

OUYANG XIU 歐陽修 (1007–1072) AND HIS COLLECTION OF STONE INSCRIPTIONS

Along with their interest in the material substance of bronzes, some scholars began to notice the great value in inscriptions engraved on bronze vessels, as well as on steles and stones, which in turn resulted in the initiation of the study of epigraphy in Northern Song 北宋 dynasty, (960–1126). Paradoxically, a great impact on this research was made by an imperial publication *Chunhua ge tie* 淳化閣貼 (Model Letters of the Imperial Archives in the Chunhua Era), regarded by many scholars as an unreliable source of information propagating a mainly political message, based largely on fake pieces (Fig. 1). The disappointment with this book aroused in connoisseurs' circles led to the publication of compendia by private collectors containing some engraved works of calligraphy transferred from the original steles.¹⁾

One such pioneering study based on a personal collection was *Cishutang tie* 賜書堂貼 (Model Letters of the Hall of Inherited Books) by Song Shou 宋綬 (991–1040) – the government official and historian.²⁾ Song Shou's compilation presented the author's private inscriptions from ancient bronze ritual vessels and the Qin 秦 dynasty (221–206 BC) stone steles.³⁾ Unfortunately,

¹⁾ Open criticism from scholars did not completely demote "Model Letters of the Imperial Archives", and the book was continually published, however, in new re-engraved and annotated editions. McNair (1994: 214).

²⁾ McNair (1994: 214); McNair (1998: 12).

³⁾ Song Shou possessed at least two inscriptions written in seal script and dated to 219 BC.

neither *Cishutang tie*, nor Song Shou's studies on his collection have survived to this day. They must have already been lost before 1240 AD according to the Southern Song dynasty connoisseur Zhao Xigu 趙熙古 (fl. c. 1195) in his *Dongtian Qingluji* 洞天請錄集 (Record of Pure Happiness from Hermit's Cave).⁴⁾ Nonetheless, besides accumulating single inscriptions and compiling them into compendia, Song Shou's collector's penchants also embraced books. This has a significant meaning for the history of art collecting in China, as it shows that books, apart from their historiographical and educational benefits were also cherished for their aesthetic values.

Song Shou had inherited a large collection of books from his grandfather – the high-ranking official Yang Huizhi 楊徽之 (921–1000), which he then expanded through his marriage with the daughter of another book collector – Bi Shi'an 畢士安 (940–1005) and furthermore through his own acquisitions.⁵⁾ It seems that what particularly attracted the collector in books was not only the content but also the precision and beauty of written characters. He would make copies of the examples he had possessed and checked every new position a few times to eliminate possible mistakes. It is said that collating considerably influenced Song Shou's own calligraphy. Therefore, we can expect that this activity also helped him develop his artistic taste. Nevertheless, Song Shou's passion for collecting was not only limited to books or inscriptions from ancient bronzes or steles. His penchants reached into completely new areas of objects, however still linked with calligraphy. It seems that it was nobody else but Song Shou who initiated the practice of collecting memorable edicts of imperial instructions *shengxun* 聖訓.⁶⁾ Together with his son Song Minqiu 宋敏求 (1019–1079), who like his father would collate books and make them available to others, they are both regarded as authors of the invaluable position *Song da zhaoling ji* 宋大詔令集 (Collected edicts of the Song) containing 3.800 edicts of the Northern Song emperors.⁷⁾ Moreover, Minqiu published individually *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集 (Collected edicts of the Tang).⁸⁾ The reason why Song

McNair (1994: 214). The information based on the studies of the 19th century scholar Cheng Wenrong 程文榮 (d. 1853) published in 1901 under the title *Nancun tiekao* 南村帖攷 (rpt. 1977: 385).

⁴⁾ McNair (1994: 214). There is a quotation translated from DTQLJ, 264.

⁵⁾ Ebrey (2008: 78).

⁶⁾ About the origins of gathering the *shengxun* see: Wilkinson (2000: 534).

⁷⁾ McNair (1994: 214); McNair (1998: 12); Wilkinson (2000: 851).

⁸⁾ Wilkinson (2000: 534).

Shou and his son collected imperial proclamations was certainly linked with the historical interests of the collectors. However, without doubt, they must also have been attracted by the aesthetic values of the written edicts.

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Song Shou can be considered in the history of collecting as the person who initiated the collecting of stone and bronze inscriptions in China. Nevertheless, the one who expanded this activity on a great scale was Quyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–72), a great historian, poet and connoisseur.⁹⁾ He came from an official, however, poor family, without any books (Fig. 2).¹⁰⁾ Nevertheless, the proximity of a neighbouring prominent family Li 李, and a friendship with a boy from this family who was devoted to learning influenced Ouyang Xiu's desires to study books, especially Han Yu's 韓愈 (768–824) essays and poetry as he wrote himself:

At the age of seventeen I sat for the district examinations, but was rejected by the examining officials. I turned to my copy of Han Yu and read it through again. Overcome with admiration, I exclaimed aloud, 'Scholars need look no further than this for a model.' I wondered why no one ever mentioned Han Yu, but did not then have the time to study him thoroughly. Nevertheless, the hope that I might eventually do so remained in my heart. I knew that first I had to take the examinations and secure the post for myself, so that I could provide for my mother. But I resolved that once I succeed I should thereafter devote all my energies to this style of writing and fulfil my longstanding desire.¹¹⁾

Apart from the considerable influence of Han Yu's calligraphic style, there also must have been other values flowing from the content of his poetry that affected Ouyang Xiu's aesthetic pursuits. Amy McNair suggests that one piece of poetry in particular, entitled *Shiguge* 石鼓歌 (The Song of the Stone

⁹⁾ The most substantial studies in English about Ouyang Xiu's collection have been written until now by Amy McNair and Ronald Egan.

See: McNair (1998); Egan (2006).

¹⁰⁾ Egan (1984: 14).

¹¹⁾ I have benefited from the English translation by Egan (1984: 14).

Drums) composed in 811 AD, must have had a significant impact on Ouyang Xiu's collecting penchants.¹²⁾ The content of the song in general concerns the author's request to the emperor to protect the recently discovered ten ancient Stone Drums carved with poems in an archaic seal script (Fig. 3).¹³⁾ Han Yu attributed the lack of interest in the archaic inscriptions to the fact that the scholars, calligraphers' and collectors' entire attention had been focused on the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361). He wrote: "Xizhi's vulgar calligraphy took advantage of its seductive beauty" [羲之俗書趁姿媚].¹⁴⁾ This open critique of the generally admired master of calligraphy must have been very controversial, though for people like Ouyang Xiu looking for something other than the politically imposed models of calligraphy that such observations seemed to be reliving.

The career Ouyang Xiu developed at the court, where he worked at the Chongwenyuan 崇文院 (The Imperial Archive), involved the compilation of the catalogue, which was a follow-up to the *Chongwen zongmu* 崇文總目 (General catalogue of the Academy for the Veneration of Literature).¹⁵⁾ His personal collection project, which lasted for nearly twenty years, Ouyang Xiu began to develop around 1045, i.e. shortly after he was charged with partisan activity during the minor reform of 1043–1044 and sent to remote areas where he was made governor of the Chuzhou 滁州 prefecture. Devoid of any entertainment, he started collecting and recording inscriptions on bronze and stones left from earlier ages simply to amuse himself.¹⁶⁾ Nevertheless, his activity from the beginning was full of concern about the preservation of material things which, despite their hardness, were inevitably exposed to destruction.¹⁷⁾ Nevertheless, Ouyang's involvement in seeking inscriptions took place much earlier and was dictated somehow by orders from the Royal House, according to Ouyang Xiu's own letter to his friends from 1045:

¹²⁾ McNair (1998: 13).

¹³⁾ Today they belong to the Palace Museum collection in Beijing. The inscriptions carved on drums around the fifth century BC are known as the earliest set of words on stone.

¹⁴⁾ Amy McNair uses the term "seductive beauty" (zi mei 姿媚). However, it could be understood as well as "charming look". See McNair (1998: 13).

¹⁵⁾ Ebrey (2008: 78).

¹⁶⁾ He explained this in a letter to Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012–1067) written in 1062 (Yu Cai Junmo qiu shu 'Jigu lu mu xu' shu 與蔡君謨求書集古錄目序書). Translation from Egan (2006: 20–21); based on JSWJ (20.1022–23).

¹⁷⁾ This statement Ouyang expressed in his colophon on Tang Kongzi miao tang bei 唐孔字廟堂碑 (A Stele from the Temple Dedicated to Confucius). Translation from Egan (2006: 21); based on JGLBW (2001: 5.2187–88).

Dear Friends,

Recently, by the grace of the court, I was made governor of this prefecture. In the south-western part of the prefecture is Langya Mountain [琅邪山], with the stream made famous by Li Yaoqing, onetime Mentor of the Heir Apparent. Earlier when I was in the Academy, the Royal House sent an order to seek out texts on old steles all over the world, which were to be collected in the Academy. It was there that I had a chance to see Li Yangbing's [李陽冰 (c. 722–c. 785)] seal script "Inscription for the Mentor's Stream". Those who make a study of seal script say that even though there are many extant examples of Li Yangbing's work, none of them can compare to this particular inscription. For the past ten years I have constantly wanted to get hold of a copy, but with no success. When I came here, I obtained one. But in addition, at the side of the stone that bears the inscription, there is another group of more than ten characters by Li Yangbing. These are even more marvellous than the text of the inscription itself, even though they are rarely seen in circulation. A mountain monk, one Huijue, pointed them out to me, and I lingered for a long time beneath them, unable to tear myself away. Accounts, both recent ones and older ones, have thoroughly documented remarkable sites in these mountains, and I felt especially distressed that this inscription alone had escaped their mention. I wanted to describe it, but feared lest my own writing prove inadequate for my thoughts. The men whose writing I cherish yet cannot equal are you two, Mei Yaochen [梅堯臣 (1002–1060)] and Su Shunqin [蘇舜欽 (1008–1048)]. For this reason I am sending you both this poem together with an ink rubbing of the inscription, asking of you poems about the calligraphy carved in that stone.¹⁸⁾

On the basis of the correspondence it can be inferred that Ouyang, at least ten years before writing the previously mention letter, had become interested in inscriptions and was in constant search for a particular one to appreciate its script. Additionally, there must have been interest in collecting inscriptions from the official site the aim of which, however, did not necessarily stem from any ulterior motive but rather from political reasons, specifically from the need to consolidate power. Moreover, the emotional attitude of Ouyang Xiu towards the objects which he considered as precious is particularly apparent, especially when he expressed regret for the lack of interests in certain inscriptions. This

¹⁸⁾ I have benefited from the English translation by Owen (1996: 638).

disappointment seems to accompany the collector during the whole period of his collection project.

The undertaking to which Ouyang devoted a large part of his life was based on a systematic method for gathering ancient rubbings (from the Zhou until the Five Dynasties), mounting and binding them, as well as writing notes briefly describing the provenance and content of the inscriptions. He did not concentrate particularly on collecting bronzes but primarily their inscriptions. Mostly, what Ouyang collected were rubbings from stones of a different nature designed for funerals, temples or official announcements. Despite the common practice of making copies of famous pieces of art, Ouyang Xiu did not follow this tradition and for fear of making mistakes did not copy the collected inscriptions. As a result the *Jigu lu* 集古錄 (Collected Records of the Past)¹⁹ – as Ouyang called his collection – comprised of approximately one thousand items, originally arranged by the dates of their acquisition.²⁰

His official statement and attitudes towards the collected antiquities were represented by Ouyang in his *Jigu lu mu xu* 集古錄目序 (Preface to Colophons on “Collected Records of the Past”) composed in 1062 for the comments he had already written or planned to write on the inscriptions in his collection (Fig. 4). There is an excellent study on this “Preface” by Ronald Egan – author of the following translation:²¹

As a rule, material things accumulate where they are enjoyed and are likewise possessed where the resources to obtain them are greatest. If there are resources but no enjoyment, or enjoyment without resources, then even if the things in question are close at hand and easy to acquire, they will not be brought to you.

Elephants, rhinoceroses, tiger, and leopards are wild beasts that live in remote mountains or foreign lands and are capable of killing humans. Yet their horns, tusks, and skins are accumulated and possessed by men. Jade comes from the Kunlun Mountains, which lie beyond a desert that stretches ten thousand miles. The jade obtained there must pass through

¹⁹ The edition used here follows the edition used by Ronald Egan i.e. JGLBW (2001) (*Jigu lu bawei* 集古錄跋尾), in OYXQJ (*Ouyang Xiu quanji* 歐陽修全集). Nonetheless, in some cases there is also a reference to the earlier publication, i.e. JGLBW (1961).

²⁰ Egan (2006: 9–10).

²¹ I have benefited from the English translation by Ronald Egan, by the permission of the Harvard University Asia Center Press, see Egan (2006: 11–13). The original version in: JSJ (2001: 42. 599–600).

ten different language regions before it finally arrives in the central kingdom. Pearls come from the South Sea, where they are usually found deep under water. Those who dive from them tie a rope around their waist before they jump in and hardly look human. Sometimes the divers never reappear and end up as a meal for sea monsters. Gold is buried deep inside mountains. It is only obtained after drilling deep mines into the rock. The miners carry torches and dried food with them as they go inside. When there are landslides or a tunnel collapses, it is not unusual for as many as a hundred men to be trapped inside and die. Such is the remoteness, difficulty, and a loss of life involved in acquiring precious things. And yet accumulations of gold, jade, and pearls are something we see all the time. This proves that any material thing can be brought to you, if it is enjoyed enough and resources are adequate.

King Tang's wash basin, Confucius' cauldron, the stone drums from Jiyang, the inscribed stones at Mt. Dai, Zhouyi, and Kuaiji; the great steles, sacrificial vessels, bronze inscriptions, poems, prefaces, and dedicatory essays written by sage rulers and worthy officials from the Han and Wei dynasties down today; and calligraphy by various masters done in archaic, greater seal, lesser seal, bafen, and clerical scripts – all these are priceless treasures from the Three Dynasties and later times, and they are the most bizarre and extraordinary, majestic and striking, skilfully crafted, and delightful of material things. They are not found in remote places and acquiring them does not involve danger or risk. Why is it, then, that exposed to the elements and ravaged by war, they are abandoned and damaged, and lie strewn about amid hillsides and ruins where no one gathers them up? It is because those who enjoy such thing are so few. Even if someone does know how to enjoy them, if his resources are inadequate, he will be lucky to obtain one or two of them and will be unable to make them truly accumulate before him.

In general, resources are less important than finding enjoyment in the thing, and normal enjoyment is not as good as single-minded concentration. By nature I am eccentric and am inordinately fond of antiquity. That which men of the world generally crave holds no interest for me. Consequently, I have been able to concentrate my enjoyment on these things. My enjoyment being extreme, I have been able to bring them into my possession despite having inadequate resources. Beginning with King Mu of the Zhou, down through the Qin and Han, the Sui and Tang, and the Five Dynasties, gathered from throughout the lands within the four

seas and nine provinces, famous mountains and great marshes, sheer cliffs and precipitous valleys, overgrown forests and ruined graveyards, including even those that tell of gods, demons, and anomalies, I have them all and have collected them together in what I call *Collected Records of the Past*. Fearing that copying them over would introduce mistakes, I have had the rubbings themselves mounted and bound together. The collection has its orderly arrangement but not according to the original date of each inscription. Since there are so many pieces, and I am still acquiring new ones, I simply add each one to the compilation in the order it is received. Knowing that a collection as large as this is bound eventually to be broken up, I have chosen the essentials concerning them and entered them in a separate catalogue of colophons, where I have also recorded the facts they contain that may be used to correct the textual historical record. It is my hope that this will be transmitted to future scholars as a contribution to learning.

Some may belittle my efforts, saying that when material things are accumulated in such quantity, it is difficult to keep the collection intact, and that sooner or later it will inevitably be broken up and scattered about. So why am I making such a fuss over these things? I can only say, by way of reply, that doing so supplies me with what I enjoy. What harm is there if I grow old amusing myself with these things? Are not accumulations of ivory, rhinoceros horn, gold, and jade also bound to be scattered about eventually? I simply can not bring myself to exchange one for the other.

Independently from the comments by Ronald Egan on the above “Preface”, a few other observations can be added.²²⁾ According to Ouyang Xiu there are two basic factors such as enjoyment and resources thanks to which any collecting activity can properly exist. The concept of “finding enjoyment in the thing” is a sort of innovation in the writings of a Confucian scholar. Therefore, Ouyang, who seems to be aware of this barely acceptable originality, tried to explain that it was not about a simple amusement but about a superior feeling which requires single-mindedness, if not obsession. This obsession, however, revolved around two values: aesthetic and historiographical. The other aspect of accumulation, which Ouyang Xiu emphasised, was the appropriate number of resources without which any group of objects cannot fully deserve to function as a collection. Thus, besides finding enjoyment, which for Ouyang was in any-

²²⁾ Egan (2006: 13–20).

way the priority, there must also have been the factor of systematic acquisition. One or two pieces might have just been a starting point for further collecting.

Moreover, Ouyang called for an openness to different models of collecting. He pointed out that in general people desire to possess inaccessible treasures such as jades, pearls, gold or gems, but do not pay attention to what is at hand such as stone inscriptions. We should add, however, that Ouyang Xiu was not very consistent in his writing, and despite promoting easy to obtain items he boasted about possessing objects “gathered from throughout the lands within the four seas and nine provinces”, etc. One might ask, how therefore did he manage to collect all these pieces from such a distance, and what was his method of collecting and seeking the inscriptions? Did he conduct any research or did he just simply find the stones by chance, while walking amidst hillsides and ruins? Did he do the rubbings by himself or with the help of someone else?

We know, that in some cases Ouyang Xiu asked friends, who occasionally went on trips to different places e.g. Liu Chang 劉敞 (1019–1068) the author of *Xian Qin guqi ji* 先秦古器記 (Record of Antique vessels of Pre-Qin Times) – the compilation, which reproduced the designs and inscriptions of eleven bronze vessels engraved into stones belonging to the author, provided Ouyang with some rubbings from ancient vessels unearthed in the Luoyang area,²³⁾ or simply acquired them from different people e.g. Xue Zhongru 薛仲孺 (or Gongqi 公期) – his relative – to whom belonged an exquisite copy of *Shiba jia fatie* 十八家法帖 (Calligraphic Models of the Eighteen Masters). Ouyang noted: “He (Xue Gongqi) claims it to be a family heirloom and it is most certainly genuine. The large majority of such works collected by people today are mere copies of copies.”²⁴⁾

Ouyang, who was an excellent historian certainly knew where to look for his precious things. Nevertheless, as usual, fate must have also played an important role in increasing his collection. So it was with an inscription from *Xuesheng meng bei* 學生冢碑 (Stele for the Students’ Graveyard), whose story Ouyang recorded in the form of a colophon in 1064.²⁵⁾ He recalled the time when passing through Gucheng 故城 county on official business he noticed “several unkempt graves in a grassy area.”²⁶⁾ His attention was particularly drawn to a toppled

²³⁾ Egan (1989: 366); Egan (2006: 8); McNair (1998: 12). Unfortunately *Xian Qin guqi ji* has been lost.

²⁴⁾ CHQ (2010).

²⁵⁾ Ebrey (2008: 79); based on JGLBW (1961: 4.1135).

²⁶⁾ Ebrey (2008: 79).

ancient stele with a very damaged text. No one, however, could tell Ouyang whose graves these were. Furthermore, due to lack of time he did not decipher the inscriptions and the issue was put aside for several years. It returned to the fore, though, at the moment when Ouyang was already living in Hebei and had embarked on his project of collecting Records of the Past. The author wrote: “I tried for several years to get a copy of it before I finally succeeded”²⁷⁾ After receiving this piece of rubbing he did some research, which showed that the author of the inscription was a scholar named Liu Xi 刘喜 from the times of the Three Kingdoms, who loved antiquity and “set up a stele to record the names of more than a hundred students who died before finishing their studies and who were buried there”²⁸⁾

The above example certifies that Ouyang Xiu was utterly determined to acquire items. However, there is another aspect of the story, which tells us the reason for which the collector decided to get this inscription. The text on the stele was damaged, so the aesthetic value of the inscription was not the key purpose. Moreover, the message did not make any significant contribution to general historical knowledge so we can assume that what motivated Ouyang Xiu was his fondness for preserving the forgotten past which may have stemmed from the collector’s own fears of being forgotten. Ouyang had presumed that his collection would be dispersed, yet he believed that at least his colophons would survive, and testify to his eccentric existence and the existence of others who deserved to be known.

Apart from his desire to perpetuate the memory of those who had passed away, Ouyang Xiu’s collection was also built on the basis of other rationales. One of them was simply the joy of looking at calligraphy and ignoring its content where necessary. As a Confucian scholar he was not very fond of Buddhist and Daoist scripts, but could not resist collecting them because of the beauty of their calligraphy. He wrote:

In what I have collected and recorded, I have never rejected anything from the Sui dynasty or earlier because such pieces usually contain something worthwhile [in their calligraphy]. The prose may be crude and shallow, and speak mostly of Buddhist doctrine, but the calligraphy, and that alone, is frequently skilful and marvellous.²⁹⁾

²⁷⁾ Ebrey (2008: 79).

²⁸⁾ Ebrey (2008: 79).

²⁹⁾ I have benefited from the English translation by Ronald Egan (2006: 32).

Despite Ouyang Xiu's admiration for the style of Buddhist and Taoist calligraphy, the nature of his collection was dominated by other standards largely defined on the basis of works engraved in stone by Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709–785) – a late Tang dynasty calligrapher and faithful governor (Fig. 5). No other works by a single artist appear in Ouyang Xiu's collection more than Yan's.³⁰ However, it was not the aesthetic values that primarily guided Ouyang Xiu's decision to choose Yan Zhenqing's calligraphy as the model for his collection; it was rather the Confucian heroism of Yan who remained loyal to the emperor during the rebellion of An Lushan and moreover was steadfast against corrupt high-ranking officials, which was to cost him his life.³¹ Therefore, to Ouyang Xiu Yan's regular script characterised by a specific strength and boldness was above all a reflection of the superior personality of his master. He wrote:

I consider my lord Yan's calligraphy to be like the loyal minister, exemplary officer, or the gentleman of morals in its uprightness, gravity, and reverence. When a person first sees it, he is in awe of it. And it follows that the longer he looks at it, the more admirable it becomes.³²

³⁰ The works of Yan Zhenqing collected by Ouyang were as follows: *Dongfang xiansheng hua zan* 東方先生畫簪 (Encomium on a Portrait of Dongfang Shuo) and *Dongfang xiansheng hua zan beiyin ji* 東方先生畫簪碑陰記 (Record on the Reverse of the Encomium on a Portrait of Dongfang Shuo) of 754 AD; *Jing ju si timing* 靖居寺題名 (Inscription at Quiet Dwelling Monastery) of 766 AD; *Fuzhou nan cheng xian ma gu shan xian tan ji* 撫州南誠縣麻姑山仙壇記 (Record of the Altar of the Immortal of Mount Magu, Nancheng District, Fuzhou) of 771 AD; *Da Tang zhongxing song* 大唐中興頌 (Paeon to the Resurgence of the Great Tang Dynasty) of 771 AD; *Gan lu zishu* 幹祿字書 (Lexicon for Gaining Employment) of 771 AD; *Ouyang Wei bei* 歐陽瑤碑 (Stele for Ouyang Wei) of 775 AD; *Duji shendaobei* 杜濟神道碑 (Spirit Way Stele for Du Ji) of 777 AD; *She tang ji* 射堂記 (Record of the Archery Hall) of 777 AD; *Zhang Jingyin bei* 張敬因碑 (Stele for Zhang Jingyin) dated by Ouyang as a work of 779 AD; *Yan Qinli shendaobei* 顏勤禮神道碑 (Spirit Way Stele for Yan Qinli) dated by Ouyang as a work of 779 AD; *Yan shijia miao bei* 顏氏家廟碑 (Yan Family Temple Stele) of 780 AD; *Yan Yunnan bei* 顏允南碑 (Stele for Yan Yunnan) of 780 AD; *Huzhou shi ji* 湖洲石記 (Huzhou Stone Record) probably written between 773 and 777 AD; *Yuan Cishan bei* 元次山碑 (Epitaph for Yuan Cishan) of 772 or 775; *Yu Cai Mingyuan* 與蔡明遠 (Letter for Cai Mingyuan) probably of 759 AD; *Hanshi tie* 寒食帖 (Cold Food Festival Letter) undated; *Xiushu tie* 修書帖 (Writing a Model Letter) undated; *Qimi tie* 乞米帖 (Request for Rice, Letter) probably of around 765 AD. See McNair (1994: 216 n. 24); McNair (1998: 122–129).

³¹ Egan 2006: 28.

³² I have benefited from the English translation by McNair (1998: 127). Compare with Egan (1989: 372); Egan (2006: 29); based on JGLBW (2001: 8.2259).

This man's loyalty and righteousness emanated from his heaven-sent nature. Thus his brush strokes are firm, strong, and individual and do not follow in earlier footsteps. Outstanding, unusual, and imposing, they resemble his personality.³³⁾

The only matter about which Ouyang Xiu was disconsolate concerned Yan Zhenqing's engagement in Buddhist and Taoist practices. Nonetheless, his impeccable reputation and writing achievements must have overcome Ouyang Xiu's doubts and convinced him to promote Yan Zhenqing as a Confucian authority in calligraphy and someone who might manifest politically different views from the imperial court.³⁴⁾ Moreover, Ouyang applied the same evaluation of calligraphic skills through the prism of personal character to other calligraphers, for example Li Jianzhong 李建中 (945–1013), about whom wrote in the following way:

Li Jianzhong was pure, scrupulous, gentle, and refined. Those who appreciate his calligraphy do so together with appreciation of his character.³⁵⁾

In fact, Ouyang Xiu's goal was to build a collection according to his own standards without particular use of the propaganda-oriented official compendia. That's why he did not share a common enthusiastic opinion about the output of Wang Xizhi and his followers explicating it in a colophon titled *Jin Wang Xianzhi Fatie* 晉王獻之法帖 (Model Calligraphy of Jin Dynasty Master Wang Xianzhi).³⁶⁾ His main objections against Wang's style seem to concern particularly a lack of homogeneity in the characters' appearance ("Graceful here and coarse there, a myriad forms were created at random", "the words lie dazzlingly before your eyes") (Fig. 6). Nonetheless, Ouyang Xiu did understand

³³⁾ I have benefited from the English translation by McNair (1998: 128). Compare with Egan (1989: 372); Egan (2006: 29); based on JGLBW (2001: 8.2261).

³⁴⁾ A specific imperial policy of sponsoring the "charmingly looking" style of Wang Xizhi's led to a situation in which any works made in a calligraphic manner different from that which promoted the court, were not included in imperial model letter compendia. This also concerned inscriptions by Yan Zhenqing, whose art remained outside the official compendium until 1185, and only at the end of the Northern Song dynasty did his 28 of his calligraphic pieces (stating that these were not ink rubbings from regular script steles but ink-written letters, poems, drafts and announcements of office) enter the palace collection for the first time. See McNair (1998: 136).

³⁵⁾ I have benefited from the English translation by Struman (1997: 26); see also Ebrey (2008: 432 n. 32).

³⁶⁾ Egan (1989: 377).

the attractiveness of this style and the reason as to why later generations cherished it so highly. It was due to its unlimited variations, which gave allowed the possibility of being original or intricate. Yet, from a Confucian standpoint, any obscure or playfulness in calligraphic expression was considered as deceitful and negative.³⁷⁾ Moreover, according to Ouyang this kind of “undisciplined” calligraphy was completely inapplicable if used in writing some official documents.

Ouyang Xiu not only expressed a different opinion concerning the court-sponsored style but neither did he enjoy the calligraphy of his contemporaries. Instead, he was enchanted by the skilfulness of the Tang masters, (whose works filled in most of his collection) and deplored the calligraphic decadence following the end of this era:

I have often discussed calligraphy with Cai Junmo (Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012–1067)), saying that as for the flourishing of calligraphy, it was never more flourishing than during the Tang, and so for the decline of calligraphy, it has never been more in decline than today.³⁸⁾

It is important, however, to explain that Ouyang Xiu did not ignore calligraphy from times before the Tang. He considered gentlemen of earlier periods to be “worthy and outstanding in their calligraphy” too. His great disappointment concerned mainly his own generation focused on “distant goals” instead of lessons from the past.³⁹⁾ Ouyang Xiu’s concept of the past was, however, quite simplified and concerned all eras before the Song dynasty.⁴⁰⁾ Stephen Owen made a comment that “Song writers were intensely aware of the differences that separated them from their Tang predecessors. (...) As collectors and scholars, they were also keenly aware of texts and artefacts lost, and the loss of past greatness was strangely linked to the physical loss of such texts and artefacts, as well as to the deterioration of what has survived, as in the following entry.”⁴¹⁾ This may serve to explain a suggestion by Ronald Egan who wrote that Ouyang must have felt as if he lived “on one side of a chasm that separates his era from

³⁷⁾ Egan (1989: 383).

³⁸⁾ I have benefited from the English translation by Ronald Egan (2006: 35); based on *Tang Angong meizheng song* 唐安公美政頌 (Encomium on Excellent Tang Public Affairs), JGLBW (2001: 6.2223).

³⁹⁾ Egan (2006: 36).

⁴⁰⁾ Egan (2006: 37).

⁴¹⁾ Owen (1996: 646).

that of pre-Song”, and he was not happy about it.⁴²⁾ Consequently, he searched for some substance which would fill this gap and satisfy his desire for complete knowledge about models of the past.

It is striking is, however, that Ouyang Xiu in his pursuit for the calligraphic models of the past also collected inscriptions commemorating people to whom the collector felt a strong moral aversion, for example an inscription entitled *Tang Liubei ting shiyan shi* 唐流杯亭侍宴詩 (Banquet Poetry of the Pavilion of Floating Cups).⁴³⁾ The rubbing was transferred from a stele made to commemorate a visit of the Empress Wu Zetian to the hot springs in Linru 臨汝 in 700 AD. The Empress had been commonly regarded as a very negative ruler, who had usurped the throne; Ouyang himself expressed a critical opinion about Wu Zetian writing that she “wreaked havoc upon the Tang dynasty” poisoning the empire.⁴⁴⁾ Nevertheless, despite this critique he decided to include in his collection this inscription commemorating an event from the Empress’s reign and, moreover, wrote a colophon on it. The main reason for such a decision, honestly confessed without inventing any additional excuse, was the “appealing” style of Yin Zhongrong’s 殷仲容 (Yan Zhenqing’s great-uncle) calligraphy, cherished by Ouyang Xiu despite his inner moral conflict, just like the Buddhist and Taoists inscriptions collected by him so passionately mainly to satisfy his own aesthetic needs.

Apart from enjoyment or the advancement of historical knowledge as well as the foundation of a new model of artistic standard and the protection of objects from destruction and oblivion, Ouyang Xiu’s collection also, if not mainly, served its owner as a personal tool for contemplation on the fleeting moments of our ephemeral life. The idea to gather inscriptions engraved in stones that had been overlooked by everyone and moreover commit himself to writing about them in a very thorough way was quite unusual against the background of other collectors’ pursuits, as there was no contemporary of Ouyang Xiu who would write so largely about the rubbings he/she had collected.⁴⁵⁾ In fact, thanks to these colophons we may observe how his author faced different philosophical, moral or perhaps just simply human problems connected with mortality. Regardless of the subject his notes often included a message about passing and

⁴²⁾ Egan (2006: 39, 42–43).

⁴³⁾ Egan (1989: 373–374); Egan (2006: 31).

⁴⁴⁾ Translation of the colophon *Tang Liubei ting shiyan shi* in Egan (2006: 31); based on JGLBW (2001: 6.2206–7).

⁴⁵⁾ Egan (2006: 10; 17).

transience, mirroring undoubtedly the ageing scholar's reflections on his own life reaching its inevitable end. One might ask, however, what was the point of collecting objects and protecting them from destruction if you realise that "all things with material form inevitably deteriorate and go to ruin"?⁴⁶⁾ Ouyang Xiu might have answered: "passion" – a compelling emotion under whose spell collectors are helpless and the only thing they can then do is to submit to this feeling and satisfy their own desires to possess. Passion, however, was for Ouyang Xiu always connected with joy and pleasure. He openly wrote about this in 1070 in his *Liuyi jushi zhuan* 六一居士傳 (Biography of the Retired Scholar of Six Ones),⁴⁷⁾ describing that there was no such power that could force him to recoil when enjoying his five possessions i.e.: "one large collection of books, one compendium of bronze and stone inscriptions dating back the ancient dynasties, one zither, one chessboard, and (...) one jug of wine". Moreover, even if one might think that these "five possessions" distracted the scholar's mind, he gave the assurance that nothing could enable himself to be "detached and freed from vexations" like they could.⁴⁸⁾

Ouyang Xiu died at the age of sixty-five. His collection of inscriptions together with colophons fell after the death into hands of his son – Fei 斐. The latter rearranged the layout of his father's compilation of colophons calling it: *Jigu lu bawei* 集古錄跋尾 (Colophons on Collected Records of the Past), giving it a chronological order and moreover adding *Lumu* 錄目 a "Catalogue" of inscriptions with brief identification of their authors and dates (if known).⁴⁹⁾ Fei's *Lumu* had already been lost during the Song dynasty, although scholars reconstructed over seven hundred titles of objects from Ouyang's collection on the basis of quotations from the Qing dynasty.⁵⁰⁾

After Ouyang, the collecting of stone and bronze inscriptions became more practiced. One of the works indicating the development of epigraphy was a book called *Xiaotang Jigu lu* 嘯堂集古錄 (Notes on collected antiquities in whistle studio, 1147) by Wang Qiu 王侁, transcribing only inscriptions of bronze objects rather than recording their forms, measurements and accounts. The author concentrated only on introducing the names of 347 objects – the

⁴⁶⁾ This is a fragment of Ouyang Xiu's colophon on a Later Han inscription about Doctor Wang Jun 王君 titled *Hou Han langzhong Wang jun bei* 後漢郎中王君碑. Quotation from Egan (2006: 44); Egan (1989: 370); based on JGLBW (2001: 3.2135).

⁴⁷⁾ Translation of the poem in: Egan (1989: 223–24).

⁴⁸⁾ Egan (1989: 224).

⁴⁹⁾ Egan (2006: 9.) JGLM (1986): 17923–18008.

⁵⁰⁾ Egan (2006: 9 n. 6).

majority of which were ritual vessels, musical instruments and seals – and their original inscriptions transferred to the standard script.⁵¹⁾ It was also not earlier than during the Xuan he 宣和 period (the Emperor Huizong time (1101–1125)), that the first collection of seal impressions, a so-called *yinpu* 印譜 was published which today, however, is lost.⁵²⁾

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⁵¹⁾ Cheng (2010: 99), based on XTJGL (1985).

⁵²⁾ Gulik (1981: 348), based on information given by the Ming poet Shen Mingchen 沈明臣 in his preface (1572) to *Gu shi jig gu yinpu* 顧氏集古印譜.

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Fig. 1. *Chun hua ge tie* 淳化閣帖, the oldest anthology of stone inscriptions published on the order of the Emperor Taizong in 992, The North Song Dynasty (960–1127), Shanghai Museum



Fig. 2. Portrait of Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修 (1007–72)



Fig. 3. The granite drum with inscriptions (770–221 BC (?))

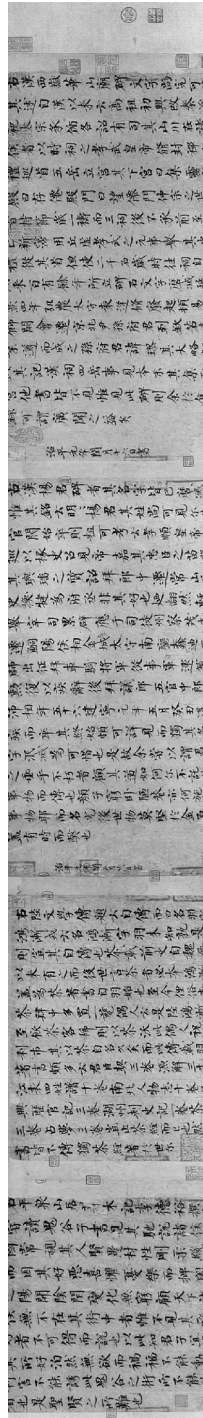


Fig. 4. A detail *Jigu lu mu xu* (Preface to Colophons on “Collected Records of the Past”), 1062, Palace Museum in Taipei

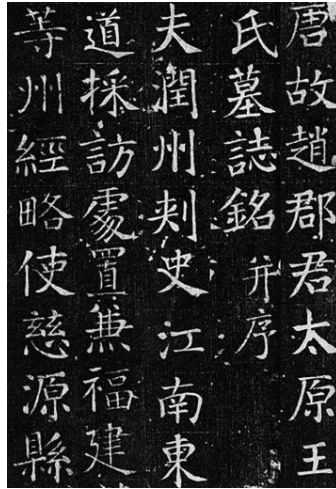


Fig. 5. Yan Chenqing 顏真卿 (709–785), details of rubbings from Yan Qinli stele, Beilin Museum, Xi'an



Fig. 6. A detail of calligraphic model 快雪時晴帖 *Kuai xue shi qing tie* (Clear Day After Sudden Snow) Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (321–379), Palace Museum in Taipei