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What the Single Bamboo Slip Found in Mawangdui Tomb M2 Tells Us about Text and Ritual in Early China

Luke Waring
Stanford University

The excavation of Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb M2[1] led to the discovery of a bamboo slip in the center of the passageway leading to the pit where the body of Li Cang 利蒼 (d. ca. 186 BCE), Prime Minister of Changsha 長沙 and the first Marquis of Dai 軑侯, was housed inside a series of nested coffins.[2] While thousands of books and articles have been

1) The Mawangdui tomb site (Changsha 長沙, Hunan 湖南) was discovered in 1971 by workers digging an air raid shelter for the local hospital, and formal excavation work on the three tombs was carried out between 1972 and 1974. The complete official excavation report for M1 is *Changsha Mawangdui yihao Han mu* 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓, ed. Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館 and Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國科學院考古研究所 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1973; hereafter cited as *Han mu*); the complete official excavation report for M2 and M3 is *Changsha Mawangdui er, sanhao Han mu: diyi juan, tianye kaogu fajue baogao* 長沙馬王堆二，三號漢墓: 第一卷，田野考古發掘報告, ed. Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館 and Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖南省文物考古研究所 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2004; hereafter cited as *Baogao*).

2) Whereas tombs M1 and M2 have been securely assigned to Xin Zhui 辛追 (d. ca. 168 BCE) and her husband Li Cang respectively on the basis of seals bearing those names found in their tombs, a degree of uncertainty still surrounds the identity of the occupant of tomb M3. Sun Weizu 孫慰祖 and Chen Songchang 陳松長 have transcribed the two characters (now only partially visible) that appear on a damaged seal discovered in M3 as Li 利 and Xi 豨, leading Chen to identify Li Xi 利豨 (d. ca. 168 BCE), Li Cang's son and the second Marquis of Dai, as the tomb's occupant; see Chen, "Mawangdui sanhao muzhu de zai renshi" 馬王堆三號墓主的再認識, *Wenwu* 2003.8: 56-59, 66. Because of the discrepancy between the date of Li Xi's death (actually, the date his son Li Pengzu 利彭祖 officially inherited the marquisate, 165/164 BCE) given in *Shiji* 史記 and the burial date (corresponding to 168 BCE) on one of the wooden boards discovered in the outer coffin of M3, as well as certain perceived discrepancies between the furnishings deemed appropriate for a man of Li Xi's rank and the actual contents of the tomb, some scholars have argued that the tomb must belong to Li Xi's younger brother, a nameless figure who is not mentioned in any transmitted or excavated source. Instead, as one of the reviewers for this article pointed out, there may be a connection between the discrepancies in these sources and the Han observance of a three-year mourning

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published on various aspects of the Mawangdui tombs and their contents,[3] this slip has gone almost entirely unnoticed.[4] The present article offers a correction to this situation out of a conviction that the M2 slip has much to tell us about the overlapping textual, ritual, administrative, and funerary cultures of early Western Han 西漢 (202 BCE-9 CE) China. While scholars working on the Mawangdui manuscripts generally restrict themselves to the documents (most made of silk but some also of wood and/or bamboo) found inside a lacquer case buried in tomb M3,[5] the individual slip from M2 shows that even seemingly mundane finds can be important sources for reconstructing early Chinese

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period for deceased fathers. For brief overviews of these debates, see Fu Juyou 傅舉有, "Mawangdui Han mu muzhuren shi shei – Mawangdui Han mu muzhu yantao sishi nian huigu" 馬王堆漢墓墓主人是誰 – 馬王堆漢墓墓主研討四十年回顧, in *Jinian Mawangdui Han mu fajue sishi zhounian guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 紀念馬王堆漢墓發掘四十週年國際學術研討會論文集, ed. Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2016), 5-7, and Huang Zhanyue 黃展岳, "Ye tan Mawangdui sanhao mu muzhu shi shei" 也談馬王堆三號墓墓主是誰, 8-10, in the same volume. For Li Xi's dates, see *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 19.978, and *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 16.618.

3) A figure of around 1,500 is given in Enno Giele, "Excavated Manuscripts: Context and Methodology," in *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*, ed. Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 121, but the current figure must be substantially higher. Zheng Yan'e 鄭豔娥 provides a partial list of studies on the Mawangdui tombs organized by category that runs to a full one hundred pages in *Baogao*, 281-381. For surveys of research into the Mawangdui manuscripts, see Liu Guozhong 劉國忠, *Gudai boshu* 古代帛書 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2004), 47-175; *Dangdai Zhongguo jianbo xue yanjiu* (*1949-2009*) 當代中國簡帛學研究 (1949-2009), ed. Li Junming 李均明 et al. (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011), 534-92; and Chen Songchang, *Boshu shihua* 帛書史話 (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe, 2012), 104-65.

4) Brief descriptions of the slip, as well as illustrations and transcriptions of its contents, are included in *Baogao* and *Changsha Mawangdui Han mu jianbo jicheng* 長沙馬王堆漢墓簡帛集成, ed. Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館 and Fudan daxue chutu wenxian yu guwenzi yanjiu zhongxin 復旦大學出土文獻與古文字研究中心 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014) (hereafter cited as *Jicheng*), a seven-volume publication and study of the Mawangdui manuscript materials. Astonishingly, aside from these short treatments, I am unaware of any published analysis of this slip. Brief descriptions and transcriptions appear in Xiong Chuanxin 熊傳薪 and You Zhenqun 游振群, *Changsha Mawangdui Han mu* 長沙馬王堆漢墓 (Beijing: Shenghuo·dushu·xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2006), 173, and He Xuhong 何旭紅, *Han dai Changsha guo kaogu faxian yu yanjiu* 漢代長沙國考古發現與研究 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2013), 126.

5) For descriptions of the case, see *Baogao*, 155; *Jicheng*, vol. 1, 3; and Donald Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 15. See *Baogao*, 156, for a black and white line drawing of the case, and plate 77 for a black and white photograph. A color photograph of the case appears in *Noble Tombs at Mawangdui: Art and Life of the Changsha Kingdom, Third Century BCE to First*

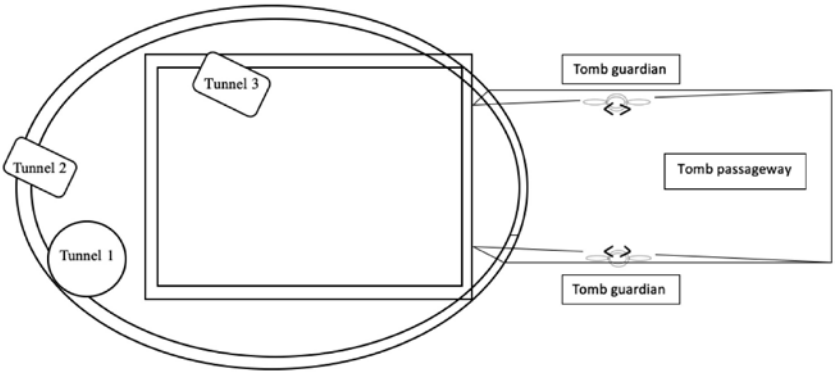

Figure 1: Locations of the tomb guardians and the three tunnels made by tomb robbers in M2 (after *Baogao*, 8).

textual culture. What is more, while scholars have typically studied the Mawangdui manuscripts as disembodied texts rather than as material artifacts, studying these sources as *things* – artifacts that were variously manufactured, displayed, used, re-used, and eventually disposed of – reveals much about the different ways in which early Chinese elites engaged with written texts. To this end, I offer a detailed description of the bamboo slip, transcriptions and translations of its contents, a consideration of how it was used and re-used at the Mawangdui tomb site, and an analysis of what its archaeological context tells us about the use of talismans in Western Han burials. Specifically, I will argue that the slip originally formed part of a multi-piece manuscript in the tomb inventory (*qiance* 遣冊/策) genre, and that it was subsequently removed and ritually deposited inside the tomb passageway of M2, underneath the watchful eyes of a pair of fearsome tomb guardians, as a way of protecting the deceased and his tomb from the threats posed by robbers and malevolent spirits. While the use of tomb inventory manuscripts in the coordination of burial rites in Western Han is well known, the M2 slip reminds us that such manuscripts were also ritual artifacts in their own right,[6] documents that played a part in religious activity at the tomb site

Century CE 馬王堆漢墓: 古長沙國的藝術和生活 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2008), 87, a bilingual exhibition volume published by the Hunan Provincial Museum.

6) For a recent study of tomb inventories that emphasizes their use as ritual artifacts, see

and continued to serve the deceased as symbols of status in the afterlife after the tomb was closed.[7]

Description of the M2 Slip

The slip was found in the middle of the tomb passage (*mudao* 墓道) leading to the tomb pit (*mukeng* 墓坑) where Li Cang's body was laid to rest.[8] The slip measures 22.7cm in length by 1.5cm in width and carries two columns of brush-written characters, originally at least fourteen in total, written in black ink in a competent if somewhat hastily executed style of Han clerical script (*lishu* 隸書). The color photograph published in *Jicheng* (Figure 2) clearly shows a split running partway through the slip beginning at its bottom edge. This split makes it impossible to read the last partially visible graph in the first (right-hand) column of text and may also have obliterated other graphs on the portions of bamboo that have broken away. Dan Xianjin 單先進 in *Baogao* provides a transcription of the slip's contents, which I reproduce here in two registers (one for each column of text) along with my translation:

Yang Yi 楊怡, "He wei 'qiance?' – yi Mawangdui sanhao mu wei li" 何爲 "遣冊"? – 以馬王堆三號墓爲例, in *Jinian Mawangdui Han mu fajue sishi zhounian*, 327-33.

7) For a study of the various ways in which tomb inventory manuscripts served to project (and also assume) status and privilege in the afterlife, see Guo Jue, "Western Han Funerary Relocation Documents and the Making of the Dead in Early Imperial China," *Bamboo and Silk* 2 (2019): 141-273.

8) The three vertical pit tombs (*shuxue tukeng mu* 豎穴土坑墓) at Mawangdui are rectangular in shape and oriented north. In each, the corpse was interred in a series of nested coffins (*guan* 棺) inside an inner coffin chamber (*guanshi* 棺室). This inner chamber was enclosed within an outer coffin chamber (*guoshi* 槨室) that in M1 and M3 was divided into four coffin compartments (*guoxiang* 槨箱), also known as side compartments (*bianxiang* 邊箱). These outer coffin chambers were constructed at the bottom of the tomb pits, which were accessed via sloping tomb passages. In each tomb, the outside of the coffin chamber had been packed with charcoal and white clay before the pit was filled with earth. The walls of the pit were constructed from rammed earth (*hangtu* 夯土), and the burial mound (*fengtu* 封土) was formed by piling heaped earth on top of the covered pit. Though M1 and M3 had not been disturbed prior to excavation, M2 had been looted several times. As a result, the coffins in that tomb had sustained serious damage and much of their contents had rotted away. Together, the three tombs yielded a stunning array of luxury materials, including lacquer dining sets, ritual vessels, silk textiles, food items, items of clothing, cash, household items such as screens and mats, toiletries, and other personal possessions. Some of these items were stored inside neatly stacked bamboo hampers (*zhusi* 竹笥), while others were distributed individually or in sets inside the tomb; see the official excavation reports cited in n.1 above for detailed descriptions, drawings, and photographs.

(I) Guards allocated to the king of Changsha, men of Peng ...
衛卒辨與長沙王彭人□
(II) A total of twenty-one persons.
凡廿一人.[9]

Dan notes that the graph *bian* 辨 (lit. "to distinguish") can mean "to repay" (*changhuan* 償還) or "to apportion" (*fengei* 分給), and he takes the phrase *Pengren* 彭人 (lit. "people of Peng") as a reference to the native or registered place (*jiguan* 籍貫) of the guards (*weizu* 衛卒) referred to at the beginning of the slip.[10] Zheng Shubin 鄭曙斌 and Jiang Wen 蔣文 in *Jicheng* acknowledge Dan's transcription and interpretations, though they provide a slightly different reading:

(I) Commanders [?] allocated to the king of Changsha ... men [of ?] ...
率卒辨與長沙王□人□□□□
(II) A total of twenty-one persons.
凡廿一人.[11]

There are three differences between the two transcriptions. First, Zheng and Jiang do not feel confident in transcribing the eighth graph in the first column (thus represented with the placeholder □ in their *Jicheng* transcription), which Dan renders as Peng 彭. Second, while Dan uses one □ symbol to represent the partially visible graph damaged by the split in the slip, Zheng and Jiang insert a further three such symbols to indicate the possibility that roughly three more graphs were originally written on the slip and may have been obliterated by the split. And third, the first graph in the first column, which Dan takes as *wei* 衛 (as part of the binome *weizu* 衛卒, "guards"), is rendered by Zheng and Jiang as *shuai* 率 (lit. "to lead" or "to command").[12] While I have been unable to find the term *shuaizu* elsewhere in either transmitted or excavated sources, the term *weizu* is indeed attested in several Han texts, including

9) *Baogao*, 9.
10) *Baogao*, 9.
11) *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 225.
12) The words *wei* (*[ɢ]ʷ(r)a[t]-s) and *shuai* (*s-rut-s) were phonologically distinct in Han times; see Axel Schuessler, *Abc Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 368, 513, and the Baxter-Sagart Old Chinese reconstruction, version 1.1 (2014) (http://ocbaxtersagart.lsait.lsa.umich.edu/BaxterSagartOCbyMandarinMC2014-09-20.pdf), last accessed 7 October 2019. Identification of this graph is complicated by the fact that the surface of the wood has splintered, distorting its appearance.

Figure 2: Photograph (*Jicheng*, vol. 2, 257) and drawing (*Baogao*, 10) of inscribed bamboo slip from M2.

Shiji and *Hanshu* 漢書, where it seems to refer to common soldiers conscripted to serve for a period of time as guards, either in the capital Chang'an 長安 or at the courts of the regional lords (*zhuhou* 諸侯).[13] Though to my (admittedly untrained) eye the graph on the surface of the bamboo closely resembles the graph *wei* 衛 as it appears elsewhere in the Mawangdui manuscripts,[14] ultimately the identification of the graph as either *wei* 衛 or *shuai* 率 matters little: the slip records the presence of twenty-one military servicemen who had been allocated to

13) See, for example, *Shiji*, 6.227, 126.3210, and *Hanshu*, 24A.1152, 51.2235, 72.3079, 77.3244, 99B.4140. In Han times, *weizu* may have been coterminous with *weishi* 衛士, a term Hans Bielenstein renders as "guards"; see Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), 114.

14) See *Mawangdui jianbo wenzi bian* 馬王堆簡帛文字編, ed. Chen Songchang (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001), 79.

Wu You 吳右, king of Changsha,[15] and who evidently played a role in the funeral rites for Wu You's deceased prime minister, Li Cang.[16]

No doubt the enigmatic nature of the slip's inscription in the context of Li Cang's burial site is the reason why it has failed to attract significant scholarly interest. Indeed, Zheng and Jiang caution that since the reading of certain graphs is still uncertain, the nature and significance of the slip await further research.[17] However, both the slip's material features and the mortuary context in which it was discovered provide clues as to how this artifact was used, suggesting that it was connected to precautions taken to protect Li Cang and his tomb from robbers and evil spirits, as well as to traditions of compiling inventories of items used in the funeral proceedings. In both its form and its contents, the M2 slip resembles the kinds of summary slips that formed part of Western Han manuscripts in the tomb inventory genre. What is more, the location where the slip was found, in the middle of the tomb passage close to the intimidating creatures guarding the entrance to the tomb pit, suggests that it was intended to perform a talismanic function, conferring protection on the deceased and his tomb. Before exploring the slip's archaeological context and the use of talismans in early China, however, I would like to provide a brief introduction to the tomb inventory manuscript genre, and to the ritual performances into which these manuscripts were incorporated.

15) In *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, Wu You is said to have succeeded his father, Wu Hui 吳回, and ascended the throne as the fourth king of Changsha in 187 or 186 BCE (*Shiji*, 17.817; *Hanshu*, 13.381), roughly a year before Li Xi succeeded his father Li Cang as Marquis of Dai in 186 or 185 BCE (*Shiji*, 19.978; *Hanshu*, 16.618).

16) I assume that the inscription on the M2 slip is a reference to real, flesh and blood guards rather than to the kinds of figurines (*yong* 俑) that are commonly found in the tombs of Western Han elites. While tomb inventory manuscripts (including those from Mawangdui M1 and M3) often contain entries for such figurines, the fact that the guards mentioned on the M2 slip were apparently allocated (by the emperor?) to the King of Changsha leads me to believe they were probably actual human beings rather than imitation models. As we will see, records related to human guards regularly appear in Western Han tomb inventories, including the M3 inventory, which provides detailed descriptions of their armor and weaponry. In the case of Mawangdui M3, no figurines that can be matched with these entries were found in the tomb.

17) For these comments, see *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 225.

Tomb Inventory Manuscripts

The individual M2 slip bears a striking resemblance to those used in tomb inventory manuscripts from the Warring States and early imperial eras.[18] Though no such document was found in Mawangdui M2, this is probably because the tomb had been looted several times prior to its excavation. Exquisitely produced and extraordinarily long tomb inventory manuscripts were found in Mawangdui M1 and M3,[19] with these documents used to coordinate the burial rites for Xin Zhui and Li Xi respectively.

Tomb inventories were lists of items that played a role in the burial and/or funeral rites of deceased elites.[20] They could take different material forms (bamboo or wood, slips or boards, single-piece documents or multi-piece manuscripts) and record different kinds of information, and they were associated (sometimes physically) with other types of funerary documents, such as "announcements to the underworld" (*gaodi ce/shu* 告地策/書).[21] Not all the items listed in tomb inventories are

18) For an overview of Warring States and Han dynasty manuscripts in the tomb inventory genre, see Mi Rutian 米如田, "Qiance kaobian" 遣策考辨, *Huaxia kaogu* 1991.3: 96-99; Ma Jinhong 馬今洪, *Jianbo faxian yu yanjiu* 簡帛發現與研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2002), 95-100; Liu Guosheng 劉國勝, "Chu qiance zhidu shulüe" 楚遣策制度述略, in *Chu wenhua yanjiu lunji* 楚文化研究論集, vol. 6, ed. Chu wenhua yanjiuhui 楚文化研究會 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004), 229-40; and Zheng Shubin 鄭曙斌, "Qiance de kaogu faxian yu wenxian quanshi" 遣策的考古發現與文獻詮釋, *Nanfang wenwu* 2005.2: 28-34. See also Enno Giele, "Using Early Chinese Manuscripts as Historical Source Materials," *Monumenta Serica* 51 (2003): 435.

19) For descriptions and transcriptions of the M1 tomb inventory slips, see *Han mu*, vol. 1, 130-55, and *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 173-220. See also Xu Daosheng 許道勝, "Mawangdui sanhao Han mu qiance zhaji" 馬王堆三號漢墓遣冊札記, in *Jinian Mawangdui Han mu fajue sishi zhounian*, 320-23. For photographs of the slips see *Han mu*, vol. 2, 223-44 (black and white; plates 270-92), and *Jicheng*, vol. 2, 221-49 (color). For an introduction to the M3 tomb inventory manuscript, as well as descriptions and transcriptions of its contents, see *Baogao*, 43-73, and *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 173-74, 227-63. For black and white photographs of the slips, see *Baogao*, plates 20-51; for color photographs, see *Jicheng*, vol. 2, 258-94.

20) It is unclear how much of a distinction might have been observed between burial rites and funeral rites in Western Han China. Armin Selbitschka has argued that grave goods were likely displayed above ground as part of some sort of ritual before they were subsequently buried; see Selbitschka, "Sacrifice vs. Sustenance: Food as a Burial Good in Late Pre-Imperial and Early Imperial Chinese Tombs and Its Relation [sic] Funerary Rites," *Early China* 41 (2018): 196-97.

21) By funerary documents I mean those documents that were manufactured specially for burial. Two recent studies emphasizing the relationships between tomb inventories and other texts that are sometimes assumed to belong to different genres of funerary

found in their tombs, and not all the items actually found in tombs are listed in the corresponding tomb inventories. Explanations for such discrepancies range from damage and looting to deliberate exaggeration, a lack of space in the tomb, and the argument that not all the items presented or displayed during the funeral ceremony were actually intended for burial.[22]

Though the material forms of tomb inventory manuscripts vary widely, the inventories from Mawangdui M1 and M3 are fairly typical in distinguishing between item entries and summary entries. Item entries record the items used or displayed in the funeral proceedings, often including the name, size, and number or quantity of the item in question. A typical entry in the inventory from M1, for example, reads "one lacquer-painted *fang* vase with lid, filled with rice alcohol" 漆畫枋 (= 鈁) 一有蓋盛米酒.[23] Summary entries are marked in the M1 inventory by a thick black line running horizontally along the top edge of the bamboo slip, followed by the words "to the right-hand side" (*youfang* 右方).[24] These slips mark divisions between sections within the inventory text and contain summaries of the contents of the proceeding slips, which would have been located on the right-hand side of each summary slip when the manuscript was unrolled. Thus, for example, the entry on one of the summary slips from the M1 inventory reads "to the right, two lacquer-painted ladles" 右方漆畫勺二, a summary entry for the two ladles

documentation are Tian Tian, "From 'Clothing Strips' to Clothing Lists: Tomb Inventories and Western Han Funerary Ritual," *Bamboo and Silk* 2 (2019): 57-80, and Guo, "Western Han Funerary Relocation Documents." For a recent study that emphasizes the diversity (in both form and content) of manuscripts in the tomb inventory genre, charting change over time in the ways such documents were used, see Tian Tian 田天, "Xihan zhongwanqi qiance de bianqian ji qi yiyi" 西漢中晚期遣策的變遷及其意義, in *Wenwu, wenxian yu wenhua: lishi kaogu qingnian lunji* (*diyi ji*) 文物，文獻與文化: 歷史考古青年論集 (第一輯) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2017), 21-27.

22) On this point, see Wei Lingshui 魏靈水, "Cong Han mu qiance kan Han dai sangzang wenhua" 從漢墓遣策看漢代喪葬文化, *Talimu daxue xuebao* 17.4 (2005): 44-46; Zheng, "Qiance de kaogu faxian yu wenxian quanshi," 32-34; He Qiang 賀強, "Mawangdui Han mu qiance zhengli yanjiu" 馬王堆漢墓遣冊整理研究 (M.A. thesis, Xinan Univ., 2006), 5; and Guolong Lai, *Exacavating the Afterlife: The Archaeology of Early Chinese Religion* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2015), 144-45.

23) Slip 174: *Han mu*, vol. 1, 144; *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 199.

24) For a slightly different interpretation of the meaning of this phrase, see Thies Staack, "Single- and Multi-Piece Manuscripts in Early Imperial China: On the Background and Significance of a Terminological Distinction," *Early China* 41 (2018): 29-30, n.95.

entered individually on the preceding two slips.[25] The M3 inventory features both slender bamboo summary slips and wider wooden summary boards, each with the same black line running across their top edge to distinguish them from the item entries written on the manuscript's bamboo slips. Summary slip 295/297 in the M3 tomb inventory, for example, reads "to the right, thirteen item types made of earth" 右方十三物土, a reference to the items listed on the preceding thirteen slips.[26]

The designation *qiance* is taken from the "Jixi" 既夕 ([Mourning Procedures of] the Evening Preceding Burial) chapter of the *Yili* 儀禮, which describes how lists of gifts, possessions, and funerary items were drawn up as part of the funeral rites for deceased elites.[27] Ye Gongchuo 葉恭綽 was apparently the first to use the term in reference to the types of manuscripts that have been found in a number of pre-imperial and early imperial Chinese tombs.[28] In fact, lists of funeral items are the earliest as well as the most commonly encountered manuscript type in early Chinese tombs,[29] with the "Jixi" chapter of the *Yili* describing how

25) Slip 200: *Han mu*, vol. 1, 145; *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 202.

26) Slip 295/297: *Baogao*, 67; *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 254. Though *Baogao* and *Jicheng* follow identical slip sequences for the M1 tomb inventory slips, they give different reconstructed sequences for the slips and boards in the M3 inventory. For this reason, references to individual slips and boards in the M3 manuscript are given in the form X/Y (X=*Baogao* sequence; Y=*Jicheng* sequence).

27) *Yili zhushu* 儀禮注疏 (*Shisan jing zhushu* ed., 1816), 39.3a-5b. Zheng, "Qiance de kaogu faxian yu wenxian quanshi," 28, notes that, judging by excavated finds, tomb inventory manuscripts were generally placed in the tombs of aristocratic elites who served as heads of regional states, enfeoffed nobles, and mid- to high-level regional officials. For a study that shows how lesser elites and ordinary people also used similar documents to "work the system" and secure status and privilege for themselves in the afterlife, see Guo, "Western Han Funerary Relocation Documents."

28) See Ye's preface (2-3) to Shi Shuqing 史樹青, *Changsha Yangtianhu chutu Chu jian yanjiu* 長沙仰天湖出土楚簡研究 (Shanghai: Qunlian chubanshe, 1955), and 38. See also Lai Guolong, "The Baoshan Tomb: Religious Transitions in Art, Ritual, and Text During the Warring States Period (480-221 BCE)" (Ph.D. diss. Univ. of California, Los Angeles, 2002), 27-28. Hong Shi 洪石, "Dongzhou zhi Jindai muzang suo chu wushu jiandu ji qi xiangguan wenti yanjiu" 東周至晉代墓葬所出物疏簡牘及其相關問題研究, *Kaogu* 2001.9: 59-69, argues that the term *qiance* is an inappropriate designation for these manuscripts, suggesting instead that we call such documents *wushu jiandu* 物疏簡牘 ("written accounts of items on bamboo and wood"), a term that appears in multiple tomb inventory manuscripts. For the sake of convenience, I will continue to use the term "tomb inventory" to refer to this textual tradition.

29) These lists are the only text type to appear more often than daybooks (*rishu* 日書) in early Chinese tombs, for example; see Martin Kern, "Early Chinese Divination and Its Rhetoric," in *Coping with the Future: Theories and Practices of Divination in East Asia*, ed.

various kinds of lists or inventories were actually read aloud by scribes as part of the funeral rites:[30]

> The scribe of the Master of Ceremonies (i.e., the eldest son of the deceased) requests permission to read aloud the funerary list, and an assistant carrying the counting tallies follows him. They stand to the east of the coffin facing the front tie-ropes, looking toward the west. Without being ordered not to wail, the mourners stop each other from wailing. Only the Master of Ceremonies and his wife continue to wail. The torch is brought to the right-hand side, with the torch bearer facing south. As the scribe reads the written document, the assistant carries out the count from a seated position. When this is over, the scribe commands the mourners to wail, the torch is extinguished, and those carrying the document and the counting tallies withdraw in reverse sequence. The Lord's scribe approaches from the west side, faces east, and commands the mourners to stop their wailing. The Master of Ceremonies and his wife cease wailing. The scribe reads the tomb inventory list aloud, and when this is over, he commands the mourners to wail. The torch is extinguished, and he withdraws.
> 主人之史請讀賵，執算從。柩東當前束，西面。不命毋哭，哭者相止也。唯主人、主婦哭。燭在右，南面。讀書，釋算則坐。卒，命哭，滅燭，書與算執之以逆出。公史自西方，東面，命毋哭。主人、主婦皆不哭。讀遣，卒，命哭。滅燭，出。[31]

Some scholars have attempted to use passages such as this one to distinguish between different types of funeral inventories on the basis of the types of items listed, and the nature of the relationship between the donors of these items and the deceased.[32] While it is perhaps unsafe to classify too hastily texts found in ancient tombs based on the categories and descriptions provided in transmitted texts of uncertain date, archaeological evidence shows that a tradition of burying written lists of items related to the deceased and his or her funeral rites persisted from

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Michael Lackner (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 265-66. Indeed, Giele, "Using Early Chinese Manuscripts," 420, notes that tomb inventory documents are the only written texts that have been found in some fifty percent of text-bearing tombs. Around fifty documents dating from the Warring States era to the Han containing lists of various funerary objects have been discovered in China since 1960, mostly in the south; see Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 139.

30) My translation is based on those in John Steele, *The I-li or Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*, vol. 2 (London: Probsthain & Co., 1917), 89, and Lai, "The Baoshan Tomb," 56-57, and idem, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 142.

31) *Yili zhushu* 39.11a-12a.

32) See, for example, Yang Hua 楊華, "Sui, feng, qian – jiandu suo jian Chu di zhusang lizhi yanjiu" 燧, 賵, 遣 – 簡牘所見楚地助喪禮制研究, *Xueshu yuekan* 2003.9: 49-59.

at least the Warring States era through the Han dynasty, and some of the ways in which these lists were used seem to match the descriptions given in transmitted records.[33] Luke Habberstad, for example, has argued that in the case of the inventory in the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng 曾侯乙 (d. ca. 433 BCE), the bamboo slips recording the chariots gifted as part of the marquis' funeral cortege were marked up during the funeral procession by scribes who counted the chariots as they passed by, which would speak to the performative spectacle within which the slips were displayed and used.[34] Certainly, there is evidence to suggest that the Mawangdui tomb inventory manuscripts were displayed at the burial site as part of a ritual performance.[35] One of the wooden boards that

33) It would probably be a mistake to attempt to reduce all the currently known tomb inventory manuscripts spanning several centuries and a wide geographical area to a single purpose or function. Lai Guolong, for example, has argued that during the shift from the Warring States to the early imperial era, the tomb inventory genre evolved from a "bookkeeping device for sumptuary control to a symbolic, magico-religious instrument of substitution"; see Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 139, 144. See also n.21 above.

34) Luke Habberstad, "Text, Performance, and Spectacle: The Funeral Procession of Marquis Yi of Zeng, 433 BCE," *Early China* 37 (2014): 181-219. See also Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 143. Some of the inventory slips discovered in the Warring States tomb at Yangtianhu 仰天湖 (Changsha, Hunan) contain notational markers (*yi* 已 and *ju* 句 [= *gou* 勾]) that seem to indicate whether or not the items had been buried, as well as other supplementary notations made after the initial manufacture of the text. This practice of making supplementary notations on tomb inventories continued into early imperial times, and the inventory from the Western Han tomb at Xiaojia caochang 蕭家草場 (Jingzhou 荊州, Hubei 湖北) also contains characters and symbols such as 方 and + that seem to have functioned as verification notations. Similar verification marks have also been found on the Western Han inventories at Fenghuangtai 鳳凰台 (Jiangling 江陵, Hubei) and Yinwan 尹灣 (Donghai 東海, Jiangsu 江蘇). For these sources, see Mi, "Qiance kaobian," 97; Liu Hongshi 劉洪石, "Qiance chutan" 遣冊初探, in *Yinwan Han mu jiiandu zonglun* 尹灣漢墓簡牘綜論, ed. Lianyungang shi bowuguan 蓮雲港市博物館 and Zhongguo wenwu yanjiusuo 中國文物研究所 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1999), 126; *Changsha Chu mu* (*shang*) 長沙楚墓 (上), ed. Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館, Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖南省文物考古研究所, Changsha shi bowuguan 長沙市博物館, and Changsha shi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 長沙市文物考古研究所 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2000), 420; *Guanju Qin Han mu jiandie* 關沮秦漢墓簡牒, ed. Hubei sheng Jingzhou shi Zhouliang yuqiao yizhi bowuguan 湖北省荊州市周梁玉橋遺址博物館 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 180-81; Li Jiahao 李家浩, "Yangtianhu Chu jian shengyi" 仰天湖楚簡剩義, *Jianbo* 簡帛 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 31-38; Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 143; and Tian, "From 'Clothing Strips' to Clothing Lists," 57-80.

35) The Mawangdui M3 inventory also includes additional content supplemented after the manufacture of the manuscript proper, and several scholars have argued (not unproblematically) that these marks and notations were made when the contents of the manuscripts were read aloud during the funeral ceremony for the deceased. In a recently published article, Jiang Wen 蔣文 notes that in addition to check marks in the form of a single vertical line | or a cross + on some of the M3 tomb inventory slips, one of the slips (50/34 [+408]), which has

was bound as part of the M3 inventory, for example, records how the document was to be presented to the officiant presiding over the burial at the tomb site, with the self-referential nature of the inscription, not to mention the beautiful appearance of the manuscript, indicating that the document was a ritual artifact rather than merely an administrative tool used to coordinate ritual proceedings.[36] In addition, Yang Hua 楊華 has tabulated the data gleaned from Warring States and early imperial tomb inventories to demonstrate a connection between the status of

fragmented into two pieces, carries an entry for some musical instruments and musicians that ends with a cross-shaped check mark and the notation "verified up to this point" (*chou dao ci* 讎到此); see Jiang, "Shuo Mawangdui sanhao mu qiance jian 408 de gouhua fu he 'chou dao ci'" 說馬王堆三號漢墓遣冊簡 408 的勾畫符和'讎到此,' *Wenshi* 2014.1: 90, 279-80. Jiang also notes the presence of verification marks on slips 45/29, 47/31, 31/35, and 52/36, among others. The three graphs (*chou dao ci*) are certainly smaller and less carefully executed than those in the entry that precedes them on the slip, and Tian Tian has situated them within the context of verification procedures made at the tomb site during the funeral rites; see Tian, "From 'Clothing Strips' to Clothing Lists," 57-80. Similarly, Chen Songchang has identified three sets of notations on the Mawangdui M3 tomb inventory manuscript that he claims were made as part of a verification procedure carried out while the texts were read aloud during the funeral ceremony, including updated entry counts, records of missing items, and notations of items that were not to be sent for burial; see Chen, "Mawangdui sanhao Han mu mudu sanlun" 馬王堆三號漢墓木牘散論, *Wenwu* 1994.6: 64-70. For a detailed analysis of these sources and issues, see my discussion in Luke Waring, "Writing and Materiality in the Three Han Dynasty Tombs at Mawangdui" (Ph.D. diss. Princeton Univ., 2019), 176-90.

36) Although Zhou Shirong 周世榮 in *Baogao*, 43, states that this board was found by itself in the eastern compartment of the outer coffin in M3, Zheng and Jiang correct this assertion by pointing out that the original excavation report explicitly states that the wooden board found by itself in the eastern compartment was in fact a different board containing an entry for fourteen items of clothing and sacks of hemp seeds. For the original excavation report, see Hunan sheng bowuguan 湖南省博物館 and Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國科學院考古研究所, "Changsha Mawangdui er, sanhao Han mu fajue jianbao" 長沙馬王堆二，三號漢墓發覺簡報, *Wenwu* 1974.7: 43. For Zheng and Jiang's comments, see *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 263. While it was originally thought that the board that was presented to the officiant at the tomb site was an address to the underworld, more recent studies have concluded, mainly on linguistic grounds, that it records the delivery of the document to the living officiants presiding over the burial rites; see Chen Songchang, "Mawangdui sanhao Han mu mudu sanlun" 馬王堆三號漢墓木牘散論, *Wenwu* 1994.6: 64-70; idem, "Mawangdui sanhao Han mu jinian mudu xingzhi de zai renshi" 馬王堆三號漢墓紀年木牘性質的再認識, *Wenwu* 1997.1: 61-64; K.E. Brashier, "Han Thanatology and the Division of 'Souls,'" *Early China* 21 (1996): 130, n.23; and Michael Friedrich, "The 'Announcement to the World Below' of Ma-wang-tui 馬王堆 3," *Manuscript Cultures*, *Newsletter* 1 (2008): 7-15. Of course, this does not affect the argument that the board, and the manuscript into which it was incorporated, were also intended to be read by underworld officials.

the tomb occupant and the lengths of the slips used.[37] Clearly, the grander the tomb and the higher the occupant's status, the longer the slips, suggesting the existence of sumptuary regulations governing the manufacture of inventories as ritual (and not just administrative) objects.[38]

Perhaps from the very beginning, then, tomb inventories were embedded in ritual acts of performance and display. They were beautiful things that embodied in their material form and ceremonial use the value and power of ritual administration and communication.

The M2 Slip as Tomb Inventory

The M2 slip resembles tomb inventory summary slips in several crucial aspects. While it is possible that the slip was manufactured as a standalone object, the use of such objects had declined following the end of the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-206 BCE), and even in Qin times single-piece manuscripts were typically wider than the M2 slip, designed to accommodate three or more columns of writing, often with additional text on their verso sides. Further, these manuscripts were typically more extended, self-contained documents reporting on topics such as ration allocations, household numbers, and convict assignments, and often recorded specific dates.[39] The M2 slip does not resemble any such document.

Single-piece manuscripts had not entirely died out by early Western Han times, and a single inscribed wooden board was excavated from the eastern compartment of Mawangdui M3.[40] However, this board (407/407) is considerably wider (four to five times as wide, judging by the photograph in *Jicheng*) than the M2 slip[41] and contains eight col-

37) Yang Hua 楊華, *Xinchu jianbo yu lizhi yanjiu* 新出簡帛與禮制研究 (Taipei: Taiwan guji chubanshe, 2007), 172-73. See also Mi, "Qiance kaobian," 97.

38) Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 143-44, also notes the connection between the presence of tomb inventories and the exalted status of the tomb occupant. Cf. further Guo, "Western Han Funerary Relocation Documents."

39) See Staack, "Single- and Multi-Piece Manuscripts in Early Imperial China," 255-57, 282, 286-88.

40) All the other wooden boards found in Mawangdui M3 were bound as part of the inventory manuscript for that tomb.

41) For the photograph, see *Jicheng*, vol. 2, 294.

umns of text in two registers. By contrast, the M2 slip bears a far closer resemblance to the slender bamboo components of the multi-piece manuscripts from Mawangdui M1 and M3.

Measuring 22.7cm × 1.5cm, the width of the slip falls within the range of the components of the M3 inventory, which measure 1-2.6cm wide, and it is close in length to the shorter summary boards of that manuscript, the shortest of which measures 23cm. While the wider summary pieces in M3 were made of wood, this manuscript also includes narrow summary slips made of bamboo,[42] and funerary manuscripts manufactured from both slender and wider pieces of bamboo have also been discovered at other early Western Han sites.[43]

Single-piece manuscripts were, by definition, unbound, and no positive visual evidence suggests that the M2 slip was ever bound together with other slips or boards. The photograph of the slip in *Jicheng* does not show any binding marks or notches; nor do any of the characters on the slip seem spaced to accommodate the presence of string, silk, or leather bindings.[44] However, some bamboo slips that we know originally formed part of multi-piece tomb inventories likewise do not exhibit positive visual evidence of having been bound, including the inventory slips from Mawangdui M3.[45]

The layout of the text on the surface of the M2 slip certainly suggests that it originally formed part of a multi-piece manuscript. The fact that

42) They are slips 295/297, 154/396, 168/397, 183/398, 324/399, and 393/400.

43) See, for example, the discussion of the manuscript found in Xiejiaqiao 謝家橋 tomb M1 in Staack, "Single and Multi-Piece Manuscripts in Early Imperial China," 248, n.9.

44) There are no spaces in-between the graphs that would indicate the scribe wrote around bindings that were already in place, or which had been planned, for example.

45) See *Baogao*, 43. One of the reviewers for this article suggests that the split in the slip may have been produced by the practice of cutting a line around the outside of the bamboo culm from which the slip was manufactured. The gradient of the split certainly resembles that of the verso lines found on some bamboo manuscripts, which were produced by just such a practice, and this could be evidence that the slip was originally bound as part of a multi-piece manuscript. Technically speaking, however, even if the split in the slip could be securely attributed to such a practice, this would prove only that the slip was taken from a section of bamboo that had been prepared with the production of multi-piece bamboo manuscripts in mind, not that the slip in question ever actually formed part of a multi-piece manuscript. For the argument that lines were cut into bamboo culms in order to indicate the best way to put bamboo slips together so that they formed a neat, even surface, see Thies Staack, "Identifying Codicological Sub-Units in Bamboo Manuscripts: Verso Lines Revisited," *Manuscript Cultures* 8 (2015): 157-86.

the number record 凡廿一人 ("twenty-one persons in total") appears in a second column, rather than in the blank space at the bottom of the first column, speaks to a desire to separate this part of the record from the entry proper. The width of the slip may indicate that it was chosen to carry more than one column of text according to a predetermined format.

The M2 slip resembles inventory summary slips in its content as well as in its form. The slip does not feature the words "to the right-hand side" (*youfang* 右方), the formula used on the summary slips and boards of M1 and M3; however, the word *fan* 凡 ("in total") at the start of a new column that introduces the number of items matches the format of certain of the wooden summary boards from M3, and the word *fan* appears prominently on summary slips from other sites.[46] Furthermore, the M3 inventory records the participation of soldiers or guards in the funeral proceedings using the same terminology (*zu* 卒) as the M2 slip.[47] Slip 25/16, for example, carries an entry for "one hundred soldiers with armor and helmets carrying halberds and wearing breast shields" 卒 [介] 胄，長戟，膺盾者百人,[48] with the presence of three hundred such soldiers 三百人卒 recorded on summary board 42/21 in the same manuscript.[49] Lastly, the M2 slip associates the guards with Wu You, King of Changsha, and similar information is recorded on some of the M3 summary boards, which mention the provenance of certain items.[50]

46) It appears, for example, in the entries on the early Western Han dynasty inventory from Fenghuangshan 鳳凰山 tomb M168 (Jiangling, Hubei); see Mi Rutian, "Qiance kaobian," 97. In addition, though it is hard to tell from the photograph published in *Jicheng*, it is possible that the upper edge of the M2 slip originally featured a black line similar to the ones used to mark the summary slips and boards in the inventories from M1 and M3 running horizontally across its top; see the photographs of the summary boards from M3: no. 21 in *Jicheng*, vol. 2, 259; no. 39 in *Jicheng*, vol. 2, 261; no. 53 in *Jicheng*, vol. 2, 262; no. 87 in *Jicheng*, vol. 2, 265; and no. 216 in *Jicheng*, vol. 2, 277.

47) See, for example, the entries on slips 25/16, 26/17, 27/18 (*Baogao*, 49, and *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 229-30).

48) For a detailed analysis of the terminology in this entry, see the notes in *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 230. The brackets indicate a damaged graph reconstructed from parallel entries.

49) See *Baogao*, 50, and *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 230. Note also that the total number of males on this summary board is introduced using the same term (*fan* 凡) that appears on the M2 slip.

50) Summary board 236/216, for example, refers to certain items that had been "received from within" (*shou zhong* 受中), as well as others that had been "provided by the House of Linxiang" (*Linxiang jia ji* 臨湘家給). Zhou Shirong interprets the former entry to mean that they were received from the palace of the King of Changsha 長沙王禁中. This being the case, the latter notations most likely refer to the fact that the items had been provided by the Li

Aside from certain material differences between this slip and the summary slips from M1 and M3,[51] the content, medium, size, and epigraphic format locate it squarely within the multi-piece tomb inventory manuscript genre. Certainly, we would expect a tomb inventory to have been buried in M2, since these documents were found in M1 and M3: it would have been strange indeed for Li Cang's wife and son to merit such an honor but not Li Cang himself. As noted above, M2 was looted several times prior to excavation and as a result yielded far fewer items than either M1 or M3. In addition, the items left behind by the robbers had sustained considerable damage owing to the tomb's exposure to the elements. Thus, the absence of a tomb inventory manuscript in M2 may be attributed to looting or to rot.

The Archaeological Context of the M2 Slip

If Li Cang's tomb originally contained a bamboo inventory, the next set of questions to address is why this particular slip was removed from it, and how the slip ended up in the tomb passageway. The ritual removal of the M2 slip from a multi-piece manuscript is consistent with the ways tomb inventories were sometimes used at other sites. Slips belonging to two sets of inventory materials (judging by the different hands used to write the entries) were found in six locations in different parts of Baoshan 包山 tomb M2 (Jiangling, Hubei; late Warring States), for example, and Lai Guolong has shown how these manuscripts were cut up and their parts redistributed during the burial process.[52] Lai argues

family; see Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, "Changsha Mawangdui er, sanhao Han mu fajue baogao," 43; *Baogao*, 63; and *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 246. Slips 45/29, 45/30, and 47/31 in the M3 tomb inventory also specify the regional origins of some of the dancers and singers, consistent with the information regarding the nationality of the guardsmen recorded on the M2 slip; see *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 231-32.

51) These differences can probably be explained by the fact that the M2 inventory would have been manufactured almost twenty years before those found in M1 and M3. Judging by excavated finds, tomb inventories were not produced to the same standards in different times and places. The inventories from Mawangdui M1 and M3 date from within a very short period of time, and yet were manufactured from different materials (the former from bamboo exclusively, the latter from bamboo and wood).

52) The bamboo slips that constituted this manuscript were found distributed between the eastern, southern, and western compartments of the outer coffin; see Lai, "The Baoshan Tomb," 32, 40-41, and idem, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 139-40. See also Constance A. Cook, *Death in Ancient China: The Tale of One Man's Journey* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 10-11.

that there was an (albeit imperfect) association between the items listed in the Baoshan inventories and the artifacts found in the parts of the tomb where the different inventory manuscript components were deposited, and he shows that the deposition of the grave goods at Baoshan (including the inventory slips) followed a ritual sequence beginning in the east and proceeding counterclockwise.[53] Lai's findings thus demonstrate a close connection between the inventory components and their locations within the tomb.

In a recent article, Tian Tian describes how the inventory from Fenghuangshan tomb M167 (Jiangling, Hubei; Western Han) was deposited in the layer of charcoal used to cover the coffin, a full 25cm from the planks of the coffin cover. Tian concludes from this that tomb inventory manuscripts were sometimes thrown or lowered into the pit as part of the funeral rites, either as or after it was filled with earth and charcoal.[54] Interestingly, an inscribed bamboo slip was found in the earth used to fill the pit of Mawangdui M3. The slip had broken into two pieces, but originally measured 16.1cm by 4.5-4.8cm. One side of the slip still retains its green hue, while the other side contains six (now indistinct) brush-written graphs.[55] Whether or not this slip originally carried a record or message similar to the one on the M2 slip, the discovery of a single inscribed slip in the earth used to fill M3 opens up a possible line of inquiry as to how the M2 slip ended up in the tomb passage. He Xuhong's 何旭紅 recent (albeit brief) description of the archaeological context of the M2 slip claims that it was actually found within the "filled earth" (*tiantu* 填土) inside the tomb passageway.[56] Though this piece of information does not appear in the official excavation reports, if true it would suggest that the slip may have been thrown or lowered into the passageway as it was being filled with earth as part of the burial ceremony.

Of course, it is also possible that this bamboo slip once belonged to a complete manuscript in the tomb inventory genre, or some related

53) See Lai, "The Baoshan Tomb," 40-41, and idem, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 139-40. Chen Zhenyu 陳振裕, "Hubei Chu jian gaishu" 湖北楚簡概述, in *Jianbo yanjiu diyi ji* 簡帛研究第一輯, ed. Li Xueqin 李學勤 (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 1993), 7, also notes that tomb inventory documents were sometimes divided up prior to burial, with different sections deposited in different rooms (*shi* 室) within the tomb along with the items recorded on those slips.

54) See Tian, "From 'Clothing Strips' to Clothing Lists," 72-73.

55) See *Baogao*, 27.

56) He, *Changsha guo kaogu faxian yu yanjiu*, 126.

textual tradition, and was simply deposited in the passageway by accident after having become separated from the rest of the manuscript, possibly by one of the three groups of robbers who gained access to the pit prior to excavation. I believe this to be highly unlikely, however. First, the passageway had been filled with earth, and there is no evidence that any of the robbers had access to this part of the tomb. Second, judging by the location of the three tunnels dug by the robbers (Figure 1),[57] even if the robbers had been able to access the passage, they would have had no reason to carry any objects from the pit through the passageway, since it did not provide them with a way of entering or exiting the tomb. Third, it would be quite a coincidence for a single summary slip recording an entry for a band of guards to have been accidentally dropped in the very part of the tomb that was apparently considered most in need of guarding. In Eastern Han tombs, for example, inscribed artifacts were often deliberately placed in antechambers as a way of guarding and protecting the entranceway to the tomb.[58] Lastly, it is extremely unlikely that the entire multi-piece manuscript to which the slip originally belonged was deposited in the passageway, given that to date not a single such inventory manuscript has been discovered in a tomb passage.[59] Moreover, it seems very unlikely that this particular slip would have survived all by itself, much less in this particular spot.

Regardless of whether the slip was deposited in the passageway itself, or in the earth used to fill it, it is telling that the location where the slip was discovered was also home to two ghoulish statues placed there to deter grave robbers and harmful spirits. The tomb passage in question is a sloped passageway (broader at the top and narrower at the bottom) that leads down from the tomb entrance to the pit from the middle of the northern side of M2. Along the passage, some 3.5 m from the pit,

57) See *Baogao*, 8.

58) See Anna Seidel, "Traces of Han Religion in Funeral Texts Found in Tombs," in *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka* 道教と宗教文化, ed. Akizuki Kan'ei 秋月觀暎 (Tokyo: Hirakawa shuppansha, 1987), 25.

59) Thirty-three of the thirty-five tomb inventories listed by Zheng Shubin, for example, were found inside the tomb chamber, the vast majority inside the actual coffin. The locations of the remaining two are not specified; see Zheng, "Qiance de kaogu faxian yu wenxian quanshi," 33. See also Peng Hao 彭浩, "Zhanguo shiqi de qiance" 戰國時期的遣冊, *Jianbo yanjiu* 簡帛研究 2 (1996): 52. Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 144, notes that after the mid-Western Han, tomb inventories moved from the outer to the inner coffin where they are often found along with the corpse.

are two wall niches (*bikan* 壁龕) dug 2m high into the sides of the passageway. Each niche was home to a single demonic statue (*ouren* 偶人) made of wood, straw, and clay, comprising a base, feet, a body, arms, a head, and horns, creating a fearsome spectacle for any who passed by and underneath them. Although the straw and wood had long since rotted away, by extracting the moisture from the space left behind by the statues and pouring plaster into this area it was possible to reproduce plaster cast versions of them. The statue placed in the western wall stood 105 cm tall and seems to have been holding something in its right hand, which was raised in a fist. The statue in the eastern wall stood 109 cm tall and was positioned with its left arm outstretched and its right arm slightly curved, holding some sort of wooden weapon (possibly a spear) that measured approximately 54 cm in length.[60] Mawangdui M3 also featured similarly grotesque statues placed in the walls on either side of the tomb passage, and the statues listed in the M3 tomb inventory most likely refer to these creatures.[61]

Such tomb guardians (*zhenmu shou* 鎮墓獸), placed in the corridor outside the tomb chamber, have been found at a number of Western Han tomb sites. These statues are often positioned in explicitly defensive positions and postures, with their arms outstretched barring entry into the tomb chamber.[62] Heavily armed and prominently displayed at a raised, imposing height on both sides of the passageway, the statues from Mawangdui M2 fully correspond to the typology of tomb guardians found in the former Chu region, including a base, a body, and horns,[63] designed to intimidate any invaders and to ward off threats to the deceased.

60) See *Baogao*, 7-9, for a description of the tomb passage, including the statues and the bamboo slip. For black and white photographs of the statues, see *Baogao*, plates 3.2, 4.1, and 4.2.

61) See *Baogao*, 9, 48. For the statues in the passageway in M3, see *Baogao*, 28, and plate 15.1.

62) Susan N. Erickson, "Han Dynasty Tomb Structures and Contents," in *China's Early Empires*, 27-29.

63) See Paola Demattè, "Antler and Tongue: New Archaeological Evidence in the Study of the Chu Tomb Guardian," *East and West* 44 (1994): 353-404; Zheng Shubin 鄭曙斌, "Chu mu bohua, zhenmushou de hunpo guannian" 楚墓帛畫, 鎮墓獸的魂魄觀念, *Jianghan kaogu* 1996.1: 81-89; and Mary H. Fong, "Tomb-Guardian Figurines: Their Evolution and Iconography," in *Ancient Mortuary Traditions of China: Papers on Chinese Ceramic Funerary Sculptures*, ed. George Kuwayama (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 87.

The bamboo slip found in M2 should be understood as part of the same protective program. Just as those statues were not manufactured merely as *representations* or *imitations* of actual guardians but were thought to perform the same protective functions as actual spirits or demons,[64] the deposition of this tomb slip, with its reference to the guards who had presumably played some sort of role in the funeral proceedings, was surely intended not merely to *reference* but to actually *perform* the protective functions associated with the guards listed in the entry. It was not uncommon in the ancient world for certain types of writing (names, in particular) to enjoy the properties of things and people, or for writing to be thought capable of exerting some sort of influence on material reality.[65] The deposition of this particular slip in the passageway of M2, in the shadow of the guardians controlling access to the tomb pit, speaks to the belief that an inscribed bamboo slip recording the participation of guards in the funeral ceremony could continue to confer protection upon the deceased even after the ceremony was over and the tomb was closed. The words on the slip would have functioned performatively: No longer linguistic signifiers to be decoded by a reader, they were talismanic marks that performed or invoked the guards' protective services.

The material form of bamboo-slip manuscripts facilitated this kind of dual use. It would have been easy to remove the slip from the manuscript without affecting the readability of the document as a whole, meaning that the underworld officials would still have been able to read the inventory and make judgments about the tomb occupant's status,

64) In this, they are similar to the terracotta soldiers guarding the tomb of the First Emperor 秦始皇 (r. 221-210 BCE), which were manufactured not to represent, depict, or replicate real soldiers, but actually to perform their protective functions in the afterlife; see Ladislav Kesner, "(Re)presenting the First Emperor's Army," *Art Bulletin* 77 (1995): 115-32, and Jessica Rawson, "The Power of Images: The Model Universe of the First Emperor and its Legacy," *Historical Research* 75 (2002): 123-54.

65) In ancient Egypt, for example, some amulets consisted entirely of the names of divine spirits; see Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1994), 111. For the idea that naming or depicting ghosts or demons allowed a person to exercise control over them and their powers, see Anna Seidel, "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha," in *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein, II*, ed. Michel Strickmann (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983), 320-22, and William G. Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1994), 132-34.

even if it was missing the odd slip. It was not unusual in the ancient world for parts of texts, or even entire texts, to be removed from their original manuscripts and contexts for use as protective amulets. While these texts tended to be spiritually potent rather than dry administrative records,[66] judging from the examples from Mawangdui M1 and M3, the inventory from which this slip was taken had itself probably been designed, manufactured, and performed as a ritually charged artifact representing, if not actually embodying, Li Cang's political power and social status.

Talismans in Early China

In describing the writing on the M2 slip as essentially "performative" in nature, I am drawing on J. L. Austin's theory of performative utterances. Just as, after Austin, under certain conditions specific utterances do not simply describe reality but actually constitute and create it,[67] in certain cases writing can also be used, in ways spoken utterances cannot, to define and determine the accepted conditions of reality. Written wills and contracts are just two examples of this kind of writing, and recent studies of performative writing have also addressed the capacity for written signs and messages to transform the spaces where they are found, and the people exposed to them, in ways that exceed or transcend their propositional value.[68]

A number of written sources from Mawangdui attest to the existence of a contemporary belief that, in certain circumstances, the written sign

66) See Theodor H. Gaster, "Amulets and Talismans," in *Hidden Truths: Magic, Alchemy, and the Occult*, ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 146; Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 111; Fabio Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007), 90; Ülkü Bates, "The Use of Calligraphy on Three Dimensional Objects: The Case of 'Magic' Prayer Bowls," in *Brocade of the Pen: The Art of Islamic Writing*, ed. Carol Garrett Fisher (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ., 1991), 56-58; and Silverman, "Arabic Writing and the Occult," 20, in the same volume.

67) See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

68) See, for example, the work of Béatrice Fraenkel: "Les Écritures exposées," *Linx* 31.2 (1994): 99-110; "Actes écrits, actes oraux: la performativité à l'épreuve de l'écriture," *Études de communication* 29 (2006): 69-93; "Actes d'écriture: quand écrire c'est faire," *Langage et société* 121-22 (2007): 101-12; and "Writing Acts: When Writing is Doing," in *The Anthropology of Writing: Understanding Textually Mediated Worlds*, ed. David Barton and Uta Papen (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 33-43.

could be used not just to record or communicate linguistic messages but also to effect change in the world through its material presence. Whether brush-written in ink or woven into textiles, whether painted or carved, this use of performative writing, perhaps sometimes also accompanied by spoken utterances embedded within ritual acts, was intended variously to ward off danger, preserve wealth, and attract good fortune.[69] Examining the performative use of writing as amulets and talismans in the Mawangdui tombs reveals that in early Western Han mortuary contexts, and almost certainly above ground as well, complex written texts containing profound philosophical truths or sophisticated technical knowledge were not the only ways in which writing could be used to project or embody elite status and identity. Rather, it was believed that, at least with certain types of writing used in certain spaces, short texts and even individual characters on bamboo slips or finely woven silk garments could be used to negotiate a person's fate and identity, both in this life and the next.

The increasing body of scholarship on premodern amulets and talismans reflects their widespread use all over the ancient and premodern world, including ancient Egypt, the ancient Mediterranean, ancient Mesopotamia, in early and medieval Judaism, early Japan, medieval Islam, and medieval Europe.[70] Amulets and talismans might contain

69) For a study of these sources, see Waring, "Writing and Materiality in the Three Han Dynasty Tombs at Mawangdui," 276-310.

70) See, for example, Gaster, "Amulets and Talismans"; Silverman, "Arabic Writing and the Occult"; Bates, "The Use of Calligraphy on Three Dimensional Objects"; *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, ed. John G. Gager (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992); *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Genizah: Selected Texts from Taylor-Schechter Box K1*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and Michael D. Swartz (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 104-19; David Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions," *Helios* 21 (1994): 189-221; Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2006); James Robson, "Signs of Power: Talismanic Writing in Chinese Buddhism," *History of Religions* 48 (2008): 130-69; Roy Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation on Inscribed Greek Amulets," in *Magic Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 107-37; David Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2011), 15-66; Jonathan Taylor, "Tablets as Artefacts, Scribes as Artisans," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 5-31; and the chapters by Jacco Dieleman, Jaime Curbera, Véronique Dasen, Árpád M Nagy, Jitse Dijkstra, Peter J. Forshaw, and Annewies Van Den Hoek, Denis Feissel, and John J. Herrmann, Jr. in *The*

extended passages of writing, short scraps of text, semantically meaningless pseudo-graphs, a combination of pictures and writing, or no writing at all, and they were committed to a wide range of different media including linen, pottery, papyrus, metal, gold, silver, lead, and even plant leaves.[71] A distinction is sometimes drawn between amulets worn or carried for protection and talismans designed to attract blessings and good fortune, and both types of object are sometimes also referred to as charms.[72] What all these objects have in common, however, is that it was believed that their material features (from their medium to any markings they may have had, written or otherwise) and presence in certain locations conferred some sort of positive force upon those who owned or used them. With amulets and talismans, the inscription of auspicious or otherwise ritually charged words and phrases was believed to allow their magic to enter and become part of the object itself, transferring that power to the body of the object's owner or user.[73]

Judging by both transmitted and excavated sources, the earliest Chinese examples of written talismans known as *fu* 符, designed to confer protection and good fortune on their owners, date to the Eastern Han dynasty,[74] though some evidence suggests they may have been in use already in the Qin and Western Han periods.[75] In Eastern Han times,

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Materiality of Magic, ed. Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (Paderborn: Verlag Wilhelm Fink, 2015).

71) Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing," 190, 205-11; Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 111; and Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers for Salvation," 114.

72) See Gaster, "Amulets and Talismans," 146; Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, 105; and Skemer, *Binding Words*, 9.

73) See Annewies van den Hoek, Denis Feissel, and John J. Herrmann, Jr., "More Lucky Wearers: The Magic of Portable Inscriptions," in *The Materiality of Magic*, 309.

74) *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 82B.2749, relates how Qu Shengqing 麴聖卿 of the Eastern Han, an expert in manufacturing written talismans from cinnabar, was able to use the talismans to kill and control demons and spirits 又河南有麴聖, 善爲丹書符劾, 厭殺鬼神而使命之. *Hou Hanshu*, 82B.2744-45, tells the story of another Eastern Han man, Fei Changfang 費長房, who was killed by demons after losing possession of his talisman. For a discussion of these accounts, see Mark Csikszentmihalyi, "Han Cosmology and Mantic Practices," in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 69-70. See also Catherine Despeux, "Talismans and Sacred Diagrams," 500, in the same volume, and Wu Rongzeng's 吳榮曾 summary of Eastern Han excavated talismanic writing on pottery and lead in his "Zhenmuwen zhong suo jiandao de Donghan daowu guanxi" 鎮墓文中所見到的東漢道巫關係," *Wenwu* 1981.3: 56-63.

75) One of the daybooks from Shuihudi 睡虎弟 (Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei, ca. 217 BCE) refers to a type of talisman known as a *Yufu* 禹符 ("Yu's talisman") in the context of rites performed before embarking on a journey; see Donald Harper, "Communication by Design: Two Silk

land contracts (*diquan* 地券), celestial ordinances for the dead (*zhenmu wen* 鎮墓文), and tomb inventories often contained explicit prayers for the protection of the living and absolution from sin for the deceased, and some were accompanied by talismanic characters or diagrams.[76] Certainly, the use of amulets and talismans, written and otherwise, was a widespread part of early "Daoism,"[77] as well as medieval Chinese Buddhist and Daoist practice,[78] and even today talismanic texts written on paper are used in China, Japan, and Chinese communities overseas to secure knowledge, wisdom, and prosperity.[79]

Explicit textual evidence from Mawangdui corroborates that at least certain sections of Western Han society believed in the power of written language – names, specifically[80] – to exert control over the people and creatures to whom those names referred. One of the spells described in the **Za jinfang* 雜禁方 [81] (Assorted Forbidden Recipes) text

Manuscripts of Diagrams (*Tu*) From Mawangdui Tomb Three," in *Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China:* The Warp and the Weft, ed. Francesca Bray et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 181-82. One of the recipes in the **Wushi'er bingfang* 五十二病方 (Prescriptions for Fifty-Two Ailments) medical text from Mawangdui also refers to bathing in water mixed with an incinerated "paired talisman" (*bingfu* 并符) as a way of curing illness; see Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 301.

76) See Seidel, "Traces of Han Religion," 21-57. Terry F. Kleeman, "Land Contracts and Related Documents," in *Chūgoku no shūkyō shisō to kagaku: Makio Ryōkai hakushi shōju kinen ronshū* 中国の宗教・思想と科学：牧尾良海博士頌寿記念論集, ed. Makio Ryōkai hakushi shōju kinen ronshū kankōkai 牧尾良海博士頌寿記念論集刊行会 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1984), 9, notes that the fact that no Eastern Han tomb has yielded more than one of these three types of document may suggest they performed similar or even identical functions.

77) Daoist talismans were typically oblong pieces of wood or metal inscribed with figurative signs and symbols in black or red ink. Historically, the term "talisman" (*fu*) was often interchangeable in the Daoist tradition with related terms such as "register" (*lu* 籙), "diagram" (*tu* 圖), and "written documents" (*shu* 書, *chishu* 赤書) that were all thought to embody cosmic energies and give their owners power over divine beings; see Despeux, "Talismans and Sacred Diagrams," 498-500. See also Wang Yucheng 王育成, "Donghan daofu shili" 東漢道符釋例, *Kaogu xuebao* 1991.1: 45-56, and Li Ling, "An Archaeological Study of Taiyi (Grand One) Worship," tr. Donald Harper, *Early Medieval China* 2 (1996): 1-39.

78) See Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, ed. Bernard Faure (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002), 123-93; Robson, "Signs of Power"; and Paul Copp, *The Body Incantatory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2014).

79) See Robson, "Signs of Power," 132.

80) See Seidel, "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments," 320-22, and Yuri Pines, "History as a Guide to the Netherworld: Rethinking the *Chunqiu shiyu*," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 31 (2003): 113-15.

81) The convention of placing an asterisk before the title of excavated texts and manuscripts that were originally untitled, or whose title is otherwise unknown, has been adopted from

from Mawangdui, for example, advises that, "When involved in a suit with another person, write the person's name and set it inside the shoe" 與人頌, 書其名直 (= 置) 履中.[82] Though direct textual references to such uses of writing in the Chinese tradition are fairly rare, and despite the fact that the **Za jinfang* is a collection of spells written on a rather shoddily produced wooden manuscript rather than on slender slips of bamboo or fine sheets of silk, the belief in written magic was not restricted to lower levels of Han society.[83] After all, the M2 slip was found in the tomb of a regional prime minister,[84] and other items that made use of writing for talismanic purposes were also found in Mawangdui M1 and M3, whose occupants likewise belonged to the aristocratic elite.[85] We should not assume a sharp divide between earlier/popular notions of writing-magic and later/elite uses of writing for "rational" communication. As Donald Harper observes, early Chinese sources do not permit us to draw firm distinctions between elite and non-elite religious ideas and practices, given the near total lack of information on the thoughts

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Rudolf Pfister via Matthias Richter; see Matthias L. Richter, *The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 13, n.20.

82) This translation can be found (under the title "Recipes for Various Charms") in Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 423. Harper explains that "the expectation is that by treading on your opponent's name in the shoe, you will magically emerge the winner in the suit" (423, n.4). For transcriptions of this spell, see *Jicheng*, vol. 6, 159. The use of writing to affect the outcome of lawsuits was apparently widespread in the Ancient Mediterranean; see Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 116-50, who explains how in Greco-Roman times curse tablets were regularly commissioned by participants in trials and lawsuits with the intention of cursing opponents or members of the judiciary. Naming in writing the people to be cursed was an important part of this process. In addition, inscriptions located on the soles of shoes and sandals from late Mediterranean antiquity call for blessings and good fortune for their owners, who are sometimes named; see Van den Hoek et al., "More Lucky Wearers," 319-21.

83) Unlike the vast majority of the medical documents found at Mawangdui, judging by the spells contained in the short **Za jinfang* text this collection was evidently not compiled predominantly for use by elites. For a brief overview of the manuscript and a translation of the entire text, see Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 29-30, 423-24. See also Ma Jixing 馬繼興, *Mawangdui gu yishu kaoshi* 馬王堆古醫書考釋 (Changsha: Hunan kexue jishu chubanshe, 1992), 1009, where Ma argues that the **Za jinfang* manuscript contains "prohibited techniques" (*jinyan shu* 禁厭術) that were colored by "superstition" (*mixin* 迷信) and also "immoral" (*bu daode de* 不道德的).

84) As one of the reviewers for this article reminds me, no less august a figure than the Duke of Zhou 周公 is associated with talismanic prayer writing in the "Jin teng" 金縢 ("Metal-Bound Coffer") chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書; see Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753-1818), *Shangshu jin guwen zhushu* 尚書今古文注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 13.323-41.

85) See n.69 above.

and actions of ordinary people.[86] We cannot assume that writing was thought to have magical properties only by those who were less than fully literate.[87]

Indeed, use as talismans has been suggested as one possible reason manuscripts were buried in early Chinese tombs,[88] and it is worth reflecting on the possible talismanic functions that an entire inventory manuscript may have had in the context of a Western Han tomb. Was the talismanic power of the individual M2 slip a function of its ritual removal and deposition in the tomb corridor, or did at least some of its power derive from the fact that it had originally been incorporated into a manuscript that itself enjoyed talismanic functions? Relevant to this point are the thirty-three peach-wood slips discovered in Mawangdui M1. Twenty-two of these had been bound together with hemp strings in a way that closely resembles a multi-piece wood-slip manuscript, with this "manuscript" placed underneath the bottom right-hand corner of the silk banner that covered the lid board of the inner coffin. Though there is no writing on the slips, the slips have been given facial features using black ink, and the *Han mu* editors describe them as "wooden figurines for expelling evil" (*bixie muyong* 辟邪木俑), citing as evidence their location in the tomb and the fact that later Chinese texts credit peach wood with certain magical properties.[89] If these slips were indeed intended to perform a talismanic function in the tomb, and if this function depended at least in part on their resemblance to a multi-piece

86) See Donald Harper, "Contracts with the Spirit World in Han Common Religion: The Xuning Prayer and Sacrifice Documents of A.D. 79," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 14 (2004): 229-31. For this reason, Harper uses the term "common religion" not in reference to the religious beliefs of commoners, but to "the everyday religious ideas and practices that individuals of different social levels 'held in common'" (229).

87) On this point, see Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 81-82.

88) See, for example, Michael Loewe, "Wood and Bamboo Administrative Documents of the Han Period," in *New Sources of Early Chinese History: An Introduction to the Reading of Inscriptions and Manuscripts*, ed. Edward L. Shaughnessy (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies – Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1997), 190-91; Anthony Barbieri-Low and Robin D. S. Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiashan Tomb no. 247* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), vol. 1, 107-09; and Timothy Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China: An Early History of* Muzhiming (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 32-33.

89) See *Han mu*, vol. 1, 100-01, and vol. 2, 176 (plate 200).

manuscript, then the inventory manuscripts in Mawangdui M1 and M3, as well as the original M2 inventory, may also have served as auspicious talismans conferring protection on the tomb occupants.

On current evidence, it is difficult to say if tomb inventories generally performed talismanic functions in the tombs of Western Han elites. It is clear, however, that these were not just administrative records or logistical tools. Rather, these beautiful manuscripts were ritual artifacts designed to ensure the continued prosperity of the deceased in the afterlife. While scholars have shown that tomb inventories (in both their form and their content) helped project an image of the deceased, their status, and the privileges they had enjoyed (which they hoped would continue into the next life),[90] the individual M2 slip shows that tomb inventories were also used to safeguard the wellbeing of the tomb occupant in a secure underground dwelling.[91] These functions are not irreconcilable or mutually exclusive, and the M2 slip likely served to symbolize and communicate Li Cang's status and privileges as prime minister of Changsha as much as it functioned as a talisman guaranteeing his personal safety.

Conclusion

The individual bamboo slip found in the passageway in Mawangdui M2 shows that talismanic writing was part of the text-object world of

90) As noted above, Guo Jue's recent study reveals how different groups in early imperial China, including lesser elites and ordinary subjects, used tomb inventory manuscripts to exaggerate and inflate their status and privilege in an attempt to secure optimal living conditions for themselves in the afterlife; see Guo, "Western Han Funerary Relocation Documents." Similarly, Yang Yi has argued that one of the primary functions of tomb inventory manuscripts was to announce the status of the deceased to the underworld. According to Yang, it did not matter that tomb inventories were not always accurate reflections of the property owned by the deceased, since the act of writing the inventories (and ritually performing the documents on which they were recorded at the tomb site) made them "true" (*zhen* 真); see Yang Yi, "He wei 'qiance?,'" 331-32.

91) Whether these dwellings were temporary "waystations" or more permanent abodes is currently a topic of some debate, with evidence for both models existing at one and the same tomb site, including Mawangdui. For these debates, see Jue Guo, "Concepts of Death and the Afterlife Reflected in Newly Discovered Tomb Objects and Texts from Han China," in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, ed. Amy Olberding and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2011), 86-105; Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife*, 75-77, 161-87; and Selbitschka, "Sacrifice vs. Sustenance," 184.

Western Han China. At least certain members of Han society believed that people, and perhaps also ghosts and spirits, could be invoked and controlled by writing down their names, and given the connection between the contents of the slip and the location where it was found, it seems likely that it was deposited with the intention of invoking and receiving the protective services ostensibly only catalogued in the slip's contents.

As part of a tomb inventory manuscript, this slip would have functioned above ground as a way of recording and coordinating the goods and people displayed at Li Cang's funeral, including a group of twenty-one guards originally allocated to the king that Li Cang served. This manuscript, which would probably have been finely produced and impressively long if the examples from M1 and M3 are anything to go by, would likewise have been displayed and performed at the tomb site, with the entries read aloud to the attendees as part of a ritual ceremony. As part of this ritual, however, the M2 slip was removed from the inventory manuscript and buried separately from the other slips. The slip was chosen precisely because it carried an entry recording the participation of a band of guards in the funeral proceedings, and it was deposited in the tomb passage (or perhaps in the earth used to fill the passageway) in order to reinforce the protective program of that part of the tomb, which included two guardians charged with defending the tomb and its owner.

The multipurpose use of this bamboo slip is thus a result of what Webb Keane has called the "bundling" of material features in artifacts, "the contingent coexistence of an indefinite number of qualities in any object, which always exceeds the purposes of the designer."[92] The bamboo slip may originally have been selected, prepared, and inscribed for incorporation into a multi-piece tomb inventory manuscript, but its material features also allowed it to be re-purposed for other ritual functions. Examining the material conditions and contexts within which this single slip was used and buried reveals a powerful fusion of text, ritual, and administration. Even seemingly mundane administrative records were linked through their materiality to other beliefs and practices, and the material division between ritual and administration remained porous at best.

92) Webb Keane, "On the Materiality of Religion," *Material Religion* 4 (2008): 230-31.

Acknowledgments

Parts of this article appeared in my Ph.D. dissertation, "Writing and Materiality in the Three Han Dynasty Tombs at Mawangdui" (Princeton Univ., 2019), and the reader is invited to consult chapters 2 and 3 for more information on tomb inventories and talismans. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments, criticisms, and suggestions, which have helped sharpen and strengthen my arguments considerably.

Abstract

A single bamboo slip was found at Mawangdui tomb M2 inside the passageway leading to the pit where Li Cang (d. ca. 186 BCE), the Marquis of Dai and Prime Minister of Changsha, was buried. Though almost entirely unnoticed in previous scholarship, the M2 slip has much to tell us about the overlapping textual, ritual, administrative, and funerary practices of early Western Han China. I offer a description of the slip, translations of its contents, a consideration of how it was used at the tomb site, and an analysis of what its archaeological context tells us about the use of talismans in Western Han burials. Specifically, I show that the slip originally formed part of a multi-piece tomb inventory manuscript, and that it was removed and ritually deposited inside the passageway in order to protect the tomb from robbers and malevolent spirits.

Résumé

Une latte de bambou isolée a été découverte dans le corridor menant à la fosse de la tombe M2 à Mawangdui où fut enterré Li Cang (mort vers 186 av. notre ère), marquis de Dai et premier ministre de Changsha. Bien que presque totalement négligée par la recherche, cette latte peut nous apprendre beaucoup sur l'entrecroisement des pratiques textuelles, rituelles, administratives et funéraires dans la Chine du début des Han occidentaux. Je propose une description de cette latte, une traduction de son texte, une réflexion sur son usage dans la tombe et une analyse de ce que son contexte archéologique nous apprend de la fonction des talismans dans les enterrements sous les Han occidentaux. Je montre en particulier qu'elle faisait originellement partie d'un ensemble de lattes constituant un inventaire de la tombe et qu'elle fut ensuite séparée et rituellement déposée dans le corridor afin de protéger la tombe des voleurs comme des esprits malfaisants.

提要

在馬王堆二號墓通往軑侯，即長沙王丞相利蒼（約卒於公元前 186 年）墓穴的過道中出土了一枚單簡。儘管在已有的研究中鮮有提及，這枚二號墓竹簡卻爲我們提供了眾多關於西漢早期文本、儀式、行政及墓葬實踐的信息。本文在介紹該枚竹簡以及翻譯其簡文之後，考量其在該墓穴的使用情況，且進一步分析該枚竹簡的考古信息所揭露出的西漢墓葬儀式對於護身符的使用情況。具體來說，本文指出該枚竹簡原本隸屬於一份由多枚竹簡所組成的墓葬清單，後被單獨取出並儀式性地放置在墓葬過道內，以此來達到保護墓穴，趨避盜墓者以及鬼神的目的。

Keywords

Mawangdui – tomb inventory manuscripts – talismans – ritual – Han dynasty