

The Record of King Wu of Zhou's Royal Deeds in the *Yi Zhou shu* in Light of Near Eastern Royal Inscriptions

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This paper introduces a new reading of the “Shi fu” (Hauling of Captives), a chapter in the *Yi Zhou shu* (Leftover Zhou Writings) that is commonly read as an early record of the conquest of China's first historically attested dynasty of Shang by King Wu of Zhou in the middle of the eleventh century BCE. I argue that this conventional reading does not give justice to the structural complexities of the “Shi fu” and disregards the fact that certain compositional units of the text are unrelated to the conquest event. I propose to analyze the “Shi fu” against a better studied corpus of the Near Eastern royal inscriptions where there are surprisingly similar examples of compositionally heterogeneous texts that constitute a textual celebration of successful universal kingship based on military valor. Notably, such a notion of universal kingship is largely alien to the later Chinese tradition where an emphasis is put on the kings' reign by virtue. While there are no reasons to consider seriously the possibility of the “Shi fu” being immediately influenced by the Near Eastern inscriptions, this parallel can be explained by the structural similarity of the societies that produced them, in particular, the similarity of how royal power was understood, legitimized, and celebrated.

“Shi fu” 世俘 (Hauling of Captives)¹ is a chapter in the *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 (Leftover Zhou Writings) that contains an unorthodox account of King Wu's 周武王 (mid 11th c. BCE) conquest of China's first historically attested dynasty of Shang 商 (late 13th–mid 11th c. BCE).

Author note: This work has grown out of dialogue with many people. I am indebted to Dega Deopik for his observations regarding the structural parallels between the Chinese sources and texts from other ancient cultures, which served as the initial inspiration for this project. My engagement with the Near Eastern sources would not have been possible without the competent guidance I received from Marwan Kilani and Eva Miller. Much of the argument was first formulated during discussions with Oliver Bentley and Pauline Harlay, and the structure of my analysis is heavily influenced by the feedback I received from them. I am grateful to the organizers and participants of the Young Scholars' Forum in Chinese Studies that was held on 7–9 May 2015 at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where the first draft of this paper was presented. I would also like to express gratitude to Cameron Bailey, Laurence Mann, Jessica Rawson, Corina Smith, and the two anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, who suggested a number of important improvements at the final stages of preparation of the manuscript. This work was supported financially by the Clarendon Fund and Wolfson College of the University of Oxford and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange.

1. I read *shi* 世 (“generation,” reconstructed by Baxter and Sagart as *lap-s > lat-s) as *ye* 拽 (“to drag,” “to haul,” *l[a]t). This differs from the conventional glossing of *shi* as *da* 大 (“great,” *lat-s), even though it is also plausible on phonological grounds. (I rely on the recent phonological reconstruction by William H. Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014]; see also the online supplement, “The Baxter-Sagart Reconstruction of Old Chinese,” September 20, 2014, <http://ocbaxtersagart.lsa.umich.edu/>.) According to this conventional glossing, the chapter title can be translated as “Great Capture.” Cf. Huang Huaixin 黄懷信, Tian Xudong 田旭東, and Zhang Maorong 張懋鎔, eds., *Yi Zhou shu huijiao jizhu* 逸周書彙校集注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 410–11 [hereafter: *Yi Zhou shu huijiao jizhu*]; Edward L. Shaughnessy, “‘New’ Evidence on the Zhou Conquest,” in *Before Confucius: Studies in the Creation of the Chinese Classics* (New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1997), 32 [first published in *Early China* 6 (1980–1981): 57–79]. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out the disputability of the conventional glossing of the title.

It started gaining more scholarly attention in the twentieth century when important studies of this text were published, arguing that it contains the most credible account of the Zhou conquest of Shang in the received corpus.² Indeed, the “Shi fu” is remarkable for violating many of the conventional ideas about early Western Zhou 西周 (mid 11th c.–771 BCE) sage kingship: King Wu is portrayed as a ruthless conqueror exterminating his enemies in thousands and practicing human sacrifice on a large scale. This contradiction between the portrayal of King Wu in the “Shi fu” and his idealized representation in the later Chinese tradition is believed to have been explicitly mentioned by Mencius (ca. 372–289 BCE), who refused to accept a text similar and related to the “Shi fu” precisely because of its harsh details.³ However, what appeared suspicious to Mencius became a proof of the text’s credibility and authenticity for scholars in the twentieth century who, under the influence of contemporary theories of the linear evolution of human societies, were ready to accept violence and brutality as standard traits of the more “primitive” steps of historical evolution. As a result, the “Shi fu” is today widely acclaimed as an early, objective, and credible historical account of the Zhou conquest of Shang.

In this paper, I would like to challenge this consensus opinion by pointing out that the “Shi fu” does not correspond to the model of an objective historical account of a single campaign that has been imposed upon it in recent scholarship. Instead, I propose to read it as a monument to successful kingship, which is a textual type very well attested in Near Eastern material. By contextualizing the “Shi fu” against Near Eastern royal inscriptions instead of later Chinese historiographic accounts, I identify structural similarities in the conception and representation of kingship that the “Shi fu” shares with Near Eastern cultures. I also propose solutions to certain textual problems of the “Shi fu” that cannot be satisfactorily solved within the conventional paradigm. Although my observations question the validity of recent historical reconstructions, they can help us to see China less as an exotic exception in the ancient world and more as an important example of an early literate society that, despite its unique characteristics, had much in common with the better investigated ancient Near East.⁴

THE PROBLEM OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

Mario Liverani’s cautious remarks concerning the interpretation of Mesopotamian royal inscriptions seem to fully apply to the scholarship of the “Shi fu”: “Historians’ use of the celebrative texts issued by the ancient kings requires an understanding of their background and their purposes, and of the communicative conventions in use, in order to reach a deeper level of reading, to recover truth behind propaganda, and to identify the real problems behind their verbal resolution.”⁵ A comparable degree of awareness about the methodological com-

2. The most significant study of the “Shi fu” in Chinese is Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980), “Yi Zhou shu Shi fu pian jiaozhu xieding yu pinglun” 逸周書世俘篇校注寫定與評論, *Wenshi* 1963.2: 1–41. See also Li Xueqin 李學勤, “Shi fu pian yanjiu” 世俘篇研究, *Shixue yuekan* 1988.2: 1–6.

3. This famous phrase, in Shaughnessy’s translation (“‘New’ Evidence,” 38–41), reads, “If one were to believe everything in the Documents, it would not be as good as not having the Documents. As for the ‘Wu cheng’ chapter, I accept only two or three strips and that is all. A humane man has no enemies in the world. With the most humane attacking the most inhumane, how could it be that the blood floated pestles?” Shaughnessy also provides a useful discussion of the relationship between the “Shi fu” and the text called “Wu cheng” 武成 (The Completion of War) chapters mentioned in the *Mencius*.

4. I have schematically outlined some of the following argument in an earlier publication focused on the transmission history of the “Shi fu.” See “Evolutsiya pamyati o zhouskom zavoyevanii Shan na primere odnogo teksta,” *Vostok* 4 (2016): 79–86.

5. “The Deeds of Ancient Mesopotamian Kings,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1995), 2353–54. See also Hayim Tadmor’s discussion of methodological

plexity of textual interpretation has not yet become commonplace in the field of early China studies; therefore, in the contemporary discussion of the “Shi fu,” a preoccupation with the proofs of authenticity and credibility has overshadowed the problem of textual interpretation and the decipherment of the text’s compositional and linguistic conventions. Nevertheless, before a certain text is proclaimed credible, it is important to identify what kind of text we as scholars are facing. For example, *Romeo and Juliet* is credible as a play by Shakespeare, but it would be disastrous to treat it as a credible source for the study of medieval Italian society. Therefore, in order to use the “Shi fu” in a justified way as a source of historical evidence, we need to first identify this text; before we start approaching it with our questions, we need to understand what kind of message the “Shi fu,” or rather its creators and transmitters, are attempting to deliver.

I understand this as a problem of contextualization and re-contextualization.⁶ The reason why we are not attempting to use *Romeo and Juliet* as a source book for the study of Italian history is that we know from the continuous tradition how to contextualize it properly within the theatrical environment. No such continuous tradition of unequivocal interpretation exists for the “Shi fu,” and even if it existed, we could not be certain that it would be equally applicable to the different stages of the text’s long transmission history. Therefore, our only choice is to attempt to reconstruct the context relying on the available evidence. First, we can extract information from within the text, just as a careful study of the structure and composition of *Romeo and Juliet* would betray its theatrical origins even to a person who has no knowledge of European theatrical culture. Second, we can rely on external evidence, trying to reconstruct the context using similarly structured texts attested in other cultures. Likewise, a hypothetical researcher unfamiliar with Shakespeare but exposed to the structure of theatrical scripts for Peking opera would probably find it easier to re-contextualize *Romeo and Juliet* than someone who does not have knowledge about dramatic scripts.

In fact, both approaches can be combined as our understanding of the text’s structure can be elucidated by comparable textual structures in other cultures. That is why the study of the “Shi fu” against Near Eastern material is particularly rewarding.

HOW TO WORK WITH A CORRUPT TEXT: METHODOLOGICAL NOTES CONCERNING THE PRESERVATION OF THE “SHI FU”

When it comes to the quality of the received text of the “Shi fu,” one has to acknowledge that it is certainly corrupt and contains transmission errors. A comparison of the received “Shi fu” and passages from an unpreserved cognate text named “Wu cheng,” cited in the chapter “Lü li zhi” 律曆志 (Treatise on Calendar and Musical Tones) of the *Han shu* 漢書 (History of the Han), reveals the probable degree of corruption and the range of various kinds of errors in the received “Shi fu.”⁷ In the following comparison, I have highlighted the characters in the “Shi fu” that do not correspond to the version preserved in the *Han shu*.⁸

problems in his “History and Ideology in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons*, ed. Frederick M. Fales (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1981), 13–33.

6. For a useful discussion of the issue of contextualization in the anthropological context, see Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 59–88.

7. The chapter “Lü li zhi” does not cite “Wu cheng” directly, but rather as a part of the calendrical treatise *Shi jing* 世經 (The Canon of Generations) composed by Liu Xin 劉歆 (50 BCE–23 CE). I borrow the notion of “cognate texts” from Matthias L. Richter, “Cognate Texts: Technical Terms as Indicators of Intertextual Relations and Redactional Strategies,” *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 56 (2002): 549–72.

8. Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 1015–16.

(1)

漢書：惟一月壬辰，旁死霸，若翌日癸巳，武王乃朝步自周于征伐紂

世俘：惟一月丙辰，旁生魄，若翼日丁巳，王乃步自于周征伐商王紂

(2)

漢書：粵若來三月，既死霸，粵五日甲子，咸劉商王紂

世俘：越若來二月，既死魄，越五日甲子，朝至接于商，則咸劉商王紂

(3)

漢書：惟四月既旁生霸，粵六日庚戌，武王燎于周廟

世俘：時四月既旁生魄，越六日庚戌，武王朝至燎于周

漢書：翌日辛亥，祀于天位

世俘：若翼日辛亥，祀于一位

漢書：粵五日乙卯，乃以庶國祀馘于周廟

世俘：越五日乙卯，武王乃以庶祀馘于國周廟

Apart from simple orthographic variations that do not affect the understanding of the text (*yue* 粵/越, *yi* 翌/翼, and *po* 霸/魄), there are more significant problems with the “Shi fu” as contrasted to the text cited in the *Han shu*.

1) **Date manipulation.** There is a difference in the date sequence in the first passage: the “Shi fu” has *bing-chen* 丙辰 (53/60) and *ding-si* 丁巳 (54/60) while the *Han shu* version has *ren-chen* 壬辰 (29/60) and *gui-si* 癸巳 (30/60). The *yuexiang* 月相 (“lunar phase”) formula in this passage is reversed to its opposite: while the *Hanshu* version reads *pangsipo* 旁死霸 (“nearing the death of the moon’s brightness”),⁹ the “Shi fu” has *pangshengpo* 旁生魄 (“nearing the birth of the moon’s brightness”). In the second passage, the *Han shu* mentions the third month, while the “Shi fu” gives the second month; however both agree on the same cyclical date *jia-zi* 甲子 (1/60). Combined, these differences do not look like simple copyist errors, and it seems that the chronology has been consciously modified in one of these texts. Knowing that the *Yi Zhou shu* has survived more transmission vicissitudes than the *Han shu*,¹⁰ it appears more probable that the *Han shu* chronology is closer to the common ancestral version than the one in the “Shi fu.” However, no matter which redaction is given higher priority, this example demonstrates that the dates in the “Shi fu” could have been subject to conscious manipulation and cannot be accepted uncritically.

2) **Character substitution.** While the *Han shu* starts its third citation from the character *wei* 惟 (initial particle), which is quite common at the beginning of dating formulas, the “Shi fu” gives an unexpected *shi* 時 (“time”), which is more difficult to accommodate with the context. In all other comparable passages, the “Shi fu” uses *wei* 惟 as well; the occurrence of *shi* looks like an error.

3) **Transposition and omission of characters.** The version of the *Han shu* often contains variants that appear more sensible grammatically and semantically, differing from the “Shi fu” only in the sequence of characters. In the first passage, the *Han shu* version reads

9. The interpretation of the *yuexiang* formulas has been a problematic issue in the scholarship for a century and opinions concerning the exact calendrical value of these terms still differ. For a relatively recent overview, mentioning differences of opinions already in the first and second centuries CE, see Shaughnessy, “Lunar-Aspect Terms and the Calendar of China’s Western Zhōu Period,” in *Time and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Xiaobing Wang-Riese and Thomas O. Höllmann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 15–32.

10. Ding Fu 丁黼 (d. 1236), one of the editors of the received redaction of the *Yi Zhou shu*, left a colophon in which he acknowledged that, despite the many emendations he had introduced into the text, it still contained many illegible passages. See *Yi Zhou shu huijiao jizhu*, 1187. I suspect that many difficulties that students of the *Yi Zhou shu* are facing today are due to the work of overly self-confident editors who boldly interfered with the text without fully understanding it.

seamlessly: 武王乃朝步自周于征伐紂 (“then King Wu set off in the morning from Zhou in order to attack [Shang king] Zhou”), while the “Shi fu” contains a combination of the coverbs *zi* 自 (“from”) and *yu* 于 (universal coverb, often meaning “at”) that is difficult to reconcile: 王乃步自于周征伐商王紂 (“then the king set off from at [!] Zhou to attack Shang king Zhou”). In the second part of the third citation, the *Han shu* version reads: 祀于天位 (“sacrificed at the Heaven’s post”), which is obscure but arguably more acceptable than the “Shi fu” version, which omits the character *tian* 天 (“Heaven”): 祀于位 (“sacrificed at the post”). Finally, the very last phrase in the *Han shu* version is also easier to understand: 乃以庶國祀馘于周廟 (“then, taking [what they received from] the many countries, they sacrificed the decapitated heads at the Zhou temple”). Although this passage looks cryptic and archaic, it is more sensible than the version of the “Shi fu,” “then King Wu with many [?] sacrificed the decapitated heads at the country’s Zhou temple” 武王乃以庶祀馘于國周廟. Considering that Zhou itself is a country, it is difficult to imagine what the “country’s Zhou temple” could possibly mean.

In sum, all the five phrases preserved in the three sequences of citations in the *Han shu* contain significant differences from the “Shi fu” that may result in divergent interpretations. This is a very worrying sign if we want to use the “Shi fu” as a source of precise historical and chronological information: virtually no single character in the text can be trusted. Nonetheless, my pessimism concerning the quality of the textual preservation of the “Shi fu” does not imply the rejection of the “Shi fu” as a valuable early textual source. However, in order to use it in a methodologically sound way, we need to move to a different level of analysis and, instead of focusing on individual words and phrases, rather concentrate on the structural patterns that underlie the composition of the text. I believe that such compositional patterns are more resistant to textual corruption and that, having examined and understood these patterns, we can develop a sensible reading of the text that cannot be easily undermined by our probable misreading of individual bits of data lost or modified in transmission.

COMPOSITIONAL UNITS AND CONSISTENCY OF THE “SHI FU”

Even though the “Shi fu” is commonly seen as an account of the Zhou conquest of Shang, it is remarkable how little of the text actually deals with the conquest as such. In fact, the description of the demise of the last king of Shang is condensed into a short passage at the beginning, while the rest deals with other issues, such as auxiliary military expeditions by King Wu’s commanders in various localities, long accounts of ritual ceremonies and sacrifices, summaries of King Wu’s hunts and military activities, and even a story about the Shang king’s self-immolation. The distinctiveness of the “Shi fu” appears more manifest if this text is juxtaposed against the *Yi Zhou shu*’s “Ke Yin” 克殷 (Subjugation of Yin) chapter. Unlike the “Shi fu,” all of the events described in the “Ke Yin” occur in the city of Shang or its vicinity. About one-third of the text is dedicated to the description of the battle, defeat, and ritualized decapitation of the king of Shang and his consorts. The rest is the description of King Wu’s celebratory ceremonies and peace-restoration activities. Thus, the “Ke Yin” fits the idea of a “conquest account” much better than the variegated text of the “Shi fu.”

If we accept that the relative share of material dedicated to a particular topic in the text reflects the importance of that theme for the composers, then the conquest of Shang would be an important subject for the composers of the “Ke Yin” but not of the “Shi fu.” Thus, the creators of the “Shi fu” may have had other priorities. What could these priorities have been?

Before I propose a tentative solution to this question, it is important to investigate the structure of the “Shi fu” in more detail. I will give an outline of the text’s compositional

units, using the criteria of chronological consistency (if dates are given, each fragment is expected to cover an uninterrupted sequence of dates), spatial consistency (each fragment is expected to cover events occurring in one locality or in localities of the same order of scale), and thematic consistency (each fragment is expected to cover one set of related activities).¹¹ For example, when a sequence of dated military campaigns is followed by an undated list of hunting trophies, this interrupts the chronological and thematic consistency. Likewise, when the description of the military success in the city of Shang is followed by a sequence of military expeditions in other locations, this interrupts the spatial and thematic consistency.

The English translation provided below is provisional. I do not discuss the numerous linguistic problems of the text, which would necessitate a separate study.¹² The passages marked with daggers † correspond to the particularly problematic parts (corrupt or otherwise difficult to interpret), for which I can only provide an approximate English rendering.

1. Conquest Summary, 17 characters¹³

維四月乙未日，武王成辟四方通殷
命有國。

In the fourth month, day *yi-wei* (32/60), King Wu completed the subjugation of the four cardinal directions and reached [all] the countries under the mandate of Yin.¹⁴

This unit provides a summary of King Wu's successful subordination of the four cardinal directions. The dating pattern employed in this unit uses the month and the cyclical date: the fourth month, day *yi-wei* 乙未. Remarkably, this summary seems to postdate the events covered in the following passages that start from the first month.

2. Campaign against Shang, 53 characters

惟一月壬辰，旁死霸，若翌日癸
巳，武王乃朝步自周于征伐紂。¹⁵

It was the first month, day *ren-chen* (29/60), [the time] nearing the death of the moon's brightness. On the next day *gui-si* (30/60), King Wu set off in the morning from Zhou to attack [the Shang king] Zhou.

11. The resulting division is virtually identical to that of Gu Jiegang, even though it was not my intention to copy his structure. My approach to the compositional analysis of the textual structure is akin to what Fales suggests for the analysis of Near Eastern texts, namely, "an analytical breakdown of the document itself into its ideological and compositional foundations, i.e. into the *complex of ideas* (as indicated by lexical items) and into the *literary structures* (as indicated by the organization of words into syntagms, etc.) which led to the writing of the document along preconceived lines and slants." (Fales, "A Literary Code in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Case of Ashurbanipal's Egyptian Campaigns," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, 170). I am starting from literary structures as they appear more obvious, hoping to touch eventually upon the complex of ideas reflected in the "Shi fu" in the concluding parts of my analysis.

12. Shaughnessy offers a valuable discussion of a number of linguistic complexities of the "Shi fu" chapter in "New Evidence." I am indebted to his work in many parts of my translation.

13. The Chinese text is based on the 2005 reprint of the *Jizhong Zhou shu* 汲冢周書 (The Zhou Writings from the Tomb in Ji County) published in 1354 (Zhizheng 至正 14). See *Ji zhong Zhou shu* (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2005), 4.8b–11a. Several of my emendations are based on the readings preserved in the "Lü li zhi" chapter of the *Han shu*.

14. Yin 殷 is an alternative name for Shang that is not attested in Shang epigraphy and known exclusively from Zhou sources.

15. This passage is given according to the "Lü li zhi." The passage in the "Shi fu" reads: 惟一月丙辰旁生魄，若翼日丁巳，王乃步自于周征伐商王紂。

粵若來三月，既死霸，粵五日甲子，朝至接于商，咸劉商王紂，¹⁶執天惡臣百人。

It was the coming third month, [the time] after the death of the moon's brightness. On the fifth day *jia-zi* (1/60) at dawn, [King Wu] arrived and confronted the Shang. [He] completely exterminated King Zhou of Shang, and captured a hundred [of his] Heaven-hated officials.

This unit describes the events immediately related to the Zhou victory over Shang. It consists of two dated events: departure from Zhou and arrival at Shang resulting in the extermination of the Shang king and capturing of his officials. Both events are dated using a complicated pattern: the month, the *yuexiang* formula, an interval of several days, and a cyclical date. The two events are set one month apart, which I do not regard as a chronological interruption considering that it could have taken about a month to move the army from Zhou to Shang (the distance is approximately 650 km, and a pace of 25–30 km a day appears realistic).¹⁷

3. Auxiliary Campaigns I, 76 characters

太公望命禦方。

Grand Duke Wang, following the order, repelled the [attacks from the] periphery.¹⁸

來丁卯，望至，告以馘俘。

On the coming *ding-mao* (4/60), Wang arrived; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.

戊辰，王遂禦循自祀文王。時日王立政。呂他命伐越戲方。

On *wu-chen* (5/60), the king †conducted the lustration ritual and inspection. [He] fulfilled the *si*-sacrifice for † King Wen.¹⁹ On that day the king established the government. Lü Ta, following the order, attacked Yue[-fang] and Xi-fang.

壬申，荒新至，告以馘俘。侯來命伐靡集于陳。

On *ren-shen* (9/60), Huang Xin arrived; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives. Hou Lai, following the order, attacked †Miji at Chen†.

辛巳，至，告以馘俘。

On *xin-si* (18/60), [he] arrived; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.

16. The passage in the “Shi fu” reads: 越若來二月既死魄，越五日甲子，朝至接于商，則咸劉商王紂。

17. See the discussion of the logistics of military campaigns in the Near East in Israel Eph'al, “On Warfare and Military Control in the Ancient Near Eastern Empires: A Research Outline,” in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures*, ed. Hayim Tadmor and Moshe Weinfeld (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), 99.

18. In the later tradition, Grand Duke Wang 太公望 is known as the purported author of texts on military strategy and esoteric arts. It is notable that, in the “Shi fu,” he is presented as just one of the many commanders whose role is restricted to the conduct of military campaigns. The even more famous ally of King Wu, the Duke of Zhou 周公, to whom the tradition ascribes foundational texts dealing with ritual order and state organization, does not even appear in this text. Most other military commanders mentioned in the “Shi fu” are not known from other sources. The names of the polities suppressed by the Zhou are also difficult to identify and open to speculative interpretations. Here and below, I comment only on those names that can be identified with a sufficient degree of reliability.

19. King Wen 文王 is King Wu's father, who reigned during the early to mid-eleventh century BCE, when Shang was still the strongest polity in the area. The later Chinese tradition views both kings as foundational figures of comparable importance.

甲申，百弇以虎賁誓命伐衛，告以
馘俘。

On *jia-shen* (21/60), Bo Yan pronounced a solemn oath before the “nimble-as-tigers.”²⁰ Following the order, [he] attacked Wei.²¹ [He] reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.

This series of auxiliary military campaigns consists of four uniform descriptions, occurring at short intervals one after another and performed by different military commanders. All campaigns are dated: in the first three cases, the dates are given before the commander’s reporting with war trophies, which creates the impression that there is an interval of several days between receiving the assignment and the report. However, in the last case the date is given before the commander’s assignment, and no separate date is mentioned before the report so that the text reads as if both the assignment and the report occurred on the same day. This fragment may be schematically represented as follows:

Table 1. “Auxiliary Campaigns I.” Structure of the Compositional Unit

#	Date	Name	Assignment	Date	Name	Results
1	–	Grand Duke Wang 太公望	Following the order, repelled the [attacks from the] periphery.	The coming ²² <i>ding-mao</i> 來丁卯 (4/60)	Wang 望	Arrived; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.
2	<i>Wu-chen</i> 戊辰 (5/60)	The king 王	<i>Mention of ritual/military activities, establishment of the government.</i> ²³	–	–	–
3	–	Lü Ta 呂他	Following the order, attacked Yue and Xifang 越戲方.	<i>Ren-shen</i> 壬申 (9/60)	Huang Xin 荒新 ²⁴	Arrived; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.
4	–	Hou Lai 侯來	Following the order, attacked Miji at Chen 靡集于陳.	<i>Xin-si</i> 辛巳 (18/60)	–	Arrived; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.

20. Later texts and commentaries suggest that “nimble-as-tigers” (*huben* 虎賁) might have constituted something akin to an elite guard. The counterpart for “nimble-as-tigers” in Western Zhou bronze texts seems to be “tiger-like servants” (*huchen* 虎臣). For examples of vessels with archeological provenance, see Department of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 中國社會科學院考古研究所, ed., *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng* 殷周金文集成, 18 vols. (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1984–1994), #2824, #4288, #4289, #4290, #4291, #4321, #4467.

21. Wei 衛 is the name of a polity known from traditional sources. It was located in today’s Qi county 淇縣 (Henan) and existed through most of the first millennium BCE until its last ruler was demoted to the status of a commoner in 209 BCE.

22. Concerning the interpretation of the dating formulas using *lai* 來 against the background of epigraphic materials, see Zev Handel, “The Use of *jīn* 今, *yì* 翌, and *lái* 來 as Time Demonstratives with *gānzhī* Dates in the Oracle-Bone Inscriptions,” in *Meaning and Form: Essays in Pre-Modern Chinese Grammar* 意義與形式：古代漢語語法論文集, ed. Ken-ichi Takashima and Jiang Shaoyu (Munich: Lincom), 57–75. Cf. Shaughnessy, “‘New’ Evidence,” 45–46.

23. The description of the first campaign is followed by a description of the king’s activities dated in a similar way and apparently positioned in the same sequence. Thus, there is a thematic interruption without chronological interruption. This episode could have been listed as a separate compositional unit, but I have decided not to do so to avoid unnecessary complexity. The exact meaning of the king’s activities described here is obscure.

24. Remarkably, in the description of the second campaign, the names of the commander sent on the campaign and the commander reporting about the campaign’s results are not the same. I would suspect either a textual loss as a result of conflation of two different descriptions into one or an interpolation—the name Xin Huang 新荒 occurs later in the text (“Auxiliary Campaigns II”), and it is made of the same characters, albeit in reverse order, as the name of the second commander in this problematic description.

5	<i>Jia-shen</i> 甲申 (21/60)	Bo Yan 百弇	Pronounced a solemn oath †before the guard†. Following the order, [he] attacked Wei 衛.	—	—	Arrived; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.
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Despite the fact that a report of the king's activities and the establishment of government interrupts this sequence, overall it is structurally consistent and that is built using a uniform compositional pattern.

4. Ceremonies, 169 characters

辛亥，薦俘殷王鼎。武王乃翼矢珪矢憲，告天宗上帝。王不革服，格于廟，秉語治庶國。籥人九終。王烈祖自太王、太伯、王季、虞公、文王、邑考以列升。維告殷罪。籥人造。王秉黃鉞正國伯。

壬子，王服袞衣，矢琰，格廟。籥人造。王秉黃鉞，正邦君。

癸酉，薦殷俘王士百人。籥人造。王矢琰，秉黃鉞執戈。王奏庸大享一終。王拜手稽首。王定。奏其大享三終。

On *xin-hai* (48/60), [they] presented the captured cauldrons of Yin kings. King Wu reverently displayed the scepter and displayed the commandments, and reported to the heavenly kindred²⁵ and the Highest Thearch(s).²⁶

The king, without changing clothes, went to the temple. Holding [the yellow battle-axe, he] spoke about bringing the many countries into order. The pipers [performed] nine refrains. The glorious ancestors of the king from King Tai, Tai the Elder, King Ji, the Duke of Yu, and King Wen [to] Late Father Yi were elevated in order.²⁷ The crimes of Yin were reported. The pipers performed. The king, holding the yellow battle-axe, reaffirmed the elders of the countries.

On *ren-zi* (49/60), the king put on the clothes ornamented with dragons and, displaying the pointed scepter, went to the temple. The pipers performed. The king, holding the yellow battle-axe, reaffirmed the lords of the domains.

On *gui-chou* (50/60), [they] presented a hundred captive men of the [Shang] king. The pipers performed. The king, displayed the pointed scepter, held the yellow battle-axe, and gripped a halberd. The king performed the "Great Sacrifice" on *yong* bells, one refrain. The king did obeisance folding his hands and touching the ground with his head. The king settled [in his place]. [The pipers] performed the "Great Sacrifice," three refrains.

25. According to Gu Jiegang, this may refer to the heavenly luminaries; see "Yi Zhou shu Shi fu pian," 8–9.

26. On the interpretation of this term, see Robert Eno, "Was There a High God in Shang Religion?" *Early China* 15 (1990): 1–26.

27. King Tai 太王 is King Wu's great-grandfather; Tai the Elder 太伯, the Duke of Yu 虞公 (allegedly given the domain of Yu, hence his name), and King Ji 王季 are King Tai's sons. King Ji is King Wu's grandfather and Late Father Yi 邑考 is King Wu's brother. This passage possibly refers to the name tablets that represented the ancestors in ritual ceremonies.

甲寅，謁我殷于牧野。王佩赤白旂。籥人奏武。王入。進萬、獻明明三終。

On *jia-yin* (51/60), †it was announced about our Yin† at the fields of Mu. The king suspended from his waist a red-and-white banner. The pipers performed “Martial.” The king entered. †[They] advanced the “Wan” [dance] and offered the “Bright-Bright,” † three refrains.²⁹

乙卯，籥人奏崇禹生開三鍾終。王定。

On *yi-mao* (52/60), the pipers performed “Venerable Yu Begets Qi”²⁸ †on *zhong* bells†, three refrains. The king settled [in his place].

The sequence of ceremonies in this unit is described using an extremely condensed and patterned language that almost entirely consists of uniform, repetitive elements. However, the focus of descriptions in this series is not on military expeditions but rather on royal ceremonies of a peculiar kind, with few (if any) direct counterparts among received or epigraphic texts.³⁰ Although bronze texts provide ample evidence for royal audience ceremonies, the context of such texts probably covers only a small part of the Western Zhou ceremonial, usually from the perspective of royal guests and recipients of gifts, which is why the singularity of the ceremonies portrayed in the “Shi fu,” with their focus on the king’s activities, is not surprising.³¹ It is possible to outline an inventory of semantic elements employed in these descriptions and create schematic descriptions of individual episodes:

- Cyclical **date**.
- Ritual **offering** (*jian* 薦) of prisoners or cauldrons.
- Ritual **paraphernalia**, such as scepters, displayed (*shi* 矢) by the king.
- Ritual **communication** (*gao* 告) to the deities (possibly to ancestors as well).
- The king’s ceremonial **attire** (a specific kind of clothes, changes of clothes).
- The king’s **going** (*ge* 格) to the temple. The king’s **assuming his place** (*ding* 定).
- Holding (*bing* 秉) of **ritual weapons** by the king.
- **Administrative deeds**: rectification (*zheng* 正) of rulers, ordering (*zhi* 治) of countries.
- **Performances** of several kinds.³²

28. Yu the Great 大禹, here called “Venerable Yu” 崇禹, is the founder of the legendary Xia 夏 dynasty believed to have preceded Shang. I follow Gu Jiegang and Edward Shaughnessy, who suggest that the character *kai* 開 in the title of the performed piece should be read as Qi 啓, which is the name of Yu the Great’s son. See Gu Jiegang, “Yi Zhou shu Shi fu pian,” 12; Shaughnessy, “‘New’ Evidence,” 57 n. 12. The substitution might have occurred as a result of a taboo introduced during the reign of Emperor Jing of Han 漢景帝 (157–143 BCE), whose personal name was Qi.

29. The “Wan” dance is believed to be attested already in the inscriptions on turtle plastrons and ox scapula produced in the thirteenth to eleventh centuries BCE; see Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭, “Shi Wan” 釋萬, in “Jiaguwen zhong de ji zhong yueqi mingcheng” 甲骨文中的幾種樂器名稱, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 1980.2: 81; Chen Zhi 陳致, “Wan wu yu yong zou: Yin ren jisi yuewu yu Shi zhong San Song” 萬(萬)舞與庸奏:殷人祭祀樂舞與詩中三頌, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong*, 2008.4: 35–64.

30. For an example of a recently published bronze text with a description of ritual proceedings reminiscent of some parts of unit four of the “Shi fu,” see Huang Jinqian 黃錦前, “A Critical Commentary of the Text on ‘Ba Bo’ yu vessel” 霸伯孟銘文考釋, *Zhongguo guojia bowuguan guankan* 2012.5: 48–54.

31. For a recent discussion of how royal court audience ceremonies were reflected in bronze texts, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, “The Royal Audience and Its Reflections in Western Zhou Bronze Inscriptions,” in *Writing & Literacy in Early China*, ed. Li Feng and David P. Branner (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2011), 239–70.

32. The main types of performances are *zao* 造 (used without an object) and *zou* 奏 (used with names of specific compositions or number of refrains [*zhong* 終]). There are also single instances of *jin* 進 and *xian* 獻 performances, each used with names of specific compositions. Most are musicians’ performances, but there are two instances of *zou* performances by the king himself.

Now it is possible to offer a schematic outline of the entire unit (elements that only appear once and therefore are not included in the inventory are marked in bold):

- 1) Date (*xin-hai* 辛亥, 48/60), offering, paraphernalia, communication, attire, going to the temple, ritual weapons, administrative deed, performance, **elevation of ancestral tablets** (?), communication, performance, ritual weapons, administrative deed.
- 2) Date (*ren-zi* 壬子, 49/60), attire, paraphernalia, going to the temple, performance, ritual weapons, administrative deed.
- 3) Date (*gui-chou* 癸丑, 50/60),³³ offering, performance, paraphernalia, ritual weapons, performance, **the king's obeisance**, assuming his place, performance.
- 4) Date (*jia-yin* 甲寅, 51/60), **submission of the Yin at the fields of Mu**, attire, performance, **the king's entry**, performance.
- 5) Date (*yi-mao* 乙卯, 52/60), performance, the king's assuming his place.

Although these patterned descriptions of ceremonies do not appear very informative to contemporary readers, we should be aware that, for the composers of the “Shi fu,” they were possibly no less meaningful than the units describing military campaigns. We should not discard the possibility that these patterned and almost choreographic records of ceremonial activities were one of the important early applications of writing in Zhou China.

5. Auxiliary Campaigns II, 80 characters

庚子，陳本命伐磨。百韋命伐宣方。新荒命伐蜀。

On *geng-zi* (37/60), Chen Ben, following the order, attacked Mo. Bo Wei, following the order, attacked Xuan-fang. Xin Huang, following the order, attacked Shu.

乙巳，陳本命新荒蜀磨至，告禽霍侯、俘艾佚侯、小臣四十有六、禽禦八百有三百兩，告以馘俘。百韋至，告以禽宣方、禽禦三十兩，告以馘俘。百韋命伐厲，告以馘俘。

On *yi-si* (42/60), †Chen Ben and Xin Huang arrived [from] Shu and Mo†; reported [to the king bringing] the seized Marquis of Huo and the captured Marquis of Ai, Marquis of Yi, and forty-six lesser officials; the seized 800 and 300 chariots; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives. Bo Wei arrived; reported [to the king] bringing the seized [prisoners from] Xuan-fang and the thirty seized chariots; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives. Bo Wei, following the order, attacked Li; reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.

The structural pattern employed in the description of this second series of auxiliary military campaigns is similar to the one used in the first series, but it has its important peculiarities. First, the regular sequence of the first series (start of campaign—completion of campaign—start of the next campaign etc.) is interrupted, and several campaigns by different commanders appear to start and end in parallel, at exactly the same dates. Second, the description of the outcomes of campaigns is more detailed, with mentions of specific prisoners and specific amounts of booty for three of the four campaigns described in this unit.

33. The text of the “Shi fu” reads *gui-you* 癸酉 (10/60), which, considering the overall sequence, is almost certainly an error.

Table 2. “Auxiliary Campaigns II.” Structure of the Compositional Unit

#	Date	Name	Assignment	Date	Name	Specific results	General results
1	<i>Geng-zi</i> 庚子 (37/60)	Chen Ben 陳本	Following the order, attacked Mo 磨.	—	—	—	—
2	—	Bo Wei 百韋	Following the order, attacked Xuan-fang 宣方.	—	—	—	—
3	—	Xin Huang 新荒	Following the order, attacked Shu 蜀.	—	—	—	—
4	—	—	—	Yi-si 乙巳 (42/60)	Chen Ben and Xin Huang ³⁴	Arrived; reported [to the king] bringing the seized Marquis of Huo 霍, the captured marquises of Ai and of Yi 艾佚, forty-six lesser officials; the 800 and 300 seized chariots;	reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.
5	—	—	—	—	Bo Wei	Arrived; reported [to the king] bringing the seized [captives from] Xuan-fang, the thirty seized chariots;	reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.
6	—	Bo Wei	Following the order, attacked Li 厲.	—	—	—	Reported [to the king] bringing decapitated heads and captives.

6. Royal Hunt, 70 characters

武王狩。禽虎二十有二、猫二、麋五千二百三十五、犀十有二、鼈七百二十有一、熊百五十有一、羆百一十有八、豕三百五十有二、貉十有八、麀十有六、麝五十、麋三十、鹿三千五百有八。

King Wu hunted. He caught 22 tigers, 2 mountain cats, 5,235 †*milu* deer†, 12 †water buffaloes†, 721 yaks, 151 black bears, 118 brown bears, 352 boars, 18 †raccoon dogs†, 16 †moose†, 50 †smaller musk deer†, 30 †musk deer†, and 3,508 deer.³⁵

34. The text reads “Chen Ben ordered Xin Huang” 陳本命新荒, but the character *ming* 命 (“to order”) seems to be interpolated from the “Assignment” pattern.

35. For an accessible overview of how China’s fauna changed during the historical period, see Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2004). Many names of animals in this list appear corruptly preserved, and others are problematic. E.g., it is unlikely that yaks inhabited the area of the middle and lower flow of the Yellow River in the late second millennium BCE.

This unit consists of a long list of numbers of different kinds of animals hunted by King Wu. The list is not dated, and we cannot establish when exactly the hunting took place. The numbers of animals are impressive (22 tigers, 5,235 *milu* deer, etc.), which raises a question of how to interpret them. I shall discuss this issue below.

7. Universal Conquest, 47 characters

武王遂征四方。凡懋國九十有九國，馘魔億有十萬七千七百七十有九、俘人三億萬有二百三十。凡服國六百五十有二。

Thereupon King Wu accomplished his campaigns in the four cardinal directions. There were 99 chastened countries, †177,779 decapitated heads†, and 310,230 captives. There were 652 countries that submitted.

This unit provides an overall summary of King Wu's conquest activities. Like the royal hunt, it is not dated, and the numbers appear too high to correspond realistically to what we might expect from late Shang China, namely 99 countries that were subjugated forcibly and 652 countries that apparently submitted to King Wu voluntarily.

8. Triumph at Zhou, 239 characters

惟四月既旁生霸，粵六日庚戌，武王燎于周廟。³⁶維予冲子綏文。武王降自車，乃俾史佚繇書于天號。武王乃廢于紂矢惡臣人百人。伐右厥甲小子鼎大師。伐厥四十夫家君鼎帥。司徒、司馬初厥于郊號。武王乃夾于南門。用俘皆施佩衣衣。先馘入。武王在祀。太師負商王紂懸首白旂、妻二首赤旂，乃以先，馘入，燎于周廟。

It was the fourth month, the time nearing the birth of the moon's brightness. On the sixth day *geng-xu* (47/60), King Wu made a burnt offering at the Zhou temple. "Here I am, the small one in the line of descent, appeasing [my Late Father] Wen." King Wu stepped off the chariot, then ordered Secretary Yi to recite the writings in front of the deity of Heaven. †Then King Wu disposed of [king] Zhou's hundred Heaven-hated officials. He beheaded from the right their *jia* young sons and slew the Great Master. He beheaded their forty great lords and slew the masters. The Administrator of Foot-Soldiers and the Administrator of Horses were the first to [deal with] them in front of the deity(ies) of the suburban sacrifice. †King Wu then †positioned [them]† in the southern gate. The captives [awaiting] to be sacrificed were all girdled with pendants and dressed in clothes. †First the decapitated heads were brought in. †King Wu was at the *si*-sacrifice. The Great Master carried the white banner with the suspended head of Shang king Zhou and the red banner with the heads of the two concubines. Then he made an offering with them. The decapitated heads were brought in. A burnt offering was conducted at the Zhou temple.

翌日辛亥，祀于天位³⁷，用籥于天位。

On the next day *xin-hai* (48/60), [they] conducted the *si*-sacrifice at the Heaven's post, †and sacrificed pipes in front of the Heaven's post.†

36. The passage in the "Shi fu" reads: 時四月既旁生魄，越六日庚戌，武王朝至燎于周。

37. The passage in the "Shi fu" reads: 若翼日辛亥，祀于位。

粵五日乙卯，乃以庶國祀馘于周廟。³⁸ 翼予冲子斷牛六，斷羊二。庶國乃竟。告于周廟，曰：古朕聞文考脩商人典，以斬紂身告于天于稷。用小牲羊犬豕於百神、水土于誓社。曰：惟予冲子，綏文考至于冲子。用牛于天于稷五百有四，用小牲羊豕于百神水土社二千七百有一。

On the fifth day *yi-mao* (52/60), taking [what they received from] the many countries, [they] then sacrificed the decapitated heads at the Zhou temple. [The king said:] “Reverently I, the small one in the line of descent, slaughter six bulls and slaughter two rams.” †The many countries were thereupon accomplished.† [The king] reported at the Zhou temple, saying: “I heard of old that my Late Father Wen perfected himself in the traditions of the Shang people. [Now], with the decapitated body of [king] Zhou, [I] report to Heaven and to [the deity of] millet.”³⁹ [He] sacrificed small animals: rams, dogs, and boars to the †oath altars† of the hundred spirits, the water, and the earth. [The king] said: “Here I am, the small one in the line of descent, appeasing my Late Father Wen so that he reaches out to me, the small one.” [He] sacrificed 504 bulls to Heaven and to [the deity of] millet, sacrificed 2,701 small animals—rams and boars—to the altars of the hundred spirits, the water, and the earth.

This unit employs the same complex dating formula as unit two that I have titled “Campaign against Shang,” which might be an indication of their textual relatedness. It contains descriptions of ritual activities of various kinds (recitation of written records, sacrificing of prisoners, sacrificing of animals) performed on three days: *geng-xu* 庚戌 (47/60), *xin-hai* 辛亥 (48/60), and *yi-mao* 乙卯 (52/60), but the language in which these activities are described has nothing in common with the formulaic language of “Ceremonies” (unit four). In addition, this unit contains short snippets of ritual speeches pronounced by the king that are fragmentary and possibly incomplete. This unit contains some of the most problematic passages in the “Shi fu.”

9. Self-Immolation of the Shang King, 79 characters

商王紂于商郊。時甲子夕，商王紂取天智玉琰璫身厚以自焚。凡厥有庶告焚玉四千。五日，武王乃俾於千人求之。四千庶則銷。天智玉五在火中不銷。凡天智玉，武王則寶與同。凡武王俘商舊玉億有百萬。

King Zhou of Shang was in the suburbs of Shang. In the evening of *jia-zi* (1/60), King Zhou of Shang took the Jade of Heavenly Wisdom and scepters and thickly sewed them onto his [clothes], preparing to immolate himself.⁴⁰ Overall, of the common jade in his possession committed to fire there were four thousand [pieces]. On the fifth day, King Wu ordered a thousand people to search for this jade. The four thousand [pieces of] common [jade] had melted. The five [pieces] of the Jade of Heavenly Wisdom did not melt in fire. As for the Jade of Heavenly Wisdom, King Wu treasured it with the like. Overall, King Wu captured 101,000,000 [pieces] of the old Shang jade.

38. The passage in the “Shi fu” reads: 越五日乙卯，武王乃以庶祀馘于國周廟。

39. Millet was the staple grain in northern China in the early first millennium BCE.

40. The commentary attributed to Kong Chao interprets the obscure character *feng* 璫 as “to roll up in order to make oneself thicker” 環以自厚; see *Yi Zhou shu huijiao jizhu*, 444. I prefer to read it as the more common *feng* 縫

This unit contains a “flashback” to the events already described in unit two, “Campaign against Shang,” and seems to offer an alternative narrative of the circumstances of the death of the Shang king. Remarkably, it is the only unit where the enemy is given subjectivity: in the rest of the text, the Shang king as well as other opponents of Zhou are portrayed only as passive witnesses and victims of the Zhou military campaigns, a depiction that is also common for Western Zhou bronze texts.⁴¹ Overall, the contradictory narrative of this unit with its difference in language conventions and rather incredible account (the king’s self-immolation with several thousand pieces of precious jade) makes it appear as a later addendum that can justifiably be examined separately from the rest of the “Shi fu.”⁴²

Even without this last unit, the remaining compositional units of the “Shi fu” are difficult to read as a linear chronological narrative. The summary given in the first unit “Conquest Summary” clearly postdates the events described in the second (“Campaign against Shang”) and the third (“Auxiliary Campaigns I”) units. The fourth unit (“Ceremonies”), in turn, is difficult to correlate with the eighth unit (“Triumph at Zhou”). Both appear to take place during the same fourth month: while in the eighth unit, the fourth month is mentioned explicitly, in the fourth unit it can be calculated from the date in unit two mentioning the third month. Furthermore, events from both the fourth and the eighth unit seem to take place on almost the same days: *xin-hai* 辛亥 (48/60) to *yi-mao* 乙卯 (52/60) in unit four and *geng-xu* 庚戌 (47/52) to *yi-mao* 乙卯 (52/60) in unit eight.

Different suggestions have been proposed to restore the chronological consistency of the “Shi fu.” For example, Gu Jiegang rearranges it slightly, switching the positions of the fourth and the fifth units, although he still has to acknowledge the inconsistency of the resulting text’s chronology.⁴³ Edward Shaughnessy is more persevering, having first put forward a theory of a calendrical reform introduced by King Wu after the conquest that resulted in the change of the month count, and later having accepted a simpler suggestion from Chou Fakao 周法高, who proposed to read *si* 四 (“four”) as a graphic error for *liu* 六 (“six”), both of which appear somewhat similar in seal script (*zhuanwen* 篆文).⁴⁴ Finally, Li Xueqin 李學勤 has suggested that units four and eight of the “Shi fu” “possibly come from the hands of different historiographers” and may refer to the same sequence of events.⁴⁵ This suggestion of Li implies that the “Shi fu” is not a linear narrative, but rather a composite text created from compositionally independent pieces. If we read the “Shi fu” against the Near Eastern royal inscriptions, this suggestion appears even more convincing.

(“to sew,” “to stitch”) and as a reference to the practice of sewing jade pieces onto the clothes of the deceased. This practice seems to have appeared in the middle of the first millennium BCE, when loose pieces of jade were sewn to the clothes. Later it developed into “jade dresses” (*yu yi* 玉衣) made of small pieces of jade enveloping the whole body, as amply attested in burials from the second century BCE to the second century CE; see Lu Zhaomeng 盧兆萌, “Shi lun liang Han de yu yi” 試論兩漢的玉衣, *Kaogu* 1980.1: 51–58. Considering that “jade dresses” could consist of several thousand pieces, the passage in the “Shi fu” is less fantastic than it may appear. The sewing of jade onto clothes and the invention of the “jade dress,” of course, emerge much later than the events depicted in the “Shi fu.” However, this anachronistic imposition of the late funerary practice onto early antiquity accords well with my suggestion of the late origin of the last unit (see below).

41. See n. 93.

42. I discuss this unit in more detail below.

43. Gu Jiegang, “Yi Zhou shu Shi fu pian,” 22–23, 31.

44. Shaughnessy, “‘New’ Evidence,” 52; Chou Fa-kao, “On the Date of the Chou Conquest of Shang,” *Guoli zhongyang tushuguan guankan* 19.2 (1986): 28.

45. Gu Jiegang, Shaughnessy, and Li Xueqin all accept the citations of the *Han shu* only in part, emending the improbable cyclical dates in unit two with the *Han shu* readings, but still preferring the “second month” (*er yue* 二月) in the “Shi fu” over the “third month” (*san yue* 三月) as recorded in the *Han shu*. See Gu Jiegang, “Yi Zhou shu Shi fu pian,” 5; Shaughnessy, “‘New’ Evidence,” 32; Li Xueqin, “Shi fu pian yanjiu,” 1–3. Gu Jiegang cites the passage from the *Han shu* in his work explicitly, but his rendering of the *Han shu* passage is erroneous, mentioning the second month (as in the “Shi fu”) instead of the third.

COMPOSITIONAL HETEROGENEITY IN NEAR EASTERN ROYAL INSCRIPTIONS

The natural counterpart for the “Shi fu” in the Near East is the textual type identified by modern scholars as “royal inscriptions.” Typologically speaking, the earliest instances of this type seem to have been related to the kings’ building activities, but later they also started to include accounts of military achievements.⁴⁶ This type is best attested in Mesopotamia,⁴⁷ and within Mesopotamia it is the large and well-studied corpus of Assyrian royal inscriptions with numerous descriptions of the kings’ military achievements that is of immediate interest for this study of the “Shi fu.”⁴⁸ However, relevant texts are also attested in other Near Eastern traditions, including Egyptian, Hittite, Urartian, etc.⁴⁹

In his overview of ancient Near Eastern historiography, Van Seters proposes a useful distinction between texts dealing with recent events and with the remote past.⁵⁰ Royal inscriptions belong to the first type, as most of them provide descriptions of events that happened during the lifetime of the current king. Although these texts mention relatively recent events, their composition can be very complex.

Perhaps the best example of a complex royal inscription coming from an early stage of a particular textual tradition is the so-called *Anitta Text*, the earliest attested source in the Hittite language, presumably composed in the eighteenth century BCE and surviving in three later copies, dating to the sixteenth, fourteenth, and thirteenth centuries BCE respectively.⁵¹ The text contains an account of several military campaigns by Anitta, son of Pithana, king of Kuššara, a polity presumably located in central Anatolia. The narrative of the inscription is remarkably disjointed and, according to Van Seters, “has the appearance of being a compilation of various earlier texts and inscriptions.”⁵² The text can be divided into three parts that seem to have been combined without any attempt to merge them into a structurally consistent composition. The first part ends with a notice of the text’s having been inscribed on a gate, which one would normally expect to see at the end of a composition, but then the narrative is continued by an account of yet another military campaign. Both the first and the second parts end with curses: in the first case directed against those who destroy the tablet with royal inscription put on the city gate, in the second against those who dare to resettle the city plundered by the king. Within the last part, which Van Seters identifies as a “haphazard col-

46. Albert K. Grayson, “Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: Literary Characteristics,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, 36–39; John Van Seters, “The Historiography of the Ancient Near East,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 2434.

47. Grayson, “Histories and Historians of the Ancient Near East: Assyria and Babylonia,” *Orientalia* 49 (1980): 149–70.

48. See Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC)*, The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, vol. 1; *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)*, The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, vol. 2; *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858–745 BC)*, The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, vol. 3 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1987/1991/1996).

49. On Hittite historiography, see Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., “Histories and Historians of the Ancient Near East: The Hittites,” *Orientalia* 49 (1980): 283–333; Alfonso Archi, “Hittite and Hurrian Literatures: An Overview,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 2367–77; Jared L. Miller, *Royal Hittite Instructions and Related Administrative Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013). For the Urartu inscriptions, see G. A. Melikishvili, *Urartskiy klinoobraznyye nadpisi* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1960).

50. Van Seters, “The Historiography of the Ancient Near East,” 2433.

51. See Erich Neu, *Der Anitta-Text*, Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974), 1–7; Hoffner, “Histories and Historians of the Ancient Near East,” 291–93; Onofrio Carruba, *Anittae Res Gestae*, Studia Mediterranea (Pavia: Italian Univ. Press, 2003): 75.

52. Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 106.

lection of royal deeds,”⁵³ there are several accounts of successful military campaigns ending either with capture of booty or receiving of tribute, a mention of the king's construction and temple-building activities, and an account of the royal hunt.

While the patchiness of the *Anitta Text* is remarkable, it is but an extreme example of a widely attested practice of compositionally heterogeneous texts among the Near Eastern royal inscriptions. Indeed, even the monumental annals of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE), originally carved on the floor and walls of the temple of the war-god Ninurta, on closer inspection appear to be a collection of “assorted texts joined together . . . with no effort to avoid duplication or make a transition between them.”⁵⁴ In addition, even inscriptions that do not show such obvious compositional inconsistency still have a certain degree of heterogeneity. For example, there are texts that alternate between the first and third person pronouns when speaking about the same person, such as the inscription of Adad-nerari II (911–891 BCE) and the stele of Adad-nerari III (811–783 BCE). Grayson believes that such inconsistency is caused by the scribes' unskillful integration of different sources, such as booty lists (in the case of the stele of Adad-nerari III) or a temple inscription (of Adad-nerari II). In the account of Shalmaneser III's (859–824 BCE) campaigns on the Black Obelisk, the “incongruous fluctuation between third and first person” only starts with the description of military activities led by the king's officer, Dayan-Ashur. This leads Grayson to conclude that the scribe was confused by his sources, and, “accustomed to writing such texts in the first person, had difficulty remembering that this passage was in third person since the subject was an officer of the king, not the king himself.”⁵⁵ However, assuming that only two sources were present in each of the above cases—one in first and one in third person—would be an oversimplification as “there could be several sources of a variety of types behind a given royal inscription.”⁵⁶ Therefore, the conflation of sources belonging to different textual types was not uncommon in antiquity, and the resulting inconsistencies were often considered acceptable even for important royal texts.

This observation is useful for my reconsideration of the “Shi fu” as a text that consists of fragments with different compositional patterns. Arguably, there are at least three distinct types of narration employed in the “Shi fu” that can be likened to the structurally dissimilar fragments in the Assyrian royal inscriptions compiled from different sources. Units two (“Campaign against Shang”) and eight (“Triumph at Zhou”) are characterized by the use of complex dating formulas and a narrative focused on the king's activities of a larger scale; units three and five (“Auxiliary Campaigns I and II”) with their patterned description of military campaigns could have originated from military reports and the accounts of booties received by the king; and unit four (“Ceremonies”) with its highly formulaic language and almost choreographic depiction of ceremonial acts seems to represent a peculiar textual type focused on minute ritual details, much smaller in scale than the narrative in units two and eight and inseparable from the court setting. Overall, the Near Eastern texts suggest that, except for the last unit (“Self-Immolation of the Shang King”), other units of the “Shi fu,”

53. K. Lawson Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 131.

54. Barbara N. Porter, “Ancient Writers, Modern Readers, and King Ashurnasirpal's Political Problems: An Exploration of the Possibility of Reading Ancient Texts,” in *Literary Construction of Identity in the Ancient World*, ed. Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 112; Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)*, 191.

55. Grayson, “Histories and Historians of the Ancient Near East,” 165–66.

56. *Ibid.*, 167.

composite and contradictory as they appear, may all come from contemporaneous records written by the scribes of King Wu for different purposes and later combined into one monumental piece celebrating the various facets of King Wu's success as a ruler.

THE FORMULAIC LANGUAGE OF MILITARY ACCOUNTS

The uniform and patterned descriptions of auxiliary military campaigns in units three and five of the "Shi fu" seem to have much in common with the patterned military records of Assyria. In his comparative study of Near Eastern conquest records, Lawson Younger points out that the uniformity of language employed in the descriptions of military campaigns might have served an ideological purpose: "The monotonous iteration of the typical syntagms instilled in the ancient public a sense of forced anticipation of the obvious outcome of the event itself; and hence, of the relentless efficacy of the action of the Assyrian king both in its operative aspects (whether in his bellicose, destructive nature or in his economic-acquisitive nature) and in its institutional implications."⁵⁷ Here is an example of a sequence of such formulaic passages describing military campaigns of Ashurnasirpal II:⁵⁸

In my accession year (and) in my first regnal year when the god Šamaš, judge of the (four) quarters, spread his beneficial protection over me (and), having nobly ascended the royal throne, he placed in my hand the sceptre for the shepherding of the people, (at that time) I mustered my chariotry (and) troops. I passed through difficult paths (and) rugged mountains which were unsuitable for chariotry and troops (and) marched to the land Tammu. I conquered Libê, their fortified city, the cities Surra, Abuqu, Arura, (and) Arubê which lie between Mounts Urinu, Arunu, (and) Etinu, mighty mountains. I massacred many of them (and) carried off captives, possessions, (and) oxen from them. The troops were frightened (and) took to a rugged mountain. Since the mountain was exceptionally rugged I did not pursue them. The mountain was as jagged as the point of a dagger and therein no winged bird of the sky flew. They had placed their fortress like the nest of the *uđinu*-bird within the mountain which none of the kings my fathers had ever approached. For three days the hero explored the mountain. His bold heart yearned for battle. He ascended on foot (and) overwhelmed the mountain. He smashed their nest (and) scattered their flock. I felled 200 of their fighting-men with the sword (and) carried off a multitude of captives like a flock of sheep. With their blood I dyed the mountain red like red wool (and) the rest of them the ravines (and) torrents of the mountain swallowed. I razed, destroyed, (and) burnt their cities.

Moving on from the land Tammu I went down to Mount Kurruru. I received the tribute of Mounts Kurruru and Simesu, the land Simerra, the land Ulmania, the land Adauš, the land Hargaiia, the land Harmasaia: horses, mules, oxen, sheep, wine, (and) bronze casseroles. I imposed upon them corvée. While I was in Mount Kurruru the radiance of Aššur, my lord, overwhelmed the Gilzānu and the Hubušku (and) they brought to me as their tribute horses, silver, gold, tin, bronze, (and) bronze casseroles.

Moving on from Mount Kurruru I entered the pass which (leads from) the city Hulan to the interior of the land Habhu. I conquered the cities Hattu, Hataru, Ništun, Sabidi, Metqia, Aršana, Tēla, Halua, cities of the land Habhu which lie between Mounts Usu, Arua, (and) Arardi, mighty mountains. I massacred many of them (and) carried off prisoners (and) possessions from them. The troops were frightened (and) took to a lofty peak in front of the city Ništun, which hovered like a cloud in the sky. Into the midst of those which none of the kings my fathers had ever approached my warriors flew like birds. I felled 260 of their combat troops with the sword. I cut off their heads and formed (therewith) a pile. The rest of them built nests like birds on mountain precipices. I brought down prisoners (and) possessions of theirs from the mountain (and) I razed,

57. Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 123.

58. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)*, 196–97.

destroyed, (and) burnt the cities which lay within the mighty highlands. The troops, as many as had fled from my weapons, came down (and) submitted to me. I imposed upon them tribute, tax, and corvée. Būbu, son of Babua, son of the city ruler of the city Ništun, I flayed in the city Arbail (and) draped his skin over the wall.

The annals of Ashurnasirpal II provide many more such descriptions, but the quoted extract is sufficient to give an idea of the formulaic pattern employed in such descriptions. Remarkably, the frequency of different constitutive elements in such descriptions is uneven: the combat itself is almost never described in detail, and the emphasis is put on the outcomes of the campaign and the booty, which is also how military campaigns are described in the “Shi fu.” As Lawson Younger remarks, “this disparity in the utilization of various syntagmic functions demonstrates clearly what was considered to be more or less significant and functional for the attainment of the Annals’ objectives (i.e., persuasion, deterrence, and celebration).”⁵⁹ The uniformity of language in Assyrian conquest records is such that a group of Italian scholars, inspired by Vladimir Propp’s seminal work on the morphology of Russian fairy tales, found it possible to develop a uniform code to describe all the elements in the annals of Ashurnasirpal II.⁶⁰ Younger brought this work even further by applying the code to Hittite, Egyptian, and biblical conquest accounts.

The application of a formalized Proppian schema would also be possible for the “Shi fu,” although the usefulness of this encoding would be questionable, given the text’s uniqueness in the transmitted corpus. Nonetheless, there appear to be similar repetitive formulas employed in bronze texts, which allow us to view the uniform description of military campaigns in units three and five of the “Shi fu” as products of the same tradition (and, if one follows Younger, the same ideological framework) that engendered the bronze texts with military accounts. The “Duoyou” cauldron 多友鼎 is an excellent example of such an account.⁶¹ Unlike some other bronzes included in the *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*, this cauldron comes from a documented excavation (although the discovery took place during sand mining and not in the course of an archaeological investigation *per se*). It was conducted in 1980 in Xiaquancun 下泉村 village (today, administratively part of the city of Xi’an), which makes me feel sufficiently certain about the authenticity of this text.⁶² Unfortunately, the “Duoyou” cauldron is commonly dated to the late Western Zhou (9th c. BCE), i.e., two centuries after the reign of King Wu. Two hundred years can be a sufficiently long time for a textual tradition to change substantially, but lacking earlier bronze texts with military accounts of comparable length and detail, I consider it feasible to use the text on the “Duoyou” cauldron as a source of information concerning the possible context of the descriptions of auxiliary military campaigns in the “Shi fu.” I consider it even more justified, since the “Duoyou” cauldron interests me not so much as a source of exact linguistic parallels with the “Shi fu” but rather as an example of the use of compositional formulas that presumably were less changeable than the language in which they were rendered for each new military account.

I provide the opening and the central part of the text that contains a formulaic description of the military skirmishes experienced by Duoyou, the donor of this vessel, in the course of

59. Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 89.

60. V. Ya. Propp, *Morfologiya volshebnoy skazki* (orig. publ. date 1928; cited after reprint: Moscow: Labirint, 2001); Enrico Badali et al., “Studies on the Annals of Aššurnasirpal II. 1: Morphological Analysis,” *Vicino Oriente* 5 (1982): 13–73.

61. *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*, #2835.

62. Tian Xingnong 田醒農 and Luo Zhongru 雒忠如, “Duoyou ding de faxian ji qi mingwen shiyi” 多友鼎的發現及其銘文試譯, *Renwen zazhi* 1981.4: 115–18.



Fig. 1. The “Duoyou” cauldron. Microfotos / Mingzhotang sheying chuanyu 明珠堂攝影創意.

his campaign.⁶³ To further highlight its patterned structure, I present the middle part in tabular form, identifying each of the structured elements that constitute the description of a single episode in the campaign. I am using the translation by Li Feng, with minor modifications:⁶⁴

唯十月，用嚴（獵）鯨（獠）放（方）興（興），廣（廣）伐京自（師），告追于王，命武公：“遣乃元士，羞追于京自（師）。”武公命多友銜（率）公車，羞追于京自（師）。癸未，戎伐簡（簡），衣（卒）孚（俘）。多友西追，甲申之辰（辰），搏（搏）于郟，多友右（有）折首執嚙（訊）：凡呂（以）公車折首二百又□又五人，執嚙（訊）廿又三人，孚（俘）戎車百乘一十又七乘，衣（卒）復（復）簡（簡）人孚（俘）。或（又）搏（搏）于隄（隄），折首卅又六人，執嚙（訊）二人，孚（俘）車十乘，從至。追搏（搏）于世，多友或（又）右（有）折首執嚙（訊），乃轆追，至于楊冢，公車折首百又十又五人，執嚙（訊）三人，唯孚（俘）車不克，呂（以）衣

63. Following von Falkenhausen (“The Royal Audience,” 240 n. 3), I understand the “donor” as the “individual who commissioned a bronze object.”

64. Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 147–48. Cf. Shaughnessy, “The Date of the ‘Duo You Ding’ and Its Significance,” *Early China* 9–10 (1983): 55–69. I use transcriptions and fonts of the electronic database *Shang-Zhou jinwen ziliao tongjian* 商周金文資料通鑑 (Comprehensive Collection of Bronze Text Materials from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties) v. 2.0 of January 2013, which I acquired from Wu Zhenfeng 吳鎮烽; an earlier version of this database underlies Wu’s collection of bronze epigraphy in thirty-five volumes; see Wu Zhenfeng, ed., *Shang-Zhou qingtongqi mingwen ji tuxiang jicheng* 商周青銅器銘文暨圖像集成 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012).



Fig. 2. Rubbing of the inscription on the “Duoyou” cauldron. Reprinted by permission of Zhonghua Book Company.

(卒)焚，唯馬毆畫(盡)。弼(復)襄(奪)京自(師)之孚(俘)。多友乃獻(獻)孚(俘)或(馘)噍(訊)于公，武公廼獻(獻)于王。

It was in the tenth month, because the Xianyun greatly arose and broadly attacked Jingshi, [it] was reported to the king. The king commanded Duke Wu: “Dispatch your most capable men and pursue at Jingshi!” Duke Wu commanded Duoyou: “Lead the Duke’s chariots and pursue at Jingshi!” On the *gui-wei* (20/60) day, the Rong attacked Xun and took captives.

Episode	Encounter	Summary of outcomes	Credit to the lord	Detailed list of captives and booty
1	Duoyou pursued to the west. In the morning of the <i>jia-shen</i> (21/60) day, [he] struck [them] at Qi.	Duoyou cut off heads and captured prisoners to be interrogated.	In all, using the Duke’s chariots,	[Duoyou] cut off 2[missing digit]5 heads, captured 23 prisoners, and took 117 war chariots; Duoyou liberated the captives from the Xun people.
2	Again, [Duoyou] struck at Gong.	—	—	[Duoyou] cut off 36 heads and captured 2 prisoners to be interrogated and took 10 chariots.
3	Following [the enemy], [Duoyou] reached [them], pursued and struck at Shi.	[Duoyou] cut off heads and captured prisoners to be interrogated.	—	—

4	Thereafter, having rapidly pursued [the enemy], [Duoyou] reached [them] at Yangzhong.	—	[Using] the Duke's chariots,	[Duoyou] cut off 115 heads and captured 3 prisoners to be interrogated. It was that [they] could not capture the [war] chariots; they burnt [them] and the [enemy's] horses they wounded gravely. Duoyou recaptured the Jingshi captives. Duoyou presented the captured, the heads, and the prisoners to the Duke, and Duke Wu then contributed [them] to the king.
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The text on the “Duoyou” cauldron appears to have been created within a scribal culture that was well versed in reporting military deeds, which resulted in the creation of a standardized pattern of the description of military campaigns and thus provides a hint at how the accounts of military campaigns in the “Shi fu” could have been composed. The text presents a three-tier structure of military subordination: the king gives the initial order to the Duke, and then the Duke delegates it to Duoyou who conducts the military campaign. Afterwards, Duoyou reports to the Duke, and the Duke transmits the report to the king. It is remarkable that the king does not appear to ever interact with Duoyou, the person who boasts to have secured the victory for Zhou.⁶⁵

It is possible to read the accounts of auxiliary military campaigns in units three and five of the “Shi fu” as products of the same scribal practice of military accounting, just as certain elements in the Assyrian inscriptions may have originated in lists of booty that had originally been separate texts. The “Shi fu” gives us a “kingly” perspective, and military commanders of Duoyou’s rank are not expected to be mentioned there, although this does not mean, of course, that the king’s subordinates would not have passed orders further down the hierarchical ladder. It becomes possible to offer a realistic explanation of why the military commanders appear so tireless in the “Shi fu”: they could have simply transmitted orders from the king to their different subordinate officers, while personally they may not have ever left the vicinity of the king’s court.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ROYAL HUNT

Another detail in the “Shi fu” that appears out of place if viewed against the corpus of transmitted Chinese texts but as organic if considered alongside the Near Eastern royal inscriptions is the account of a royal hunt.⁶⁶

65. The physical location of the text on the more visible side surface of the vessel and not on the bottom suggests that Duoyou was doing his best to make the text describing his achievements as visible and public as possible. This celebration of military achievements in the “Duoyou” cauldron text provides a very illustrative and contrastive counter-case to the “Shi fu”: although the eventual foundation of the two texts is similar (military victories), they are different in ambition. The “Shi fu” celebrates a successful reign of the universal monarch while the text on the “Duoyou” cauldron only commemorates a loyal executor of orders coming from the superiors.

66. For a speculative yet thought-provoking overview of the possible uses of writing during Shang, see Robert W. Bagley, “Anyang Writing and the Origin of the Chinese Writing System,” in *The First Writing*, ed. Stephen D. Houston (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 190–249. For an excellent source-based discussion with examples of hunting-related records from the corpus of Anyang inscriptions, see David N. Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 2000), 108–9.

The above-mentioned *Anitta Text* contains a very similar passage that is reminiscent of unit six of the “Shi fu”:⁶⁷

I made a vow, and I [went] hunting. In a single day I brought to my city Neša 2 lions, 70 swine, 60 wild boars, and 120 (other) beasts—leopards, lions, deer, gazelle, and [wild goats].

Although summaries of royal hunting exploits are not known from later Hittite texts (which is another curious parallel, given that no texts with descriptions of royal hunts similar to the “Shi fu” survive in the Chinese tradition),⁶⁸ they are very well attested in the corpus of Assyrian royal inscriptions, where they were common in the period between the reigns of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE) and Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE), after which the theme of the royal hunt disappeared from texts but continued in visual art.⁶⁹ In textual records, accounts of royal hunts were often positioned in the summaries at the end of royal inscriptions after the descriptions of military campaigns. Such accounts appear to contain lifetime summaries of the kings’ hunting activities and are different from the reports of individual hunts that sometimes also occur in texts.⁷⁰ Here is an example from the annals of Aššur-dān II (935–912 BCE):⁷¹

[The gods Ninurta and Nergal], who love my priesthood, gave to me the wild beasts (and) commanded me [to hunt]. I killed from my . . . chariot (and) on my swift feet [with the spear] 120 lions within [. . .]. I killed 1,600 wild bulls. I captured 2 [strong] wild virile bulls by ambush. I killed 56 elephants.

This Assyrian text sheds some light on the significance of hunting accounts in royal inscriptions: they demonstrate that the king has found the grace in the eyes of the gods and thus confirm the divine sanction and legitimacy of his power. The phenomenon of the royal hunt as a means of legitimation has been convincingly described using broad evidence from traditional Eurasian societies by Thomas Allsen. Much of his discussion is immediately relevant to my analysis of the “Shi fu,” but I will restrict myself to a summary of the most elucidating observations.⁷² Allsen argues that hunt was a “form of spiritual communication” that, in traditional societies, “always has ideological content.” Speaking of the Assyrian kings, he observes that the hunt was “a religiously sanctioned attribute of kingship; indeed, it was a requirement of office.”⁷³ Hunting in traditional Eurasian societies was regarded as a display

67. Gary Beckman, “The Anitta Text,” in *Historical Sources in Translation: The Ancient Near East*, ed. Mark W. Chavalas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 218.

68. Hoffner, “Histories and Historians of the Ancient Near East,” 327.

69. See Tadmor, “Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in *Assyria 1995*, ed. Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 327–28.

70. De Odorico provides a very good description of the difference between the two types of hunting accounts: “In general, we must distinguish between single hunting trips and ‘general’ totals relative to the whole reign. In the first case the deeds are narrated within the annalistic sections or within the passages relating to military activities (mainly they appear as a sporting relaxation of which the king avails himself during a pause in the military operations), while in the second case they are related at the end of the inscriptions, or at least in a position or in a manner to release them from any specific temporal context. Especially in the latter case, it is obviously important to have killed and captured many animals, as well as animals of many different species.” Marco De Odorico, *The Use of Numbers and Quantifications in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1995), 143.

71. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)*, 135. Grayson reconstructs the missing passages using other inscriptions relying on the same compositional pattern.

72. Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 160–85.

73. *Ibid.*, 161.



Fig. 3. Lion hunting scene. Ashurbanipal (668–627 BCE). North Palace at Nineveh. BM 124850-1. Image courtesy of Klaus Wagensonner.

of spiritual achievements that in turn lead to good fortune at hunting so that “special skill in hunting demonstrated one’s possession of particular spiritual power, a charisma that could be transferred to the political arena.” Interestingly, Allsen identifies this kind of charisma “as part of a larger ideological package, which includes universal authority, a heavenly mandate to rule, and the monarch’s royal glory, his very special good fortune” that was first developed in the ancient Near East and later, according to Allsen, spread to the steppe region.⁷⁴ If the evidence of the “Shi fu” is accepted seriously, one might argue that this ideological package became current in northern China no later than the end of the second millennium BCE.

Allsen points out that the lion hunt was a particularly important element of the demonstration of royal charisma in the Near East (fig. 3).⁷⁵ In the absence of lions in China, it seems that their place was taken over by tigers. At least we know that tigers are the first to be mentioned in King Wu’s hunting trophy list.

Overall, it appears justified to read the account of the royal hunt in the “Shi fu” in the same way as similar accounts in Near Eastern texts, i.e., as a lifetime summary demonstrat-

74. *Ibid.*, 162.

75. *Ibid.*, 162–63. For a discussion of the ritual significance of the lion hunt in Ashurbanipal’s inscriptions and its connections with the triumphal ritual, see Elnathan Weissert, “Royal Hunt and Royal Triumph in a Prism Fragment of Ashurbanipal (82-5-22,2),” in Parpola and Whiting, *Assyria 1995*, 339–58.

ing the king's virtue and charisma, and not as a record of a hunt that took place as King Wu was returning to Zhou from his successful expedition at Shang.⁷⁶

TRIUMPHAL CELEBRATION AND RITUAL DECAPITATION OF THE ENEMY KING

One of the striking parallels between the “Shi fu” and Assyrian materials is the sequence of triumphal activities after the conquest. This similarity is most obvious when the evidence of the “Shi fu” is compared with the Assyrian royal bas reliefs, such as those commissioned by king Ashurbanipal (668–627 BCE). It has already been mentioned that certain semantic elements of royal commemoration, such as the royal hunt, are expressed in Assyria not only in texts but also in visual art. The bas reliefs represent the triumphal victory of Assyrian kings, portraying the events in their chronological sequence and thus making it possible to reconstruct elements of the conquest ritual in more detail than one could achieve by consulting only the textual evidence. We have reliefs from different reigns, but their contents are sufficiently uniform to create an impression of “a regular and pre-established order with a consequent obvious result.”⁷⁷

One notable similarity between the “Shi fu” and the Assyrian materials is the division of triumph into two consecutive episodes. Davide Nadali has recently discussed this two-part division:⁷⁸

The celebration of victory occurs in two different moments and at distinct places. Each has different participants, different recipients and, as a consequence, different finalities. The first victory occurs after the battle, immediately after the Assyrian army conquers a city and defeats the enemy. The second victory, more spectacular and triumphant, occurs also after the battle, but distant from the battlefield. The place which can more appropriately be called the triumph (*erāb āli*) is the Assyrian city, the capital from where the king left for the campaign and where he comes back after the success. Triumphs are celebrated in the historical cities of Assyria, in the capital where the main residence of the king was and in the most important sacred places of the religious Assyrian landscape at the temples and sanctuaries of the Assyrian gods.

The emphasis on the large-scale triumphal celebration in the royal heartland is evident in the “Shi fu,” where the most significant rituals take place after King Wu's return from the conquest campaign.⁷⁹ Thus, both Assyria and Zhou China appear to put a similarly strong emphasis on the triumphal ceremonies in their heartland.

An even more intriguing parallel is the treatment of the severed head of the conquered king: the similarity between the “Shi fu” account and Ashurbanipal's bas-reliefs is so strong

76. This mistaken reading of the royal hunt as an element in the linear sequence of events accompanying the Zhou conquest of Shang appears to have already become common by the time of the composition of the “Xiao xu” 小序 (The Lesser Sequence of Chapters) of the *Shang shu* 尚書 (The Venerated Writings). The entry of the “Xiao xu” corresponding to the “Wu cheng” chapter appears to have been composed for a text cognate to the “Shi fu.” It mentions a hunt, but treats it as a casual hunt that King Wu engaged in when returning from his Shang campaign: “King Wu went on a punitive expedition against Yin. He attacked them as he went there and hunted on his way back” 武王伐殷，往伐歸獸。 *Shang shu zheng yi* 尚書正義, Wuying dian Shisan jing zhushu 武英殿十三經注疏 (Beijing, 1739), 10.21a.

77. Davide Nadali, “Outcomes of Battle: Triumphal Celebrations in Assyria,” in *Rituals of Triumph in the Mediterranean World*, ed. Anthony Spalinger (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 76.

78. *Ibid.*, 77.

79. This observation would be true irrespective of whether units four and eight (“Ceremonies” and “Triumph at Zhou”) are read in the traditional way, in which case one refers to celebrations in the city of Shang and the other to the rituals in the Zhou heartland, or, following Li Xueqin, as differently patterned descriptions of the same events, both occurring in the Zhou heartland and thus corresponding to the more important second part of the triumphal ritual. In any case, the most important ceremonies take place in the Zhou heartland.



Fig 4. Teumman's head taken to be identified. Ashurbanipal. Southwest Palace at Nineveh. BM 124801. Image courtesy of Klaus Wagensonner.

that these reliefs could be used as illustrations for some of the most gruesome scenes of the “Shi fu.” This is how Nadali describes the ritual treatment of the head of Elamite king Teumman by Ashurbanipal, using the evidence on bas-reliefs:⁸⁰

In the upper register of room I in the North Palace, Ashurbanipal is represented in front of the Ishtar Temple in Arbela pouring liquid over the severed head of Teumman. That grisly trophy is presented to the goddess Ishtar and thus becomes the object of a ritual.

Comparing this description with the corresponding part of the “Shi fu” suggests that the itinerary of the head of the defeated king of Shang was strikingly similar:

武王在祀。太師負商王紂懸首白旂、妻二首赤旂 乃以先， 馘入， 燎于周廟。

King Wu was at the *si*-sacrifice. The Great Master carried the white banner with the suspended head of Shang king Zhou and the red banner with the heads of the two concubines. Then he made an offering with them. The decapitated heads were brought in. A burnt offering was conducted at the Zhou temple.

It should be noted that the treatment of Teumman's head is unusual for the Assyrian material and, lacking further evidence, cannot be regarded as an essential element of any conquest. It is possible that the sacrifice of the enemy king's head was an ad hoc invention by both Ashurbanipal and King Wu. However, one cannot completely discard the possibility that both kings learned about this peculiar practice through the complex network of interacting polities that inhabited Eurasia in the late second to early first millennium BCE. Of course, it is only possible to talk about exchange in triumphal practices mediated by oral communication. It would be too far-fetched to imagine that King Wu and Ashurbanipal learned about the decapitation of enemy kings from texts written in foreign languages, especially if one considers the temporal gap, geographical distance, and complete unrelatedness of the writing systems of Mesopotamia and China.

80. Nadali, “Outcomes of Battle,” 88.

INDIVIDUAL QUANTIFICATIONS AND "TOTALS"

Numbers in the "Shi fu" can cause confusion. On the one hand, there are modest and very realistic numbers of captives and booty in units three and five dealing with auxiliary military campaigns. On the other hand, there are highly suspicious and seemingly exaggerated numbers of countries conquered, enemies killed, and prisoners taken in unit seven ("Universal Conquest"). Should we accept all these numbers or discredit all of them? And if we make a selective and qualified judgment, what criteria should we rely on?

Fortunately, the Assyrian royal inscriptions contain a large number of texts with numerical records that provide insight. These numbers have been thoroughly studied in the valuable monograph of Marco De Odorico, and some of the notions developed in his study can be fruitfully borrowed for the analysis and interpretation of the "Shi fu."⁸¹

De Odorico proposes to distinguish between numbers related to individual events and the "totals" that may summarize results of several campaigns or even a whole reign.⁸² In particular, "totals" appear in those parts of inscriptions that contain summaries of the preceding material.⁸³ Such summaries are often positioned at the end of the text, normally after the description of individual military campaigns.

In the case of the "Shi fu," it seems that units six ("Royal Hunt") and seven ("Universal Conquest") appear at a position in which summaries would be located in Assyrian royal inscriptions, following units three and five with descriptions of individual campaigns. Furthermore, neither of these two units is related to a particular date, which further suggests that they may be summaries of activities that happened over a large span of time.

As I have already mentioned above, reading the contents of unit six as a summary (perhaps a lifetime summary) of hunting activities of the king makes it appear much more realistic than the conventional reading, which treats it as a hunt casually conducted on the way back from the city of Shang. To me, the idea of a king in charge of a victorious army returning home after an exhausting battle and engaging in a massive hunting expedition would appear extremely unlikely. However, if we think of this passage as a summary of lifetime achievements, the numbers are comparable to lifetime summaries of hunting exploits of Assyrian kings.⁸⁴

Unit seven presents a more difficult problem. Its numbers are of a higher order than in the Assyrian inscriptions, and even the contestable records about mass-scale deportations performed by Assyrian kings never amounted to as many as the 320,230 people presumably captured by King Wu. Perhaps different conventions were employed when describing quantitative results of individual events and lifetime summaries. Acknowledging this would allow us to explain the stark contrast between the modest "realism" of numbers in units three and five and the breathtaking gigantism of numbers in unit seven.

One last remark should be made concerning unit eight containing an account of the king's sacrifices. There the king first makes an offering of six bulls and two sheep, which is then followed by a much more impressive number of 504 bulls and 2,701 heads of smaller livestock. There is nothing unrealistic about these numbers, and actually they are more or less in line with summaries of triumphal sacrifices in Assyrian records.⁸⁵ However, contrasted with

81. De Odorico, *The Use of Numbers and Quantifications in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*.

82. *Ibid.*, 88–96.

83. See the discussion on the summaries of royal hunts above.

84. De Odorico, *The Use of Numbers*, 143–49.

85. See n. 97.

the previous record with only six bulls and two rams, it is also possible to view the larger numbers as an element of some kind of “total.”

RECONSIDERING THE COMPOSITION OF THE “SHI FU”

Having examined practices and conventions of the Near Eastern royal inscriptions, I would conclude that reading the “Shi fu” as a celebration of a successful reign of a glorious martial monarch should be preferred over the reading of this text as a linear account of events immediately related to the Zhou conquest of Shang. Details such as the completion of the conquest of the four cardinal directions, the summary accounts of royal hunts and conquered countries, and even the elaborate descriptions of a triumphal ritual make more sense if we think of them as important elements of the textual representation of charismatic, expansionist kingship. Although we only have one such text from China, in the Near East this model is well attested in many linguistic and genre variations. An important common feature of such texts is their restricted historiographic scope that seldom transcends the current reign. Their concern is not the objective recording of historical information, but rather the grandiose, sometimes even embellished depiction of the reigning king using information and textual records that were readily available to the court scribes.⁸⁶

Why is the “Shi fu” the only text of its kind surviving in China while comparable texts from the Near East are so abundant? One of the main reasons may be the absence of a tradition of monumental building in ancient China: while numerous temples and palaces have been excavated in the Near East, what is left to archaeologists in China today are only the earthen foundations of buildings gone to ruin thousands of years ago. As most Near Eastern royal inscriptions come from the context of monumental building, it is not surprising that we do not have counterparts in China. However, when it comes to examples of non-monumental royal inscriptions, such as the beautifully crafted and elaborate “letter to god” by Sargon II (722–705 BCE)⁸⁷ or the *Anitta Text* that, despite its monumental origins, had survived in a scribal tradition, they seem to be as peculiar and difficult to tie to a specific context as the “Shi fu.” Therefore, there seems to be nothing exceptional in the fact that China has not produced texts similar to the “Shi fu” so far.

Applying the Near Eastern model to the “Shi fu” would make it possible to propose a new interpretation of the text as a composite record drawn from various types of records presumably current in the early Western Zhou court. This would also explain the distinctive structural dissimilarity of the different compositional units of the “Shi fu” without seeing them as diachronic layers added at different times by scribes accustomed to different compositional techniques and thematic priorities. Seeing the “Shi fu” as a potpourri of contemporary textual material assembled to serve as a monument to King Wu’s reign would not only offer a simpler explanation of the text’s composite structure but would also be consistent with what we know about the compositional techniques attested in the Near East. This observation brings me to the problem of dating of the “Shi fu,” to which I will not claim to have found a definite solution. I have no doubts that the text in its received form cannot be justifiably treated as a Western Zhou work, and earlier I have demonstrated that even the variants current during

86. See Thomas Schneider, “History as Festival? A Reassessment of the Use of the Past and the Place of Historiography in Ancient Egyptian Thought,” in *Thinking, Recording and Writing History in the Ancient World*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 117–43.

87. Carlo Zaccagnini, “An Urartean Royal Inscription in the Report of Sargon’s Eighth Campaign,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, 259–95.

the Han dynasty were substantially different from the “Shi fu” that we read today. However, assuming that the text was assembled from contemporary scribal materials either during King Wu’s reign or soon after it seems to provide the simplest and most convincing explanation of the text’s structural heterogeneity and its use of multiple compositional patterns in individual sections. From a work that postdates the reign and does not rely on primary scribal materials, we would expect a higher degree of homogeneity and narrative consistency, such as we see in the above-mentioned chapter “Ke Yin.” Therefore, the complex compositional structure of the “Shi fu,” which mirrors the complex structure of some Near Eastern royal inscriptions, is perhaps the strongest argument in support of the chronological proximity of the text’s origin to King Wu’s reign, even though the received “Shi fu” has undergone a substantial evolution since then.

The proposed reconstruction does not answer the question of the text’s intended purpose and target audience. It would be tempting to relate the “Shi fu” to the mysterious genre of “letters to god” in the Assyrian corpus, mainly attested by the above-mentioned letter to god by Sargon II with a detailed account of his eighth campaign. Leo Oppenheim suggests that this letter was intended to be performed in public to the primary deity of the city, other gods and goddesses, and the general populace of Ashur.⁸⁸ In unit eight of the “Shi fu,” Secretary Yi 史佚 recites writing in front of the heavenly title, and perhaps the “Shi fu” or some of its constitutive components were also composed to be performed in a similar setting.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, we may never know whether it was the case. What we do know, though, is that the Secretary is among very few characters that the “Shi fu” mentions by name, alongside the king himself, the military commanders, and captured leaders of the enemy states. This seems to put the Secretary at a very high position in the social hierarchy and suggests that he might have enjoyed a high degree of authority.⁹⁰

I regard the story of the Shang king’s self-immolation at the end of the “Shi fu” as a later accretion. This section contradicts the narrative of unit two (“Campaign against Shang”). Furthermore, the enemy is given full subjectivity, while in all other sections of the “Shi fu” the enemy is presented as a passive object and victim.⁹¹ The format of dating formulas in the last unit is also different from the rest of the “Shi fu.”⁹² Finally, the emphasis of this section on the precious jade seems to be an element of a later idealized representation of dynastic

88. A. Leo Oppenheim, “The City of Assur in 714 B.C.,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 19.2 (1960): 133–47; Grayson, “Histories and Historians of the Ancient Near East,” 157–59; Zaccagnini, “An Urartean Royal Inscription.”

89. See Martin Kern, “The Performance of Writing in Western Zhou China,” in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign*, ed. Sergio La Porta and David Shulman (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 109–75. I follow Kern’s translation of *shi* 史 as “Secretary,” acknowledging that the specific contexts in which *shi* occur in early texts suggest a different scope of responsibilities than that of the scribes in the Near Eastern traditions.

90. Cf. Tadmor, “Propaganda, Literature, Historiography,” 335.

91. Drawing from Hittite material, Hoffner considers “the scheme of military action in which the opponent is not just a passive object of the king’s action, but an equal participant with his own initiative” to be an element of later, more mature historiography. See “Histories and Historians of the Ancient Near East,” 294–95.

92. The formula “at the time of *jia-zi*, in the evening” 時甲子夕 appears suspicious because early texts normally only mention the dawn (*zhao* 朝) as part of the dating pattern (this also applies to unit two). The word “evening” (*xi* 夕) does occur in bronze texts, but only as a part of compounds meaning “daily and nightly” (*zhaoxi* 朝夕 or *suxi* 夙夕). The formula “[after] five days” (*wu ri* 五日) in the last unit of the “Shi fu” is also different from units two and eight. First, it lacks the first character *yue* 粤 (“after”), which may be an omission or an indicator of a different convention. Second, the formulas “on the X day” 粤幾日 in units two and eight are always preceded by an elaborate dating formula containing the month, the *yuexiang* (“lunar-phase”) term, and the cyclical day. No such elaborate date is given in unit nine.

transitions that was supposed to be accompanied by the capturing of jades that magically conferred prosperity onto the realm of the ruler who inherited these artifacts.⁹³

Apart from this incongruent story of the Shang king's self-immolation, it seems to be possible to treat the text as a structural whole while still distinguishing several distinct compositional patterns that could be interpreted as extracts or summaries based on different works of court scribes. I have already discussed the possible connection between the descriptions of auxiliary campaigns in units three and five and the patterned description of military campaigns attested in bronze texts (see the section on the formulaic language of military accounts above), but it is not the only part of the "Shi fu" to employ a rigidly patterned language. The description of ritual ceremonies in unit four ("Ceremonies") is remarkable as it has no counterparts in either received or excavated texts. Nevertheless, it seems to be based on a very stable set of conventions concerning the schematic depiction of ceremonial activities that could have been practiced at the Zhou court. The relatively freeform narrative of units two and eight with elaborate dating formulas seems to have counterparts in other ancient texts, including bronze texts and several chapters of the *Shang shu*, such as the opening part of the "Shao gao" 召誥 (Announcement of the Duke of Shao) and the ending of the "Luo gao" 洛誥 (Announcement concerning Luo). The narrative pattern employed in these units can be seen as a general-purpose textual device for the recording of royal deeds and miscellaneous events. Finally, the summaries of the royal hunt and conquered lands in units six and seven with their totalizing scope can be seen as the compositional nexus of the text.⁹⁴

THE IDEAL OF KINGSHIP IN THE "SHI FU"

The "ideological package" of kingship identified by Allsen seems to have been fully embraced by the early Western Zhou rulers in eleventh-century BCE China.⁹⁵ The "Shi fu" is underlain by a set of concerns that are structurally similar to the Assyrian royal texts and reliefs as well as the *Anitta Text*. What all these works seem to have in common is the celebration of royal valor of a specific kind: universal and having no rivals in the human realm, grandiose in scale, posing an existential threat to the enemies while still respectfully paying homage to the divine and otherworldly authorities who warrant the perpetuity of all these qualities. In the textual realm, such kingship looks for a means to commemorate its achievements, focusing primarily on the outcomes of military campaigns, particularly on the losses on the enemy side and on the war booty captured.

93. The "Xiao xu" of the *Shang shu* has the following record corresponding to the unpreserved chapter "Dian bao" 典寶 (Testaments and Treasures) that is believed to describe the victory of Cheng Tang 成湯, the founder of Shang 商, over Jie 桀, the last king of the preceding legendary state of Xia 夏. This description also mentions the capturing of precious jades, which, according to the Pseudo-Kong Anguo 偽孔安國 commentary, had the property of protecting the state against floods and droughts (*Shang shu zheng yi*, 7.6a): "The Xia army was defeated. Then [Cheng] Tang pursued them. He then attacked [them] at [the locality of] Sanzong where he captured their precious jades. [At that time] Elder Yi and Elder Zhong composed the 'Testaments and Treasures.'" 夏師敗績，湯遂從之，遂伐三股，俘厥寶玉。誼伯、仲伯作《典寶》。

94. The first unit ("Conquest Summary") may be compositionally alien to the main part of the text, but it is very brief, and I would not dare to make conclusions based on such limited evidence. Neither its inclusion nor its omission seriously affects my argument.

95. One element of the Near Eastern pattern that is absent from the "Shi fu" is the account of the king's building activities that is often positioned at the very end of the royal inscription. The description of royal sacrifices in the "Shi fu" can possibly be regarded as a structural counterpart of such building accounts, especially considering that the erection of palaces in Assyria could have been accompanied by large-scale banquets similar in scale to the holocaust depicted in the "Shi fu." See, e.g., a list of goods used at the palace-dedication banquet by Ashurnasirpal II in Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)*, 292.

The similarity between the commemoration of kingship in the “Shi fu” and in Assyrian royal inscriptions may suggest that they represent some sort of universal practice and that similar texts would be produced in any other ancient culture. However, this is not the case. Even in Mesopotamia, Babylonian culture is known to put much less emphasis on the military valor of the king, and in China’s antiquity no other texts similar to the “Shi fu” are known. Clearly, the complex of ideas outlined by Allsen is not essential to the survival and continuation of kingship as such. In this case, what purpose does it serve?

I would not try to offer a definitive answer to this question, but the ample Near Eastern evidence seems to provide a clue. As Liverani remarks, “the topic [of success in war] becomes pivotal, and almost obsessive, only in the case of states especially engaged in an expansionistic and ‘imperialistic’ policy, from the Akkadian Dynasty down to the Neo-Assyrian Empire.”⁹⁶ Thus, it was possibly a strong expansionist kingship that brought forth the similar textual patterns that we see in Akkadian texts (24th–22nd c. BCE), the *Anitta Text* (18th c. BCE), and Assyrian royal inscriptions from the reign of Tiglath-pileser I⁹⁷ (1114–1076 BCE) onwards. King Wu, as he is celebrated in the “Shi fu,” seems to be a rightful member of this large transcultural family of expansionist monarchs.

This suggestion may have several important implications for our understanding of ancient history. First, it helps us to see early Western Zhou China not as a curious exotic exception from the patterns of ancient history but rather as an example of an early society consolidated by aggressive kingship where the royal power was legitimized by conquest and the ability to spread authority. Second, as the “Shi fu” is an independently conceived counterpart of the Near Eastern royal inscriptions, its striking parallels with the better attested Near Eastern material might help us to reconsider the widespread phenomenon of royal inscriptions with records of military achievements. It may be possible to see them, across cultures, as spontaneously reinvented textual responses to the internal need for the celebration of royal authority. Therefore, not only the “Shi fu,” but also the royal inscriptions in certain traditions of the Near East may be independent developments, and not reduplications of a textual pattern that was invented once and then copied by others.

To put it more generally, it seems that different literate societies, when encountering similar social needs and challenges, produce similarly structured textual responses. This does not imply, however, that all literate societies necessarily invent the same textual structures. Much depends on the underlying social fabric, which is, of course, different in every case, but also malleable and open to external influences. Today, theories about China’s undisturbed development during the Bronze Age are once again shattered as increasing archaeological evidence highlights China’s intensive interaction with its western and northern neighbors who inhabited parts of the Eurasian steppe belt.⁹⁸ The social practices that were involved in such exchange are much more difficult to track than the “hard” material artifacts. Nevertheless, completely disregarding the possibility of such “soft” influences would not be justified either.⁹⁹ Speaking of the ideal of universal kingship represented in the “Shi fu,” I suggest that, until we accumulate sufficient evidence, we should consider both the possibility of its

96. Liverani, “The Deeds of Ancient Mesopotamian Kings,” 2361.

97. See Tadmor, “Propaganda, Literature, Historiography,” 325.

98. Evgeny Chernykh, “The ‘Steppe Belt’ of Stockbreeding Cultures in Eurasia during the Early Metal Age,” *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 65.2 (2008): 90–91; Yang Jianhua 楊建華 and Shao Huiqiu 邵會秋, “Shang wenhua dui Zhongguo beifang yiji Ouya caoyuan dongbu diqu de yingxiang” 商文化對中國北方以及歐亞草原東部地區的影響, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 2014.3: 45–57.

99. Gideon Shelach, “Violence on the Frontiers? Sources of Power and Socio-Political Change at the Eastern-most Parts of the Eurasian Steppe during the Late Second and Early First Millennia BCE,” in *Social Complexity in*

independent formation in Shang-Zhou China and the possibility of its external borrowing via the complex network of military interactions in Asia in the late second to early first millennium BCE.

We do not know whether later Western Zhou kings would attempt to re-enact kingship as it is portrayed in the “Shi fu” and accomplish the universal conquest in their reigns as their Assyrian counterparts did. What we do know, though, is that King Wu’s universal conquest became subject of re-enactment in a different way, mainly, through the liturgy of “Martiality” (*wu* 武) amply attested in Eastern Zhou textual sources.¹⁰⁰ It is possible that the emphasis on ritual, which is particularly strong in East Asia, served as a powerful mechanism of cultural reconciliation, allowing the later rulers to develop a less bellicose agenda while never officially condemning the more militant practices of the foundational age that continued to be regularly re-enacted in liturgy.¹⁰¹

Prehistoric Eurasia: Monuments, Metals, and Mobility, ed. Bryan K. Hanks and Katheryn M. Linduff (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press), 241–71.

100. For thorough investigative reconstructions of the elements of this cult, see Gao Heng 高亨, “Zhou dai Da wu yue de kaoshi” 周代大武樂的考釋, *Shandong daxue xuebao* 1955.2: 50–68; Sun Zuoyun 孫作雲, *Shijing yu Zhou dai shehui yanjiu* 詩經與周代社會研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966), 239–72. Concerning liturgical elements in the Odes (*Shi* 詩), see Shaughnessy, “From Liturgy to Literature: The Ritual Contexts of the Earliest Poems in the Book of Poetry,” in *Before Confucius*, 165–96; Martin Kern, “Bronze Inscriptions, the *Shangshu*, and the *Shijing*: The Evolution of the Ancestral Sacrifice during the Western Zhou,” in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC to 220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 143–200.

101. I discuss the changing contexts of appreciation of the “Shi fu” that ensured the text’s continuous survival and circulation in a separate study. See Grebnev, “Evolutsiya pamyati o zhouskom zavoyevanii Shan,” 76–103.