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Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China by David N. Keightley

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this, townships all over South Africa erupted, and several thousand blacks—African, Coloured, and Asian—were arrested by the South African state. These momentous events provide both the point of departure and the concluding chapter for Gail M. Gerhart's important book on the evolution of an ideology of black power in South Africa and the transformation of black consciousness that she believes these events betokened.

In view of the dearth of serious and scholarly work on African political organization and thought in South Africa since World War II, Gerhart's book is more than welcome. The author traces in detail the ideological antecedents to recent events in the formation of the Youth League among members of the oldest African nationalist organization in South Africa—the African National Congress—and shows the continuities in the thought of the leaders of the Youth League like Lembede and Mda, with that of Robert Sobukwe, the leading ideologue of the Pan Africanists who broke away from the ANC in 1959, and the late Steve Biko, more recent leader of the Black Consciousness movement, who died in a South African jail last year. Indeed, the best chapters of the book, and its central core, deal with these four major leaders. Based on a wide range of written materials as well as on extensive oral evidence, her work has a sureness of touch here, and a sensitivity and balance that are rare qualities in a field that has too often been the monopoly of polemicists.

This said, it is perhaps unfair to complain. Nevertheless, Gerhart's understanding of the ideas of the leaders she has chosen to study does not extend fully either to the context in which they operated or to their followers. The first two chapters of her book appear to suggest that until 1943, when the Youth Leaguers appeared to their rescue, the African peasants were parochial, the workers confused, and the petty bourgeoisie at best naive, at worst stupid as well. These generalizations result from too heavy a leaning on the sweeping statements of superficial sociological surveys rather than detailed historical research. And while, for the period she has researched, Gerhart has a sympathetic perception of the position and problems of the leadership, the masses still remain to be manipulated at will, a backdrop against which real history is acted out. There is little exploration of the interface between leaders and their constituency, and little detailed analysis of the changing nature of the South African political economy over these years that would enable us to set the leaders and their ideology in context. As a result, although the work achieves its more limited goal and gives us a fine account of the ideology of black power (though black is largely portrayed as African rather than African, Coloured, and Indian—increasingly the usage within South Africa), it does not in the end go on to explain ei-

ther Soweto 1976 or the path of future change in South Africa.

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ASIA AND THE EAST

DAVID N. KEIGHTLEY. *Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1978. Pp. xvii, 281. \$25.00.

A new era in the study of early Chinese history is dawning, and David N. Keightley's impressive new book is a harbinger of the knowledge to come. The Shang dynasty (1500?-1050? B.C.) has been a most elusive period in China's past. It was only in the late 1920s, when excavations were undertaken at Anyang, that the Shang passed from the realm of legend into that of authenticated history. In the years since, our efforts to understand behavior in Shang times and, thereby, the origin of patterns that became characteristic in Chinese civilization have been hampered by the great difficulties involved in studying the Shang oracle bone inscriptions. The bones have been scattered in public and private collections throughout the world. Faked inscriptions abound. Many inscriptions are on bone fragments that too often have not been reassembled or have been incorrectly pieced together. Worst of all, virtually every word surviving in the inscriptions has presented a puzzle to those trying to determine etymologies, grammatical usages, and meanings.

In spite of a massive outpouring of literature on the inscriptions, it was not until the mid-1960s that some order began to appear in the chaos of oracle bone studies. Two works of that time stand out. One is a dictionary, the *Chia-ku wen-tzu chi-shih*, by the Chinese scholar Li Hsiao-ting, which collates commentaries on Shang graphs and attempts to arrive at word definitions. The other, *Inkyo bokuji sorui*, by the Japanese specialist Shima Kunio, is a concordance of published inscriptions, arranged according to content and chronology. Neither book, of course, did more than make the field more accessible to students already highly trained in modern Asian languages and in Chinese historical linguistics, scholars who often worked in the fashion of traditional classicists rather than as historians.

Keightley's current work represents both a continuation of the process of synthesizing the scattered research of earlier scholars and a new step toward the ultimate goal of making historical sense out of our legacy of Shang texts. It is a meticulously pre-

pared handbook covering all the basic aspects of oracle bone study: types of bones used, techniques of bone preparation, divination procedures, methods of writing, characteristic types of inscriptions, instructions on ways of authenticating, dating, and reading the inscriptions, and an appreciation of the Shang texts as historical sources. Copious notes refer the reader to the previous literature on each point raised and indicate current controversies and directions for future research. The work's value is much enhanced by extensive illustrations, tabulations of data, bibliographic citations, and a detailed index. The book is a model of historiographical comprehensiveness and rigor that no student of the Shang period can afford to do without. Henceforth, the obstacles to specialization in Shang history should be less daunting. We should be able to look forward not only to Keightley's promised *Studies in Shang Divination* but also to other historical examinations of this seminal era of the Chinese past.

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ARTHUR F. WRIGHT. *The Sui Dynasty*. Conclusion by ROBERT M. SOMERS. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1978. Pp. 237. \$15.00.

This work was not written for the specialist, but it should be read by historians of China and particularly by historians of early China. It is one of those lamentably rare attempts to write the history of a Chinese age. The general reader will find this Sui history presented in an elegant manner and peopled with lively historical figures, for the late Arthur F. Wright eschewed social science history and concentrated on the individuals who made history. The specialist will appreciate the synthetic nature of this work, which pulls together and goes beyond Wright's earlier studies of Sui history.

The first two chapters are both background. We are introduced to the Chinese models the Sui rulers had before them and to Charlemagne for comparative purposes (although this comparison is not sustained in the work). Wright acquaints us with his major sources and reveals his frustrations generated by working with them. The second chapter provides a sweeping overview of sixth-century China. This chapter sketches the factors that divided north and south at the end of three centuries of disunion and also sets forth the notions that were shared between the Chinese south and the semi-Chinese north. There is, however, only minimal reference to the social and economic history of the period.

Chapter three, "The Rise of Yang Chien," is Wright at his best. Yang Chien, posthumously entitled Emperor Wen, was a nervous bundle of con-

traditions. Although a devout Buddhist who came closer than any Chinese ruler to establishing a Buddhist regime in China, Yang Chien was not deterred by his faith from personally beating officials to death in the halls of the palace. Although a thoroughly authoritarian ruler, he was continuously beset by doubts about himself and his regime. Wright describes this dynast and his immediate coterie with a fine feeling for the period and the commanding figures of it.

"Reunification" (chapter four) provides the only sustained institutional analysis in the work. The largest section of this chapter deals with the building of Ta-hsing-ch'eng, the Sui capital; Wright is again on familiar ground with this topic and he does an outstanding job of conveying the emerging majesty of this city, which, within a century, was to become the largest metropolitan center in the world. Other sections of this chapter describe central and local government reforms and recruitment mechanisms.

"The Restoration of Cultural Hegemony" (chapter five) complements the preceding chapter in that it deals with ritual and ritual codification, the new law code, educational institutions, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Confucianism, however, is not adequately dealt with. We are told that different versions and interpretations of the Confucian classics were much debated in the Sui (p. 120), but the exemplary biography of Liu Cho, a renowned Confucian scholar, does not provide us with a sense of what issues were being discussed among the Confucianists. Similarly, we are offered a keen appreciation of the Buddhist commitment and fervor of Yang Chien, but we are not given much sense of what constituted the dominant strains of Buddhism.

The sixth chapter, a straightforward account of the conquest of the south, is the last chapter written for this volume. Chapters seven, eight, and nine come from a shorter history of the Sui written by Wright for *The Cambridge History of China*. The scale of the work changes sharply at this point; the average length of each of these three chapters is only about one-half the length of the average of the first six. Although shorter, these chapters follow the same general format. Thus, chapter seven parallels chapter three in providing a biography of the second Sui emperor followed by sketches of a dozen men, most of whom were members of the inner circle of the Sui court. Chapter eight, "The Dynasty at Its Height" takes up the second emperor's reforms (of the law code, for example) and the dynasty's construction projects (such as the secondary capital at Loyang and the canal system). Wright's final chapter ("Military Disaster and Political Collapse") outlines the wars of expansion of the Sui, wars culminating in the terribly costly attacks on