

Law and Ritual at the Dawn of Imperial China as Reflected in Excavated Sources.

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The PhD project deals with the representation Qín Shǐhuángdì 秦始皇帝 and the constitution of power relations in Qín-dynasty China from a textual and art-historical perspective, taking - among other sources - various excavated Qín manuscripts such as the *Lǐyé* 里耶, *Wángjiātái* 王家臺 or *Yúnmèng Lónggǎng* 雲夢壘崗 into consideration. At the dawn of imperial China, people of all ethnic backgrounds, social belongings and philosophical affiliations entered into the Qín universalist type of empire. Qín society was to a high degree heterogeneous and characterized by a combination of different cultural units. The emperor's imperative of territorial expansion meant unprecedented cultural integration and marked a break between the cultural structure of the people and the state. In this respect, an exponentially increasing bureaucratic apparatus as well as the promulgation of restrictive laws were an unavoidable phenomenon that require to be understood in political terms as an accommodation of the state to its new social structure.

With the implementation of a massive bureaucratic apparatus, significant power shifts took place. One minor portion of society comprised appointed officials who functioned as elongated arms of the emperor and were acquainted with government structures. In dialogue with his closest advisors, the emperor debated laws (*lǜ* 律) behind closed doors in protected spaces and places – half celestial, half profane – from where a social order was projected in terrestrial places, urban and rural, that concerned the corporate reality of ordinary people.

In sharp contrast to the laws and legal cases recorded in manuscripts like the *Lǐyé*, earlier excavated texts like the Qīnghuá bamboo manuscripts, but also the famous Qín stelae inscriptions eulogize and position the figure of the sovereign in an overtly material, ritual or spatial context. In this sense, it would be particularly interesting to examine if and how this notion developed over time, and what conclusions one could draw regarding textual arrangement, genre tradition, and the narratives related to the identity of a sovereign.