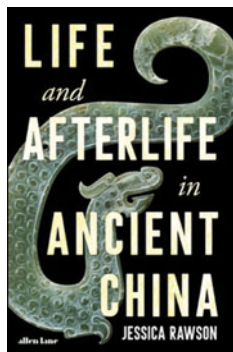


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JESSICA RAWSON. 2023. *Life and afterlife in Ancient China*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin; 978-0-241-47270-5 hardback £40.



This engaging book by Jessica Rawson provides a highly readable yet thoroughly referenced overview of the heterogeneous societies that existed in areas of East Asia (now part of China) during the millennia before the imperial conquest by the Qin state in 221 BC. The Qin conquest is famously reflected in the iconic tomb of Qinshihuangdi, the ‘August Thearch’ whose tomb mound and surrounding walled mausoleum and tomb park, including the pits of the world-renowned terracotta soldiers, are the focus of the final chapter of the book. There are 11 preceding chapters, separated into four sections, each focusing on a single iconic tomb before discussing the surrounding environmental, cultural, political and social contexts.

The chapters reflect various important stages in the social developments of what we usually think of as ‘Ancient China’.

The first section of the book is entitled ‘Building and dwelling’ and has three chapters based on sites that date between 3200 and 1200 BC encompassing the ‘Late Neolithic’ and ‘Early Bronze Age’. In traditional historiography, the Early Bronze Age includes the first two of the ‘Three Dynasties’ that occur in central narratives of early China: the ‘Xia’ (as Rawson puts it ‘possibly before 1500 BC’) and the ‘Shang’ (c. 1500–1045 BC). The first chapter, ‘The mystery of jade’, concerns the Liangzhu culture (3300–2200 BC), famous for the large-scale production and use of jade objects and presents an elaborate jade-containing burial at the Fanshan locus in Liangzhu, Zhejiang. Chapter 2, ‘A disrupted banquet’, starts with a vandalised tomb at the site of Taosi, in Linfen, Shanxi. The third chapter, ‘The warrior with the bronze hand’, discusses the tomb of a Shang aristocrat named Ya Chang who was interred at the site of the last capital of the Shang at Yinxu in Anyang, Henan. All three of these chapters discuss the tombs within their broader social, artistic, technological and ideological situations. For example, in contextualising the Liangzhu burial, Rawson discusses the connections to earlier jade tradition such as the Hongshan culture (c. 4500–3000 BC) and the broader context of Liangzhu society beyond jade production and use. Likewise, the second chapter explores more than just the fascinating history of the Taosi site, which rose to prominence around 2300 BC on the Fen River in the eastern parts of the Loess Plateau and then saw a dynamic series of transformations, including an apparently violent collapse around 1900 BC. Rawson also discusses the broader geographical context, including the site of Shimao, in Yulin, Shaanxi, about 500km to the west of Taosi, which overlaps considerably in time (c. 2200–1800 or 1600 BC). For Rawson, these two together provide compelling evidence for an increasingly transformative connection between the Steppe and the Central Plains of China mediated through the Loess Plateau area. This theme is developed further in the third chapter, which ostensibly focuses on the quintessential Bronze Age Central Plains site of Yinxu. In addition to the Ya Chang tomb, Rawson explores other important finds associated with burial rituals, including the other unlooted aristocratic tomb at Yinxu, the tomb of the

Shang consort and general Fu Hao, as well as chariots, which represent a new and unequivocally Steppe-associated technology adopted in the Yellow River Valley region at this time.

The second section is called ‘The language of objects, 1200–700 BC’ and includes three chapters: ‘4. Sacrifices in a hidden land’, ‘5. The gift economy at Baoji’ and ‘6. Innovations and heirlooms’. Chapter 4 is the only chapter in the book that does not use a tomb as the touchstone. Instead, this chapter concerns the sacrificial pits from the site of Sanxingdui in Guanghan, Sichuan, located in the Yangzi River Valley that is roughly contemporary with the Yinxu tombs. In the past two years, there have been new discoveries at Sanxingdui that could not be incorporated into Rawson’s narrative but that further elaborate on the patterns she discusses in this chapter (Sanxingdui 2022). She points out how the Sanxingdui finds are seemingly quite distinct from the rituals and objects of the Central Plains though some aspects of the longer-term influence of Sanxingdui seem undersold in this narrative. Chapters 5 and 6 return to sites in the Yellow River Valley. The former discusses the early Zhou remains around Baoji, Shaanxi, and particularly the tomb of Yu Bo who was leader of the Yu lineage, as well as the broader context of the historical transition between the Shang and Zhou dynasties at the end of the second millennium BC. The latter chapter returns to the area between Taosi and Shimao by focusing on the tomb of the lord of Rui at Liangdaicun in Hancheng, Shaanxi. This chapter discusses the Western Zhou era and elaborates on several related social phenomena of the early first millennium. These include the increasing importance of connections to the Steppe region, particularly the significance of horses, and a ritual reform evident in the bronzes used in later Western Zhou burials. The latter demonstrates a reduced emphasis on alcohol and a regimented symbolism of rank through sets of ritual vessels among other things. Rawson argues that this ‘ritual reform’ is something that can, effectively, be recognised only through a close attention to material culture, which is an illustration of the way archaeological data can expand our understanding beyond historical sources.

The third part is titled ‘Converging cultures, 700–300 BC’ and comprises four more chapters: ‘7. The Steppe frontier’, ‘8. Circling south’, ‘9. The orchestra of Zeng’ and ‘10. A kingdom by design’. Throughout this section, Rawson increasingly emphasises the importance of horses and connections to the Steppe and beyond. The first of these chapters focuses on an elaborate tomb of a leader of a pastoral group the ‘Mountain Rong’ from a massive cemetery at Yuhuangmiao, north of Beijing in Jundushan, Hebei. Stone elements of this burial evoke patterns seen in Steppe monument forms such as the khirigsuurs of Mongolia and kurgans of Central Asia. Rawson confidently asserts that associated groups might have been riding horses, which is plausible but still requires direct evidence (compare Li *et al.* 2021). Furthermore, the pronouncement that the “Steppe offered very little wealth” (p.200) seems to overlook the importance that animals, and perhaps textiles, played as objects of wealth. Chapter 8 returns to the Yangzi River Valley with a discussion of the unusual circular tomb of Lord Bai of Zhongli in Bengbu, Anhui. Unusual in shape and monumental in size, this tomb from the sixth century BC contains a host of finds such as gold-foil armour, various knives and even clay imitations of stone boulders. Rawson suggests these reflect connections to the north and to the Steppe even in this relatively southern elite burial context. Such northern connections are also emphasised in Chapter 9, which focuses on the fantastic, unlooted and well-preserved tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng discovered in Suizhou, Hubei,

and dating to around 433 BC. The broader context of this tomb requires a discussion of the state of Chu, one of the major antagonist states of the Warring States periods and a dominant force in the south. The material repertoire of this tomb illustrates the importance of music in the ritual practices of southern states. In this chapter we also see an example for a potential connection to Central Asia. Rawson mentions anthropomorphic figures that were part of the frame of the bell set found in this tomb as “the first time humans have a technical as well as a decorative role” (p.256), but in fact we see such dual use of human figures in bronzes at Sanxingdui, hundreds of years earlier. Likewise, in Chapter 10, which discusses the tomb of King Cuo of Zhongshan, at Lingshou, near Shijiazhuang, Hebei, she points to a winged bronze figure as reflection of a Central Asia idea, but the Sanxingdui bronzes have examples of winged figures as well. I do not imply a direct influence of Sanxingdui on these later sites, but rather suggest that we should not be too quick to ascribe influence too universally to a set of connections in any one direction, such as to Central Asia. After all, as Rawson illustrates effectively and repeatedly throughout this book, Ancient China was a thoroughly heterogeneous and complex patchwork of societies that entailed a complicated history of influences and connections.

The final part of the book is titled ‘Conquest on horseback, 300–221 BC’ and in the two chapters Rawson successfully evidences strong connections to the Steppe and Central Asia. The touchstone for Chapter 10, ‘Catacombs and chariots’, is a warrior’s tomb at the site of Majiayuan in Zhangjiachuan, Gansu. The tomb contained the remnants of five chariots, including an incredibly elaborate chariot with decorative elements that show strong artistic connections to examples from Iran. Here, Rawson’s argument that horses “joined several diverse societies and cultures together” (p.323) is most clearly evident. Finally, Chapter 12, ‘The everlasting army’, brings us to the First Emperor’s tomb and a useful synthesis of the extensive archaeological and historical work on the tomb complex and its context. Rawson advances an argument that the army and objects in this tomb and others should not be considered to be replicas, but rather analogues that are understood to be actual and effective agents in the context of the afterlife for which the objects are interred.

This last point is one of many arguments and scholarly interventions woven through the book. Rawson shows that these various tombs are not just evidence of death but instead are windows into the life and afterlife of those with whom they are connected. They show in various ways that burial rituals are more about the participants than they are about the deceased (see discussion in Flad 2002). They also reflect the diversity of life, practice, ritual and culture in Ancient China. There are elements of the book’s formatting, especially difficulties in trying to connect the figures with the text and their references, and some parts of the argumentation that I might nitpick. For instance, there is even greater diversity still that could be explored if regions beyond those connected to the Central Plains, particularly in the south, were examined further. Only the Sanxingdui site reflects an example of a place further afield from the traditional core region. Sometimes an occasional turn of phrase reflects an absolutist certainty that might be questioned. For example, Rawson believes that the residents of Taosi “cannot have had any knowledge of Liangzhu or Shijiahe, nor of the routes by which jade had reached (the Taosi leader)” (p.41). Is it really impossible to believe that information and even people might have moved occasionally at great distances at this early time?

These minor issues aside, the book is a thoroughly enjoyable read and appropriate for readers who seek a broad overview of Ancient China, a multifaceted introduction to

archaeological examples of burial practices in this era and those who wish to engage with the scholarship of an unparalleled figure in the study of the Chinese Bronze Age.

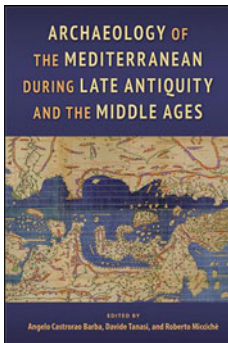
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ANGELO CASTRORAO BARBA, DAVIDE TANASI & ROBERTO MICCICHÈ (ed.). 2023. *Archaeology of the Mediterranean during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6969-2 hardback \$95.



The fall of the Western Roman Empire did not bring the end of this world, but rather a change. This volume is part of the recent growing interest in academia in what happened next, from the fifth century AD and onwards. The editors of the book organised a conference session in 2019 called ‘After-life of Ancient Urbanscapes and Rural Landscapes in the post-Classical Mediterranean (AD 400–1300)’. This session and its papers, many of which are published as chapters in the current volume, are part of an attempt to drive against what the editors define as a ‘Classical-centric’ or ‘Roman-centric’ vision (p.2). While the title of both the conference and the book use the general geographical term ‘Mediterranean’, the case studies in the latter are more geographically focused and could be defined as encompassing the Mediterranean Islands, or as Greece and the central Mediterranean. The volume comprises two sections: the first is dedicated to Greece and the second focuses on Malta, Corsica, Sicily and Southern Italy, the latter of which is not mentioned in the Introduction.

The section on Greece is composed of five contributions. The first is by Natalia Poulou on the finds of several sites dated to the sixth–ninth centuries on the Aegean islands and Crete, with a special focus on numismatic finds. The second part of this chapter deals with typological problems in ceramic identification, which is especially important because of the