gan” is left out in the *Zuoce Huan-zun*. At the same time, the *zun* inscription does not contribute any additional information; its purpose rests entirely with the existence of the inscribed vessel itself—even though Huan’s particular choices in casting the *zun* vessel might be somewhat enigmatic. Matsumaru Michio 松丸道雄 has argued that the *you* vessel reflects an underlying official text and was probably cast in the royal foundry (that is, under royal supervision) while the *zun* vessel, which is cruder in its execution and “manifestly inferior” (Shaughnessy) in its calligraphy, expresses a more personal view and was probably cast on Huan’s own authority at a regional foundry.⁷⁹ Considering the diction of the inscription, this is plausible, although it does not explain why Huan chose to have a more “personal” but inferior *zun* cast in the first place (while also owning the *you*) and why he, despite of his exalted position as Maker of Records presumably responsible for royal writing, accepted inferior calligraphy for this purpose. Be this as it may, the calligraphic difference between the two vessels shows that Huan was not in charge of the calligraphy carved into the mold of the *you* vessel (otherwise, he would have been able to reproduce it on his “private” vessel); this task was apparently delegated to a subordinate specialist at the royal court. He may not even have been in control of the calligraphy for his own more “personal” *zun* vessel—or his own writing skills were rather undistinguished. In short, the comparison of the two vessels suggests that despite their official titles, we do not fully know to which extent, and in which specific contexts, the high-level Secretaries and Makers of Records were engaged in the actual clerical work.

Another example of a set of vessels all belonging to the same Secretary shows how variable the expression of donorship was. The Late Western Zhou *gui* 殷 tureen by Secretary Song 頌 (“*Shi Song-gui*” 史頌殷) carries the longest inscription of the set—sixty-two characters neatly arranged in six vertical columns—which is also repeated on three more tureens (repeated in both the vessels and their lids) and two *ding* 鼎 tripods [Ill. 5a–b, 6a–b]:

⁷⁹ Matsumaru 1980, 20–54; Shaughnessy 1991, 174–175. It should be noted, however, that the question of regional foundries is not sufficiently clear; see Rawson 1999, 365–366, 407, 417.



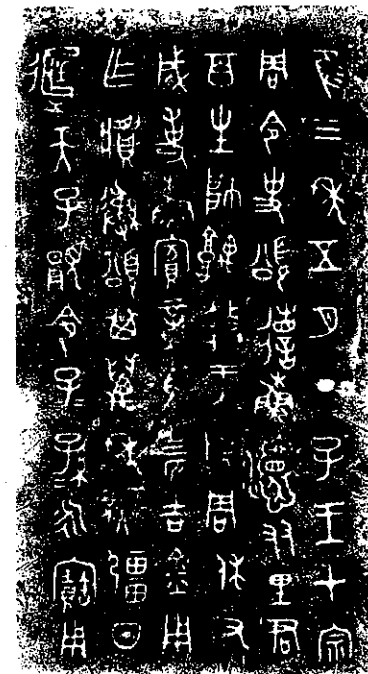
5a Shi Song-gui. After Wang Shimin et al., *Xi Zhou qingtongqi fenqi duandai yanjiu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 90, plate 74.



5b Shi Song-gui, rubbing of inscription in the lid. After Guo Moruo, *Liang Zhou jinwenci daxi tulu kaoshi* (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1957), 2:40a.



6a Shi Song-ding. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:851, plate 206B.



6b Shi Song-ding, rubbing of inscription. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:851, plate 206A.

It was [the king's] third year, the fifth month, the day *dingsi*. The king was in [the western capital] Ancestral Zhou. He commanded [me,] Secretary Song to inspect [the area of] Su. [I] led the [local] officers of [royal] rule, the village eminences, and the noble families [from Su] to assemble and swear [allegiance] in [the eastern capital] Chengzhou.⁸⁰ With [royal?] blessing, [I] accomplished the matter. [The representatives from] Su attended [my] audience [and presented me with] a jade tablet, four horses, and auspicious metal. On account of this, [I] make [this] meat-offering vessel. May [I,] Song [enjoy] ten thousand years without limit, daily extolling the Son of Heaven's illustrious mandate! [May] sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons, forever treasure and use [this vessel]!⁸¹

While this inscription tells about the Secretary's successfully performed duty that finally led to the casting of a whole set of vessels, his *yi* 匜 water container is more laconically inscribed, containing merely fourteen characters (including two reduplicatives) in three lines [Ill. 7a–b]:

[I,] Secretary Song have made [this] *yi*. May [I enjoy] ten thousand years! [May] sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons forever treasure and use [this vessel]!⁸²

The same text, in the same arrangement, is then repeated on another *pan* 盤 water basin with only the vessel designation in the first phrase changed from *yi* to *pan* [Ill. 8].⁸³ Even shorter is, finally, the Secretary's inscription on a *hu* 瑚 food vessel, comprising just six characters [Ill. 9a–b]:

[I,] Secretary Song have made [this] *hu*. [May it] forever be treasured!⁸⁴

Without doubt, Secretary Song, serving as the royal representative in an important mission of inspection, was a man of great stature, and he was richly rewarded for his services. Yet when he, like other men of his position, had his accomplishments recognized by the king and was given permission to have them represented in a bronze vessel, nothing but his official title as Secretary suggested anything about him being a “scribe” or “archivist,” or in any way concerned with writing at the royal court. Indeed, whenever a Secretary or Maker of Records presented his merits cast in bronze, he never dwelled on his being a functionary of writing.

⁸⁰ This line is dubious; my translation follows Shirakawa who also discusses alternatives proposed by other scholars.

⁸¹ Shirakawa 24.174–184 (# 138).

⁸² Shirakawa 24.186–187 (# 138b).

⁸³ Shirakawa 24.188 (# 138d).

⁸⁴ Shirakawa 24.187–188 (# 138c). Shirakawa and others denote the vessel as a *fu* 簠 food container, based on a confusion that goes back to Chinese antiquarians of the Song dynasty. For clarification, see Li Ling 1991, 85.



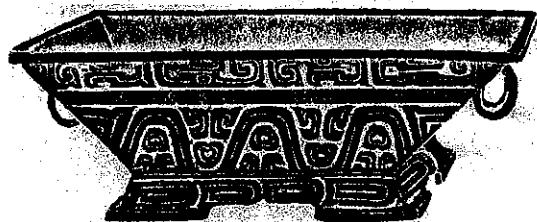
7a Shi Song-yi. After Rong Geng, *Yin Zhou qingtongqi tonglun* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), plate 260.



7b Shi Song-yi, rubbing of inscription. After Guo Moruo, *Liang Zhou jinwenci daxi tulu kaoshi* (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1957), 2:44b.



8 Shi Song-pan, rubbing of inscription. After Guo Moruo, *Liang Zhou jinwenci daxi tulu kaoshi* (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1957), 2:44b.



9a Shi Song-hu. After Chen Baochen, *Chengqiuguan jijin tu* (Taipei: Tailian guofeng chubanshe, 1976), 41.



9b Shi Song-hu, rubbing of inscription. After Chen Baochen, *Chengqiuguan jijin tu* (Taipei: Tailian guofeng chubanshe, 1976), 42.

In the sequence I have listed them here (not intending to suggest their original sequence of production), the Secretary Song inscriptions again show us a continuous focus toward the irreducible core, that is, the “statement of dedication.” In fact, the two possible further reductions would have been, first, to eliminate the final prayer (in the *fu* inscription already shrunk to the two characters *yong bao* 永寶 [“forever treasure”]), leaving the inscription as a pure statement of donorship; this could then, second, be limited to the mere name of the donor. However, in keeping the prayer, the three different inscriptions, cast into a set of at least six different vessels, adhere to a set of conventions that by Late Western Zhou times (but apparently not before) had become overwhelmingly dominant. Note that in the *yi* and *pan* inscriptions, this prayer takes up ten of the fourteen characters.⁸⁵ While Secretary Song does not refer to his activities as a functionary of writing, his inscriptions remain strictly within the confines of the textual and ritual conventions that by Late

⁸⁵ With these numbers, I follow the convention of counting as two characters those that are repeated in the inscription, but written out only once, followed by the marker “=” to indicate their repetition.

Western Zhou times were almost uniformly followed, alongside a standardized calligraphy and vessel design.⁸⁶

Unlike the earlier artifacts and inscriptions discussed so far, the Secretary Song vessels come from the Middle Western Zhou period, beginning in the mid-tenth century BCE, when a series of social, political, and ritual reforms were institutionalized.⁸⁷ Although our sources for Western Zhou history are both tightly limited and heavily biased, evidence from excavated bronze vessels and their inscriptions is indicative of a number of new developments following King Zhao's disastrous military campaign southward that resulted in a "crushing defeat" and the death of the king.⁸⁸ During the following reign of King Mu, power was no longer as concentrated in the royal family as it had been before; instead, large numbers of official appointments were given to members of the elite. Military reforms and land transactions were put into effect. Meanwhile, the eastern part of the realm appears to have slipped from royal control; "inscribed vessels from the middle and late Western Zhou have been found almost exclusively in the western Wei River capital region."⁸⁹ In this time of crisis, as the administrative reforms led to a more complex bureaucracy, they were at the same time represented in new, and elaborate, forms of court ritual. It is one of these rituals, the ceremony of royal appointment, that from now on was given prominent expression in numerous bronze inscriptions.

V. The Appointment Ceremony and the Representation of Writing in Western Zhou Bronze Inscriptions

In the ceremonies of royal appointment, the king (or sometimes a high-level aristocrat) issued a profoundly formulaic "charge" (*ming* 命, also written as *ling* 令, "order") or "bestowal" (*ci* [易>]賜) with which he commanded the appointee to a certain position and bestowed on him the insignia and paraphernalia appropriate to the task. The charge or

⁸⁶ Rawson 1990, vol. IIA, 93, 125; Rawson 1999, 438–439. As noted by Rawson, "a strong centralized control of ritual seems to have been in place"; for bronze design, a "static repertoire" came into being, "limited and reiterated," and of "persistent sameness"—expressing an aesthetic ideology that embraced the bronze object as well as the wording and calligraphy of the inscription.

⁸⁷ After Jessica Rawson's pioneering work on the Middle Western Zhou ritual reform, the centrality of this period for the subsequent reception and perception of Western Zhou civilization is becoming increasingly visible. A notable recent addition to this important research is Falkenhausen 2004a.

⁸⁸ Shaughnessy 1999, 322–323.

⁸⁹ Shaughnessy, 1999, 323–328; see also Li Feng 2000.

bestowal was pronounced orally and at the same time given out in writing on bamboo slips (*ce ming* 冊命/*ce ling* 冊令; *ce ci* 冊[易>]賜); the written charge was then used as the basis for the inscription of a bronze vessel or bell that was cast for the appointee.⁹⁰ It is this kind of vessel, cast not for the king but for the appointee who henceforth used it in the sacrifices to his ancestors, that furnishes the most elaborate references to writing we now have for Western Zhou times. To be sure, royal appointments were also made during the early reigns of the dynasty, and sometimes their record was produced in bronze. Yet of eighty Western Zhou appointment inscriptions noted by Chen Hanping, only three date from the Early Western Zhou period; none of them gives account of the elaborate ritual that we see in Middle and Late Western Zhou inscriptions, and none of them involves reference to the written charge (*ce*).⁹¹

By contrast, beginning in Middle Western Zhou times, the representation of the appointment ceremony in bronze inscriptions—and most likely the ceremony itself—became thoroughly standardized, regardless of the position of the appointee or the particular circumstances of the charge.⁹² There are four Late Western Zhou inscriptions that so far provide the most comprehensive picture of the ceremony: those of the Song-*ding* 頌鼎 tripod (ca. 825 BCE?; repeated on at least three *ding* tripods, five *gui* tureens and their lids, and two *hu* 壺 vases and their lids) [Ill. 10a–b, 11a–b, 12a–b], the X-*ding* 趯鼎 (809 BCE) [Ill. 13a–b], the Huan-*pan* 寰盤 (800 BCE; repeated on at least one *ding* tripod) [Ill. 14a–c], and the Shanfu Shan-*ding* 善夫山鼎 (789 BCE) [Ill. 15a–b].⁹³ The X-*ding* inscription comprises 97 characters:

⁹⁰ Kane 1982–83; Chen Hanping 1986; Wong Yin-wai 1978; Falkenhausen 1993, 156–167. As pointed out by Falkenhausen, the "statement of dedication" and the "statement of purpose" (prayer) were not part of the initial charge but later attached to the version of the charge that was then inscribed.

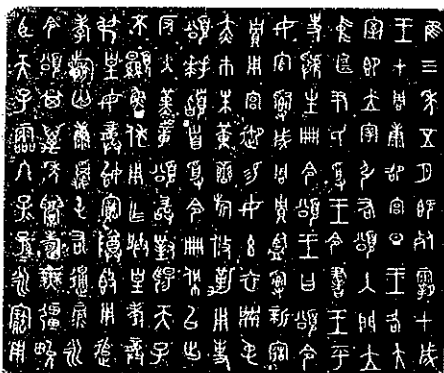
⁹¹ Chen Hanping 1986, 21–25. The three Early Western Zhou vessels are the "Yi hou Ze-*gui*" 宜侯矢鬲 (Shirakawa 10.529–554 [# 52], translated in Lau 1999, 97–104); the above-mentioned "Zhou gong-*gui*" (Shirakawa 11.591–605 [# 59], translated in Dobson 1962, 194–195); and the "Da Yu-*ding*" 大盂鼎 (Shirakawa 12.647–675 [# 61], translated in Dobson 1962, 221–226, and Behr 1996, 155–159).

⁹² Chen Hanping 1986, 28–31.

⁹³ The pronunciation of the character 趯 ("X") is unclear; for the text of the X-*ding* inscription, see Chen Hanping 1986, 26, and Chen Peifen 1982:17. For the Song-*ding* inscription, see Shirakawa 24.165–168 (# 137), with the translation of the *gui* inscription in Shaughnessy 1999, 298–299; for the Shanfu Shan-*ding* inscription, see Shirakawa 26.357–361 (# 154), with the translation in Shaughnessy 1997a, 74–76. For the Huan-*pan* inscription, see Shirakawa 29.590–595 (# 177). Shaughnessy 1999, 298, dates the Song-*gui* (and by implication the other Song vessels) tentatively to 825 BCE. The remaining three inscriptions are fully dated (year, month, day). See also Shaughnessy 1991, 285, Table A16.



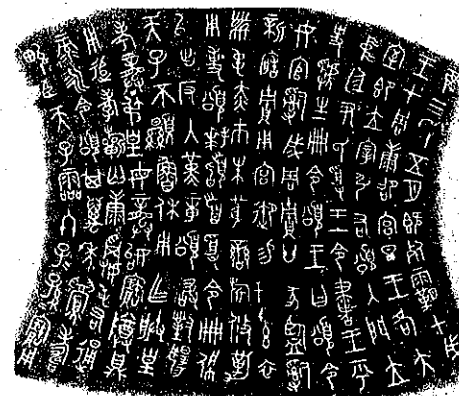
10a *Song-gui*. After Wang Shimin et al., *Xi Zhou qingtongqi fenqi duandai yanjiu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 87, plate 71.



10b *Song-gui*, rubbing of inscription. After Wang Shimin et al., *Xi Zhou qingtongqi fenqi duandai yanjiu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 87, plate 71.



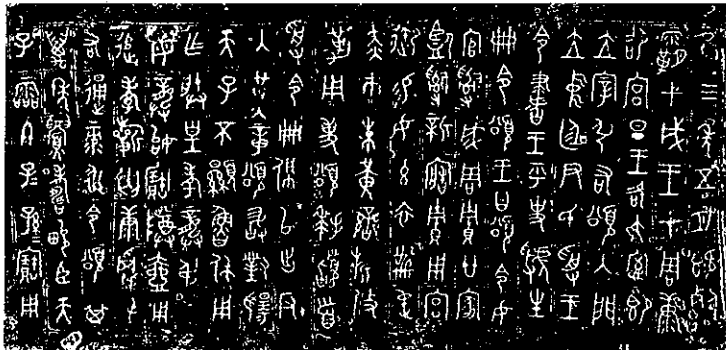
11a *Song-ding*. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:831, plate 192B.



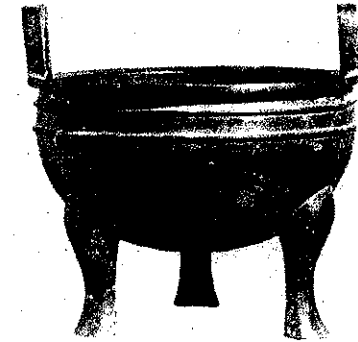
11b *Song-ding*, rubbing of inscription. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:831, plate 192A.



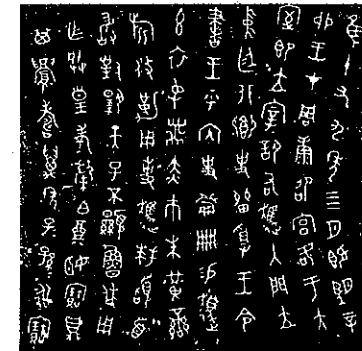
12a Song-hu. After Rong Xibai (= Rong Geng), *Shang Zhou yiqi tongkao tulu* (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1983), 383, plate 724.



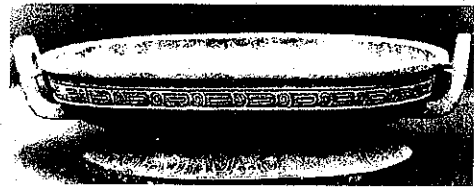
12b Song-hu, rubbing of inscription. After Wang Shimin et al., *Xi Zhou qingtongqi fenqi duandai yanjiu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 137, plate 17.



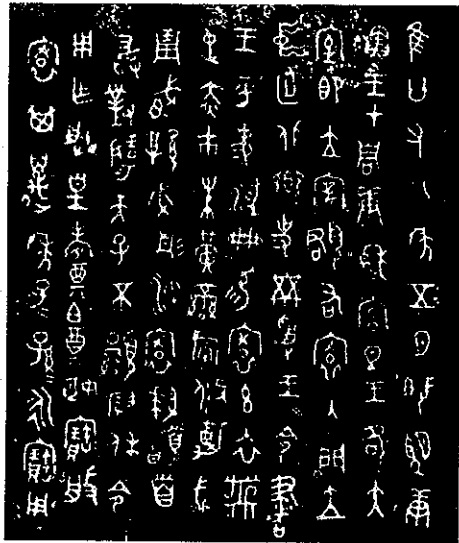
13a X-ding. After Wang Shimin et al., *Xi Zhou qingtongqi fenqi duandai yanjiu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 45, plate 76.



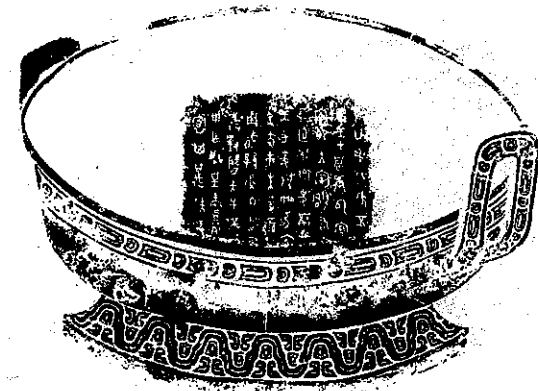
13b X-ding, rubbing of inscription. After Wang Shimin et al., *Xi Zhou qingtongqi fenqi duandai yanjiu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 45, plate 76.



14a Huan-pan. After Wang Shimin et al., *Xi Zhou qingtongqi fenqi duandai yanjiu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 155, plate 10.



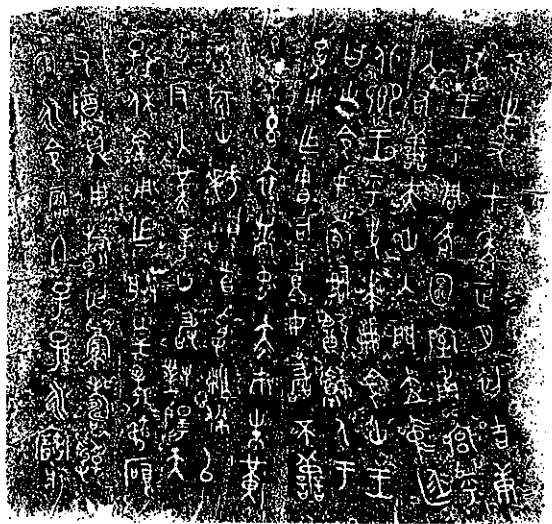
14b Huan-pan, rubbing of inscription. After Wang Shimin et al., *Xi Zhou qingtongqi fenqi duandai yanjiu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 155, plate 10.



14c Huan-pan, rubbing of vessel and inscription. After Guo Moruo, *Liang Zhou jinwenci daxi tulu kaoshi* (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1957), 1:18b, plate 158.



15a Shanfu Shan-ding. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:837, plate 198B.



15b Shanfu Shan-*ding*, rubbing of inscription. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:837, plate 198A.

It was the nineteenth year, the fourth month, after the full moon, the day *xinmao*. The king was in the Zhao [Temple] of the Kang Palace. He arrived at the Great Chamber and assumed his position. Assisted to his right by Intendant Xun, [I,] X entered the gate. [I] assumed [my] position in the center of the court, facing north [toward the king]. Secretary Liu⁹⁴ presented⁹⁵ the king with the written order. The king called out to the Secretary of the Interior, Y,⁹⁶ to announce the written bestowal to [me,] X: “[I bestow on you] a black jacket with embroidered hem, red kneepads, a scarlet demi-circlet, a chime pennant, and a bridle with bit and cheek-pieces; use [these] to perform your service!”⁹⁷ [I] bowed with my head

⁹⁴ Chen Peifen 1982, 19, interprets *liu* 留 as *zhou* 籀, the name of the Secretary that only Eastern Han sources—900 years later!—like Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) in *Hanshu* 1987, 30.1719, or, around 100 CE, Xu Shen in *Shuowen jiezi* 1988, 15A.11b–12a, ascribe to the reign of King Xuan (r. 827–782 BCE). While the reading of *liu* as *zhou* is entirely possible, and the inscription indeed dates from the King Xuan era, the understanding of *liu* as reference to Secretary Zhou (whom the later sources credit with the development of a new calligraphic style and the compilation of a character list) remains speculative.

⁹⁵ Reading *shou* 受 as *shou* 授, as commonly suggested by Chinese and Japanese scholars; see, e.g., Chen Hanping 1986, 27, on the present inscription; Shirakawa (24.159) on the Song-*hu*; Wang Guowei 1975a, 1.18a, on the Song-*ding* and Huan-*pan*.

⁹⁶ Again, the name of this Secretary of the Interior is unclear.

⁹⁷ I provisionally follow Shaughnessy in the translation of the various paraphernalia.

touching the ground. [May I] dare in response to extol the Son of Heaven's greatly illustrious and abundant blessings and on account of this make for my August Deceased Father, the Elder Zheng(?), and his wife Zheng [this] precious tripod! May [I enjoy] extended longevity for ten thousand years! May sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons, forever treasure [this tripod]!⁹⁸

This text is extremely similar, in large parts even verbatim identical, to the other three inscriptions. Regardless of the previous status of the appointee, and despite the different kinds of new appointments being given, the list of rewarded insignia, for example, is identical in three inscriptions and only slightly extended in the Huan-*pan*. This fact alone testifies to a written institutional memory at the Zhou royal court of King Xuan 宣 (827–782 BCE), considering that the inscriptions date from 825(?), 809, 800, and 789 BCE⁹⁹ and that their bronze carriers were in the possession of different individuals. However, both the present text and the Huan-*pan* are slightly shorter than their counterparts in the representation of the award ceremony. The Song and Shanfu Shan inscriptions contain an important additional component immediately before the “statement of purpose.” In the Song inscriptions, the text reads:

[I,] Song, bowed with my head touching the ground; [I] received the bamboo slips with the [written] order and suspended them from my girdle before exiting. In return, [I] brought in a jade tablet.

In the Shanfu Shan-*ding* inscription, the corresponding passage goes:

[I,] Shan bowed with my head touching the ground; [I] received the bamboo slips with the [written] order and suspended them from my girdle before exiting. In return, [I] brought in a jade tablet.

It is unclear what the jade tablet refers to. The first part of the passage, however, is unambiguous: the appointee receives the written charge and takes it with him (no doubt, a copy was kept in the royal archive). The

⁹⁸ Chen Peifen 1982, 17–20; Chen Hanping 1986, 26.

⁹⁹ There might be a more immediate connection between the Huan-*pan* and the X-*ding* inscriptions, namely, that both vessels might have been dedicated to the same ancestors. In the X-*ding* inscription, the father's name is written with a graph that Chen Peifen has transcribed as 𠄎 and Chen Hanping as 𠄎. It is not impossible—though quite speculative—that the graph is a graphic variant of *zheng* 正, which might be understood as *zheng* 正 (“correct”), signifying not a lineage name but a posthumous temple name (“the Correct One”). This, in fact, is how the graph *zheng* [奠 >] 鄭 that appears in both inscriptions as the name of the mother has been interpreted in the case of the Huan-*pan* (where it also appears as the name of the father); see Shirakawa 29.594.

vast majority of Middle and Late Western Zhou appointment inscriptions mention neither the initially written order (*lingshu* 令書) nor the appointee's exiting with the inscribed charge appended to his body; they simply provide the text of the royal appointment charge, often introduced by "the king says" (*wang yue* 王曰).¹⁰⁰ However, it is clear that the charge was always issued in an elaborate, strictly orchestrated and standardized court ritual, and that this ceremony—or, more precisely, that part of the ceremony that focused on the appointment proper—is represented most extensively in the Song and Shanfu Shan inscriptions.

The textual performance that emerges from these standardized descriptions—note the uniformity not only of the performances but also of their inscribed records—is a complex interplay between the oral and the written performance of text, and it includes Secretaries or Makers of Records in both. First, prior to the appointment ceremony, a written order was prepared at court. After the ritual participants formally assumed their positions, a Secretary handed the order to the king. The king then called out to a second Secretary who read the written order to the appointee. Then, the document was given to the appointee who attached it to his girdle. After the ceremony, this written charge served as the basis for the bronze inscription that was cast in the appointee's name, though probably still under royal supervision. Since the appointee, now vessel donor, henceforth used the inscribed vessel in the sacrifices to his ancestors, the "statement of dedication" and the "statement of purpose" (being the prayer to the ancestors) were attached to those parts of the original written charge that were to be represented on the vessel. Within the vessel donor's own ceremonies, that is, the sacrifices to his ancestors, the written word was probably again transformed into a spoken announcement and prayer to the ancestors and integrated into another elaborate performance that included food and wine offerings, dance, music, song, and perhaps additional features.¹⁰¹

The original appointment ceremony was thus focused on the presentation and handover of a written document. In an illocutionary speech act on behalf of the king, the Secretary presented—by reading it out

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed discussion of this phrase and its ceremonial implications, see Falkenhausen 2004.

¹⁰¹ Such interaction between the written and the oral is not unusual for complex civilizations where a highly developed ritual system of oral performances becomes combined with writing; for early Greece, see Thomas 1992, 61–65.

loud—the document, thus bringing the appointment under the full ritual force and imposing dignity of the royal ceremony. In a number of inscriptions, such as in the one on the Shanfu Shan-*ding*, this force is further magnified by the king issuing a stern imperative in conjunction with the appointment: "Do not dare not to be good!" (*wu gan bu shan mu gan bu shan*).¹⁰² The written document was important, but it was its ritual performance, with the king personally present, that sealed its authority. It is at this point where the function of the Secretary comes in. The king did not read to the appointee; all he did was to maintain his position. His chief ritualist and representative read: he led the functionaries of the written word, but he also was the master of its transformation back into what was perceived as the original royal speech act. The king, as far as we can tell from the inscriptions, controlled and approved the document—which represented his spoken voice—through his mere presence at the ceremony when the text was recited to the appointee.

Here, we recognize the ceremony to be not only of ritual but also of legal significance. Just at the time when the appointment ceremony became a major part of Western Zhou administration and ritual, that is, in the Middle Western Zhou period, inscriptions on legal contracts also appeared in larger numbers.¹⁰³ One characteristic feature of these inscriptions is that they meticulously list the names and titles of the officials that served as witnesses at the time of the legal agreement. I propose that in the bronze inscriptions representing appointment ceremonies, the same logic is in place: especially from the appointee's perspective, it was important that his bronze vessel, which was sanctioned by the court, included the names and titles of the officials who delivered the appointment (and hence the right to have the vessel cast). This record, ceremonial as it was, thus forever related the very existence of the bronze vessel to the official, bureaucratically verified original event of the appointment ceremony. This might have been particularly important when in later generations, the personal memory of the ceremony and even of the appointee himself was no longer available, while the vessel was still being used in the family's ancestral sacrifices. Inscriptions like those under discussion enlisted both the king and his chief officials as witnesses of the appointment.

¹⁰² See also Kane 1982–83, 16–17.

¹⁰³ Lau 1999; Schunk 1994; Skosey 1996.

VI. "Recording" or "Announcing"? The Problem of *Ce* 冊

Before continuing the analysis, it is perhaps necessary to address, and then to put aside, a different reading of the inscriptions just discussed. In his prominent translations and discussions of the Song and Shanfu Shan inscriptions, Edward L. Shaughnessy has consistently interpreted *ce ming* not as "to read out loud the written charge" but as "to record" it, thus assuming not an oral performance but an act of writing.¹⁰⁴ He translates the pertinent passage in the Song-*gui* as follows: "Yinshi (that is, the Overseer, a functionary of writing, MK) received the king's command document. The king called out to Scribe Guo Sheng to record the command to Song." Consider the sequence of action: the Overseer receives the writing, and then the king calls for a scribe to put it into writing. I find such a sequence awkward and unlikely. First, as many Chinese and Japanese commentators agree, the Overseer does not receive the writing from the king, but the king receives it from the Overseer (the respective graph in the original Chinese allows either choice). This is most logical; so far, we have only been told that the king "assumed his position"—after walking in with the written charge already in hand? Is this how kings behave in court ritual? The opposite is far more likely: the king assumes his position and only then is given the document, which he passes on to the Secretary. This sequence is important: surely, the king has not written the document, but it is nevertheless issued by him, and thus has to physically pass through his hands.

Even more important than this point is the following one, that is, the interpretation of the technical terms *ce ming* and *ce ci*. The problem rests with *ce* 冊 which here I do not interpret as "recording" but as "announcing" or "reciting" the charge or bestowal¹⁰⁵—despite the fact that it is normally understood as "bamboo document." A strong force

¹⁰⁴ Shaughnessy 1999, 298. Similarly, Shaughnessy 1997, 76, translates the corresponding passage of the Shanfu Shan-*ding* inscription as "The king called out to Scribe Hui to record the command to Shan." The same reading can be found in Wong Yin-wai 1978, 95.

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that Chen Mengjia 1985, 149–160, offered the same understanding five decades ago. Likewise, Chen Hanping 1986, 12–20, 116–117, is perfectly clear. Unfortunately, Western translators of classical Chinese texts, including James Legge and Bernhard Karlgren, have mostly missed the point. As a result, the misunderstanding now even dominates the entry on *ce* in Schuessler's widely used dictionary 1987, 55–56.

in the common interpretation of the word *ce* has been the analysis of the graph which even in its modern form appears like a pictogram of bamboo slips held together by a chord (in the way bamboo slips were indeed bundled).¹⁰⁶ Yet while graphic deciphering is as attractive as it is in most cases fallacious, there is indeed sufficient Western Zhou (and certainly later) textual evidence for *ce* as "bamboo document." It does not follow, however, that this meaning is exclusive; that it is dominant in compounds like *ce ming* or *ce ci*, or that there exists a verbal meaning of "to record" (as in "to record the command").

Ce ming can be taken either as an adverb-verb phrase or as a verb-object phrase. The king may "command by means of *ce*," or he might "*ce* the command." There is support for both readings, as both *ming* and *ce* function both nominally and verbally in early texts. While the verb *ming* is followed by the direct object of the person who is being "commanded," the verb *ce* takes as its direct object a certain matter like a "command" or a "bestowal." One might feel more inclined to read the common appointment phrase "The king called out to Secretary X to command Person Y by using the bamboo document" but it remains worthwhile to consider the appearance of verbal *ce* in Late Shang oracle bone inscriptions. Here, the index compiled by Matsumaru Michio 松丸道雄 and Takashima Ken'ichi 高嶋謙—¹⁰⁷ furnishes a wide array of cases where scholars have understood the word *ce* (in its various written forms including 冊, 冊, and 冊) not just as "bamboo slips" but—perhaps altogether more often—in several other meanings, in particular including (a) "to announce" or "to announce through prayer," (b) "to stab" or "to chop off," and (c) "to enclose" or "to confine."¹⁰⁸ In most cases, Chinese and Japanese scholars of the past century have identified these acts as ritual procedures performed in conjunction with royal sacrifices (and even *ce* itself has occasionally been understood as the name of a royal sacrifice). Looking for the common etymological core in the various proposed meanings of *ce*, I am inclined toward the bi-directional notion of both "taking (the

¹⁰⁶ For a faithful rehearsal of these interpretations, see Zhang Yuqiang 1994.

¹⁰⁷ Matsumaru and Takashima 1994, # 31, 259–262, 585.

¹⁰⁸ He Jinsong 1996, 200–205, has argued with particular force that the graph *ce* 冊 in early oracle bone and bronze inscriptions does not represent bundled bamboo slips but conjoined wooden palisades, and that *ce* 冊 is just written for *zha* 柵. One may not need to be persuaded by the graphic interpretation (although it seems stronger than in many other cases) in order to see how it matches the verbal meaning of "to enclose/to confine."

sacrificial victims) into possession" (including by stabbing them) and "giving (the ancestors) possession over (the victims)" (again including by killing them). In fact, as amply illustrated by Shirakawa, *ce* in oracle bone inscriptions frequently governs two objects: the direct object of the sacrificial victims and the indirect object of the ancestors to whom, or for whom, the victims are "*ce*-ed."¹⁰⁹ Writing may very well have been involved to produce a record of securing and presenting the sacrificial victims to the spirits—in the same way as the Shang kings greatly valued the production of their oracle records—but it was an act of secondary, auxiliary order, compared to the actual sacrifice. By contrast, one can easily imagine how—parallel to the appointment inscriptions on bronze vessels discussed above—the "announcing" of the sacrificial victims to the spirits was the central illocutionary speech act that transformed the procedure of merely slaughtering the victims into one of piously sacrificing them.

By contrast, Creel's proposal that *ce* 冊 means "book," 冊 "to communicate with the spirits by means of a book," and 冊 "to tell by means of a book"¹¹⁰ is based entirely on speculation about the combination of the semantic classifiers *shi* 示 ("spirits") and *yue* 曰 ("to speak") with the graph *ce*. However, as is well documented in virtually every excavated text, semantic classifiers were not nearly as neatly employed as in much later (post-Han) periods. In early texts, the presence or absence of a particular classifier is in no case a definite indication of the implied word; graphs like *ce* 冊, 冊, and 冊 were readily interchangeable. Xu Shen's *Shuowen jiezi* is an energetic if at times forced attempt to respond to this problem, and excavated manuscripts with their numerous graphic variants allow us to finally comprehend the magnitude of his project.¹¹¹ Xu Shen, who glossed *ce* 冊 as "documentary charge" (*fuming* 符命),¹¹² was a champion of the written word; but he glossed 冊 simply as *gao* 告 ("to announce"), leaving it to the late imperial commentator Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815) to imagine the meaning that was then later put into English by Creel.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Shirakawa 1974, 109–112.

¹¹⁰ Creel 1937a, 38.

¹¹¹ See Kern 2005; Kern 2003a; Kern 2002.

¹¹² *Shuowen jiezi* 1988, 2B.32b. Xu likely alludes to the use of bamboo slips as "tal-lies" (*fu* 符) inscribed with an official order on two matching halves; on such tallies, see Falkenhausen 2005.

¹¹³ *Shuowen jiezi* 1988, 5A.28a.

Considering the proximity between the bronze inscriptions and the early *Documents* speeches, it is imperative to examine also the latter in order to reach a conclusion on *ce ming*. As noted above, there are a number of chapters from the *Documents* and one chapter from the *Remnant Zhou Documents* that mention Secretaries, Makers of Records, or the use of documents. Four passages pertain to our discussion of *ce*:¹¹⁴

The passage in "The metal-bound coffer" reads as follows: *shi nai ce zhu yue* 史乃冊祝曰.¹¹⁵ Here, the phrase *ce zhu* 冊祝 is followed by *yue* 曰 ("saying"), which introduces the actual wording of the prayer given as a direct address to the spirits. *Ce zhu* is parallel to *ce ming* in the appointment inscriptions; as the ruler addresses his subordinates with a "charge" or "command" (*ming*), he speaks to his ancestral spirits with a "prayer/invocation" (*zhu*). In both cases he is represented by the Secretary. Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753–1818), the authoritative late imperial commentator on the *Documents*, suspected that the (lost) early Han version of the text in ancient characters (*guwen* 古文) might have written 冊 instead of 冊, thus meaning "to announce," as the graph had been glossed in the *Shuowen jiezi*.¹¹⁶ For *ce zhu*, Sun thus suggests "to announce the prayer to the spirits." This is not to doubt that the text indeed implies a written prayer; after all, it was stored in a coffer, and the slips (*ce*) were later taken out and consulted. But as Sun rightly points out, this does not mean that the two instances of *ce* need to be same word. Sun's reading of *ce zhu* is hence fully compatible with both the Western Zhou bronze inscriptions and the verbal use of *ce* in Late Shang oracle bone passages (while neither set of data was available to him).

The second relevant passage is in "The announcement concerning Luo." Here, the text reads *wang ming zuoce Yi zhu ce, wei gao Zhou Gong qi hou* 王命作冊逸祝冊，惟告周公其後。Commentators and translators differ about the meaning of the specific contents of the "announcement" (*gao* 告)—whether the Duke of Zhou is said to stay behind, or whether his successor is named¹¹⁷—but this does not concern us here. Parallel to the bronze inscriptions, the first five characters read "The king commanded the Maker of Records, Yi"; this is then followed by the

¹¹⁴ For the sake of space, I will refrain from discussing how I differ from the earlier *Documents* translations by Legge and Karlgren.

¹¹⁵ Compare Legge 1985, 353; Karlgren 1950, 35.

¹¹⁶ Sun Xingyan 1986, 13.325. Note, however, that this again confuses graphic deciphering with the interpretation of the word.

¹¹⁷ Compare Legge 1985, 451; Karlgren 1950, 55; Dobson 1962, 162.

command “[to present] the prayer document” (*zhu ce* 祝冊). The early commentator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) paraphrases the sentence as follows: “[The king] orders Secretary Yi to read out loud (*du* 讀) the written prayer and inform the spirits...”¹¹⁸ Sun Xingyan fully approves, explicating that Zheng Xuan refers to the *speaking* of the inscribed prayer (*yan zhu ce* 言祝冊).¹¹⁹ As in the previous passage, there is no reason to doubt that the prayer was indeed inscribed, and that the Maker of Records was called upon to perform the speech act of addressing it to the spirits. In the very next—the penultimate—paragraph of the same chapter, the text reads *wang ming Zhou Gong hou, zuoce Yi gao* 王命周公後，作冊逸誥。¹²⁰ Again leaving considerations about the Duke of Zhou aside, we turn to the unproblematic phrase *zuoce Yi gao* 作冊逸誥, “the Maker of Records, Yi, made the announcement (*gao* 誥),” showing the Maker of Records in his usual role as *speaking* for the king.

The third passage, “The testamentary charge,” reads *dingmao, ming zuo ce du* 丁卯，命作冊度。¹²¹ In this sentence, which stands isolated, *zuo ce* may best be taken as a verb-object phrase, “to make a bamboo document.”¹²² Thus, two days after the king’s death, “an order was given to make a document [of the deceased king’s testamentary charge] and [lay out the ritual] regulations.”¹²³ This charge is then mentioned again later in the text, when the court assembly gathers for the funeral: *taishi bing shu, you bin jieji, yu wang ce ming yue* 太史秉書，由賓階階，御王冊命曰，¹²⁴ with the final verb *yue* (“saying”) being directly followed by the king’s charge. Having ascended the stairs, the Grand Secretary, holding the testamentary charge of the dead king, turns toward the new king and—in Zheng Xuan’s paraphrase—“reads out loud” (*du* 讀) to him the document of his late father.¹²⁵ In other words, the Grand Secretary here

¹¹⁸ Sun Xingyan 1986, 19.419.

¹¹⁹ Sun Xingyan 1986, 19.420.

¹²⁰ Compare Legge 1985, 452; Karlgren 1950, 55.

¹²¹ Compare Legge 1985, 549–551; Karlgren 1950, 70.

¹²² Wang Guowei 1975a, 1.10b, however, takes *zuoce* as the usual title and *du* as the name of the Maker of Records. This would result in “On the day *dingmao*, one issued a command to the Maker of Records, Du.”

¹²³ As suggested by Sun Xingyan 1986, 25.487, who surmises that *du* 度 (“regulations”)—which I take here as a verb “to lay out regulations”—refers to the funerary and mourning rites.

¹²⁴ Compare Legge 1985, 558; Karlgren 1950, 71.

¹²⁵ Sun Xingyan 1986, 25.501–502; Wang Guowei 1975a, 1.18a. (Wang Guowei takes issue with Zheng Xuan only on the question where the reading takes place; see also 1.23b–25a.)

still speaks as the representative of his king (now dead), announcing the charge to the new ruler. Here, we see precisely the formula used in the bronze inscriptions, that is, *ce ming* “to announce the written charge” (or “to command by means of the document”). No passage could be clearer about the function of the Grand Secretary in Western Zhou court ritual and about the specific meaning of the technical term of ritual language, *ce ming*. With the originator of the charge already dead, and the Secretary holding his written charge in hand, the idea of *ce ming* as “recording the charge” gives up the ghost.

The last pertinent passage in any received text of possibly Western Zhou date is found in “The great capture” chapter from *Remnant Zhou Documents*: descending from his chariot, the victorious king lets “Secretary Yi read out loud (繇 > 籀 = *du* 讀) the written document to Heaven.”¹²⁶ Again, the passage is unambiguous: the Secretary announces the king’s written message, addressing Heaven.

This review of the available early evidence¹²⁷ should suffice to rectify our understanding of an exceptionally important set of inscriptions together with some equally important passages from the *Documents*. Turning now back to the Western Zhou appointment inscriptions, we no longer wonder how the Secretary could have been formally “recording” the charge during the apparently quite brief ceremony. We also do not struggle to reconcile two contemporaneous but entirely different images of the Secretary: the one of Secretaries as vessel donors who never dwell on their accomplishments of writing, and the one of Secretaries in appointment inscriptions who do nothing but writing. Instead, both types of inscriptions consistently show the Secretary as the main representative of the king. He goes on diplomatic and military missions, he leads various kinds of rituals, and he announces the royal appointments. In the broader terms of cultural history, understanding the interplay of speech and writing in Western Zhou court ritual is imperative to a better grasp of this foundational period of the Chinese cultural tradition. Confusion about the single phrase *ce ming* easily lends itself to precariously inflated statements about the nature and use of writing.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Huang Huaixin et al. 1995, 464–465; Shaughnessy 1980–81, 59.

¹²⁷ I have deliberately limited myself to the earliest sources. For a survey of pertinent passages in Eastern Zhou texts, see Chen Mengjia 1985, 160–164.

¹²⁸ Cf. the sweeping conclusions advanced in Shaughnessy 1999, 298–299.

VII. *Bronze Inscriptions and Literacy*

Finally, in order to appreciate the actual representation of writing in Western Zhou texts and artifacts, two points regarding the issue of Western Zhou literacy need to be added. First, the large number of inscriptions does not constitute evidence for widespread, general literacy (regardless of however common administrative writing may have been).¹²⁹ Here, we must keep in mind that the casting of vessels, inscribed or not, must have remained under some system of royal control. Especially from Middle Western Zhou times onward, this is evident from the uniformity not only of the wording of the inscriptions but also of their calligraphic execution as well as of the shape and design of the vessels themselves. Only some kind of centralized control over the casting of bronze vessels could have ensured this degree of standardization.¹³⁰ Here, it is helpful to recall Matsumaru Michio's suggestion about the Huan-*zun* and Huan-*you* vessels, namely, that the one is an official product (a well-cast vessel, an inscribed text of official diction, professional calligraphy) while the other is a private one (inferior casting, a more personal text, comparatively poor calligraphy). If this is correct, and if the "official" vessel matches the standards of its time, then it must have come from some centralized agency. At the same time, the various characteristics of the "private" vessel would be evidence that even with the existence of local foundries, the work of the central agency was not easily reproduced elsewhere, not even by one of the highest dignitaries of the state.¹³¹

The second, related point to observe is that we do not need to assume that the appointees (or vessel donors in general) were actually literate.

¹²⁹ I believe it is important to separate these two functions of writing, and types of literacy, for the pre-imperial period. The fact that a particular clerk could create administrative records does not mean that he was able to reproduce the language employed in bronze inscriptions, nor do bronze inscriptions presuppose such clerks as their readers.

¹³⁰ Rawson 1999, 438; 1990, vol. IIA, 93, 125.

¹³¹ Li Feng 1997, 40 has argued that in a number of cases where we have inscriptions of the same text appearing on multiple vessels, the different calligraphic styles are evidence of different scribal hands. From this, he concludes "that the person who composed the inscription was not the person who inscribed it." This is certainly true. One may even go a step further and note that the person in whose name the vessel was cast (the donor) was not necessarily always the composer of the inscription—he may have instructed someone else to do this for him, perhaps in a particular diction, on the basis of the existing bamboo documents or earlier inscriptions. Or, as the uniformity even of the prayer sections suggest (not to mention the official appointment records), some centralized guidance was in place.

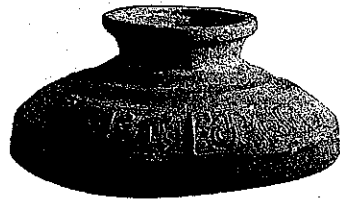
According to the by now extensive archaeological record, the case of the Huan vessels is exceptional but not unique. Normally, a vessel donor did not commission his additional private casting in addition to the one that adhered to official standards. While some bronze donors—certainly the Secretaries and Makers of Records—may have been literate, this was not a prerequisite for them to have their vessels cast by able hands working under the supervision of the royal court. We may consider two other cases where the text of an earlier, "official" vessel was duplicated on a clearly lower, presumably local level. For the lids of the two Shi Yun 師 鬲 *gui* tureens [Ill. 16a-d], Matsumaru has shown that the person who copied the characters into the new mold was illiterate.¹³² Similarly, for the Ke-*lei* 克 罍 and Ke-*he* 盨 vessels [Ill. 17a-d], Li Feng has concluded that "if, as is most likely, the Ke *lei* inscriptions were inscribed by a well educated and skillful scribe, the structural shortcomings and inferior artistic features of the inscriptions of the Ke *he* suggest that they must have been inscribed by a semi-literate man."¹³³ Remarkably, in either case this did not stop the high-ranking donor from having his vessel cast and from then keeping it no matter what—which suggests either that these donors did not think of the mistakes as impairing the integrity, functionality, and prestige of their inscriptions, or that they themselves could not tell the difference. Anyway, a donor's literacy was not imperative to having a vessel cast, nor was it required for knowing the inscribed text. In the case of an appointment inscription, he knew the royal charge because it had been recited to him during the ceremony. If he ever forgot it, he did not have to flip through his bamboo slips or peek into the depth of his vessel. A cursory glance at his "black jacket with embroidered hem, red kneepads, scarlet demi-circlet, chime pennant, and bridle with bit and cheekpieces" (or anything else of that order) would have sufficed.

VIII. *Conclusion: The Representation of Writing in the Western Zhou Period*

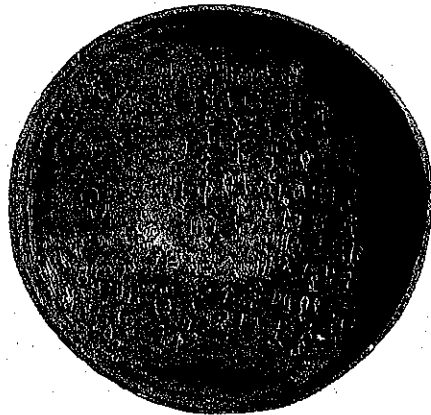
When thinking about the nature and purpose of writing at the Western Zhou royal court (including its political extensions), the question to ask

¹³² Matsumaru 1980, 55–75. The vessels date from the end of the Western Zhou or somewhat thereafter.

¹³³ Li Feng 1997, 12.



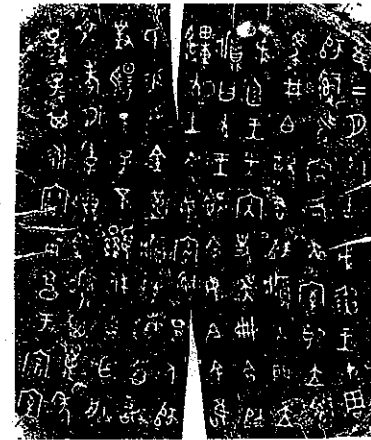
16a *Shi Yun-gui*, lid of vessel 1, outside. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:713, plate 119B.



16b *Shi Yun-gui*, lid of vessel 1, inside. After Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 2:713, plate 119B.



16c *Shi Yun-gui*, rubbing of inscription in lid of vessel 1. After Matsumaru Michio, *Seishû seidôki to sono kokka* (Tokyo: Tôkyô daigaku shuppankai, 1980), 56, plate 9.



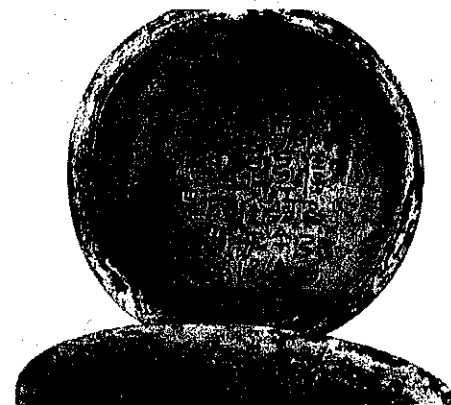
16d *Shi Yun-gui*, rubbing of inscription in lid of vessel 2. After Matsumaru Michio, *Seishû seidôki to sono kokka* (Tokyo: Tôkyô daigaku shuppankai, 1980), 57, plate 10.



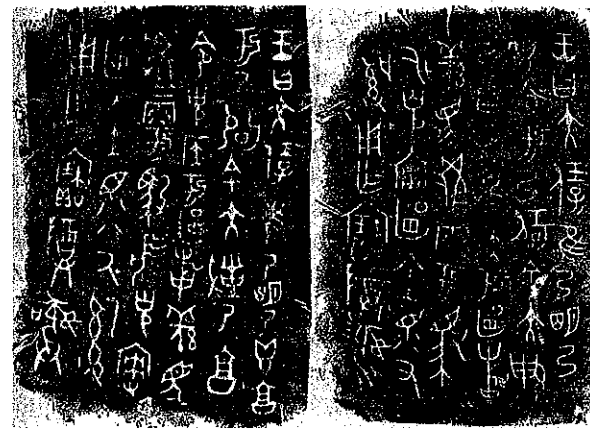
17a *Ke-lei*. After *Kaogu* 1990.1, color plate 3.2.



17b *Ke-he*. After *Kaogu* 1990.1, color plate 3.1.



17c *Ke-he*, inscription in lid. After *Kaogu* 1990.1, color plate 3.3.



17d *Ke-he* and *Ke-lei*. Rubbings of inscriptions in *Ke-lei* (left) and *Ke-he* (right). After *Kaogu* 1990.1:25, plate 4.

is not about the existence of written texts but about how written texts are part and parcel of the Western Zhou system of elaborate religious and political court ritual. There is an invisible but unmistakable textual basis for the highly ritualized manifestations and usages of bronze writing, furnished by clerks specializing in the production of administrative and archival documents. But this writing is not representational or self-referential. It does not explicitly draw attention to its own existence. It becomes representational, however, as soon as it is transformed into an item of display, connected to a material artifact of ostentatious prestige, and integrated in the context of ritual performance. Here, the written text is more and less than what it says. It is less because it is only one version of a text that exists also in other, often even more complete versions, and because it unfolds its full relevance only in acts of ritualized presentation. On the other hand, it is more: transcending its contents, it renders visible the prestige of its donor, it assumes the force and authority that rested with both its precious material carrier and the performance in which the written text was presented, and it further contributes to the overall system of Western Zhou public display and cultural memory.

For good reasons, bronze inscriptions recorded not merely the royal charge but also the original appointment ceremony. Through the use of the vessel in the donor's ancestral sacrifices, this royal ceremony remained present for "ten thousand years" and with "sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons" who in later generations sacrificed to the original donor as their ancestor. That from Middle Western Zhou times onward, bronze vessels, their inscribed texts, and the calligraphy of these inscriptions became increasingly standardized may be seen as more than just a phenomenon of mass production (which it certainly also was). From the royal perspective, it was an expression of a mature political and ritual system (even while, or perhaps precisely because, actual political stability was deteriorating) that claimed pious adherence to the model established by the dynastic founders. From the perspective of the vessel donor, it integrated his achievements and status into the overall social and political system of the Western Zhou, representing his duties and merits as a tangible extension of the royal court itself.

The received Western Zhou literature leaves no doubt about the display nature of writing in important court affairs. Royal prayers and charges like those mentioned in the *Documents* were prepared in writing and then recited. During the recitation, the written text did not just serve as an *aide-mémoire* but was presented and accepted in an expression of dignified demeanor, emphatically supporting and—attached to

the girdle of the recipient—materially embodying the spoken word. It also must have been significant that the masters of ritual, who on so many different occasions spoke in the king's voice, bore titles like "Secretary" and "Maker of Records" even though they may have been primarily readers and announcers—as opposed to writers—of the many documents that, perhaps, their lower-ranked clerks regularly produced for them. Moreover, what David N. Keightley has noted for Late Shang oracle bone inscriptions is true for Western Zhou bronze inscriptions as well: "I conceive of the inscriptions as a form of conspicuous cultural capital, in which the Shang elites invested considerable labor resources to produce artifacts whose overwhelming value was ritual."¹³⁴ Unlike the Late Shang bovine shoulder blades or turtle plastrons that were first used in oracle-taking and only thereafter incised with the divination record, inscriptions on bronze vessels were cast together with their material carriers. They were an intrinsic part of elaborate artifacts that displayed material value, technological mastery, and control over the cultural tradition.

The inscribed text was but a secondary or tertiary version, to some extent adapted to the religious use of the vessel, of a preexisting record.¹³⁵ In other words, the text proper did not depend on the bronze vessel for its existence. It transcended any particular material carrier not only because it also existed elsewhere in perishable but easily stored and readily reproducible form. Especially from Middle Western Zhou times onward, the same inscription was often also cast into a whole series of bronze artifacts. A single inscription could be spread across several material carriers or repeated as a whole on each artifact.¹³⁶ In one instance from ca. 811 BCE, Li Feng has suggested that three sets of altogether twenty-seven *ding* tripods and *gui* tureens with identical inscriptions were cast.¹³⁷ Especially for identical inscriptions repeated within a single set of bronze artifacts that was meant to be kept together (including inscriptions in both the body and the lid of a single vessel, as seen in

¹³⁴ Keightley *forthcoming*. For a similar argument regarding certain types of tomb manuscripts of late Warring States and early imperial times, see Kern 2005. Historically, the case of Western Zhou inscriptions fits squarely with the earlier bone inscriptions and later tomb manuscripts.

¹³⁵ Falkenhausen 1993, 163–164.

¹³⁶ For example, the Qin gong 秦公 bells dating from the early seventh century BCE show both ways. The same text of 135 characters was inscribed five times: three times in full on three *bo* 罍 bells and two more times spread across one set of two and one set of four *yongzhong* 甬鐘 bells; see Kern 2000a, 65.

¹³⁷ Li Feng 1997, 26.

several instances above), the act of repeating the same text did not provide any additional information. In these series, the particular aesthetic format of textual multiplication contributed to the display of repetition of the prestigious bronze objects. It was this *format*—as opposed to the text proper—that depended on the prestigious material carrier. Here, writing transcended its principal functions of storing and circulating information; instead of conveying a specific account of historical detail (which was anyway stored on perishable material), it visually displayed cultural and social accomplishment.

The literary form of bronze inscriptions was guided by historical thinking. This is evident from its concern with past achievements as well as from the donor's expectation, imposed on his descendants, that these achievements will not be forgotten by "sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons." But both the "writing of history" in these texts and the bronzes' material promise of imperishable permanence were rhetorical gestures: as the existence of the text did not depend on its particular carrier, so did the memory of the past not depend on the textual format of the inscription. Archaeology has yielded evidence that inscribed bronze vessels were often kept for generations before being buried together in a tomb or a pit.¹³⁸ While earlier inscriptions thus continuously retained the representation of earlier accomplishments, the actual knowledge of their underlying texts was archived and portable.¹³⁹

What the archival versions of the inscribed text could never achieve, however, was to transform the singular, ephemeral occasion on which a vessel was granted into the conspicuous visual display of the donor's prerogatives that resulted from that occasion. The prestige of the ritual vessel became the prestige of the person who had been granted permission to own it. Just through their material, shape, and decoration, the elaborate bronze vessels were, "quite probably, the most accomplished, expensive, labor-intensive, and beautiful human-made things their owners and handlers had ever seen."¹⁴⁰ Their decoration denoted their nature as ritual objects,¹⁴¹ and thus signaled the importance of both the object and its possessor.¹⁴² Where a vessel was inscribed, for example

¹³⁸ Hoards of vessels were buried in pits especially at a moment of crisis, for example at the end of the Western Zhou, when the vessels had to be saved from invaders.

¹³⁹ See, for example, the case of inscribed Qin gong bronzes discussed in Kern 2000a, 64–69.

¹⁴⁰ Falkenhausen 1999, 146.

¹⁴¹ Rawson 1993, 92.

¹⁴² Bagley 1993, 44–45.

with the record of the appointment ceremony, the inscription explicitly represented the royal speech act.¹⁴³ One might well speculate that this speech act was repeatedly performed during the donor's periodical ancestral sacrifices (or during the sacrifices that later generations performed for him) where it recaptured the original orality of the appointment ceremony.

Unlike an uninscribed vessel, the one bearing a text was thus doubly representational. In numerous examples especially from the Middle Western Zhou period onward, one finds that the beautiful, regularly spaced calligraphy was itself ornamental. I shall conclude the present essay with an appreciation of a superior example of this phenomenon: a rather simple yet elegant bronze water basin of 47.3 cm in diameter that either shortly before 900 BCE or a generation later was cast by the royal Secretary Qiang, the Shi Qiang-*pan* 史牆盤 [Ill. 18a–c].¹⁴⁴ When excavated from a pit in December 1975, it was accompanied by 102 other bronze vessels—74 of them bearing inscriptions—most of them coming from four generations of the Wei 微 family of royal Secretaries; the water basin is among the latest of these vessels. Its 16.2 cm high exterior base and wall bear a bird ornament in flat, continuous ribbons that is familiar from other bronze vessels of the Middle Western Zhou period. The inscription is cast, again typical of Zhou bronze vessels, on the vessel's otherwise unadorned interior.

In this inscription, Secretary Qiang presents himself as a member of the Western Zhou royal court, boasting a distinguished ancestral line of royal Secretaries. A master of the dynasty's political and cultural memory, he outlines in panegyric terms the genealogy of the Western Zhou kings and then pairs them in no less eulogistic fashion with the line of his ancestors who had, one after the other, served the succeeding Zhou rulers. This text is exceedingly interesting because it is the most powerful self-representation of an early Chinese functionary of writing we have seen so far.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ The four inscriptions discussed above are highly exceptional in giving a more or less comprehensive account of the ceremony. By contrast, the royal speech act, introduced by "the king said" (or a variation of that formula), was a standard element of these inscriptions. For a discussion of this speech act, see Falkenhausen 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Shirakawa 50.335–368 (*hō*-# 15); translations in Shaughnessy 1991, 3–4, 183–192; Lau 1999, 184–204. The date of the vessel is not settled; see Luo Tai 1997.

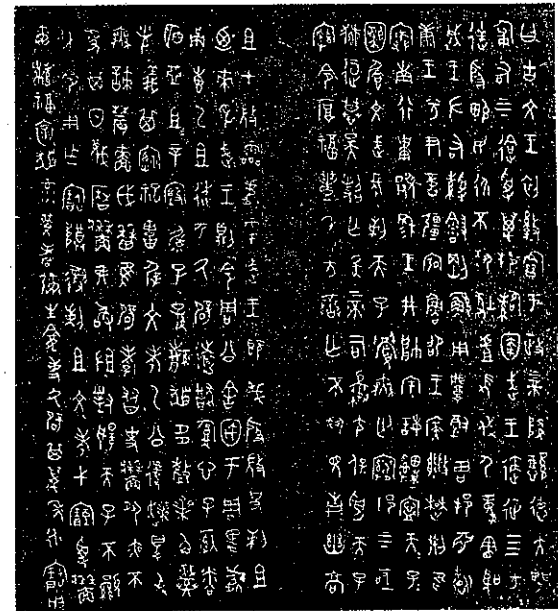
¹⁴⁵ To my mind, Qiang did not produce an historical account (which quite likely rested in the archives) but a display of his own achievements to be presented in the sacrifices to his ancestors.



18a Shi Qiang-pan. After Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo et al., *Shaanxi chutu Shang Zhou qingtongqi* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 2:43, plate 24.



18b Shi Qiang-pan. After Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo et al., *Shaanxi chutu Shang Zhou qingtongqi* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 2:43, plate 24.



18c Shi Qiang-pan, rubbing of inscription. After *Kaogu xuebao* 1978.2: 140, plate 1.

The 275 characters (including nine ligatures [hewen 合文]) are cast into two beautifully symmetric columns of nine vertical lines each. Each line comprises fifteen characters that are evenly spaced apart; only in the final line, the carver of the mold had to accommodate twenty characters. This slight mark of imperfection testifies to two conflicting goals: first, it suggests a pre-existing text that when inscribed could not be shortened by even a mere five characters. Second, while the carver had sufficient space available to let these characters run into another vertical line, he chose (or was instructed by Secretary Qiang) not to do so—clearly in order not to distort the overall balance of the two columns. Striking a remarkable compromise, he managed to respect both the integrity of the text and the symmetry of its display. Compared to most other vessel types that in their appearance are defined by shape and ornament while more or less hiding their inscriptions on the inside, the form of the water basin uniquely serves the form of the text. Its nearly flat, widely open shape, with the customary bird ornament confined to its rather unobtrusive outside, is entirely dominated by the display of the two

columns of elegant characters, promoting, above anything else, an image of calligraphic beauty and order.

This image is further reflected in how the text's narrative structure matches the two columns. In the first half of his text, Secretary Qiang eulogizes the lineage and achievements of the Zhou royal house, presumably concluding with his own ruler. The second half of the text begins with the third character from the bottom of line nine, that is, almost precisely at the column break. Parallel to the royal genealogy, the royal functionary now lists and praises his own ancestors and their accomplishments, finally ending with his own person. The balance of the two columns thus corresponds with the balance of the eulogistic narrative.

A third aesthetic choice concerns purely the literary form of the text. The inscription is composed mostly in tetrasyllabic verse, with the metric form further enhanced through frequent end-rhyme. In their regularity, both features betray an unusual sense of order and ornament for their time; in general, mid-Western Zhou inscriptions rhyme less frequently, and they unfold in a less strictly confined meter. But even more exceptional is the fact that rhyme and meter are carefully applied to the two long genealogies but not to the final prayer section, which is left in unbound prose.¹⁴⁶ This is exactly the opposite of what one finds in most other inscriptions. No doubt, the royal Secretary Qiang was aware of this fact. He deliberately granted the weight of aesthetic emphasis not to the prayer but to the preceding narrative—a narrative that defined both himself and his ancestors in their intimate relation to the Zhou kings.

In its visual appearance, its intrinsic literary aesthetics, and its contents, the Shi Qiang-pan is the epitome of order and regularity. It represents the ideal political order of the Zhou royal lineage, the ideal order of the Qiang family line, and, finally, the ideal order of the written artifact. Not with a single word of his long inscription does Secretary Qiang refer to himself or and his forebears as men of writing. He praises his ancestors for having "assisted" and "served" their rulers, for their correctly performed sacrifices and for their personal qualities. When finally coming to himself, he promises to further "serve" his lord. Yet at the same time, his combination of Zhou dynastic memory, perfected literary form, and superb visual display of text as ritual ornament reveals an extreme degree of authorial self-consciousness. In sacrificing to his ancestors—despite all its idiosyncrasies still the presumed use of the

¹⁴⁶ For the reconstruction of the entire rhyme scheme, see Behr 1996, 199–204.

vessel—Qiang presents himself as the keeper of Zhou memory and thus as his ancestors' worthy successor. He is the hereditary royal Secretary because his ancestors were hereditary royal Secretaries. With his inscription, we finally see a Western Zhou Secretary as the master of the written word, performing the mastery of royal ritual display.

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