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“My Tomb Will Be Opened in Eight Hundred Years’’: A New Way of Seeing the Afterlife in Six Dynasties China

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Abstract: Jie Shi analyzes the sixth-century epitaph of Prince Shedi Huiluo as both a funerary text and a burial object in order to show that the means of achieving posthumous immortality radically changed during the Six Dynasties. Whereas the Han-dynasty vision of an immortal afterlife counted mainly on the imperishability of the tomb itself, Shedi’s epitaph predicted that the tomb housing it would eventually be ruined. This new, pessimistic vision of tombs was shaped by the experience people had in the Six Dynasties of encountering numerous ruined tombs in their daily life. To secure an afterlife for the deceased, they adopted a new strategy, which relied on words: they inscribed epitaphs on stone, concealed them in the tombs, and expected that after the tombs fell into ruin the epitaphs would resurface to be read by future audiences.

In a large undisturbed sixth-century tomb at Jiiazhuang 賈家莊 in Shouyang 壽陽 county, Shanxi province, archaeologists discovered an epitaph declaring a belief about tombs different from what Chinese held before that time.¹ This brick tomb, among the largest of its period, had a single burial chamber, which measured 5.44 by 5.42 meters in area and had a crushed vaulted ceiling about 4.60 meters high (figs. 1 and 2). Three square epitaph stones, each with a stone cover, lay side by side on the floor of the tomb chamber. According to the inscriptions engraved on these stones, the central and largest was for the major tomb occupant, Prince Shedi Huiluo 廋狄迴洛 (505– 562).² The flanking two referred to his two wives buried with him.³

A contemporaneous reader of the prince’s well-composed epitaph (see fig. 3, p. 246, and Appendix 1) would come to a statement that might astonish him or her near the end of the text: “The tomb will collapse and the pond will be filled up, and they will finally be occupied by foxes and hares. My tomb will be opened in eight hundred years as heaven orbits.” The first person pronoun “I” (*wu* 吾) that begins the last sentence renders unambiguous the tomb occupant’s expectation that his own tomb is doomed to ruin followed by excavation.

This passage violates the conventional Chinese belief held until that time: that the tomb was never supposed to be damaged or opened. According to a second-century dictionary, the basic idea of a tomb was to “conceal,” and to prevent the exposure of, the deceased’s body.⁴ The tomb, the final resting place of one’s ancestor, generated emotions of empathy and solicitude and upheld the moral principles of filial piety, which Confucianism takes deep to heart. States the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of rites): “Ruins and graves express no mournfulness to the people, and yet the people mourn (amidst them)” 墟墓之間，未施哀於民而民哀。⁵ Visitors to a tomb were not supposed to ascend the tumulus, because even footsteps would disturb the deceased,⁶ and physical damage to the tomb was thought to be inauspicious and immoral. It is recorded that, on hearing that his father’s tumulus had collapsed after being flooded, Confucius himself could not

restrain his tears. Lamenting this, he thought wistfully of the ancients, who avoided such suffering because they did not build tumuli: “I have heard that the ancients did not need to repair their graves.”⁷

In accordance with this ritual convention of venerating tombs, such funerary genres as dirges (lei 誄), laments (ai 哀), and stele epitaphs (bei 碑), which first became popular during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220) and were only occasionally inscribed on imperishable materials in the tomb, generally praised the deceased’s merits and expressed loss, sadness, and piety, but rarely mentioned anything about the opening or the destruction of tombs.⁸ To the contrary, funerary inscriptions that have been recovered from the Han dynasty almost always anticipate the everlastingness of the tombs—sometimes labeled as “the residences for ten thousand years” (wansuizhai 萬歲宅)—that housed them. An inscription in an Eastern Han tomb (151 C.E.) asserts: “After the tomb is sealed, it will never again be opened” 閉壙之後不復發。⁹

In light of these and many other inscriptions, Shedi’s epitaph seems to be an anomaly, if not an antithesis of, the Chinese concept of the tomb. But, in fact, Shedi’s epitaph is not an isolated case. On the contrary, about a dozen recovered sixth-century epitaphs, not only from the Northern Qi (550–577), which Shedi served, but also from the Eastern Wei (534–550), quite explicitly express the expectation that the tomb will come to ruin (see Appendix 2), whereas in many more Six Dynasties epitaphs from both northern and southern China, some of them as early as the early fourth century, this expectation remains implicit. The appearance of such pessimistic inscriptions suggests that about this time the concept of the tomb changed significantly.

Why and how did the change come about? Was it in response to social and political changes? Or had a new religious notion turned people’s thought to the instability of tombs? To answer these questions, this article tries to bridge the methodological gap that separates historians, for whom the greatest value of the epitaphs is archival,¹⁰ and art historians, who are interested almost exclusively in the form and iconography of the epitaph stone.¹¹ Such methodological segregation prevents a synthetic perspective on the funerary context of epitaphs. This article begins by exploring the epitaph not only as a text but also as an object, and then places it in the context of the funerary rituals and the life experience of the Six Dynasties before and about the sixth century.

The Tripartite Time in Shedi’s Epitaph

Shedi’s epitaph and its analogues make it clear that, between the fourth and sixth centuries, the funerary narrative changed. In order to understand the transition from the commemorative eulogy of the deceased to the expectation that the tomb will eventually be ruined, we must first delve into the 930 Chinese characters that compose Shedi’s epitaph. Whereas the conventional way of reading such epitaphs is to distinguish the different literary genres of various passages, I read the text as a series of reflections on three different temporalities: Shedi’s life and career (the past), lines 1–18 and 27–30; his death and funeral (the present), lines 18–26 and 30; and the destiny of his tomb (the future), lines 30–31. The transitions connecting these three sections are dramatic in tone and emotion.

The first part begins with a plain, prosaic narrative (ji 紀) of Shedi’s life and career (lines 1 to 18). The author spares no pains to trace Shedi’s ancestry and to describe his virtue, talent, and achievements. He devotes much ink to Shedi’s successes as a high-ranking commander who was instrumental in assisting Northern Qi emperors to crush their enemies. In return, the imperial

court awarded Shedi special honors, gradually promoting him from a relatively humble position to prefectural prince—the highest rank available to one who was not a member of the Northern Qi royal family. Accompanying the historical narrative is a rhymed rhapsody (lines 27 to 30) elaborating Shedi's worldly stature and achievement. Here, the author compares Shedi with ancient heroes and with four legendary sages and politicians, Yi Yin 伊尹, Lü Wang 呂望, Zhongshan Fu 仲山甫, and Shen Bo 申伯:

惟岳降神，誕茲哲人，應期匡贊，命世稱珍，侔伊媿呂，誇甫超申。

It was the sacred mountain that sent down the spirit and gave birth to this sage. Corresponding to the time, he supported and assisted [the emperor]; well known in the world, he was extolled and beloved. He equaled Yi [Yin] and paralleled Lü [Wang]; he rivaled [Zhongshan] Fu and exceeded Shen [Bo].¹²

After making these analogies the author mentions Shedi's royal rank and emblems:

秩崇八命，衣加九章。

He was awarded the rank of Eight Appointments [that is, prince] and a robe with Nine Patterns.

The contrast between the first and the second parts, between past and present and between his life and his death, is dramatic. Shedi's life occupies a large percentage (lines 1 to 18, 27 to 30) of the whole text. The next section, on his death and funeral, only takes a few lines. (lines 18 to 26, 30)

Accompanying a prosaic passage (line 19) on the untimely death of the prince in the second month of 562 is a rhymed couplet (line 18) expressing regret that such extraordinary merits were not rewarded with a longer life. Then follows a strikingly brief account of his funeral procession (line 30):

□毀行祖□，龍輜巡路。蕭鼓晝鳴，哀歌夜呼。

The hearse set out after an offering to the road (zu 祖) was made; the dragon hearse then cruised on its way. The mourning drums were beaten in the day and the elegies were sung in the night.¹³

Although the dragon hearse, as a mark of privilege, highlights the superior status of the prince,¹⁴ the drum (xiaogu 蕭鼓) and mourning elegies (ai'ge 哀歌) convey an aura of desolation.

In the next sentence the prince's splendid image totally vanishes, and the leading actors are nature and nature's power to ruin:

逝水東驚，流光西顧。墳傾池滿，終貽狐兔。

The rushing water flows east; the light of the orbiting sun glows in the west. The tomb will collapse and the pond will be filled up, and they will finally be occupied by foxes and hares.¹⁵

Looking to the future of the almost-royal tomb, the author sees not a grand monument, but a desolate underground burial no different from the dens dug by foxes and hares. The abrupt ending of the eulogy contrasts dramatically with the preceding long and lush account of the

prince's personal achievement. Although the laud overwhelms the lament in length, the doleful end of the prince's story overpowers the magnificent beginning.

In closing the epitaph (end of line 31), the prince predicts the remote future and adds a word of instruction for that time:

□天度八百年後開吾墓，改封更葬起丘墳，宜官享祿多福祚。

My tomb will be opened in eight hundred years as heaven orbits. The tumulus [namely, the grave] will be rebuilt, the remains will be reentombed; and a mound will be erected. May he receive official titles, salaries, and good luck.¹⁶

Someone in centuries to come will find and restore the ruined tomb. Although the text gives no indication of a ritual for the opening of the tomb, it specifies a series of funerary rituals to follow the opening: making a (new) grave, burying the coffin in the grave, and covering the grave with a mound; this is the regular sequence for any funeral and tomb construction. The hidden “he” expected to enjoy the “official titles, salaries, and good luck” might refer to the person who will open this tomb and rebury the remains in the future. The important point, however, is not the restoration or the reward for the restoration, but the prince's own and unequivocal prophecy of his tomb's ruin.

The Prophecy of Ruin in Six Dynasties

The above-mentioned prediction of the tomb's ruin was not an isolated phenomenon, but a popular topos in extant epitaphs and received texts from the Six Dynasties. Reading Shedi's epitaph in conjunction with other contemporary documents allows us to plumb the significance of this particular expression in a broader historical context.

In contrast to tomb inscriptions of the Han dynasty, those of the Six Dynasties almost invariably predict ruin in implicit or explicit ways. Among the earliest epitaphs dating from the early fourth century, formulaic expressions such as “[these epitaphs were made] to show to the future generations” (bi shi laishi 俾示來世) only hint the future excavation of the tomb housing the epitaph.¹⁷ Direct indications of ruin, however, appeared in the late fifth century. In an epitaph dating from 496, the ending focuses on a desolate, lonely tomb: “The door [covered] with pines has become distant and weeds will occupy the dark entryway” 松門已杳，玄闥將蕪。¹⁸ This imagery of a deserted tomb overrun with weeds was repeated, with slight variations, in many later epitaphs. Madame Wang Puxian's 王普賢 (487–513) epitaph: “The tomb [will be overrun with] dust and weeds; the pine forest [will lie in a state of] desolation and waste” 塋裏埃蕪，松間荒翳。¹⁹ Yuan Hui's 元暉 (464–518) epitaph: “The door of the [Yellow] Spring closes in loneliness; the trees [on the tumulus] grow in desolation” 寂寥泉戶，荒芒 □樹。²⁰ Occasionally anonymous intruders were imagined to come across such lonely ruins: “Weeds will flourish on the tumulus, [turning the mound into] a vast undistinguishable area nobody recognizes. Boys collecting firewood will trample it; shepherds will ascend it” 草繁丘壟，蒼芒誰識；芻童來踐，牧豎斯陟。²¹ The “state of desolation and waste” is ascribed, most empirically, to erosion from natural causes and to topographic changes over time, as Yuan Huai's 元懷 (d. 518) epitaph confesses: “I fear the shifting mountains and valleys and the loss of markets and audience halls. But though the funerary halls may change, the metal and stone will not disintegrate” 惧陵谷易，市朝或侵，坟堂有改，金石无虧。²²

In many epitaphs the literary wordings of such expressions suggest lament rather than prophecy, but they commonly express an uneasy concern about the future of the tomb. “Shifting mountains and valleys” (linggu huo qian 陵谷或遷), a phrase repeated numerous times in the extant epitaphs from the late fifth century on, perhaps best captures such apprehensions about nature’s instability. To move from the impermanence of nature to the perishability of the human body required no great mental leap, and that further anxiety about human mortality is clearly spelled out in the epitaph for Yuan Xie 元協 (453–520): “The world is inconstant; how can there be constancy? We should have given a hundred lives for him [to have him redeemed]; nothing is everlasting” 世非常世, 胡寧有常. 人百其身, 物無永昌.²³

According to available archaeological data, Six Dynasties epitaphs with explicit references to the destruction or excavation of the tomb emerged circa the 530s. Among the earliest known examples is Cui Hun’s 崔混 (505–538) epitaph, dated to 538:

灑水浸潤 The trickling water seeped through,
周墓以崩 the Zhou tomb collapsed.
牧火既遺 The shepherd’s torch fell,
秦墳用毀 the Qin tomb was burnt.
陵谷非恒 Mound and valley are not everlasting;
金石唯久 Nothing but metal and stone lasts long.²⁴

Adopting the rhetorical strategy of analogy, the author of the epitaph compares Cui’s tomb with two ruined tombs well known in history. The “Zhou tomb” figures in Zhan guo ce 戰國策 (Intrigues of the Warring States; compiled in the third century B.C.E.) relating that water seepage loosened the earth packed around King Ji Li’s 王季歷 (fl. mid-twelfth century B.C.E.) grave, and finally the coffin was exposed.²⁵ A rumor circulating during the Han dynasty related how the “Qin tomb”—that is, the tomb of Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝 (r. 221–210 B.C.E.)—burned when a shepherd, who accidentally intruded into the emperor’s burial chamber in search of his missing sheep, dropped his torch.²⁶ If these two powerful rulers could not guarantee their tombs’ perpetuity, how much assurance could lesser people have?

Another epitaph, written in the form of a rhapsody (fu 賦) and dating to 547, notes not only that the ancient tomb will be reopened, but specifies when: “After eleven generations, the king of Wu’s tomb was reopened; in three thousand years, Duke Teng’s hut (burial) was unlocked again” 世經十一, 吳王之墓復開; 時歷三千, 滕公之廬重啟.²⁷ According to a historical record, a tomb at Changsha purportedly occupied by Wu Rui 吳芮 (d. 202 B.C.E.)—a king of the Wu principality of the Western Han empire—was unearthed in the mid-220s.²⁸ Another story about Duke Teng’s burial is more likely fictional, but was cited by over a dozen epitaphs from the 530s on. It has the hearse of either Duke Teng or Xiahou Ying 夏侯嬰 exiting the capital through the eastern gate just when the four horses drawing it suddenly halted. Kneeling on the ground, they kept scratching the soil with their front hoofs until an ancient tomb chamber came to light. An inscription in the chamber prophesized that in three thousand years this tomb would be uncovered and would then become Duke Teng’s final resting place:

佳城鬱鬱, 三千年見白日, 吁嗟滕公居此室。

Dark, dark is this fine city! It will be brought back to light in three thousand years. Alas, Duke Teng, this is the chamber you must inhabit!²⁹

Whoever created the tale enlisted chronological specificity to lend a touch of veracity.

Like Duke Teng's, Shedi's epitaph also predicts the reopening of his tomb and the reburying of his physical remains. This short prophecy, which follows the prediction of the tomb's ruin, further specifies that the reopening would occur in eight hundred years. The epitaphs would become even more precise over time. A Northern Qi epitaph, dating from 555, names the person who in nine hundred years will open Yuan Zisui's 元子邃 (d. 555) tomb: this Zhang Sengda 張僧達 does not seem related to the royal Yuan clan of the Northern Wei or the Eastern Wei. This epitaph also offers the reassurance that Yuan Zisui will be reburied.³⁰

These increasingly detailed predictions are a particular type of occult prophecy, called chen 讖, that spread throughout Chinese literature from the late Eastern Zhou (475–221 B.C.E.) period on.³¹ The term chen, according to the Eastern Han lexicographer Xu Shen 許慎 (58–147), meant something “verified” (yan 驗).³² Such prophecies, some of which are accompanied by diagrams (tu 圖), are all characterized by anonymous, mysterious origins, and were often found on objects of unknown provenance.³³ Nevertheless, they often won widespread credence. According to present-day scholarship, throughout the Han and the Six Dynasties, politicians often fabricated chen prophecies to legitimize their political claims.³⁴

Every effort was made to “verify” chen predictions. A Qin prophecy that declared, “It is Hu that will destroy the Qin” 亡秦者胡也³⁵ was verified by history: the Qin empire collapsed because of the corrupt and incompetent second emperor, Huhai 胡亥 (230–207 B.C.E.), whose name contained the character Hu 胡. As was predicted, Hu destroyed the Qin. Only predictions that were fulfilled qualified as chen prophecies; therefore chen always predicted something that was already widely believed and thus readily “verified,” after which they were considered immutably true.

Han-dynasty funerary inscriptions also often mention the expected lifespan of the tomb—usually as “one thousand” (qiansui 千歲) or “ten thousand” (wansui 萬歲) years.³⁶ For example, an inscription on the central pillar in a stone chamber-tomb dating from 18 C.E. yearns: “May it not be opened in a thousand years” (qiansui bufa 千歲不發),³⁷ a thousand years being a figure of speech for permanence.³⁸ Seldom do Han funerary inscriptions refer to the tomb's future ruin, whereas the sixth-century epitaphs always assume the tomb was preordained to be ruined before being restored.³⁹

The Tomb Doomed to Ruin

During the Han dynasty many people believed in a posthumous immortality that could be achieved by physically preserving the body within an everlasting burial.⁴⁰ For example, they believed that once the so-called nine orifices (jiuqiao 九竅) were closed with jade plugs, flesh and bone were magically immune to perishing.⁴¹ But with the collapse of the Han dynasty and the civil wars that followed, there arose serious doubts about these previously cherished ideas, and these doubts were augmented by frequent encounters with exposed ruined tombs. During the tumultuous civil war, which offered countless opportunities for tomb robberies, the belief in the efficacy of the jade plugs collapsed.⁴² Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226), the first emperor of the Wei dynasty (220–265), was horrified by what he witnessed in person:

Since the tumultuous years with death and riots, none of the imperial mausoleums of the Han dynasty has escaped plundering. The looters burned the jade suits to take jade pieces and gold wires. All bones were destroyed. This is virtually a burning execution! How possible it is that it did not cause a great pain [to the deceased]!⁴³

For this and other reasons, Cao prohibited “lavish burials” in favor of “thrifty burials,” a policy that remained in force during the Western Jin dynasty (266–316) and had an enduring impact on funerary practice throughout the Southern and Northern Dynasties (386–589).⁴⁴

During the Six Dynasties people frequently happened on ancient ruined tombs.⁴⁵ Four centuries of practicing lavish burials in the Han dynasty had left tens of thousands of graves and miles of cemeteries, many of which were abandoned and lay desolated.⁴⁶ As events or anecdotes of such discoveries were documented, circulated, quoted, and sometimes even fabricated in unprecedentedly large numbers and great detail, a literary topos of ruined “ancient tombs” (guzhong 古冢) gradually came into being during the Six Dynasties.⁴⁷ Contemplating the ruin of ancient tombs, these pieces inquired into the unavoidable destruction of the deceased’s body and the means to secure the posthumous life. Xie Huilian’s 謝惠連 (407–433) story best exemplifies the literary works that prompted people during the Six Dynasties to rethink the meaning of death and immortality.⁴⁸

On an autumn day in 430, while excavating, at a depth of several yards, a moat north of the wall of the Eastern Precinct (present-day Nanjing), laborers unearthed an ancient tomb. It was made entirely of wood and lacked an aboveground marker. Two broken coffins without headpieces lay in the outer casket (guo 槨). Buried there were about twenty types of ceramic, bronze, and lacquer objects, most of which were of unusual form. The “five-penny-weight” coins and fruit seeds were still relatively intact, but the wooden human figurines disintegrated at touch.⁴⁹ Then, to rebury the deceased, a ritual was held:

銘志不存，世代不可得而知也。命城者改埋於東岡，祭之以豚酒。既不知其名字遠近，故假為之號曰冥漠君云爾。

The grave inscription had not survived, so we were unable to ascertain the date or age of the tomb. My lord commanded that those working on the wall rebury them on the eastern hill. And there, with pork and wine, we conducted a ceremony for the dead. Not knowing their names or their official titles, we gave them the provisional title “Lord of Darkness.”⁵⁰

This ancient grave had been flooded, and the structure and contents lay in chaos. Profoundly disturbed by the sight, Xie could not stop ruminating over the life and death of the tomb occupant:⁵¹

追惟夫子 I think back on you, gentleman:
生自何代 When were you born?
曜質幾年 How long were you in the resplendent body?
潛靈幾載 How long was your soul concealed?
為壽為夭 Did you die old or young?
寧顯寧晦 Were you illustrious or unknown?
銘志湮滅 The inscription has perished;

姓氏不傳 no part of the name comes down.
今誰子後 Who are your descendants now?
曩誰子先 Who were your ancestors then?
功名美惡 How was it your achievement and fame, good or bad,
如何蔑然 disappeared?

In Stephen Owen's reading, this poem expresses the writer's irresistible attachment to remembrance and his fear of being forgotten; this is especially true of the latter part of the poem, in which Xie is contemplating the unknown tomb occupant.⁵² In the first half of the rhymed text and even more so in the prose preface, however, Xie is obsessed by the tomb's ruin, about which he writes at length and in concrete detail, mentioning even the coins, the figurines, and the fruit. The length and literary power of this first section suggest that the author's desire for remembrance was not inspired by an abstract philosophy or religious dogma that stressed immortality, but by his vivid experiences of having seen a tomb in utter ruin. Thanks to the knowledge provided by modern archaeology, we now can surmise that the tomb Xie chanced on was probably a wooden chambered tomb dating from about the late first century B.C.E. A few tombs of the same type excavated near present-day Yangzhou were composed of large timber compartments and contained abundant fruit offerings, wuzhu coins, and wooden figurines, precisely as in Xie's literary description.⁵³ Xie's encounter with the ruined tomb was almost certainly not a fiction but, rather, a disquieting episode in his life.

As ruined tombs became a commonplace reality and then a widely received literary motif, people sorrowfully accepted that their own tombs would suffer reopening in years or centuries to come. One Eastern Jin epitaph, dated to 325, speaks directly to future readers: "For those who will come across this tomb during the coming thousand generations, please show mercy on me" 千世邂逅, 有見此者幸愍焉!⁵⁴ The expectation expressed in Shedi's epitaph is similarly melancholy, as are the sentiments in Xie's poem and many other tomb epitaphs of the time. We can easily imagine that the dying Prince Shedi, while planning his tomb complex, might have pictured himself as an ancient anonymous "Lord of Darkness." Indeed, when his tomb was discovered fourteen centuries later, it lay in utter ruin (see fig. 1, p. 218): the upper part of the tomb chamber had completely disappeared, the wooden casket had disintegrated into amorphous fragments, and around these fragments lay shards of what had once been ceramic vessels. Just as the epitaph had predicted, "The tomb will collapse and the pond will be filled up. They will finally be occupied by foxes and hares."

Encounters project one life or being onto another and generate immediate interrelationships between the two; they thus shape and reshape the human being's attitude toward the world. Xie's encounter with a tomb whose ruin has robbed the deceased of identity, indeed, of personhood, has aroused in him a fear of having the same fate. Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), the famous calligrapher, expresses the same concern in his well-known statement that "people in the future will look back at us as we look back at people in the past" 後之視今, 亦猶今之視昔.⁵⁵

Protecting the Epitaph against the Elements

But if the tomb that sheltered the deceased could no longer be expected to be everlasting, how could the prince prepare for his afterlife in advance? Did he abandon the hope for posthumous

immortality or even eternal remembrance? His epitaph, carved and preserved in stone, offers some answers to these questions.

Epitaph stones are compact, visually compelling works of art. As was typical in the sixth century, Prince Shedi's epitaph consists of two stone sections: the inscribed bottom tablet and the upper cover. On the cover is an inscription that names the deceased and records his official titles.⁵⁶ Concealed under this tight-fitting cover was the inscribed tablet (see fig. 3, p. 246). Written in the "Wei stele" (weibei 魏碑) style, the calligraphy is of high quality, executed in a refined style that anticipates the "regular script" (kaishu 楷書) that would be epitomized by the Tang masters a few decades later.⁵⁷ The craftsmanship of the carving is equally outstanding, with each stroke being accurate, firm, and sharp. Scale and spacing must have been carefully calculated beforehand, for all characters are of the same size and the text ends precisely at the lower left corner, or the "end," of the slab. This object thus combines in one the three arts of literature (that is, the elegantly rhymed eulogy, calligraphy, and stone carving).

The cover also embodies a paradox. Although skillfully crafted, the three demanding artworks in Shedi's tomb were not meant to be seen. Moreover, when viewed in situ by present-day scholars, the prince's epitaph is visually modest (fig. 2, p. 219, no. 30). It measures only 0.81 meters on a side and 0.11 meters in thickness. Unlike steles that stand upright, epitaph stones lie flat. Rather than inviting the viewer's gaze, they almost completely evade visibility. Along the coffin and grave goods, the epitaph—text, calligraphy, and carving—was sealed in the forbidden tomb chamber, in permanent darkness. Who, then, was the intended audience of these stones?

Choosing stone as the medium of the texts indicates a strong wish that these epitaphs would endure, and would perhaps outlast the tomb itself, which was "expected" to "open"—to be ruined—in eight hundred years. At that far distant time, when the epitaphs are exposed and the words again brought to light, they will have found their true audiences.

How the form of the epitaph stones developed also helps to reveal their distinctive purpose. Some scholars traced epitaphs back to various funerary inscriptions found in Qin and Han tombs.⁵⁸ But true epitaphs, termed "tomb records" (muzhi 墓誌), not only recorded the name of the tomb's occupant, but also employed formulaic wording and a special calligraphic style, and both came into being during the third century. The earliest true epitaphs, as Fuguhara Keirō 福原啓郎 asserts, were small memorial steles erected in Western Jin tombs.⁵⁹ According to most scholars, these functioned as surrogates for aboveground commemorative steles.⁶⁰ The next stylistic development—covering the inscription and laying it flat—demonstrates a growing desire to protect the stone. The practice of laying epitaph stones flat started in south China in the first half of the fourth century and then spread throughout China.⁶¹ Stone lids to protect the text were introduced in the north in the early sixth century.⁶² This new modification—epitaph slab plus lid—assumed the shape of a square box. Sometimes the vertical edges of slab and lid were adorned with floral patterns and with mythological animals or deities.⁶³ This form of muzhi became standard and continued in use until the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties.⁶⁴

In the latest form of these flat, covered epitaphs, legibility and even visibility were sacrificed in the interest of protecting the text, but the placement of the epitaphs nonetheless suggests an interest in capturing attention if only after eight hundred years. Like Shedi's and his wives' epitaphs, most of the sixth-century Chinese epitaph stones that have so far been excavated were laid between the tomb entrance and the coffin (see fig. 2, p. 219). Rather than retreating to a minor corner, they still occupied a prominent spot next to the entrance of the tomb chamber. Anyone entering the tomb would have encountered them first. An epitaph dated to 535 states,

“The epitaph was carved at the tomb’s entrance; the inscription was made at the gate of the [Yellow] Spring” 墓門刊誌, 勒銘泉扉.⁶⁵

Moreover, the placing of the epitaphs near the tomb entrance suggests that they were interred at or near the end of the entombment ritual. Some epitaphs even specify that these objects were made toward the end of the funerary ceremony. A Northern Wei epitaph proclaims that the tomb would be sealed tomorrow, as the epitaph is being carved today 掩埏明旦, 鐫誌今晨.⁶⁶ Another epitaph (503 C.E.) states that it was made on the same day that the tomb was sealed.⁶⁷ Making epitaphs marked the end not only of the ritual of entombment, but also of the entire funeral ceremony. After the epitaph was laid down within the burial chamber, participants in the ritual might have paid their last homage to the deceased from the tomb ramp, then sealed the tomb and filled the ramp. As Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) notes in a lament, the mourners prostrated themselves in the tomb passage and cried.⁶⁸ The limited space in the tomb itself and the relatively spacious tomb passages in Shedi’s and other sixth-century tombs in northern China support Lu’s description.⁶⁹

The importance of epitaphs was indicated not only by their privileged position in ritual space and time, but also by the comparability of their shapes with that of the coffin and the burial chamber. Judy Ho, in her study of Tang epitaph stones, observes a subtle similarity between the epitaph stone and the tomb. She interprets the square epitaph stone as “a miniature version of the tomb,” and the domed cover and square bottom as “analogous to the tomb structure.”⁷⁰ Her observation applies to the sixth-century epitaph as well.⁷¹ Wu Hung has further noted that the practice of covering the epitaph stone conceptually resembles the practice of concealing the burial.⁷² Hence the covered text was analogous to the covered body of the deceased subject.

The special characteristics of Six Dynasties epitaph stones suggest that they were meant to be elegant, enduring, and privileged. Although they were concealed in the “dark spring” (youquan 幽泉), they were not expected to stay there forever. From the instant the tombs were sealed, their true audience was not their contemporaries, but their future discoverer. Embedded in these inscribed stones was a new concept of a posthumous immortality that was ensured to enjoy an immortal afterlife in the gaze of future audiences.

The Myth of Ruined Tombs

As the predicted ruin of tombs, confirmed by frequent real-life encounters with ruined tombs, subverted the concept of posthumous immortality based on the myth of imperishable matter, a new myth had to be created to sustain the possibility of an immortal afterlife.

The introduction of chen prophecies into epitaphs added a religious dimension to the prediction of ruin engulfing tombs. These magic prophecies, according to a number of Six Dynasties texts, were frequently spotted in tombs. Most of these reports are anecdotes. One, for instance, relates that Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) once ran into an old tomb that had fallen into water. From the remains he collected a brick bearing a prophecy that this tomb would fall into a river in eight hundred years.⁷³ Another text reports an even more detailed prophecy inscribed on a coffin from a ruined tomb: this tomb will fall into water in seven hundred years and roll down a cliff in the third month of the twentieth year of the Yuanjia 元嘉 era (443).⁷⁴

Such stories can easily be dismissed as fantasies. Yet in light of the epitaphs of Shedi, Yuan Zisui, and others, we must reappraise these statements, for the excavated funerary materials suggest that Six Dynasties audiences took these apparently artificial stories seriously.

The predictions intentionally highlighted specific details about the time and place of these events so as to assure readers of their credibility and accuracy.

The crux of these prophecies was the prediction of what the future discoverers of ruined tombs would do with them. If not Shedi himself, at least his direct superior, Prince Gao Cheng 高澄 (521–549),⁷⁵ was purported to have come across an ancient tomb housing a prophecy:

東魏相齊王澄以舟師還，次於小平津。北岸古塚崩，骨見，
銘曰：“今卜高原，千秋之後，化為下泉，當逢霸主，必為改
遷。”王曰：“古人之卜，其何至也。”令更葬之。

On his way back with his navy, Gao Cheng, Prime Minister of the Eastern Wei and Prince of Qi, anchored (the navy) at the Ferry of Little Ping. The ancient tomb on the northern bank had collapsed, leaving the bones [of the deceased] exposed. An inscription [from the tomb] reads: “Now I made a divination in favor of this high plateau. [The prognostication foretells that] the plateau will turn into underground springs in a thousand years and will encounter a supreme prince who will remove [the physical remains of the deceased] to a new grave.” The prince responded, “How accurate is this ancient divination!” He [therefore] gave an order to have [the remains] reburied.⁷⁶

The basic narrative is surprisingly similar to that of Prince Shedi’s epitaph: a tomb is predicted to be ruined and eventually reburied within centuries to come by an unnamed “supreme prince”; and Gao Cheng’s response, which attests the credibility of the prophecy, is precisely what Shedi expects in the last line of his epitaph. This account, however, is fundamentally different from the story of Xie Huilian in one respect: Xie’s prose and rhapsody provide a generally plausible account of a real-life event; whereas Gao’s story is turned into myth by the inscription’s claim that the later encounter (with a supreme prince) was predetermined and could be foreseen by the time the tomb was completed.

The new myth of the tomb’s afterlife concerns not only redeeming the perishable remains of the deceased, but also retrieving the lost fame of the tomb’s occupant. Xie Huilian could not hide his great disappointment at finding no information about the ancient gentleman to whom he finally assigned the pseudonym “Lord of Darkness.” Through names dead persons become known to the world, but only through words are the names passed down. An immortal afterlife eventually depends on written words. Cao Pi, who despised the use of metal and stone for burial, favored an alternative means to achieve deathlessness. Abandoning the concept of transcendence (xian 僊), he embraced the simple idea of imperishability (buxiu 不朽), which was impossible for either the body or the tomb, but eminently attainable in words. He claimed that “writing is a great method to administer a state and a noble business to attain imperishability” 盖文章，經國之大業，不朽之盛事。⁷⁷ Such an idea echoed an old teaching, recorded in Zuo Zhuan 左傳 that defines the deathless as those whose words will live on after they have died.⁷⁸ Material cannot attain deathlessness when “the divine water offered before the table did not cause longevity, and the spirit pills placed behind the deceased’s elbows failed to generate wings” 案前神水，未見長生，肘後靈丸，寧能羽化。⁷⁹ In place of the myth of physical transcendence in the afterlife, the new myth of posthumous immortality is based on the deathlessness of words, which can convey remembrance through generations.⁸⁰

Shedi's epitaph reflects this same faith in words. What motivated the prince's former subordinates to make this epitaph was the fear that "(his) civil brightness and martial splendor would fade away like spring blossoms, and his great fame and achievements would wither away like autumn leaves."⁸¹ Such sentiments, with slight variations, became almost formulaic in Six Dynasties tomb epitaphs.⁸²

Yet, words require a medium in which to be imperishable. On the one hand, in total contrast to the Han-dynasty faith in physical immortality, many Six Dynasties epitaphs assert the endurance of words and the perishability of all materials, including the most durable—stone and metal. In the words of one writer: "The stone casket easily decays and the bronze sword hardly endures. Only things recorded on bamboo never fade, like the orchid or the calamus" 石槨易朽, 銅劍難存, 唯當緗竹, 不殞蘭蓀.⁸³ But bamboo does disintegrate over time. This is even more true of paper and silk; nor do cinnabar and malachite (danqing 丹青) make for lasting, let alone everlasting, inks.⁸⁴ Ironically, the most lasting medium on which words can be inscribed turns out to be—stone. This troubling paradox finds expression in the contradictory epitaph of Madam Hulü, one of Shedi's wives: "Mounds and valleys constantly change; metal and jade are perishable. [I have] had my good reputation engraved and preserved on the stone of the [Yellow] Spring" 陵谷易遷, 金玉可朽, 用勒徽音, 寄之泉石.⁸⁵

This paradox perhaps reflects the changed role of the material in the pursuit of posthumous immortality (or deathlessness) that was resumed during this period. As direct means to achieve posthumous immortality stone and metal had failed, but as enduring media on which to record words, they continued to prevail.

Just as stone is the hardest material to disintegrate, the tomb proved to be the least perishable of all perishable venues. The carved stone had to be preserved in the tomb to escape the fast-changing outside world. One epitaph bemoans the swiftness and irrevocability of change:

斧柯潛壞，桑田屢改。松柏為薪，碑表非固。敬刊幽石，永寘窮泉。

The axe handle decayed without being realized; mulberry fields frequently changed; pines and cypresses turn into firewood; steles and tomb markers never stand long. [So I have] engraved this dark stone, full of respect, and wish it could stay forever in the [Yellow] Spring.⁸⁶

The axe handle refers to a story that was widely circulated during the fifth and sixth centuries. A logger named Wang Zhi 王質 accidentally entered a grotto located in a mountain. In it he encountered two child immortals playing chess (weiqi 圍棋) and stopped to watch them. Before the game was over, he noticed that his axe handle had entirely disintegrated, so much time having gone by without his realizing it.⁸⁷ According to Shenxianzhuan 神僊傳 (Biographies of the immortals), Lady Magu 麻姑 once witnessed the Eastern Sea transformed three times into mulberry fields and then back into the sea.⁸⁸ Both legends illustrate how fugitive mundane time appears from the perspective of Immortals. The legends echo what is frequently claimed in contemporary epitaphs: that "the mountain and valley will exchange their positions" 陵谷易位.⁸⁹ Mountains, which had been reputed to be the surest sites of posthumous immortality, lost that distinction and came to be considered erratic. Frustrated by a world in which the only constant was change, Du Yu 杜預 (222–284) had two identical steles made and erected one on a mountaintop and sank the other into a river.⁹⁰ His intention? That at least one of his steles would

remain in view on the ground for all times, no matter how low the mountain descended or the riverbed rose.

Behind these pessimistic metaphors and predictions about the tomb was a common faith that the epitaph would endure. Though the tomb will be ruined, the inscription promising posthumous immortality will endure and be rediscovered. Though the body of the deceased will decay, his name and reputation will survive and be known to the future. The perishable stone and tomb are not a guarantee of transcendence; rather, they are omens of destruction that will be followed in the indeterminate future by the restoration of both the tomb and the identity—perhaps even the fame—of the deceased. As predicted, a stranger will happen upon the tomb, remove the lid of the epitaph stone, and rediscover the inscribed lines. It is for this person that “we inscribed the name in the terrace of the [Yellow] Spring and wish it would be known by the world in the future” 而刊名泉臺, 冀詳于來世.⁹¹

Conclusion

Let us return to the basic question raised at the beginning of this article: what is the significance of Shedi’s and other sixth-century epitaphs that anticipated the ruin of the tombs?

These epitaphs reveal a new way of seeing posthumous immortality both in northern and in southern China during the Six Dynasties. This view prevailed after an earlier method, pursuing immortality of the body through the power of imperishable materials, had overtly failed. Between the third and sixth centuries the idea that tombs would disintegrate emerged alongside the notion that posthumous immortality could be achieved through words. What reshaped people’s minds was not philosophical meditation, but the vivid realities of ravaging warfare, tomb robbery, destruction, and ruin.

The funerary culture of the Six Dynasties changes in two important ways. First, whereas in the Han dynasty the tomb was considered the resting place for the deceased in the afterlife, during the Six Dynasties the tomb also became a cache for the deceased’s identity and reputation, as embodied by the epitaph. In other words, the deceased subject, or “occupant,” of the tomb had both bodily and verbal forms. Although these two kinds of remains pertained to the same individual, their destinies differed: the flesh would decay and vanish; the words carved in stone would last. This seems to indicate that the epitaph was considered superior to the physical remains.

Secondly, whereas in the Han dynasty the tomb and the deceased’s reputation survived or disappeared in tandem, during the Six Dynasties the survival of the tomb and the identity of the deceased ironically became incompatible. As the tomb was doomed to collapse, the epitaph was destined to survive, to emerge into the world of the living, and to address the living. Although the tomb and the epitaph were both for the sake of the deceased, their purposes differed: the tomb was to “conceal”; the epitaph, to “reveal.”

Prince Shedi’s tomb and his epitaph, however, bear each other out most remarkably. On the one hand, the grand, stout structure and the elaborate décor of the tomb form a parallel to the first two sections of the epitaph,⁹² which celebrate the prince’s great secular achievements and his spectacular funeral procession. On the other hand, the tomb’s vulnerability, attested by its ultimate ruin, echoes the pessimistic prophecy that concludes the epitaph. The tomb itself, like the epitaph it contains, is a paradox, a contradiction between two “knowns”: its present and its presently known future.

The idea of worldly inconstancy expressed in the epitaphs is different from the Buddhist idea of impermanence (wuchang 無常), which must have been well known to the Six Dynasties subjects. Funerary epitaphs from the Six Dynasties rarely contained Buddhist terminologies or phrases. Among nearly five hundred epitaphs gathered by Zhao Chao, I only encountered four pieces, all belonging to Buddhist practitioners, with definite Buddhist concepts.⁹³ Thus Buddhism was almost surely not considered as a necessary element of regular epitaphs during that period. Whereas the Buddhist concept of wuchang refers to transitoriness, or “the constant, uninterrupted series of transformations culminating in a thing’s gross annihilation,”⁹⁴ the tombs’ eventual ruin was more often thought to be the result of the inconstancy of the world, particularly of the mundane realm aboveground, as represented by shifting mountains and valleys. Contrary to the Buddhist teaching against all worldly attachments, these epitaphs demonstrate an overt obsession with securing posthumous fame through words.

Chinese epitaphs also challenge the conventional methodological wisdom of scholars today, who tend to divide epitaphs into unrelated literary and material aspects. In fact, the term muzhi refers to both a text and an object, both verbal and material.⁹⁵ Shedi’s epitaph demonstrates that the textual and the visual/material were organically bound to each other in Six Dynasties epitaphs, like the two sides of a coin. As a burial object, the epitaph was immanently associated with the tomb, occupying a spot in it and serving the purpose of it. Therefore a comprehensive understanding of the epitaph necessarily requires a coordinated study of the interrelated verbal, visual, material, and spatial relations. This also means that, in order to examine the object in an organic and synthetic way, the researcher must cross the established boundaries between the disciplines of history, literary studies, religious studies, cultural anthropology, and art history.

This study also challenges the approach to tombs that scholars take today. Archaeologists and art historians customarily look at excavated funerary sites as wreckages of intact “originals” waiting to be reconstructed. But this assumption is hardly sustainable once the concept of “original” is cast in doubt. “Original” is only an ideal image (a myth, so to speak) of the object, whereas the object itself lives in the course of incessant decaying. According to Alois Riegl, cultural relics are essentially “ruins” that are charged with different degrees of “agevalue,” by which he refers to the symbolic values that modern viewers attach to historical remains precisely because these objects are old, worn, and withered.⁹⁶ This was also true of the Six Dynasties subjects, who sensed and contemplated the age-value not only of ruins, but also of new and yet-to-be-ruined objects, although the main concern at that time was not so much about aesthetics in Riegl’s sense as about immortality. To persons living in the Six Dynasties, a brand-new tomb was unsettling, because they knew that it would eventually meet with ruin.

Footnotes:

I would like to thank Wu Hung, Robert Harrist Jr., Zheng Yan, and the anonymous reviewer for HJAS, for their valuable insights and critiques of different versions of this essay.

1 Wang Kelin 王克林, “Bei Qi Shedi Huiluo mu” 北齊庫狄回洛墓, *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 1979.3: 377–99.

2 For Shedi Huiluo's official biography, see Li Baiyao 李百藥, *Bei Qishu* 北齊書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 19.254; Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Beishi* 北史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 53.1908. All dates are Common Era unless otherwise noted.

3 Wang Kelin, "Bei Qi Shedi Huiluo mu," pp. 396–98. For a transcription of their epitaphs, see Zhao Chao 趙超, *Han Wei Nanbeichao muzhi huibian* 漢魏南北朝墓誌彙編 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1992) [hereafter HWNM], pp. 407–8, 414.

4 Wu Hung, *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), pp. 9–10.

5 James Legge, trans., *Li Chi: Book of Rites* (1885; rpt., New York: University Books, 1967), 1:191.

6 "When one goes to a burying-ground, he should not get up on any of the graves." Legge, trans., *Li Chi*, 1:89.

7 "He then first returned, leaving the disciples behind. A great rain came on; and when they rejoined him, he asked them what had made them so late. 'The earth slipped,' they said, 'from the grave at Fang.' They told him this thrice without his giving them any answer. He then wept freely, and said, 'I have heard that the ancients did not need to repair their graves!'" James Legge, *Li Chi*, 1:123.

8 For these Han funerary genres, see Huang Jinming 黃金明, *Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao leibeiwen yanjiu* 漢魏晉南北朝誄碑文研究 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), pp. 10–71; Robert Joe Cutter, "Saying Goodbye: The Transformation of the Dirge in Early Medieval China," *Early Medieval China* 10–11.1 (2004): 71–72; Hayashi Kana 林香奈, "Kan Gi Rikuchō no rui ni tsuite—Bohi to no kanren o chūshin ni" 漢魏六朝の誄について—墓碑との関連を中心に, *Nihon Chūgoku Gakkai hō* 日本中国学会報 45 (1993): 35–49; Patricia Ebrey, "Later Han Stone Inscriptions," *HJAS* 40.2 (1980): 325–53. For examples of the Han inscriptions in tombs, see Nagata Hidemasa 永田英正, *Kandai sekkoku shūsei* 漢代石刻集成, 2 vols. (Dōhōsha shuppan, 1994), 1:44–45, 108–9, 182–83; Wu Hung, "Private Love and Public Duty: Images of Children in Early Chinese Art," in *Chinese Views of Childhood*, ed. Anne Behnke Kinney (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), pp. 79–82. Although on very few occasions Han-dynasty tombs bore inscriptions on the door anticipating the tomb's future exposure, their purpose was to persuade the readers not to excavate these tombs or to scare them away so to keep the tomb intact; see Xuzhou bowuguan 徐州博物館, "Jiangsu Tongshan xian Xi Han erhao yadongmu cailiao de zai buchong" 江蘇銅山縣西漢二號崖洞墓材料的再補充, *Kaogu* 考古 1997.2: 39–40; Yokota Kyōzō 横田恭三, "Kameyama Kanbo no saiseki kokuji ni tsuite" 龜山 漢墓の塞石刻字について, *Atomi Gakuen Joshi Daigaku kiyō* 跡見学園女子大学紀要 33 (2000): 83–95; Gu Chengyin 顧承銀, Zhuo Xiansheng 卓先勝, and Li Dengke 李登科, "Shandong Jinxiang Yushan faxian liangzuo Han mu" 山東金鄉魚山發現兩座漢墓, *Kaogu* 1995.5: 386.

9 Wu Hung, "Beyond the 'Great Boundary': Funerary Narrative in the Cangshan Tomb," in *Boundaries in China*, ed. John Hay (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), p. 98. For the excavation report of the tomb from which the inscription was found, see Zhang Qihai 張其海, "Shandong Cangshan Yuanjian yuannian huaxiangshi mu" 山東蒼山元嘉元年畫像石墓, *Kaogu* 1975.2: 124–34.10 For a critical historiography of epitaphs, see Timothy Davies, "Potent Stone:

Entombed Epigraphy and Memorial Culture in Early Medieval China” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2008), pp. 15–18.

11 For an extensive discussion of epitaphs as a particular type of burial object loaded with religious and cosmological meanings, see Zhao Chao, *Gudai muzhi tonglun* 古代墓誌通論 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2003), pp. 102–16.

12 These analogues seem to have been intentionally selected to fit with Shedi’s official career and identity. For instance, as a member of Three Dukes (sangong 三公), the highest ranks of the Northern Qi bureaucratic system, Shedi was indeed an equal of Yi Yin, Lü Wang, Shen Bo, and Zhongshan Fu, all of whom held top positions in their times.

13 See Appendix 1, “Epitaph,” line 30. Blank spaces both before and after the character zu make the line difficult to read. Wang Tianxiu identifies the second blank as dao 道 but offers no explanation for that, and therefore interprets the line as “to be buried at his hometown”; see Wang Tianxiu 王天廡, “Bei Qi Shedi Huiluo fufu muzhi dian zhu” 北齊厓狄回洛夫婦墓誌點註, *Wenwu jikan* 文物季刊 1993.1: 77, 79 n. 51. In my reading, however, the word xing 行 refers to the outset of the funeral procession. The word hui 毀 is most difficult to interpret; possibly it is an error for 發 (to start; to set out) due to the resemblance between the two graphs.

14 The “dragon hearse” (long’er 龍輜, longchun 龍輶) is equipped with shafts that bear privileged dragon images on them. “When the son of Heaven is put into his coffin it is surrounded with boards plastered over, and (rests on the hearse), on whose shafts are painted dragons.” James Legge, trans., *Li Chi*, 1:159; Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, 8.66, in *Shisanjing zhushu: fu jiaokanji* 十三經註疏: 附校勘記, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 1:1294. As the seventh-century exegete Kong Yingda notes, dragon hearses were symbols of the imperial house (or the house of Son of heaven), whereas princes (or vassals) were not entitled to them; see Kong Yingda, *Liji zhengyi*, 45.1583. In the epitaph of Prince Shedi this use is probably not a hyperbole, because, as lines 19–21 of the epitaph suggest, the emperor awarded him with an honored funeral which might have included imperial funerary instruments or props.

15 See Appendix 1, “Epitaph,” lines 30–31.

16 See Appendix 1, “Epitaph,” line 31. The first character was either deliberately left blank or damaged. Besides the translation provided, there is another possible reading: that Tiandu is the first name of a person. However, in either reading the prediction of the tomb’s reopening remains unchanged.

17 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, pp. 16–17.

18 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 36.

19 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 70.

20 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 112.

21 Dated to 522. Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 129.

22 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 92.

23 Dated to 520. Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 117.

24 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 328.

25 昔王季歷葬於楚山之尾，樂水齧其墓。Chan-kuo Ts’e, trans. J. I. Crump (1970; 2nd ed. revised, San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1979), p. 384. King Ji Li was the father of King Wen 文王, who founded the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 B.C.E.) with his son King Wu 武王 (d. 1043 B.C.E.).

- 26 Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu 漢書* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 36.1954.
- 27 Zhao Chao, HWNM, p. 376; see also Appendix 2, line 3.
- 28 Chen Shou 陳壽, *Sanguozhi 三國志* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 28.770.
- 29 Zhang Hua 張華, *Bowuzhi jiaozheng 博物志校證*, collated by Fan Ning 范寧 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), p. 85. The term “fine city” (jiacheng 佳城), appearing dozens of times in sixth-century epitaphs (the earliest known example dates from 533), became a metaphor for a rediscovered tomb, or a tomb preordained to be rediscovered in the future. 30 Zhao Chao, HWNM, pp. 401–2. Some prophecies, however, have different attitudes toward the people who would open the tombs. For example, the epitaph of Xu Zhifan 徐之範 (507–584) ends with a prophecy that predicts that Xu’s tomb will be opened by Sun Changshou 孫長壽 in one thousand and eight hundred years. Condemned as an evil robber, Sun and his entire family are maliciously cursed to death: “The one who opens this tomb will have his whole family exterminated” 所發者滅門! In this case, the ending prophecy functions more like a pre-scheduled revenge; see Luo Xin 羅新 and Ye Wei 葉煒, *Xin chu Wei Jin Nanbeichao muzhi shuzheng 新出魏晉南北朝墓誌證* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), pp. 355–62.
- 31 Zhao Wanli 趙萬里, *Han Wei Nanbeichao muzhi jishi 漢魏南北朝墓誌集釋* (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1956), p. 114.
- 32 Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu 說文解字注* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1999), p. 90.
- 33 For discussions of the concept and history of chen, see Chen Pan 陳槃, “Chen wei shiming” 讖緯釋名, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊* 11 (1944): 300; Sugimoto Tadashi 杉本忠, “Shin’isetsu no kigen oyobi hattatsu” 讖緯說の起源及び發達, *Shigaku 史學* 13.2 (1934): 233–81; Zhong Zhaopeng 鐘肇鵬, *Chen wei lun lue 讖緯論略* (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), pp. 11–26.
- 34 For the political use of the chen prophecy in the Han, see Jack Dull, “A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (ch’an-wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1966). On the political use of chen prophecies in the Six Dynasties, see Lü Zongli, *Power of the Words: Chen Prophecy in Chinese Politics AD 265–618* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).
- 35 Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji 史記* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 6.252.
- 36 For such examples, mostly from Shaanxi and Shanxi, see Shaanxi sheng bowuguan 陝西省博物館 and Shaanxi sheng wenguanhui 陝西省文管會, *Shanbei Dong Han hua xiang shike xuanji 陝北東漢畫像石刻選集* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1958), pp. 82–83; Shaanxi sheng bowuguan and Shaanxi sheng wenguanhui, “Mizhi Dong Han huaxiangshi mu fajue jianbao” 米脂東漢畫像石墓發掘簡報, *Wenwu 文物* 1972.2: 69–73; Liang Zonghe 梁宗和, “Shanxi Lishi xian de Handai huaxiangshi” 山西離石縣的漢代畫像石, *Wenwu cankao ziliao 文物參考資料* 1958.4: 40; Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 山西省考古研究所 et al., “Shanxi Lishi zaici faxian Dong Han huaxiangshi mu” 山西離石再次發現東漢畫像石墓, *Wenwu* 1996.4: 13–27; Suide Han huaxiangshi zhanlanguan 綏德漢畫像石展覽館, *Suide Handai huaxiangshi 綏德漢代畫像石* (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin meishu chubanshe, 2001), p. 192, pl. 123; Li Lin 李林, Kang Lanying 康蘭英, and Zhao Liguang 趙力光, *Shanbei Handai huaxiangshi 陝北漢代畫像石* (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1995), p. 220, pl. 644.

37 Nanyang diqu wenwudui 南陽地區文物隊 and Nanyang bowuguan 南陽博物館, “Tanghe Han Yuping dayin Feng jun ruren huaxiangshi mu” 唐河漢鬱平大尹馮君孺人畫像石墓, *Kaogu xuebao* 1980.2: 247–48.

38 No substantial difference exists between the phrases “a thousand years” and “ten thousand years,” although the latter number is apparently ten times larger than the former; see Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風, *Hanyu dacidian 漢語大辭典*, 13 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1986–94), 1:835, 9:463, entries for *qiannian* 千年 and *wannian* 萬年, respectively.

39 Prophetic tomb epitaphs, which emerged in the first half of the sixth century, continued to be used throughout the Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties; see Zhao Zhenhua 趙振華 and Wang Xuechun 王學春, “Tan Sui Tang shiqi sangzang wenhua zhong de muzhi chenyan: Du Liu Shantao muzhi ji qi chenyan” 談隋唐時期喪葬文化中的墓誌識言——讀柳山濤墓誌及其識言, *Beilin jikan 碑林集刊* 10 (2004): 193–200; Liu Tianqi 劉天祺, “Sui Tang ‘chenyu’ muzhi ji xiangguan wenti” 隋唐識語墓誌及相關問題, *Tangdu xuekan 唐都學刊* 2009.7: 34–37.

40 In Mawangdui 馬王堆 Tomb 1, for instance, the body of Lady Dai 軼 (fl. early second century B.C.E.) was shrouded in many layers of cloth, put into four nested coffins, and concealed in a water-logged environment. After nearly 2,200 years the body was in an almost perfect state of preservation. In Mancheng 滿城 Tomb 1, the corpse of Prince Liu Sheng 劉勝 (d. 113 B.C.E.) was encased in a suit made of 2,498 pieces of cut and polished jade sewn together with 1,100 kilograms of gold thread. Thus clad, and with the so-called nine orifices (*jiuqiao* 九竅) closed with jade plugs, the flesh and bone were believed to be magically immune to perishing. Although in Han China there was another voice that advocated thrift burial and simple treatment of the body, this voice could hardly compete with the dominant belief in postmortem immortality achievable through the power of non-perishable materials. *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所*, *Changsha Mawangdui yihao Han mu 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓*, 2 vols. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1973), 1:31–32; *Hunan yixueyuan 湖南醫學院*, *Changsha Mawangdui yihao Han mu gushi yanjiu 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓古屍研究* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pp. 45–46; *Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao 滿城漢墓發掘報告*, 2 vols. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 1:346–49. An anti-traditionalist Yang Wangsun 楊王孫 (fl. first century B.C.E.), who in his will was determined to be buried naked without coffins, shrouds, or jade or stone body plugs, received criticism from one of his friends: “These are the customs left by the ancient sages. Why are you so stubborn on insisting on your own knowledge?” As a believer in Huang-Lao thought, Yang argues that it is unnatural and hence harmful to have the corpse “wrapped with silk and cloth, isolated in inner and outer coffins, restrained by cords and wires, and plugged with jade and stone in the mouth” 裹以幣帛, 鬲以棺槨, 支體絡束, 口含玉石, 欲化不得; see Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, 67.2908.

41 Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954–74), vol. 5, part 2: *Spagyric Discovery and Invention: Magisteries of Gold and Immortality*, p. 284; Wu Hung, “The Prince of Jade Revisited: Material Symbolism of Jade as Observed in the Mancheng Tomb,” in *Chinese Jade, Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia* 18, ed. Rosemary E. Scott (London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 1997), pp. 147–70. Most scholars agree that the jade suit was made to protect or preserve the body symbolically and was related to the idea of eternity; see Robert Thorp, “Mountain Tombs and Jade Burial Suits: Preparations for Eternity in the Western Han,” in *Ancient Mortuary Traditions*

of China: Papers on Chinese Ceramic Funerary Sculptures, ed. George Kuwayama (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), pp. 26–39; Jessica Rawson, “Ancient Chinese Ritual as Seen in the Material Record,” in *State and Court Ritual in China*, ed. Joseph P. McDermott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 39–40; James Lin, “Jade Suits and Iron Armour,” *East Asia Journal: Studies in Material Culture* 1.2 (2003): 20–43. Although most scholars attribute jade’s magic power to its physical hardness, Eugene Y. Wang has recently proposed a new theory of the afterlife by reading jade discs (bi 璧) and many other pictorial motifs painted on Mawangdui silk banners as metaphorical images of yin-yang vapors and their copulation, which is discussed in the Mawangdui medical texts from Mawangdui Tomb 3; see his “Ascend to Heaven or Stay in the Tomb: Paintings in Mawangdui Tomb 1 and the Virtual Ritual of Revival in Second Century B.C.E. China,” in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, ed. Amy Olberding and Philip Ivanhoe (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011), pp. 37–84. Whether taken literally or metaphorically, jade, being enduring, embodied the idea of immortality for Han-dynasty people.

42 Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), the last prime minister of the Han dynasty, was himself a notorious looter. Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Hanshu 後漢書* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 74.2396.

43 Chen Shou, *Sanguozhi*, 2.81.

44 Sha Zhongping 沙忠平, “Wei Jin bozang lun” 魏晉薄葬論, *Wenbo 文博* 2001.3: 30–34; Wang Bo 王波, “Wei Jin Nanbeichao shiqi de bozang xisu ji qi yuanyin fenxi” 魏晉南北朝時期的薄葬習俗及其原因分析, *Jianghai xuekan 江海學刊* 1998.5: 122–27; Xu Jijun 徐吉軍 and He Yunxiang 賀雲翔, *Zhongguo sangzang lisu 中國喪葬禮俗* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1991), pp. 63–72.

45 Such unexpected encounters occurred in such places as roadsides, gardens, lakes, riverbanks, waterways, military barracks, and even private houses. For examples, see He Xun 何遜 (d. 518), “Tangbian jian guchong shi” 塘邊見古塚詩, in *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩*, ed. Lu Qinli 遼欽立, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 2:1700; Li Yanshou, *Nanshi 南史* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 33.870,

43.1087; Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯, *Nan Qishu 南齊書* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 1.13, 26.480; Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔, *Yiyuan 異苑* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 7.65. 46 A late Han author lamented on a tragic scene he came across in a melancholic tone: 出郭門直視, 但見丘與墳。古墓犁為田, 松柏摧為薪。 “Walking out of the gate of the outer city wall, / I see nothing but tumuli and mounds. / The ancient tombs have been ploughed into farmlands; / The pines and cypresses (of these tombs) were chopped down for firewood”; *Gushi shijiu shou jishi 古詩十九首集釋*, ed. Sui Shusen 隋樹森 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), pp. 21–22.

47 For example, Ren Xiaogong 任孝恭 (d. 548), “Ji zafen wen” 祭雜墳文; He Zilang 何子朗 (ca. 479–522), “Baizhong fu” 敗塚賦; see *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文*, ed. Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (Taipei: Hongye shuju, 1975), p. 3351; Yao Silian 姚思廉, *Liangshu 梁書* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 50.714.

48 Li Yanshou, *Nanshi*, 19.537.

49 Xiao Tong 蕭統, *Zengbu liuchen zhu wenxuan 增補六臣註文選* (Taipei: Zhengda yinshuguan, 1974), pp. 1120–21.

50 English translation by Stephen Owen, with slight modification, in his *Remembrance: The Experience of the Past in Classic Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 38–39.

- 51 Xiao Tong, *Zengbu liuchen zhu wenxuan*, p. 1121.
- 52 Owen, *Remembrance: The Experience of the Past in Classic Chinese Literature*, pp. 33–50.
- 53 For examples, see Yangzhou bowuguan 揚州博物館, “Jiangsu Hanjiang Yaozhuang 101 hao Xi Han mu” 江蘇邗江姚莊 101 號西漢墓, *Wenwu* 1988.2: 19–43; Yangzhou bowuguan, “Jiangsu Hanjiang Yaozhuang 102 hao Han mu” 江蘇邗江姚莊 102 號漢墓, *Kaogu* 2000.4: 50–65.
- 54 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 18.
- 55 Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen, p. 1609.
- 56 See Appendix 1, “Cover.”
- 57 Tseng Yuho, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1993), pp. 151–242.
- 58 Shihuangling Qin yongkeng kaogu fajuedui 始皇陵秦俑坑考古發掘隊, “Qin Shihuang ling xice Zhaobeihucun Qin xingtu mu” 秦始皇陵西側趙背戶村秦刑徒墓, *Wenwu* 1982.3: 1–11; Funakoshi Shin 船越信, “Chin Kan no gasenmon keito boshi” 秦漢の瓦塼文刑徒墓誌, *Kodai bunka 古代文化* 43.9 (1991): 43–46; Feng Shi 馮時 and Jin Wenxin 金文馨, “Muzhi qiyuan chuyi” 墓誌起源芻議, *Zhongguo wenwubao 中國文物報* 1996.3.31; Xu Ziqiang 徐自強, “Muzhi qianlun” 墓誌淺論, *Huaxia kaogu 華夏考古* 1988.3: 107–12; Lai Fei 賴非, Qi Lu beike muzhi yanjiu 齊魯碑刻墓誌研究 (Ji’nan: Qilu shushe, 2004), pp. 191–202.
- 59 Fuguhara Keirō, “Sei Shin no boshi no yigi” 西晉の墓誌の意義, in *Chūgoku chūsei no bunbutsu 中国中世の文物*, ed. Tonami Mamoru 砺波護 (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku, jinbun kagaku kenkyūjō, 1993), pp. 315–70; see also Hibino Takeo 日比野丈夫, “Boshi no kigen ni tsuite” 墓誌の起源について, in *Egami namio kyōju koki kinen ronshū, minzoku bunka hen 江上波夫教授古稀記念論集, 民族文化篇* (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1977), pp. 181–92.
- 60 Shen Yue 沈約, *Songshu 宋書* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 15.407; see also Kenneth Ch’en, “Inscribed Stelae during the Wei, Chin, and Nan-ch’ao,” in *Studia Asiatica: Essays in Asian Studies in Felicitation of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of Professor Ch’en Shouyi*, ed. Laurence G. Thompson (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1975), pp. 75–84; Nagata Hidemasa, *Kandai sekkoku shūsei*, 1:340; Zhao Chao, *Gudai muzhi tonglun*, p. 49.
- 61 Luo Zongzhen 羅宗真, *Liuchao wenwu 六朝文物* (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 2004), pp. 221–26.
- 62 Liu Fengjun 劉鳳君, “Nanbeichao shike muzhi xingzhi tanyuan” 南北朝石刻墓誌形制探源, *Zhongyuan wenwu 中原文物* 1988.2: 74–82; Huang Zhanyue 黃展岳, “Zaoqi muzhi de yixie wenti” 早期墓誌的一些問題, *Wenwu* 1995.12: 51–58. The square muzhi without a lid emerged earlier in the late fifth century, and the earliest known muzhi covered with a lid dates from 505; see Zhao Chao, *Gudai muzhi tonglun*, p. 52.
- 63 Susan Bush, “Thunder Monsters and Wind Spirits in Early Sixth Century China and the Epitaph Cover of Lady Yüan,” *Boston Museum Bulletin* 72.367 (1974): 25–54; Takahashi Sōichi 高橋宗一, “Hokugi boshiseki ni kakareta hōō kishin no kasei” 北魏墓誌石に描かれた鳳凰・鬼神の化成, *Bijutsushi kenkyū 美術史研究* 27 (1989): 87–104.
- 64 Zhao Chao, *Gudai muzhi tonglun*, pp. 98–112, 125–213.
- 65 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 316.
- 66 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, pp. 56–57.
- 67 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 43.
- 68 Lu Ji, “Da mu fu” 大暮賦, in *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, p. 2011.

- 69 Albert Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 182–89.
- 70 Judy Ho, “The Twelve Calendrical Animals in Tang Tombs,” in *Ancient Mortuary Traditions of China*, ed. George Kuwayama (Los Angeles: Far Eastern Art Council, 1991), p. 71.
- 71 Zhao Chao, *Gudai muzhi tonglun*, p. 105.
- 72 Wu Hung, “Rethinking East Asian Tombs: A Methodological Proposal,” in *Dialogues in Art History, from Mesopotamian to Modern: Readings for a New Century*, ed. Elizabeth Cropper (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2009), pp. 139–65.
- 73 “The grass divination is auspicious; the turtle divination is inauspicious. [This tomb will] fall into a river in eight hundred years” 筮吉龜凶，八百年，落江中。Chen Qiaoyi 陳橋驛, *Shuijingzhu jiaoshi 水經注校釋* (Hangzhou: Hangzhou daxue chubanshe, 1999), p. 701.
- 74 Liu Jingshu, *Yiyuan*, 7.67.
- 75 Gao Cheng was the eldest son of Gao Huan 高歡 (496–547), the founder of the Northern Qi. He succeeded Gao Huan to be king of Qi and became the virtual ruler of Eastern Wei after his father died in 547. Shedi became Gao Huan’s subordinate around 531 and must have later been subject to his young heir Gao Cheng; see Li Baiyao, *Bei Qishu*, 19.254–55.
- 76 Li Fang 李昉, *Taiping yulan 太平御覽*, Sibū congkan edition (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 726.3.
- 77 Cao Cao, Cao Pi, and Cao Zhi 曹植, *San Cao ji 三曹集* (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1992), p. 178.
- 78 Fan Ning, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi 春秋左傳正義*, 35.277, in Ruan Yuan, *Shisanjing hushu: fu jiaokanji*, 2:1979.
- 79 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 417.
- 80 It must be noted that the early notion of immortality (xian) did not disappear during the Six Dynasties but still existed, most notably, in Daoist practice; see Anna K. Seidel, “Post-Mortem Immortality, or the Taoist Resurrection of the Body,” in *Gilgul: Essays on Transformation, Revolution, and Permanence in the History of Religions Dedicated to R. J. Zwi Werblowsky*, ed. S. Shaked, D. Shulman, and G. G. Stroumsa (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), pp. 223–37.
- 81 See Appendix 1, “Epitaph,” line 25.
- 82 Huang Jinming, *Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao leibeiwen yanjiu*, pp. 145–92.
- 83 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 439.
- 84 An epitaph composer puts it: “Cinnabar and malachite eventually perish and oxskin-bound slips easily fall apart” 丹青有歇，韋編易絕，銘茲琬琰，幽塗永晰。Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 183.
- 85 Wang Kelin, “Bei Qi Shedi Huiluo mu,” p. 396; Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 414.
- 86 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 382.
- 87 Tang Qiu 湯球, *Jiujia jiu Jinshu jiben 九家舊晉書輯本*, collated by Yan Qianzi 嚴茜子 (Ji’nan: Qilu shushe, 2000), p. 180. A slightly different version is recorded in Chen Qiaoyi, *Shuijingzhu jiaoshi*, p. 695.
- 88 Quoted by Li Fang, *Taiping yulan*, 38.10.
- 89 For an example, see Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 92.
- 90 Fang Xuanlin 房玄齡, *Jinshu 晉書* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 34.1031.
- 91 Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, p. 335.
- 92 Just as the epitaph devoted most of its content to the prince’s illustriousness, the tomb was outstanding among Six Dynasties tombs in scale, decoration, and furnishings. Wang Kelin, “Bei Qi Shedi Huiluo mu,” p. 397. For the size of the Northern Qi imperial tombs, see Li Meitian 李

梅田, “Bei Qi muzang wenhua yinsu fenxi—yi Yecheng Jinyang wei zhongxin” 北齊墓葬文化因素分析——以鄴城、晉陽為中心, *Zhongyuan wenwu* 2004.4: 60–61, tables 1 and 2.

93 For these Buddhist examples, see Zhao Chao, *HWNM*, pp. 146–47, 311, 388.

94 Elvin W. Jones, “Buddhist Theories of Existents: The Systems of Two Truths,” in *Mahāyāna Buddhist Meditation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Minoru Kiyota (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1978), p. 10.

95 For example, whereas one passage from *Nanshi* reports that a tomb-record was installed in the tomb passage, on another occasion in *Bei Qishu* an official is purported to compose more than ten tomb-records with literary grace. Obviously in the former context the term *muzhi* refers to an object and in the latter it describes texts; see Li Yanshou, *Nanshi*, 33.867, and Li Baiyao, *Bei Qishu*, 35.467.

96 Alois Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origin,” trans. K. W. Forster and D. Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 25 (1982): 29–33.

Appendix 1

A Line-by-Line Transcription and Translation of Shedi Huiluo's Epitaph

Cover

齊故定州刺史太尉公厓狄順陽王墓銘

The epitaphic tombstone of Shedi, the former regional inspector of Dingzhou, defender-in-chief, prince of Shunyang

Epitaph

1 王諱洛，字迴洛，朔州部落人也。大□長公之孫，小曾長公之子。王稟資靈岳，啟質

The Prince was named Luo, and his style name was Huiluo. As a native of a tribe in the Shuo commandery, he was a grandson of the chief senior, and a son of the chief junior. The prince acquired a gift from spiritual mountains, and derived his nature

2 懸星，隨運匡朝，應時贊世。傳說之翼高宗，呂望之輔太祖，年代雖殊，人何優劣。鴻

from stars hanging in the sky. He followed the mandate to serve the court, and responded to the times to save the world. [Compared to] Fu Yue, who once assisted Gaozong, [and to] Lü Wang, who once assisted Taizu, although they lived in different periods, [how can you distinguish between them] which is good and which is bad? The great

3 源與帶地均長，隆基與於天比□。石氏一門萬石，楊家四世五公。物論愧其勳朱，

origin [of this clan] is as long as the earth, which is in the shape of a band; the high foundation [of this clan] is as [wide?] as heaven. The Shi family produced five two-thousand-bushel officials in one household; the Yang family yielded five dukes in four generations. Public opinion appreciated his achievements;

4 有識多其冠冕。王少逢艱險，長屬雲雷，刃集紫庭，兵交絳雉。¹心存拯亂，志在扶危。

wise people lauded his official headdress. The prince encountered difficulties and dangers when he was young, and he went through clouds and thunders after becoming an adult. Blades met in the Purple Palace; weapons clashed inside the maroon curtains. The prince set his mind to rescuing a world caught up in the turmoil; he had a resolution to save those in danger.

5 捨放夫之輕文，習摸睽之重略。射隼高墉，安假玄妻之歎；前禽不失，足感孟德之

He rejected the Jue hexagram for its downplaying of civil tactics; he practiced and followed the Kui hexagram for its stress on strategies. Shooting a falcon on a tall wall: why would he bear the lament of [Dou] Xuan's ex-wife?² Like a leading bird [coming voluntarily toward the hunter] without being hunted, he sufficiently appreciated [Cao] Mengde's

6 情。年甫弱冠，值³獻武皇帝龍戰方始，玄黃未分，虔劉逆首贊大業。中興中以軍

affection.⁴ When he had just turned twenty, Emperor Xianwu was in the early stage of his dragon fight; black [heaven] and yellow [earth] had not yet settled. He killed the rebels as his first contribution to the great enterprise. During the period of the restoration, for his military

7 勳補都督，除後將軍太中大夫，母極縣開國子，食邑四百戶，遷右箱都督，轉子為

merit he was promoted to commander-in-chief and was appointed as the rear general superior grand master of the palace, dynasty-founding viscount of the Wuji county, with a fief of four hundred households; he was then transferred to [to the post of] commander-in-chief of the Right Wing and promoted from viscount to

8 伯，增邑一百戶。[^]太祖哀我隴蜀，獨隔皇天，忿彼逋誅，仍竄崑澗。乃命鷹揚，龔茲

count with one hundred more households added to his fief. Emperor Taizu felt regret that Long and Shu were separate from the August Heaven and was angered by those having escaped punishment and fled to Yao and Mian. So [Taizu] ordered [the general of] the ascending eagle to solemnly launch

9 [九] 伐。轉左箱都督，斬馘褰旗，弔民罰罪。除使持節都督朔州諸軍事朔州刺史，尋

the [Nine] Attacks. [Shedi] was then transferred to [the post of] commander-in-chief of the Left Wing. He cut off the enemies' ears and captured their flags; he comforted the people and punished the guilty. He was appointed as the commander-in-chief commissioned with extraordinary powers and the regional inspector of the Shuo commandery governing the military affairs of the Shuo commandery, and was soon

10 除 [鎮] 東將軍金紫光祿大夫母極縣開國公，又除使持節都督西夏州諸軍事西

appointed as the east-guarding general and grand master of the palace with golden seal and purple ribbon, and the dynasty founding duke of Wuji county. He was also appointed as the commander-in-chief commissioned with extraordinary powers and the regional inspector of the Western

11 夏州刺史。邙山之役，王受虜行師，有征無戰。復增邑兩百戶，通前為七百戶。

Xia commandery governing the military affairs of the West Xia commandery. During the Campaign of Mangshan, the prince was awarded a [ritual vessel ornamented with] clam [patterns] and he marched the army out. The campaign [succeeded] without a fight. Two hundred more households were added to his fief. With the previous fief, the total reached seven hundred households.

12 世宗纂業，班爵敘勞，除征西大將軍儀同三司，尋除驃騎大將軍臨清縣散子東

After Emperor Shizong inherited the [imperial] legacy, he issued noble titles to award the good services. The prince was appointed great campaigning general of the west, unequalled in honor, and soon appointed great fast-cavalry general and nominal viscount of Linqing county, and great commander-in-chief of Eastern

13 壽陽大都督。高祖受禪，以王佐命元勳，啟弼王室，除開府儀同三司，別封東燕

Shouyang. After Emperor Gaozu received the throne, considering the prince as one of the founding ministers of the imperial house, he appointed the prince [to the rank of] commander unequalled in honor, with an additional award of [the title of] dynasty-founding viscount of the Eastern Yan

14 縣開國子領兼中□□，除使持節都督建州諸軍事建州刺史，轉離石大都督崑崙

county, [...] commander-in-chief commissioned with extraordinary powers and the regional inspector of the Jian commandery governing the military affairs in the Jian commandery. He was [then] transferred to [the post of] commander-in-chief in charge of the people at Kelan\

15 領民都督黑水領民都督。天保之季，改開府三司，為三師，食章武郡幹，加特進，除

and commander-in-chief in charge of the people at Heishui. At the end of the Tianbao era (550–559), the prince was transferred to commander unequalled in honor, serving as [one of] the three preceptors and taking Zhangwu prefecture as his fief. The Prince was titled lord specially advanced, and was appointed

16 使持節都督肆州諸軍事肆州刺史。肅宗御曆，重昌帝道，建侯裂壤，大啟山河。

commissioner with extraordinary powers and commander-in-chief and regional inspector of Si commandery governing the military affairs at the Si commandery. After Emperor Suzong had ruled the [imperial] reign and revived the imperial Way, he split the territory and established feudal marquises, and generously divided the mountains and rivers.

17 以王經始屯夷，義彰窮險，封順陽郡王，除使持節都督朔州諸軍事朔州刺史 [食]

Because the prince managed crises and peace from the very beginning and demonstrated his commitment through difficulties and dangers, the emperor made him the prince of Shunyang prefecture, and appointed him commissioner with extraordinary powers and regional inspector of Shuo commandery governing the military affairs at Shuo commandery and taking

18 博陵郡幹。大寧二年兼太尉公，除太子大師。但積善無驗，報輔乖徵；東流未已，西

Boling prefecture as his fief. In the second year of the Daning era (561–562), the prince was appointed the great master of the imperial crown prince. However, his accumulated merit was not testified, and his services and assistance were barely verified. The eastward flow had not yet ceased; the western

19 光俄逝。春秋五十有七。以大寧二年二月薨於鄴，窆於晉陽大法寺。詔贈使持

light suddenly vanished. The prince died at the age of fifty-seven at Ye in the second month of the second year of the Daning era. He was temporarily buried in the Great Law Monastery at Jinyang. By imperial decree he was awarded

20 節都督定瀛濟恒朔雲六州諸軍事定州刺史太尉公，王如故。贈物一千段，祭以

[the title of] commissioner with special powers, governor of the military affairs of the Ding, Ying, Ji, Hen, Shuo, and Yun commanderies, and defender-in-chief, and was allowed to maintain his princely title. A gift of a thousand rolls of silk was sent to him,

21 太牢，禮也。惟王含文挺秀，表逸群之資；俶儻難量。幼有不羈之志，方揚旌汧隴

and a Tailao [a pig, an ox, and a goat] was sacrificed according to ritual. The prince was literarily talented and [...] showed outstanding gifts; his brilliance was unmeasurable, and during his youth he had uncontainable ambitions. Once upon a time, he waved a flag in Yan and Long,

22 稅駕江湄。追士季之長驅，同王濬之秉旆。奉鑾輅於梁山，告功成於岱嶺。豈圖

and stationed his carriage at the bank of the Yangzi River. In penetrating deep into the enemy land he followed [General Zhong] Shiji [225–264]; in keeping [the imperial] flags upright he resembled [General] Wang Jun [206–286]. He escorted the imperial carriage at Mt. Liang and reported his success at Mt. Dai. It was unexpected

23 九萬未窮，負天之力忽盡；三千尚遠，送日之轡先徂。秦亡蹇叔，未足稱酸；鄭殞遊

that the power to buttress heaven would be suddenly exhausted before ninety thousand [li] had been reached. When there was still a long way ahead during a three-thousand-li journey, the bridle [of the horse, in the course of] seeing off the sun had an untimely fall. [Compared to his death] the loss of Mr. Jianshu of the Qin was not poignant enough; the sadness of the death of Mr. Youqiao of the Zheng

24 喬，曾何比戚。粵以大齊河清元年歲次壬午八月戊戌朔十二日己酉葬於朔州

was barely comparable. On yiyou, the twelfth day of the eighth month, whose first year was wuxu of the first year of the Heqing era of the Great Qi, when Jupiter lodged at Renwu, the prince was buried in Shuo commandery

25 城南門。王故吏等恐文昭武烈，與春萼而俱消；鴻名茂績，共秋飄而競殞，相與式

at the southern gate. The former subordinates of the prince feared that his civil brightness and martial splendor might fade away like the spring blossoms, and his great fame and achievements wither away like autumn leaves. Therefore, gathering with respect,

26 鐫青石，誌美玄泉。其詞曰：

they engraved the dark stone to record [his] beauty in the [Yellow] Spring. The words are:

27 惟岳降神，誕茲哲人，應期匡贊，命世稱珍，侔伊媿呂，誇甫超申，三捨服楚，一進降

It was the sacred mountain that sent down the spirit and gave birth to this sage. Corresponding to the times, he supported and assisted [the emperor]; well known in the world, he was extolled and beloved. He equaled Yi [Yin] and paralleled Lü [Wang]; he rivaled [Zhongshan] Fu and exceeded Shen [Bo]. He subjugated the Chu by [retreating] three she; in a single move he vanquished

28 秦。偉哉盛烈，綽矣雄圖，月中射菟，日裏彈烏。平隴吞蜀，陵江滅吳，飄如拉朽，儻

the Qin. How great was [his] grand heroism and how handsome was [his] ambitious plan! He shot down the hare in the moon and the crow in the sun. He conquered the Long and annexed the Shu; he crossed the River and destroyed the Wu. [He attacked] fiercely, as if pulling apart something disintegrated; [he advanced] swiftly

29 似摧枯。經文緯武，非弛非張，威稜後服，德制先強。秩崇八命，衣加九章，若昆匡

as if smashing something rotten. Civil affairs formed his warp, and military affairs his weft; his personality was neither loose nor taut. His might toppled those whose submission came late; his virtue subdued those who surrendered early. He was awarded the rank of eight appointments and a robe with nine patterns. He was an equal of the tribe of Kun that assisted

30 夏，如韋翼商。□毀行祖□，龍輻巡路，蕭鼓晝鳴，哀歌夜呼。逝水東驚，流光西顧，墳

the Xia and the tribe of Wei that once aided the Shang. The hearse set out after an offering to the road was made; the dragon hearse then cruised on its way. The mourning drums were beaten during the day and the elegies were sung in the night. The rushing water flows east; the light of the orbiting sun glows in the west. The tomb

31 傾池滿，終貽狐兔。□天度八百年後開吾墓，改封更葬起丘墳，宜官享祿多福祚。

will collapse and the pond will be filled up, and they will finally be occupied by foxes and hares. My tomb will be opened in eight hundred years as heaven orbits. The tumulus will be rebuilt, the remains will be reentombed; and a mound will be erected. May he receive official titles, salaries, and good luck.

Appendix I Footnotes:

1 The character is wrongly engraved as zhi 雉. The correct character, according to the context, must be wei 帷.

2 Shooting a falcon on a tall wall (she sun gao yong 射隼高墉) is a metaphor from the Zhouyi 周易, under the Jie 解 hexagram, referring to a wise and talented gentleman who waited for a proper time for action and who in the end saw his fortune rise; see Kong Yingda, Zhouyi zhengyi, 4.40, in Ruan Yuan, Shisanjing zhushu: fu jiaokanji, 1:52. According to a story perhaps invented during the Six Dynasties, a man named Dou Xuan 竇玄 once divorced his wife in order to marry a princess. Feeling betrayed, Dou's ex-wife wrote him a poignant letter lamenting that "whereas in clothes the old are no comparison to the new, among people the new are no comparison to the old"; see Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢, Yiwen leiju 藝文類聚, 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 1:30.533–34. By citing this story the author is probably defending Shedi's betrayal of his former master, Erzhu Zhao 爾朱兆 (d.533) and his defection to Gao Huan in 531.

3 There is a blank (marked as ^) intentionally inserted before the character xian 獻 to show respect for the following emperor.

4 Not hunting (killing) a leading bird coming voluntarily toward the hunter (qian qin bu shi 前禽不失) is another metaphor from the Zhouyi, under the Bi 比 hexagram, referring to a victorious ruler's mercy on defectors from his enemies; see Kong Yingda, Zhouyi zhengyi, 2.14, in Ruan Yuan, Shisanjing zhushu: fu jiaokanji, 1:26. Although the bird may represent Shedi, Cao Cao (i.e., Cao Mengde, 155–220), who was well known for his success in winning the loyalty of many talented generals and officials initially serving his enemies, is analogous to Gao Huan, who welcomed Shedi's defection to him.

Appendix 2

Transcriptions and Translations of Six Dynasties Funerary Epitaph Passages with Explicit References to the Destruction or Excavation of Tombs

Eastern Wei

1. 人世不留，陵谷終易。後雨毀防，巒水侵壁。年來或忘，傳功歲去，有淪遺跡。盛德不朽，寄之金石。

Human lives do not last, mountains and valleys eventually shift. A rain in the later age destroyed [the tumulus at] Fang; the water seepage penetrated the walls [of the tomb]. [The deceased] will be forgotten within years to come; the spread merit will vanish over time; remaining traces will disappear. [But] this great virtue is deathless, [because it has been] inscribed on metal and stone. (544 C.E., HWNM, p. 360)

2. 山頽川竭，丘夷壑徙。曲池已平，高墳會毀。天井蘭干，陰溝彌彌。吾生不化，于嗟居此。

Mountains will fall and rivers will dry. Mounds will flatten and valleys will shift. The sunken pond will be filled and the high tumulus will vanish. The lantern ceiling and railings [will fall in] a dark ditch replete [with water]. My life will not transform; alas, here I will reside. (544 C.E., HWNM, p. 365)

3. 世經十一，吳王之墓復開；時歷三千，滕公之廬重啟。居諸送生，陵谷相貿。終同侵毀。

After eleven generations, the Wu king's tomb was reopened; in three thousand years, Duke Teng's hut (burial) was unlocked again. Those who are seeing off the dead come and go; the mountains and valleys shift toward one another. They will eventually disintegrate and ruin. (547 C.E., HWNM, p. 376) Northern Qi

4. 恐陵移谷換，或見前和。敬鑄琬琰，寘彼巖阿。

We fear that as mountains and valleys shift, on occasion the frontal piece [of the coffin] will be exposed. With respect we inscribed the beautiful stone and put it in the high mound. (555 C.E., HWNM, p. 398)

5. 三千見日，八百流□。陵谷相貿，市朝或變。不刊玄石，孰宣清猷...今葬後九百年必為張僧達所開。開者即好遷葬，必見大吉。

In three thousand years it will come to light; in eight hundred years it will flow [. . .]. Mountains and valleys shift toward one another, markets and audience halls may change. Without engraving a dark stone who will proclaim his brilliant mind? . . . This tomb is sure to be

opened by Zhang Sengda in nine hundred years after the entombment. If the excavator reburies [the remains] instantly and well, he or she will see great fortune. (555 C.E., HWNM, p. 402)

6. 千秋萬歲，時移世易。孤竹之墳已毀，長沙之墓且問。不有所記，終古何述。是用勒銘玄壤，貽諸後昆。

Within a thousand years or ten thousand years, the age will change and the world will be transformed. The tomb of the Guzhu [state] having already collapsed; the [location of the] tomb of Changsha had to be asked about. Without written documents, how do we relate remote antiquity? For this reason we made inscriptions in the dark soil and leave it to the later generations. (560 C.E., HWNM, p. 410)

7. 摧瑤林於小年，埋玉樹於長夜。恐灤瀕之遷毀，衡阿之淪謝。

The gem forest was destroyed when it was still young; the jade tree was buried in the long night. We fear the shift and destruction of the river banks [which caused the exposure of the coffin with water seeping into the tomb] and the falling and withering of Mt. Heng. (561 C.E., HWNM, p. 413)

8. 墳傾池滿，終貽狐兔。□天度八百年後開吾墓，改封更葬起丘墳，宜官享祿多福祚。

The tomb will collapse and the pond will be filled up, and they will finally be occupied by foxes and hares. My tomb will be opened in eight hundred years as heaven orbits. The tumulus will be rebuilt, the remains will be reentombed; and a mound will be erected. May he receive official titles, salaries, and good luck. (562 C.E., HWNM, p. 416)

9. 碑上萬山，棺浮灤水。乎嗟此室，還葬滕公。...非復春秋，空交狐兔。

The stele ascended onto Mt. Wan, and the coffin floated in the seeping water. Alas, this chamber will return and Duke Teng will be buried here. . . . Springs and autumns no longer recur; only foxes and hares are to be befriended in vain! (565 C.E., HWNM, p. 426)

10. 滄海之中，浮棺終泛；□山之下，沉碑已出，是知高岸為谷，見日何期？故勒此他山，石傳盛美。

In the vast seas the coffin eventually floated; under Mt. [Wan], the sinking stele finally emerged. So we know the high banks used to be valleys. When will this [epitaph] see the sun? So we inscribed this mountain stone and [use it to] spread the grand beauty. (571 C.E., HWNM, p. 452)

11. 恐山移谷徙，齧和見日。聊銘員石，志此窮泉。

We are afraid that mountains will move and valleys will shift, the frontal piece [of the coffin] will be eroded and the [coffin will] come to light. We therefore inscribed the round stone and kept a record in the deep springs. (574 C.E., Luo Xin and Ye Wei, Xin chu Wei Jin Nanbeichao muzhi shuzheng, p. 220)