

2 The *Lǐyē* 里耶 Manuscripts

2.1 General Background

The *Lǐyē* 里耶 corpus is named after an ancient township in present-day Lóngshān 龍山, Húnán Province, where an impressive collection of over 37,000 wooden ‘strips’ (*jiǎn* 簡) and ‘tablets’ (*dú* 牘) were excavated from wells and other sites in 2002 and 2004 (Fig. 2.1).³³ Of the 37,000 mainly wooden documents, over 18,000 are blank, while over 17,000 bear an approximate 100,000 graphs, making it by far the largest Qín manuscript corpus ever discovered.³⁴ The manuscripts include archival records linked to the Qín administration of Qiānlíng County (*Qiānlíng xiàn* 遷陵縣) in Dòngtíng Commandery (*Dòngtíng jùn* 洞庭郡), shortly before the unification of the empire in the 25th year of King Zhèng 政 of Qín (222 BC), and encompass most of the dynasty’s history, extending up until the second year of Emperor Èrshì 二世 of Qín (208 BC).³⁵

What makes the discovery of the corpus so fascinating is the relatively well-preserved physical condition of certain texts. Due to partial publication, these texts have not yet undergone philological analysis or systematic translation into modern languages. Unlike comparable Qín manuscripts – those discovered in tombs at Fàngmǎtān 放馬灘, Yúnmèng Lónggǎng 雲夢壟崗, Wángjiātái 王家臺 and Shuǐhǔdì 睡虎地, or others acquired obscurely from the Hong Kong antique market, like the Yuèlù archives, the *Lǐyē* manuscripts were excavated *in situ* and seem to have been written and stored for everyday use.³⁶ An analysis of the cache is underway to ad-

³³ Chén Wěi 2012; Gāo Yìzhì 2013: 239–244.

³⁴ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2003; *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2007; *Lǐyē gǔchéng Qín jiǎn yǔ Qín wénhuà yánjiū* 2009; Lǐ Xuéqín 2003; Mǎ Yì 2007; Shěn Sòngjīn 2003; Wáng Huànlín 2007; Yóu Yìfēi 2013. The number of documents in comparison to the *Lǐyē* archive is as follows: *Yúnmèng Lónggǎng* 雲夢壟崗, 293 Warring States bamboo strips and one wooden tablet; *Yuèlù*, 2,000 Qín bamboo strips from the state of Chǔ; *Fàngmǎtān* 放馬灘, 460 Qín bamboo strips; *Wángjiātái* 王家臺, 814 Qín bamboo strips; *Shuǐhǔdì* 睡虎地, 1,155 Qín bamboo strips.

³⁵ The first two lines of *Lǐyē* manuscript 8-757 state: “(What is known) today (as) Qiānlíng became a county in the 25th year (of King Zhèng) [222 BC] (*jīn Qiānlíng niànwǔ nián wéi xiàn* 今遷陵廿五年爲縣)”. King Zhèng 政 of Qín, who became August Emperor of Qín (Qín Shǐhuáng 秦始皇) in 221 BC, will be referred to as the First Emperor in this book. “Emperor Èrshì 二世 of Qín,” literally meaning “Second Generation Emperor of Qín,” will be referred to as the Second Emperor.

³⁶ For a summary of Qín-related epigraphic sources, see Lǐ Xuéqín 2003; Wáng Huī and Chéng Xuéhuá 1999. For a general overview of bamboo and silk manuscript discoveries in the 20th century, see Pīn Yǔqiān and Duàn Shǔ’ān 2006. The average span of document preservation for archives was roughly 13 years in the Early Hàn dynasty (Wáng Guìhǎi 1999: 227–232) and 10 years

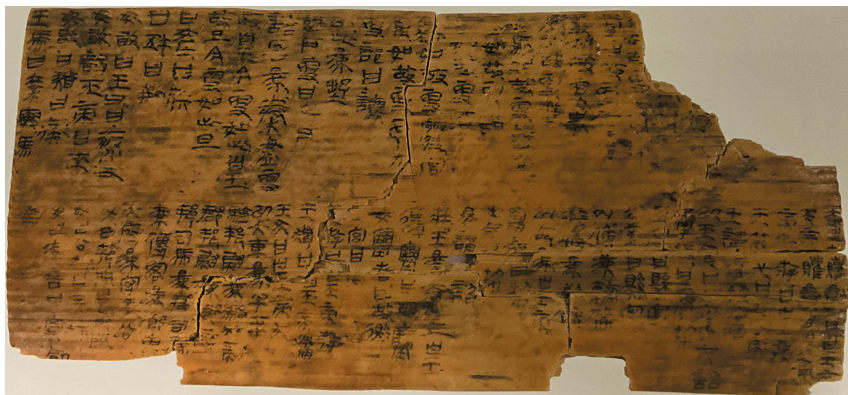


Fig. 2.1: Polychrome photograph of *Lǐyē* wooden ‘tablet’ (dú 牘) 8–461. Ink on wood. Dimensions: 12.5 x 27.4 x 0.6 cm.³⁷

dress historical gaps and inaccuracies, and provide supplementary information to researchers in addition to the very rare imperial Qín objects currently available.

Dòngtíng Commandery was situated at the periphery of the empire in the former state of Chǔ 楚. This region borders the Yí 夷 River to the north, Dòngtíng Lake (Dòngtíng hú 洞庭湖) and the Zī 資 River to the east, and encloses the region where the Yuán 沅 River originates in the west. In the south lies Tánchéng 潭成 County (Fig. 2.2).³⁸ Qiānlíng County is located in the northwestern area of Dòngtíng Commandery and is connected with other parts of the region via the Yǒu 酉, Yuán 沅 and Lǐ 澧 River valleys.

The archeological site of ancient *Lǐyē* is situated at the southernmost tip of Lóngshān County on the western side of the Yǒu 酉 River valley and covers approximately 5,500 square meters.³⁹ At an average altitude of 254.5 meters above sea level, its climate is relatively temperate, with adequate rainfall that allows for the cultivation of millet, rice and other grains. The region was logistically accessible and open to trade with other territories through overland transportation routes and waterways. The first two lines of manuscript 8-167+8-194+8-472+8-1011 state:

in the Wú Kingdom (Sòng Shǎohuá 2008: 261). A possible reason for this may have been the danger of uncontrollable fire outbreaks (Ma Tsang Wing 2020a: 545–546).

³⁷ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2012a: 14.

³⁸ Guō Tǎo 2017; Yóu Yīfēi 2015.

³⁹ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2007.

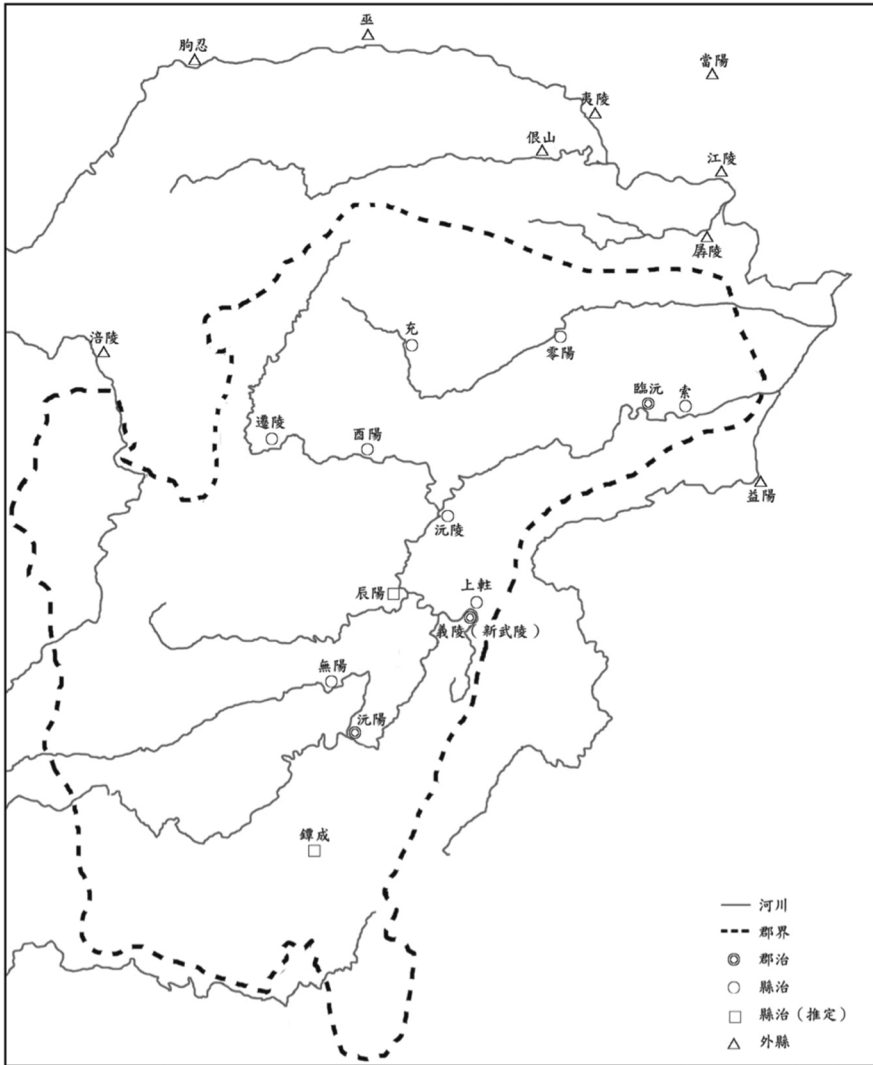


Fig. 2.2: Reconstructed map of Dōngtíng Commandery.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Tân Qíxiāng 1982 in Yóu Yīfēi 2015: 42.

8-167+8-194+8-472+8-1011 I-II: 校長寬以遷陵船徙卒史⁴¹ 【酉陽, 酉陽】□□【船】□元(沅)陵, 寬以船屬酉陽校長徐. [. . .]⁴¹

Section Commander Kuān uses the boats of Qiānlíng to move Commandery Secretaries⁴² 【to Yǒuyáng, Yǒuyáng】□□【boat】□ Yuánlíng (County). Kuān provides a boat to Xú, Section Commander of Yǒuyáng (County). [. . .]⁴²

Comments: Chén Wěi and Gāo Mǐn argue that an official with the title ‘*xiàozhǎng* 校長’ could have been in charge of a local ‘post’ (*tíng* 亭) in the Qín dynasty.⁴³ According to their view, this title should be interchangeable with ‘Commanding Official of a Post’ (*tíngzhǎng* 亭長). I do not share this opinion. The criminal cases on strips 1–2, 4, 25 and 68 of the “Wéi yù dèng zhuàng”, and strip 100 of a Hàn dynasty segment in the “Zòuyànshū” both mention ‘*xiàozhǎng* 校長’ and ‘*tíngzhǎng* 亭長’ separately.⁴⁴ Information in the *Lǐyē* corpus is scarce on this matter. There is no mentioning of the official title ‘*tíngzhǎng*’. Perhaps, manuscript 8-149+8-489 (column B, line IV) provides additional information, given that it closely aligns with the hierarchical ordering of strips 471–472 of the “Èrnián lǜlìng”. In contrast to the “Wéi yù dèng zhuàng” and “Zòuyànshū”, which both assign ‘*xiàozhǎng*’ and ‘*tíngzhǎng*’ to authorities at the local level, the “Èrnián lǜlìng” and *Lǐyē* texts associate ‘posts’ (*tíng* 亭) with ‘*xiàozhǎng*’ – officials at the county level. Yuánlíng 沅陵 and Yǒuyáng 酉陽 were counties in Dòngtíng Commandery, and Yǒuyáng was a county adjacent to Qiānlíng.⁴⁵

Paleolithic and Neolithic findings, revealing traces of prehistoric habitation in the area, were discovered by provincial excavation teams in 1996.⁴⁶ In preparation for the planned construction of a hydro electric energy plant, ongoing archaeological efforts, which began in 2002, have revealed further evidence of Shāng, Zhōu, Chǔ (of the Late Warring States), Qín and Hàn settlements.⁴⁷

Two main sites have been documented in excavation reports: the ancient township of Lǐyē, dating back to the Late Warring States in the Chǔ Commandery of Qiánzhōng 黔中, which, after the Qín annexation, was assigned to Qiānlíng County under the administrative sovereignty of Dòngtíng Commandery; and the township of Wèijiāzhài 魏家寨, founded in the Western Hàn dynasty.⁴⁸ Chǔ set-

⁴¹ Chén Wěi 2012: 101.

⁴² All translations are my own unless stated otherwise. For a guide on reading and translating early Chinese texts, see Gassmann and Behr 2005.

⁴³ Chén Wěi 2012: 90–91; Gāo Mǐn 1971.

⁴⁴ See Lau and Staack 2016: 311–312.

⁴⁵ Yóu Yīfēi 2015.

⁴⁶ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuo* 2007.

⁴⁷ Fán Guódòng 2009; *Guójiā wénwù jí* 2003: 62–69; *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuo* 2003, 2007; *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuo*, *Xiāngxī Tújiā Miáo zú zìzhìhōu wénwù chǔ* 2003; *Riya Shinkan kodokukai* 2004.

⁴⁸ Evidence that Qiānlíng was part of, or in communication with, Dòngtíng Commandery appears in 36 *Lǐyē* documents. “*Qiānlíng Dòngtíng* 遷陵洞庭”: 8-181+8-1676, 8-188, 8-189, 8-230, 8-305, 8-333, 8-372+8-1337, 8-443, 8-507, 8-513, 8-515, 8-524, 8-553, 8-556, 8-828, 8-947, 8-1116, 8-1127+8-2397,

tlers had already fortified the township of Lǐyē with a protective moat and wall (Fig. 2.3–2.5). It measured 235 meters in length along the western flank (168 meters extant) and approximately 150 meters to the north (85 meters extant) and south (97 meters extant). Its width varied between 5.4 and 11 meters, with the western partition being the widest at 7 to 11 meters. This section also features remnants of a town gate built during the Hàn dynasty. According to the excavation report, Qín wooden strips were also discovered beneath the wall structure in 2006, but they are still under preliminary investigation. A section of the eastern wall and parts of the town facing the riverbank are missing, perhaps owing to erosion caused by the Yǒu River, whose course was gradually widened in the 20th century.

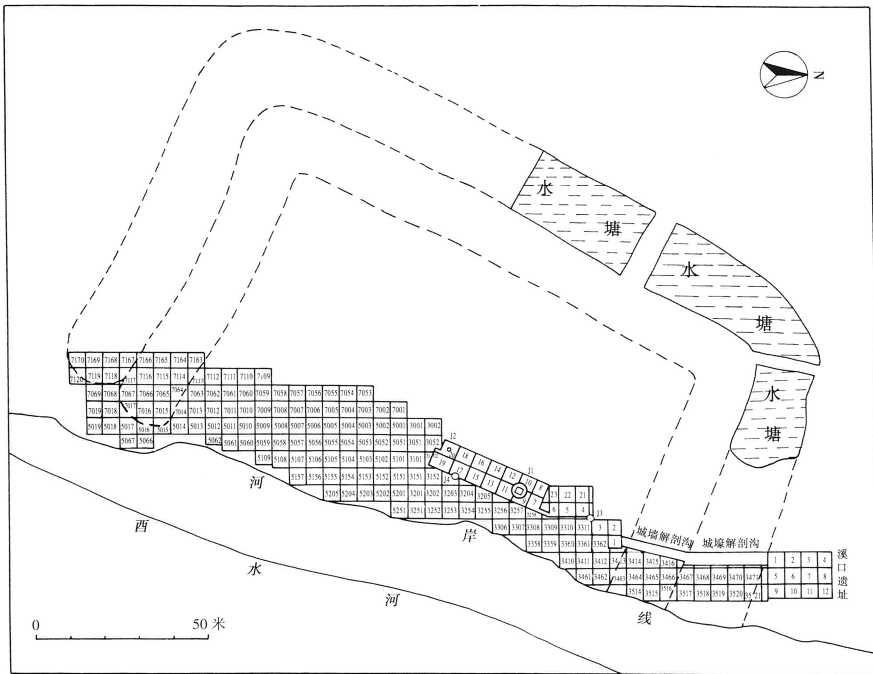


Fig. 2.3: Archeological map of the ancient township of Lǐyē, with the Yǒu 西 River in the east and the remains of the surrounding moat and township walls.⁴⁹

8-1244, 8-1253, 8-1382, 8-1497, 8-1573, 8-1594, 8-1637, 8-1653, 8-1682, 8-1684, 8-1884, 8-1935, 8-1948; “*Qiānlíng Dòngtíng yānlíng dòngtíng*”: 8-695, 8-976, 8-1826; “*Qiānlíng Dòngtíng jùn yānlíng dòngtíng jùn*”: 8-1149; “*Qiānlíng Dòngtíng jùn yānlíng dòngtíng jùn*”: 8-469.

⁴⁹ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2007: 12.



Fig. 2.4: Photograph of the archeological site of *Lǐyē*, with the reconstructed remains of the surrounding moat and township walls, as seen from the main gate in the northwest. Orientation: north.⁵⁰

In adjacent areas outside the archeological remains of the ancient *Lǐyē* township, a total of 236 Warring States tombs at *Màichá* 麥茶, 255 Western *Hàn* tombs at *Qīngshuǐpíng* 清水坪, and 70 Western and Eastern *Hàn* tombs at *Dàbǎn* 大板 were excavated. They contained an array of burial objects, including bronze, pottery vessels, *bì*-discs (*bì* 璧) as well as coins and weapons that adorned the resting place of distinguished individuals (Fig. 2.6–2.10).⁵¹ No imperial *Qín* tombs have been found to date.

Several wells were discovered by archeologists alongside the river within the township (Fig. 2.12–2.13). One of these, designated ‘J1’ and located in survey area T9, measures 3.5 to 5.5 meters in diameter and reaches a depth of 19.4 meters. Starting from layer 5, approximately 3.8 meters below the surface, 13 of the total

⁵⁰ My photograph taken on May 14, 2019 during a field trip to *Lǐyē*.

⁵¹ For more information on sumptuary laws intended to regulate social hierarchies in early funerary practices, see Brashier 2011; Gāo Chóngwén 2011; Wu Hung 2010.



Fig. 2.5: Photograph of the archeological site of Lǐyē, with the reconstructed remains of the surrounding township walls (on the right) and the modern wall (in the middle) that protects the archeological site from the Yǒu 酉 River, as seen from the main gate in the northwest. Orientation: southeast.⁵²

18 layers contained fragmentary Chǔ documents written on bamboo, as well as one document written on a rectangular wooden tablet (in layer 5), a few iron and bronze weapons (in layers 12, 13 and 17) and the entire cache of presently retrieved Qín wooden manuscripts (in layers 5 to 17).⁵³ Most Qín manuscripts were recovered from layers 6A, 6B, 8A, 9C, 10C, 12 and 15 (Fig. 2.11).

Based on current evidence, Qín officials in Dòngtíng Commandery notably seem to have preferred wood over bamboo for official writing purposes.⁵⁴ Compared to other manuscripts discovered in tombs, which are almost exclusively written on bamboo, with the exception of maps depicted on wood, the Lǐyē corpus exhibits particularities in terms of materiality, dimensions and content.⁵⁵ It does

⁵² My photograph taken on May 14, 2019 during a field trip to Lǐyē.

⁵³ Chén Wěi 2009.

⁵⁴ For a discussion on the use of bamboo and wood as writing carriers, refer to Liú Ruì 2003.

⁵⁵ See Hsu Mei-Ling 1993 concerning wooden maps found at Fàngmǎtān 放馬灘.



Fig. 2.6–2.10: Hàn dynasty objects recovered from tombs in the surrounding area of Lǐyē. From left to right: bronze *hú*-kettle (*tóng hú* 銅壺), M331:1, dimensions unknown; *bì*-discs with colored glaze (*liúli bì* 琉璃壁), M339:1, dimensions unknown; decorated bronze sword (*tóng jiàn* 銅劍), M334:1, dimensions unknown; bronze *dīng*-vessel (*tóng dīng* 銅鼎) with inscription, M84:5, dimensions unknown; iron coins (*wǔ tiě qián* 五鐵錢), M99, dimensions unknown.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2007: color print appendixes 47, 48, 57 and 65.

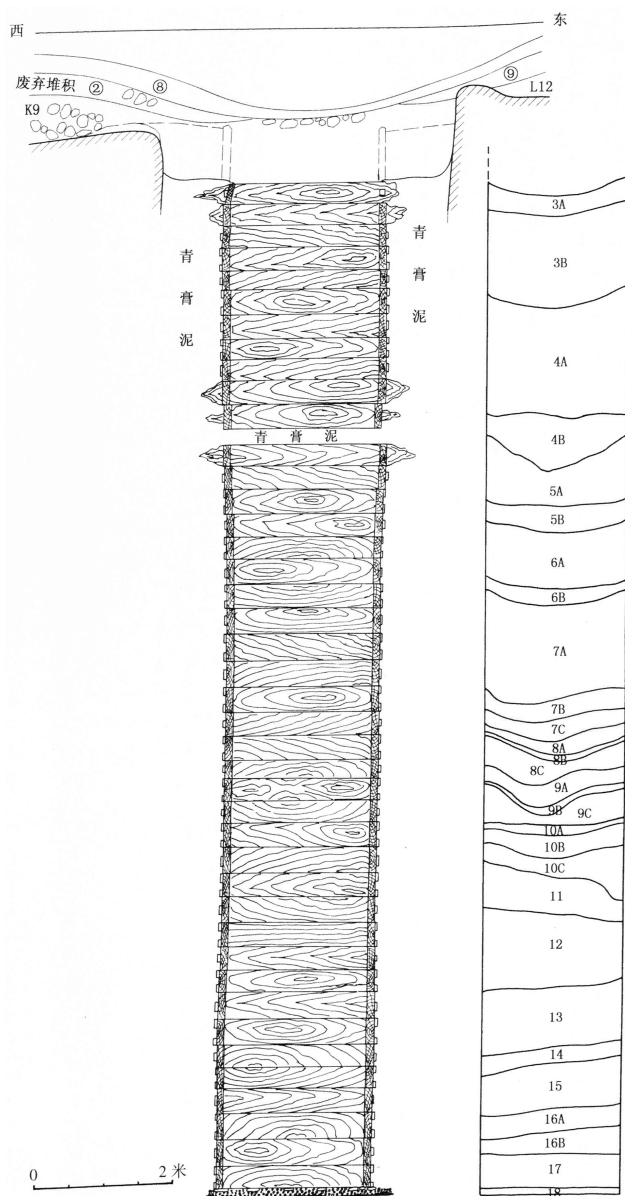


Fig. 2.11: Sketch of well J1 in survey area T9. Profile view of layers 3A–18.⁵⁷

57 Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ 2007: 43.



Fig. 2.12: Photograph of modern protective structures above wells J1 (excavated), J2 (intact) and J3 (intact) within the archeological site of *Lǐyē*, as seen from the main gate in the northwest. Orientation: east.⁵⁸

not reveal how the system *should* work but, in fact, how officials and administrative relations *did* work.⁵⁹

‘Day books’ (*rì shū* 日書), ‘prognostication texts’ (*zhān bǔ* 占卜) or narratives concerned with the afterlife and resurrection, as prominently reflected in the *Shuǐhǔdì* or *Fàngmǎtān* documents, for example, are absent in the *Lǐyē* corpus.⁶⁰ There is no sign of popular appropriation of elite beliefs by low-ranking officials or any indication that the documents were integrated into ritual practice. Beyond household registration and population records, the texts address land ownership, logistics, fiscal and legal procedures, *corvée* labor, conscription, warfare, official terminology and medical prescriptions.

⁵⁸ My photograph taken on May 14, 2019 during a field trip to *Lǐyē*.

⁵⁹ Yates 2012–2013: 299.

⁶⁰ For more information on the *Shuǐhǔdì* or *Fàngmǎtān* documents, see Lewis 2007: 236; Pines 2004: 38–39.



Fig. 2.13: Photograph of excavated well J1, with modern protective beams made of wood.⁶¹

As it appears, Qiānlíng County, particularly the township of Lǐyē, was of pronounced administrative and military importance. The Qín administration sent a wide array of people to the region, including soldiers, state officials, workers and others.⁶² It may come as unexpected that such weight was given to Qiānlíng, yet one should not underestimate the significance of remote areas in the creation of an imperial identity and the legitimization of the dynasty's rule over vast lands and peoples.⁶³ Qiānlíng County is not mentioned as an administrative unit under the Qín dynasty in

⁶¹ My photograph taken on May 14, 2019 during a field trip to Lǐyē.

⁶² On forced migration and resettlement in the Qín dynasty, see Barbieri-Low 2019. On the role and practice of local officials in the Late Warring States and early imperial governments, see Sou 2013.

⁶³ Dōngtíng Commandery was much larger and better connected than previously assumed by Charles Sanft and others (*Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2007: 235; Sanft 2014a: 92–93). Even border regions and settlements in the very south of the Qín and Hàn territories, such as Lǐngnán 嶺南, were probably not “loosely connected to the imperial structure” or “sparse to nonexistent,” as described by Mark E. Lewis (Lewis 2007: 11, 151). Rather, they seem to have been characterized by dynamic transportation networks and policies, combining both local and imperial influences (Brindley 2015; Demandt 2020; Yao 2016). Comprehensive studies on interaction, exchange and migration processes along the Eurasian trade routes further reveal the very complex political, geo-

transmitted or excavated historiography and appears for the first time in a *Lǐyē* entry that was recorded one year before the proclamation of the empire.⁶⁴

8-757 I-II: [. . .] 今遷陵 𠂔 廿五年爲縣 [. . .]⁶⁵

[. . .] (What is known) today (as) Qiānlíng 𠂔 became a county in the 25th year (of King Zhèng) [. . .]

Comment: The 25th year of King Zhèng converts to 222 BC.⁶⁶

After the military conquest of the state of Chǔ by the Qín in 223 BC, Qiānlíng County did not become an isolated part of the empire but was instead actively integrated through frequent communication, economic exchange and shared access to resources. Manuscript 52 from layer 16 is a meticulous record of the distances between Qiānlíng and other administrative units:

16-52 I-VII: 鄢到銷百八十四里 𠂔 銷到江陵二百卅里 𠂔 江陵到孱陵百一十里 𠂔 孱陵到索二百九十五里 𠂔 索到臨沅六十里 𠂔 臨沅到遷陵九百一十里 𠂔 千四百卅里.⁶⁷

(From) Yān to Xiāo (is) 184 miles 𠂔 (From) Xiāo to Jiānglíng (is) 240 miles 𠂔 (From) Jiānglíng to Chánlíng (is) 110 miles 𠂔 (From) Chánlíng to Suō (is) 295 miles 𠂔 (From) Suō to Línyuán (is) 60 miles 𠂔 (From) Línyuán to Qiānlíng (is) 910 miles 𠂔 1,440 miles.

Comments: One ‘mile’ (*lǐ* 里) was a measure of distance in the Qín and Hàn dynasties equivalent to approximately 415.80 meters.⁶⁸ As stated by Mǎ Yì, Yóu Yīfēi and Xiè Kūn, Yān, Chánlíng and Suō were counties in the Qín empire, while Xiāo and Jiānglíng were place names.⁶⁹ Yàn Chāngguì discusses imperial Qín communication routes not in terms of the hierarchical position of administrative units but by considering topographical features and the course of rivers.⁷⁰ When a document had to be transported by boat either downstream or upstream, Yàn Chāngguì advocates the view that this was referred to as ‘xià 下’ or ‘shàng 上’, respectively. He reaches the same conclusion as Mǎ Yì but adds that Suō was an important strategic hub situated in the north of Lǐyē, where the main ‘communication pathways’ (called

graphical and social flow of goods, information and people at the fringes of the empire and beyond in Early China (i.e. Brosseder 2015; Christian 2000; Di Cosmo 2015).

⁶⁴ Chén Wěi 2011a, 2011b; Yóu Yīfēi 2015.

⁶⁵ Chén Wěi 2012: 217.

⁶⁶ Chén Wěi 2012: 217.

⁶⁷ Transcription taken from Mǎ Yì 2005.

⁶⁸ Hulsewé 1961: 206–207.

⁶⁹ Mǎ Yì 2005; Yóu Yīfēi 2015; Xiè Kūn 2015.

⁷⁰ Yàn Chāngguì 2013.

‘*dào* 道’) of Dòngtíng Commandery converged, making it a crucial intersection for the transportation of documents. Suǒ County (Suǒ xiàn 索縣) also appears in the “Èrnián lǜlìng”.⁷¹

In order to incorporate newly conquered territories, the Qín sought to replace the decentralized system of government (*fēnfēng zhì* 分封制) with a system based on the parceling of land into ‘commanderies’ (*jùn* 郡), ‘counties’ (*xiàn* 縣), ‘marches’ (*dào* 道) and ‘districts’ (*xiāng* 鄉), which were further subdivided into ‘settlements’ (*yì* 邑), ‘townships’ (*lǐ* 里), ‘sections’ (*xiào* 校), ‘subsections’ (*máo* 鬣), ‘posts’ (*tíng* 亭) and ‘postal units’ (*yóu* 郵).⁷²

Officials at Qiānlíng County level supervised at least three ‘districts’ (*xiāng* 鄉): Èrchūn 貳春, Qǐlíng 啓陵 and Dū 都. Whenever individuals or ‘households’ (*hù* 戶) migrated from one district to another, it was the responsibility of the ‘District Incumbent’ (*xiāngshǒu* 鄉守) to register and forward the matter to the Qiānlíng County authorities “in accordance with the statutes and ordinances” (*rú lǜlìng* 如律令).⁷³ *Lǚyě* manuscript 8-142, although heavily damaged, contains records of the counting and reallocation of people from one administrative unit to another:

8-142 I–III, rI: 二月辛未[8], 都鄉守舍徒薄(簿)𠄎受倉隸妾三人, 司空城𠄎凡六人. 捕羽, 宜、委、𠄎𠄎 𠄎二月辛未[8]旦, 佐初𠄎⁷⁴

In month 2 on a *xīnwèi*, Shè, Incumbent of Dū District, (compiles) the register of convicts 𠄎 receive three (female) Bondservants from the Granary, (from) the Commissioner of Public Works. Wall 𠄎 In total, there are six people. Catch bird feathers, Yí, Wěi, 𠄎 𠄎 Month 2 in the morning of a *xīnwèi*, Assistant Chū 𠄎

Comments: The number in the brackets denotes the position of the day in the ‘sexagenary cycle’ (*gānzhī* 干支). ‘*Xīnwèi* 辛未’ is in position 8 of the 60-day cycle. For a discussion of calendar and timekeeping systems, see chapter three.

71 Yàn Chāngguì 2006.

72 For a discussion of ‘townships’ (*lǐ* 里) and ‘posts’ (*tíng* 亭) in the Qín dynasty, see Lau and Staack 2016; Zhāng Jīnguāng 2004: 587–602. ‘Marches’ (*dào* 道) were regions similar to counties in size, but inhabited by native tribes (Yates 2012–2013: 306). The term ‘settlement’ (*yì* 邑) appears on manuscript 8-1236+8-1791, the term ‘subsection’ (*máo* 鬣) on manuscript 8-149+8-489, and the term ‘postal unit’ (*yóu* 郵) on manuscript 8-1432. For an overview of the construction of territories in the Qín empire, see Tong 2021.

73 One way to interpret ‘statutes and ordinances’ (*lǜlìng* 律令) is as components of a legal system consisting of ‘penal codes’ (*lǜ* 律) for the punishment of criminals (and potentially civil codes for non-criminals), and ‘administrative codes’ (*lìng* 令) for the functioning of administration (Zhāng Zhāoyáng 2008).

74 Chén Wěi 2012: 82.

The term ‘*shǒu* 守’ generally stood for anyone holding office in the *Lǐyē* texts, hence the official title ‘Incumbent’ is a fitting translation, as suggested by Lau and Staack.⁷⁵

The phrase ‘register of convicts’ (*tú báo (bù)* 徒簿(簿)) is often preceded by the verb ‘to make’ or ‘to compile’ (*zuò* 作).⁷⁶ In the *Lǐyē* documents, ‘*tú(lì)* 徒(隸)’ refers to individuals with a criminal record or ‘convicts’ who were compensated with basic necessities and a fixed state income to repay fines, redemption fees or debts.⁷⁷ For more information on *cor-vée* labor, see chapter five.

Bird feathers were used for a multitude of purposes, including weaponry (e.g. arrows), currency, writing utensils, fans, dance performances, clothing decoration, hangings, jewelry, boxes, hats, carriages, architecture, etc. and were therefore required in large quantities.⁷⁸

A disregard for the rules or failure to uphold deadlines typically resulted in fines or punishment. Strip 184 from the “Statutes Concerning the Delivery of Documents” (*Xíng shū lǜ* 行書律) in the *Shuihǔdì* explicitly states:

Shuihǔdì, “Statutes Concerning the Delivery of Documents” (*Xíng shū lǜ* 行書律), strip 184: 行命書及書署急者，輒行之；不急者，日瘳(畢)，勿敢留。留者以律論之。⁷⁹

When forwarding (royal) commands as well as documents marked “urgent”, these are to be forwarded immediately. Those that are not urgent are to be fully dealt within a day; one must not venture to withhold them. Cases of withholding are to be condemned according to the statutes.⁸⁰

Lǐyē manuscript 8-137 recounts the failure of a ‘servant’ (*pú* 僕) to forward reports on domestic animals to higher authorities, which ultimately exposed the wrongdoings of his superior and resulted in the punishment of the Official in Charge of the Documents:

8-137 I-III, rI-II: 𠄎朔戊午[55]，遷陵丞遷告畜官僕足，令𠄎𠄎毋書史，畜官課有未上，書到亟日𠄎𠄎守府事已，復視官事如故，而子弗𠄎𠄎事，以其故不上，且致劾論子，它承𠄎𠄎就手。⁸¹

𠄎𠄎 new moon on a *wùwǔ*, Prefect Qiān of Qiānlíng reports to Servant Zú from the Office of Domestic Animals, orders𠄎𠄎 not the Official in Charge of the Documents, the evaluations

⁷⁵ See, Lau and Staack 2016: 86, footnote 486.

⁷⁶ Examples can be found on manuscripts 8-199+8-688, 8-285, 8-681, 8-686+8-973, 8-787, 8-815, 8-1069+8-1434+8-1520, 8-1143+8-1631, 8-1207+8-1255+8-1323, 8-1278+8-1757, 8-1340, 8-1425, 8-1559 and 8-1742+8-1956.

⁷⁷ See Cáo Lǚnǐng 2015; Gāo Héng 1983; Lǐ Lì 2009.

⁷⁸ For a study on the documented history of featherwork in Early and Medieval China, see Milburn 2020. For an overview of the trade, taxation and use of feathers during the Qín dynasty, based mainly on readings of the *Lǐyē* manuscripts, see Wáng Zījīn 2016.

⁷⁹ Chén Zhìguó 2008.

⁸⁰ Translation is taken from Hulsewé 1985: 85, with minor modifications.

⁸¹ Chén Wěi 2012: 77.

of the Office of Domestic Animals exist (but have) not yet been sent to the higher authorities. The documents are urgently due— 𠄎𠄎 The matters of the Governor have ended. (He) repeatedly inspected the matters of the office as he did in the past, but he did not 𠄎𠄎 matters, for this reason did not declare to the higher authorities, and moreover exposed the crimes of his master and brought about his judgment, it received— 𠄎𠄎 By the hand of Jiù.

The bureaucratic institutions of the imperial administration aimed to “panoptimize” the fundamental elements of human life across different levels of government. To gain an overview of disposable assets, the provincial, prefectural and local administrations needed to collect extensive personal and institutional data, which was then shared among authorities to facilitate a rapid and accurate flow of information. Literate individuals, both before and during the imperial period, generated enormous amounts of written records in labor-intensive scripts. What set the Qín dynasty apart from its predecessors was not merely the creation of administrative records, but its mastery of document archiving and exchange.⁸² All relevant information had to be promptly catalogued, accessed and processed at the appropriate time and place, a task as challenging for imperial officials as procuring writing materials and maintaining meticulous records.⁸³

2.2 Physical Properties of the Manuscripts

Layer 5 of well J1 revealed several heavily damaged Chǔ characters on bamboo fragments.⁸⁴ Judging from the photographs printed in *Lǐyē Qín jiǎn* (yī) and the 2012 transcriptions provided by Chén Wěi, a large percentage of the wooden Qín texts from layers 5 to 17 were either lost or have suffered irreparable damage due to physical exposure, natural decomposition or fire.⁸⁵ The majority of strips and

⁸² On the strategic military importance of document storage and archiving in early imperial times, see Péng Hào, Chén Wěi and Kudô Motoo 2007.

⁸³ Assuming it took a skilled craftsman five minutes to carve and polish each wooden document. For the estimated 100,000 document fragments in the *Lǐyē* corpus, the manufacturing process would have required 500,000 minutes, equaling 694.4 days (500,000 minutes / 720 minutes) or almost two years of continuous work. This is assuming 12-hour workdays without breaks or days off, and includes the time needed to fell and transport the necessary trees to the workshop. Around four to five years might be a more realistic estimate. However, considering that some documents consist of multiple fragments, a total production time of around three years seems plausible.

⁸⁴ Yates 2012–2013: 292.

⁸⁵ The first volume of *Lǐyē Qín jiǎn* published by the Cultural Relics Publishing House (*Wénwù chūbǎnshè* 文物出版社) in January 2012 contains high-resolution, polychrome photographs with

tablets are made of ‘fir wood’ (*shānmù* 杉木), while others are made of either ‘pine wood’ (*sōngmù* 松木) or tree species of unknown origin.⁸⁶ Since radiocarbon or mass-spectrometry dating have yet to be applied to the wood or ink, the age and physical authenticity of the documents remain unverified.

In terms of dimensions, the documents average 23 centimetres in length, equivalent to one Qín ‘foot’ (*chǐ* 尺), with widths varying from 1.4 to 5 centimeters. Narrow ‘strips’ (*jiǎn* 簡) usually contain one or two lines, whereas ‘tablets’ (*dú* 牘) are wider and, depending on the content, feature columns consisting of 2 to 12 lines, with up to 32 graphs per line or a maximum of approximately 370 graphs per side (Fig. 2.14). Given that the texts often continue on the *verso*, or sides of certain multi-angled documents, one strip or tablet often forms a self-contained unit. No overwritten graphs seem to exist. Whenever a mistake needed correction, the part of the document containing the error was cut off with a so-called ‘scratch knife’ (*xuē* 削) or ‘document knife’ (*shū dāo* 書刀) and stored separately (Fig. 2.15).⁸⁷ Some wooden documents were bound with twine (now decayed) and likely stored in labeled boxes, none of which have survived in *Lǐyē*.⁸⁸

Robin Yates speculates on the basis of Early Hàn statutes found at Zhāngjiāshān 張家山 that the nondisclosure of information was ensured through the careful storage of documents in labeled and sealed boxes.⁸⁹

Zhāngjiāshān, “Statutes on Households” (*Hù lǜ* 戶律), strips 331–333: 民宅園戶籍、年細籍、田比地籍、田合籍、田租籍，謹副上縣廷，皆以篋若匣匱盛，緘閉，以令若丞、[⊥]官嗇夫印封。獨別為府，封府戶。節(即)有當治為者，令史、吏主者完封奏(湊)令若丞印。嗇夫發，即褫治為。[⊥]其【事】已，輒復緘閉封緘(藏)。不從律者：罰金各四兩。其或為誰(詐)偽，有增減也，而弗能得：贖耐。⁹⁰

As for the registers of the people’s houses, gardens and households, the detailed registers of ages, the land registers with the neighboring fields, the registers of the names of the fields, and the registers of the field taxes, copies are to be conscientiously forwarded up to the

transcriptions of the 2,627 bamboo and wooden strips and tablets excavated from layers 5, 6 and 8 of well J1.

⁸⁶ This and the following information is taken from *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2007: 179–180.

⁸⁷ For a drawing of a ‘scratch knife’ (*xuē* 削) and other writing utensils, such as a bamboo writing brush, or an ink stone and rub stone found at Fèngguāngshān 鳳凰山, tomb M168 (dated 167 BC), see Selbitschka 2018: 454, 456.

⁸⁸ Labeled boxes made of thread and bamboo, containing written documents, were excavated from tomb M1 at Mǎwángduī 馬王堆 (Zhāng Jīn 2016).

⁸⁹ For a discussion of sealing procedures, see Chén Zhìguó 2008.

⁹⁰ Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015: 798.



Fig. 2.14: Photograph of an original *Lǐyē* tablet consisting of three different fragments enclosed in a customized protective casing, with a corresponding transcription in modern Chinese characters. On display at the *Lǐyē* Museum of Qín Slips.⁹¹

County Court, and in every case are to be held in a trunk or a coffer or an armoire and closed and sealed, using the seal of the Magistrate, or the Assistant, or the Bailiff of the (relevant) office. They are to be placed by themselves in a document repository and the door of the repository is to be sealed. When it is necessary to put some of them in order or create (new ones), the Magistrate's scribe and the official in charge are to check to see if the seals are whole and to match (the impressions) with the seals of the Magistrate or the Assistant, and the Bailiff is to open (them). Then they are to put them in order or create (new ones)

⁹¹ My photograph, taken at the *Lǐyē* Museum of Qín Slips (*Lǐyē Qín jiǎn bówùguǎn* 里耶秦簡博物館) on May 14, 2019.



Fig. 2.15: Detail of a kneeling scribe carrying a ‘scratch knife’ (*xuē* 削) or ‘document knife’ (*shū dāo* 書刀) at his waist, with a writing utensil tucked behind his right ear. Stone carving dating back to the late Eastern Hàn dynasty. Rubbing on paper. Dimensions unknown.⁹²

together. When they have completed 【the matter】 , they are to store and immediately close and seal (the container) once more, and the storehouse is to be sealed. Those who do not obey the statutes are to be fined four ounces of gold each. Should anyone make false and fraudulent (entries), either increasing or diminishing them and (the officials) are not able to catch them, (punish them with) redeemable shaving.⁹³

Comments: In the *Yuèlù* bamboo archives, one ‘ounce’ (*liǎng* 兩) of gold was equivalent to 1/16 of a ‘catty’ (*jīn* 斤), three ‘maces’ (*chuí* 錘), 24 ‘*zhū* 銖’ or 576 coins, which was an estimated three-month salary for an average official.⁹⁴ The market value of gold set the value of other tradable goods but was prone to large fluctuations depending on the time and location of exchange. We learn from strips 46, 55–56 and 119, found in tomb 247 at Zhāngjiāshān, that one ounce of gold was worth 315 coins at the time and place specified in the texts.⁹⁵

Twenty-two so-called ‘labels’ (*sì pái* 筭牌) were also retrieved from layer 8 by the team of archeologists.⁹⁶ On average, the labels are 10 to 13 centimeters long and

⁹² Zēng Zhāoyù, Jiǎng Bǎogēng and Lí Zhōngyì 1956: Plate 28, number 6.

⁹³ Translation is taken from Yates 2012–2013: 327–328, with minor modifications. My *pīnyīn* transcriptions.

⁹⁴ My estimation is based on the calculation in Yú Zhènbō 2013 that evaluates the value of gold on the basis of recovered *Yuèlù* documents. For a discussion of coins in Early China, see Thierry 2017.

⁹⁵ Péng Hào 2001.

⁹⁶ This corresponds to a negligible fraction (approx. 0.01329%) of all *Lǐyē* strips and tablets containing text. For a study on *Lǐyē* labels, see Zhāng Jīn 2016. For a study on bamboo boxes as a document storage, see Zhōu Bèi and Gěng Xiāngxīn 2011: 61–64, 72.

5 to 7 centimeters wide.⁹⁷ All labels share the following characteristics: 1) they are rectangular in shape with two rounded corners at the top, 2) the top section is stained with a line of black ink (ca. 1–3 centimeters in width), 3) except for one label, they contain two or four punctures in, or just below, the black line, possibly serving as fixing devices for twine, and 4) the exact date is recorded in the first line on the right half of the label (Fig. 2.16, 2.17). In addition, certain labels mention the official responsible for the box and/or its contents. A contents list and the destination to which the documents were to be sent are also provided. Scholars speculate that these labels were produced not only for archiving purposes but also for transportation.



Fig. 2.16, 2.17: Polychrome photographs of Lǐyē 'labels' (sì pái 笥牌) 8-776 (l) and 8-777 (r). Ink on wood.⁹⁸ Dimensions of label 8-776: 14.7 x 11.2 cm.⁹⁹ The black mark at the top is 2.8 cm wide and the horizontal distance between the two punctures is 3.7 cm. Dimensions of label 8-777: 12.2 x 10.2 cm. The black mark at the top is 2.4 cm wide. The horizontal distance between the upper two and lower two punctures is 2 cm. The label contains a zoomorphic symbol of a bird in the lower left corner.

The calligraphic and structural characteristics of each label vary substantially. Despite many labels being manufactured after the implementation of the Qín

⁹⁷ The longest label is 8-1536, with a length of 16.7 cm. The shortest label is 8-285, with a length of 7.5 cm (Zhāng Jīn 2016).

⁹⁸ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2012a: 13.

⁹⁹ These and following dimensions are taken from Zhāng Jīn 2016.

writing reform, ‘seal script’ (*zhuàn shū* 篆書) remained in common use.¹⁰⁰ Only six labels, or 27.3 percent of the total, make use of the typical ‘small seal script’ (*xiǎo zhuàn* 小篆), which is rare for Qín manuscripts unearthed in other areas.¹⁰¹ Each label was written by a different individual. Label 8-1201 even resembles the embellished ‘large seal script’ (*dà zhuàn* 大篆), as seen in Late Zhōu dynasty inscriptions found on jade, clay, stone and bronze (Fig. 2.19, 2.20–2.22).¹⁰² Interestingly, label 9-2309 seems to depict a bronze bell in the upper left corner (Fig. 2.18). Whether this



Fig. 2.18, 2.19: Photographs of *Lǐyē* ‘labels’ (*sì pái* 筭牌) 9-2309 (l) and 8-1201 (r). Ink on wood.¹⁰³ Dimensions of label 8-1201: 10.5 x 12.3 cm.¹⁰⁴ The black mark at the top is 2.5 cm wide. The horizontal distance between the upper two punctures is 5.8 cm, and between the lower two, 5.9 cm. The space between the upper left and lower left puncture is 1.7 cm, and between the upper right and lower right, 2 cm.

¹⁰⁰ Wáng Huànlín 2016. For an in-depth analysis of the orthography and the lengthy process of script unification in early Chinese writing, see Galambos 2004, 2006.

¹⁰¹ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2007. The six labels are: 8-94, 8-214, 8-419+8-612, 8-1201, 8-1536 and 8-1776.

¹⁰² *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2017: 248.

¹⁰³ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2012a: 153; *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2017: 248.

¹⁰⁴ These and the following dimensions are taken from Zhāng Jīn 2016.

symbol and the depiction of the bird or ‘hook’ (*gōu* 鉤) on labels 8-777 and 8-1201 served as embellishments or conveyed important information remains open to debate until more evidence comes to light.



Fig. 2.20–2.22: Examples of the character ‘*dāng* 當’ in inscriptions on bronze and clay from the Warring States period. Detail of a bronze spearhead found at Wūdāng 武當 (*Wūdāng máo* 武當矛) (l); detail of a clay stamp seal collection found at Shízhōng 十鍾 (m) (*Shízhōng yìn jǔ* 十鍾印舉); and, for comparative purposes, detail of *Lǐyě* label 8-1201 (r).¹⁰⁵

Both the spacing and linear arrangement of the characters on the labels are generously laid out and show a relatively high degree of consistency, which may be attributed to their peculiar form. Labels written in archaic or Chǔ script might have facilitated the transportation of documents to regions where the Qín writing reform had not yet been introduced, and a mutually comprehensible set of characters was still required for communication. Messengers traveling hundreds of kilometres through vast, often contested territories, such as those belonging to the former Chǔ and other states, faced constant threats of attack by insurgent groups. Although highly speculative, it cannot be ruled out that these labels were purposefully designed to disguise the content stored in the boxes.

Documents designated by the research teams as ‘postal document strips’ (*yóu shū jiǎn* 郵書簡) stand out due to their irregular shape. Unlike the labels, these strips seem to have been incorporated into one text or bundle of texts, possibly serving as ‘cover pages’ (*jiǎn* 檢) or subsections of documents meant for dispatch to different regions. Based on his readings of these sources and related material, Yóu Yīfēi concludes that Dòngtíng Commandery comprised at least 14 counties.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, the physical characteristics of these strips have not been systematically documented or referenced in transcriptions and, as a result, have yet to receive proper scholarly attention. Classification is further impeded by the dissimilar for-

¹⁰⁵ Gāo Míng 1983: 843.

¹⁰⁶ Yóu Yīfēi 2015.

mats of archaeological document numbers used by Chén Wěi and the editors of *Lǐyē Qín jiǎn* (yī).

As the name suggests, postal document strips – recognizable by the pointed tip at the bottom – may represent the early development of an empire-wide postal or courier system.¹⁰⁷ Whereas some strips have their upper section stained with blank ink, others seem to have been intentionally left blank. The vertical-linear arrangement of characters is consistent, and the spacing is generous throughout the collection. A systematic study of these strips could reveal how they were categorized, archived and read, potentially offering insights into the various stages of their production, the status of one or more documents within the corpus, and whether correlations exist between the length, content or linguistic features of strips belonging to the same text (Fig. 2.23, 2.24).



Fig. 2.23, 2.24: Polychrome photographs of *Lǐyē* ‘postal document strips’ (*yóu shū jiǎn* 郵書簡) 9-46 (l) and 9-24 (r). Ink on wood. Dimensions unknown.¹⁰⁸ The top section of strip 9-46 is not stained with black ink and reads: “Sent by the Prefect of Qiānlíng himself. Use the imperial postal system to deliver to Dòngtíng” (*Qiānlíng chéng zì fā yǐ yóu xíng Dòngtíng* 遷陵丞自發以郵行洞庭). The top section of the strip on the right is stained with blank ink and reads: “(From) Qiānlíng. Use the postal system to deliver to Dòngtíng” (*Qiānlíng yǐ yóu xíng Dòngtíng* 遷陵以郵行洞庭).

¹⁰⁷ For a comparative study on the shape of various *Lǐyē* manuscripts, see Yáo Lěi 2015. For a study on postal transportation in the later imperial postal system(s), see Giele 2015.

¹⁰⁸ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2017: 16, 21.

A thorough analysis of the large cache of completely blank strips and tablets has yet to be conducted by the archeological team. Although these writing carriers lack textual content, their material characteristics should not be overlooked, as they could offer valuable information through radiocarbon testing, mass spectrometry and other methods. Unfortunately, the exact original positions of each document fragment or cluster within the layers of well J1 are unknown. This renders the reliable reconstruction and sequencing of these materials in specific cases extremely difficult, if not impossible.¹⁰⁹

2.3 Handling of Documents

Invaluable to the reconstruction efforts is the abundance of documents containing the exact date, rank and names of individuals involved in the administrative process. At the end of certain entries, the signatory clause ‘*shǒu* 手’, preceded by a slash, introduces the signature of the individual in charge of handling or writing the document (or parts of it). The person assigned the task of ‘*shǒu* 手’ may have been responsible for composing or copying a text, or transcribing a speech act. Alternatively, or additionally, they may have been involved in organizing, binding, carving and archiving the documents.¹¹⁰

Intellectual scepticism dominates debates about the meaning of ‘*shǒu* 手’, especially since the discovery of Hàn dynasty manuscripts at Jūyán 居延 and Zǒumǎlóu 走馬樓 dating back to the Wú dynasty. The signatures in these manuscripts suggest that administrative officials were most likely responsible for the textual content rather than the physical production of the texts.¹¹¹ Yet, the use of ‘*shǒu* 手’ as a scribal signature by clerical personnel appears to have been a distinctive feature of Qín bureaucracy in particular regions of the empire, a practice that was discontinued in later dynasties.¹¹² Tab. 2.1 provides a comprehensive list of officials entrusted with this responsibility in the *Lǐyě* texts recovered from layers 5, 6 and 8 of well J1.

¹⁰⁹ For a list of fragments that seem to match one another, see the appendix in Chén Wěi 2012: 480–486.

¹¹⁰ Lewis 1999; It is difficult to define the exact rate of literacy in early imperial dynasties, as it heavily depends on context (Giele 2009: 138).

¹¹¹ See Giele 2005; Hú Píngshēng 2004; Xíng Yitián 2012b; Zhāng Chūnlóng and Lóng Jīngshā 2003.

¹¹² For a discussion of the signatory clause ‘by the hand of’ (*shǒu* 手) in the “Qín clay documents” (*Qín wǎshū* 秦瓦書), refer to Guō Zizhí 1986. For an analysis of ‘*shū* 書’, ‘*xiě* 寫’ and ‘*shǔ* 署’, three terms used in early imperial administrative and legal texts to refer to acts of writing, see Staack 2019.

Tab. 2.1: List of officials in *Lǐyē* texts from layers 5, 6 and 8 assigned the task of ‘*shǒu* 手’ (literally, ‘by the hand of’).¹¹³

No.	Personal Name	Year(s) of entry	Occurrence: Manuscript number(s) ¹¹⁴
1	Bān 般	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	6: 8-827, 8-1002+8-1091, 8-1055+8-1579, 8-1211, 8-1706, 8-2053
2	Bǎo 葆	–	1: 8-657r
3	Bèi 貝	28th year of King Zhèng [219 BC]	2: 8-767r, 8-1562r
4	Bīng 兵	27th year of King Zhèng [220 BC]	1: 8-63r
5	Bīng 冰	–	1: 8-60r+8-656r+8-665r+8-748r
6	Bísǐ 彼死	–	1: 8-647r
7	Cāo 操	26th year of King Zhèng [221 BC]	1: 8-1452r
8	Chǎn 產	–	1: 8-1020
9	Cháo 朝	28th year of King Zhèng [219 BC]	1: 8-1463r
10	Chōu 繆	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	11: 8-783, 8-785, 8-790, 8-811+8-1572, 8-888+8-936+8-2202, 8-984, 8-1361, 8-1678, 8-1933, 8-2186, 8-2200
11	Chū 初	32nd year of King Zhèng [215 BC]	1: 8-1443r
12	Chǔ 處	31st–32nd year of King Zhèng [216–215 BC]	2: 8-152r, 8-173r
13	Chuò 綽	–	1: 8-740r
14	Cuì 萃	30th year of King Zhèng [217 BC]	1: 8-141r+8-668r
15	Cuó 瘞	32nd year of King Zhèng [215 BC]	2: 8-145r, 8-478
16	Dài 帶	–	2: 8-1259r, 8-1281
17	Dé 得	31st year of King Zhèng [216 BC]	4: 8-125, 8-212+8-426+8-1632, 8-216+8-351, 8-1894
18	Dìng 定	–	1: 8-66+8-208

¹¹³ Tab. 2.1 is based on the texts transcribed and revised in Chén Wěi 2012. To avoid inaccuracies, instances where ‘by the hand of’ (*shǒu* 手) is directly preceded by a missing text fragment have not been taken into account.

¹¹⁴ ‘R’ stands for the ‘*recto*’ of the manuscript.

Tab. 2.1 (continued)

No.	Personal Name	Year(s) of entry	Occurrence: Manuscript number(s)
19	Èr 貳	26th year of King Zhèng [221 BC]	1: 8-163r
20	Fù 富	31st year of King Zhèng [216 BC]	5: 8-262, 8-1266, 8-1300, 8-1545, 8-1621
21	Gǎn 感	29th, 31st year of King Zhèng [218 BC, 216 BC]	29: 8-4, 8-48, 8-184, 8-217, 8-261, 8-270, 8-326, 8-521, 8-763, 8-766, 8-1066, 8-1084, 8-1128, 8-1153+8-1342, 8-1177, 8-1192, 8-1239+8-1334, 8-1247, 8-1286, 8-1375, 8-1511r, 8-1540, 8-1580, 8-1584, 8-1642, 8-1652, 8-1938, 8-2245, 8-2249
22	Gǎn 敢	32nd year of King Zhèng [215 BC]	1: 8-2247
23	Gàn 贛	1st year of Second Emperor [209 BC]	2: 8-653r, 8-1050
24	Gǒu 狗	–	1: 8-1094
25	Guò 過	33rd year of King Zhèng [214 BC]	3: 8-761, 8-2487, 8-2548
26	Hé 和	–	1: 8-61+8-293+8-2012
27	Héng 橫	32nd year of King Zhèng [215 BC]	3: 8-1069r+8-1434r+8-1520r, 8-1226, 8-2481
28	Hú 狐	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	1: 8-769r
29	Huǎn 緩	–	1: 8-611
30	Huà 華	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	3: 8-820, 8-1008+8-1461+8-1532, 8-1454+8-1629
31	Hùn 園	33rd year of King Zhèng [214 BC]	2: 8-154r, 8-904+8-1343
32	Jī 畸	–	2: 8-118, 8-864
33	Jiā 嘉	1st year of Second Emperor [209 BC]	1: 5-1
34	Jiān 兼	26th year of King Zhèng [221 BC]	1: 8-63
35	Jiāo 驕	–	1: 8-657r
36	Jìng 敬	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	2: 8-770r, 8-880
37	Jiù 就	–	2: 8-137r, 8-2466
38	Jū 居	31st year of King Zhèng [216 BC]	1: 8-1559r
39	Jù 巨	–	1: 8-2035r

Tab. 2.1 (continued)

No.	Personal Name	Year(s) of entry	Occurrence: Manuscript number(s)
40	Kān 堪	30th year of King Zhèng [217 BC]	3: 8-76, 8-754r+8-1007r, 8-2030r
41	Kè 客	–	1: 6-6
42	Lián 連	30th year of King Zhèng [217 BC]	1: 8-141r+8-668r
43	Lǚ 履	33rd–34th year of King Zhèng [214–213 BC]	3: 8-143r, 8-768r, 8-1561r
44	Mǎo 卯	–	1: 8-1523r
45	Mù 目	–	2: 8-112, 8-1998r
46	Píng 平	34th year of King Zhèng [213 BC]	2: 8-1449r+8-1484r, 8-1527r
47	Qì 氣	28th, 32nd year of King Zhèng [219 BC, 215 BC]	3: 8-75r+8-166r+8-485r, 8-140, 8-157
48	Qíáng 強	–	1: 8-1824
49	Qióng 邛	29th, 30th year of King Zhèng [218–217 BC]	3: 8-645r, 8-1515r, 8-1628r
50	Qū 祛	–	1: 8-677r
51	Qū 誼	–	5: 8-1122, 8-1148, 8-1466r, 8-1483r, 8-1492r
52	Què 卻	–	3: 8-843, 8-1238, 8-1947
53	Quē 缺	–	1: 8-1014
54	Ráo 饒	–	2: 8-739r, 8-1436r
55	Rén 壬 ¹¹⁵	26th, 31st–32nd, 34th [221 BC, 216–215 BC, 213 BC]	9: 8-157r, 8-183r+8-290r+8-530r, 8-756, 8-764, 8-1324, 8-1421, 8-1516r, 8-1574+8-1787, 8-2246
56	Rúyì 如意	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	2: 8-1565r, 8-2190r
57	Shàng 尚	28th, 30th, 32nd year of King Zhèng [219 BC, 217 BC, 215 BC]	6: 8-62r, 8-75r+8-166r+8-485r, 8-130r +8-190r+8-193r, 8-136r+8-144r, 8-722, 8-1490r+8-1518r

115 Judging from the calligraphy, the official named Rén 壬, who was active in 221 BC (manuscript 8-1516), was not the same Rén 壬 who wrote from 216 BC onward.

Tab. 2.1 (continued)

No.	Personal Name	Year(s) of entry	Occurrence: Manuscript number(s)
58	Shěn 沈	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	5: 8-886, 8-1346, 8-1399, 8-1554r, 8-2234
59	Tián 恬	34th year of King Zhèng [213 BC]	1: 8-1525r
60	Tián 田	–	1: 8-1991
61	Tuó 佗	–	1: 8-1697
62	Wǔ 伍	–	1: 8-140r
63	Wǔ 午	–	1: 8-175r
64	Wú 吾	–	1: 8-1980
65	Xiè 歇	34th year of King Zhèng [213 BC]	3: 8-755r, 8-759, 8-1523
66	Xiè 謝	–	1: 8-1073r
67	Xīn 欣	30th, 32nd year of King Zhèng [217 BC, 215 BC]	5: 8-155, 8-158r, 8-164r+8-1475r, 8-178r, 8-890+8-1583
68	Xū 胥	–	1: 8-140
69	Yán 言	31st year of King Zhèng [216 BC]	2: 8-921, 8-1560r
70	Yí 卮	34th year of King Zhèng [213 BC]	1: 8-1549
71	Yì 義	–	2: 8-1447r, 8-2036r
72	Yí 臧	28th year of King Zhèng, 1st year of Second Emperor [209 BC, 219 BC] ¹¹⁶	2: 5-1, 8-1563r
73	Yuán 元	–	1: 8-60r+8-656r+8-665r+8-748r
74	Zǎng 駟	–	1: 8-76
75	Zé 擇	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	1: 8-169r+8-233r+8-407r+8-416r+8-1185r
76	Zhāng 章	31st year of King Zhèng [216 BC]	1: 8-648r
77	Zhōng 忠	–	1: 8-72
78	Zhú 逐	28th–30th year of King Zhèng [219–217 BC]	4: 8-686r+8-973r, 8-701r, 8-1563, 8-1566r

¹¹⁶ The term ‘first year’ (*yuán nián* 元年) in the text refers to the first year of the Second Emperor in 209 BC (Chén Wěi 2012: 1).

Tab. 2.1 (continued)

No.	Personal Name	Year(s) of entry	Occurrence: Manuscript number(s)
79	X (pronunciation unknown) 𠙴	28th year of King Zhèng [219 BC]	1: 8-75r+8-166r+8-485r
80	X (pronunciation unknown) 𠙴	26th–27th year of King Zhèng [221–220 BC]	2: 8-63, 8-135
81	X (pronunciation unknown) 𠙴	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	10: 8-348, 8-405, 8-865, 8-898+8-972, 8-902, 8-1517r, 8-1771, 8-1809, 8-1973, 8-2269
82	X (pronunciation unknown) 𠙴	34th year of King Zhèng [213 BC]	1: 8-487+8-2004
83	X (pronunciation unknown) 𠙴	35th year of King Zhèng [212 BC]	1: 8-673+8-2002
84	X (pronunciation unknown) 𠙴	29th year of King Zhèng [218 BC]	2: 8-781+8-8-1102, 8-1524r
85	X (pronunciation unknown) 𠙴	–	1: 8-1839
Total		26th–35th year of King Zhèng, 1st year of Second Emperor [221–212, 209 BC]	208

In total, the *Lǐyē* documents from layers 5, 6 and 8 identify at least 85 individuals across 208 documents who were responsible for the production and handling of official texts in and around Dòngtíng Commandery.¹¹⁷ The manuscripts span from 221 to 212 BC, as well as the first year of the Second Emperor’s reign in 209 BC.

¹¹⁷ For an analysis of 680 different surnames discovered in excavated Qín documents, see Lǐ Shìchí 2017.

Whereas most of those identified are categorized as either ‘Secretaries’ (*shǐ* 史) or ‘Assistants’ (*zuǒ* 佐), their skills and duties were not confined to these titles.¹¹⁸

Strictly speaking, the term ‘scribe’ is too narrow to describe clerical personnel, as it fails to capture the full range of responsibilities these individuals undertook. Moreover, the term ‘*shǐ* 史’, which at times means ‘scribe’, particularly in received literature from the Eastern Zhōu and later periods, is more accurately translated as ‘Secretary’ in the context of the *Lǐyě* documents.¹¹⁹ “Scribal literacy” or “administrative literacy,” categories proposed by William V. Harris and Ma Tsang Wing, respectively, or Michael Nylan’s notion of “rude literacy” – denoting a group of specially trained workers capable of reading and writing characters in short, formulaic sentences, and handling the materiality of manuscripts – may more aptly describe the responsibilities of *Lǐyě* manuscript officials, without limiting them to a single skill set or rank.¹²⁰

Given the sheer number of individuals responsible for the correspondence between *Lǐyě* and other imperial institutions of Qiānlíng County and Dòngtíng Commandery, the documents provide us with important data on early script types, styles and hands.¹²¹ Unfortunately, there is little scholarly consensus regarding the specific calligraphic features.¹²² Liú Gāng, for example, argues that the characters in these documents are emblematic of: 1) Chǔ script in rare cases, 2) ‘ancient clerical script’

118 See Xíng Yitián 2012a. Ma Tsang Wing identified 56 instances of official titles preceding their names elsewhere in the same document. He concluded that 10.5% of these were ‘Incumbents’ (*shǒu* 守), 29.8% ‘Secretaries’ (*shǐ* 史) (including ‘Prefectural Secretaries’ (*lǐngshǐ* 令史), ‘Judiciary Secretaries’ (*yùshǐ* 獄史), and one ‘Secretary to the (County) Military Commandant’ (*wèishǐ* 尉史)), 57.9% ‘Assistants’ (*zuǒ* 佐), and the remaining 1.8% fell into other categories (Ma Tsang Wing 2017: 325–327). Qín material culture often featured production marks used to monitor quality and quantity, and as an administrative tool for resource distribution and mass mobilization. For a study on marking practices in the production of Qín terracotta warriors, see, for example, Lǐ Xiùzhēn, et al. 2016.

119 On the etymology of ‘*shǐ* 史’, see Behr 2004: 16. On the broader history of ‘*shǐ* 史’ during the Eastern Zhōu periods, see Vogelsang 2007.

120 Harris 1991: 7–8; Ma Tsang Wing 2017: 331; Nylan 2011. These views are reconciled by Muchou Poo, arguing that many individuals across various social strata possessed basic reading and writing skills in the Qín and Hàn dynasties. However, high cultural literacy, or the number of fully literate individuals, was, in relative numbers, very low among the lower classes (Poo 1998: 181–182). In addition to reading, writing and accounting, Ma extends the concept of “administrative literacy” to encompass skills related to the physical alteration of documents, such as the carving of ‘notches’ (*kèchǐ* 刻齒) into the *Lǐyě* ‘tallies’ (*quàn* 券) (Ma Tsang Wing 2017: 327–331). Other forms of handling material documents could have included organizing, binding, carving and archiving.

121 Richter 2006 differentiates between “types of script” (morphological qualities), “styles of script” (structural and non-structural or calligraphic features) and “hand” (different individuals or a single individual with different writing styles).

122 Liú Gāng 2012.

(*gǔ lì* 古隸), and 3) predominantly ‘Qín clerical script’ (*Qín lì* 秦隸).¹²³ The latter is believed to have evolved from the ‘Qín seal script’ (*Qín zhuàn* 秦篆) as a result of the Qín writing reforms and closely resembles records excavated at Shuǐhǔdì 睡虎地.¹²⁴ Liú Gāng further subdivides the ‘ancient clerical script’ into three distinct variants:

- 2a) Similar to the script found on Chǔ ‘silk manuscripts’ (*bó shū* 帛書). In general, this variant is characterized by a high level of graphic complexity, more strokes per character and balanced brushwork with round or circular elements. Its overall asymmetry and flattened, rectangular composition impart a sense of spontaneity and natural casualness to the writing.
- 2b) Similar to the ‘small seal script’ (*xiǎo zhuàn* 小篆), this variant exhibits a less regular appearance, which may be attributed to the unique processing, function and materiality of the documents. It shares strong calligraphic similarities with the ‘ancient elegance script’ (*gǔ yǎ* 古雅) of the imperial Qín stone inscriptions found at Mount Tài 泰, Yì 嶧 and Lángyá 琅邪.¹²⁵
- 2c) An ancient variant of the ‘clerical script’ (*lì shū* 隸書).¹²⁶ This variant is more consistent than 2a) and 2b) in terms of composition, size, horizontal orientation and symmetry, yet it remains less regular than the clerical script. For this reason, some scholars consider it an early stage of the ‘Qín clerical script’ (*Qín gǔ lì* 秦古隸).¹²⁷

The study of scribal culture in ancient Chinese manuscripts has proven invaluable for exploring various facets of manuscript production, reconstruction, authentication, archiving and scribal training in Ancient China. It has also enabled

¹²³ In Katsuya Onishi’s opinion, clerical script and ‘scribal writing’ (*shǐ shū* 史書) should be differentiated. Clerical script is a “more vernacular script type which developed out of the clericization of seal script,” while scribal writing “refers to a standardized clerical script” in terms of character forms and character selection that “had to conform to the Qín and Hàn writing systems.” The scribal writing of the Qín and Early Hàn periods was hence a script influenced by regional Qín traditions. It was only from the mid-Western Hàn period onwards that scribal writing became “synonymous with Hàn clerical script” (Onishi 2018: 397–398).

¹²⁴ Liú Gāng 2012.

¹²⁵ See also Kern 2000.

¹²⁶ Legend has it that ‘clerical script’ (*lì shū* 隸書) was invented by Chéng Miǎo 程邈, an educated prisoner of the First Emperor (Ch’én Chih-Mai 1966: 35). The character ‘lì 隸’ means ‘dependent’, ‘subordinate’, ‘servant’ or ‘slave’ (*Hànyǔ dà cídiǎn* 漢語大詞典, Vol. 12, 2001: 175; Unger 1989: 61). Aesthetic properties of clerical script include more precise character alignment, greater uniformity in character composition and increased variation in character size and stroke thickness (see Hé Línyì 1998).

¹²⁷ Liú Gāng 2012.

scholars to group excavated manuscript fragments into individual, local and regional writing systems.¹²⁸ It should be noted, however, that the classification and dating of scripts pose significant challenges.¹²⁹ Transitions between scripts are often fluid, complicating diachronic comparisons, particularly when characters are inscribed on different materials for various purposes across geographically distant regions. At best, visual juxtapositions of script criteria can help identify and recognize individual, local or regional tendencies at specific points in time.

The transition between different scripts in Ancient China was not abrupt; it resulted from long-term historical developments and transculturation processes within certain spheres of influence.¹³⁰ A unified writing system, inspired by the idea of strong political and administrative consolidation, reflects the envisioned microcosmic modality of an orderly worldview in which every element, graph and aesthetic feature had its designated place.¹³¹ But to what extent did the Qín writing reform truly succeed in standardizing the form and meaning of characters? And how much variation from earlier scripts was incorporated into the new universal standard or, at least, tolerated by imperial institutions?¹³²

When comparing the *Lǐyě* manuscripts, we observe that handwriting, character size, composition and alignment vary from text to text, and sometimes even within the same manuscript. A recent study by Chén Zhèngxián on the *Lǐyě* corpus and other excavated material from the Qín dynasty looks at graphic variants of ‘*qīng* 卿’ (*khran) and ‘*xiāng* 鄉’ (*han), ‘*lì* 吏’ (*rəh) and ‘*shì* 事’ (*s-rəʔ), ‘*shǔ* 鼠’ (*nhaʔ) and ‘*yǔ* 予’ (*laʔ) as well as ‘*dà* 大’ (*dās), ‘*tài* 太’ (*thās) and ‘*tài* 泰’ (*thās).¹³³ He argues that characters like ‘*tài* 太’ and ‘*tài* 泰’ or ‘*qīng* 卿’ and ‘*xiāng* 鄉’ serve as key benchmarks for distinguishing between the pre-imperial and imperial periods, as well as for assessing the extent of the writing reform completed under Lǐ Sī 李斯 (ca. 280–208 BC; served 246–208 BC). According to Chén Zhèngxián, the unification of the empire occurred in month 7 of the 25th year of King

128 See Smith 2011b. For more on detecting fake manuscripts through the analysis of textual errors, document material, provenance and calligraphy, see Hú Píngshēng 2010: 98–101; Xíng Wén 2016. For a study on scribal culture, workshops and scriptural calligraphy in early Buddhist manuscripts, see Tsui Chung-hui 2020. For a discussion of script unification based on early excavated and transmitted sources, see Galambos 2004, 2006.

129 Hé Líníyí 1998; Lǐ Shǒukuí 2003; Wú Jiànwěi 2006.

130 Boltz 1994: 156–177; Ch’én Chih-Mai 1966: 35–36; Galambos 2006: 43.

131 See Harper 1999.

132 For criteria on discerning variations in handwriting on the *Guōdiàn* bamboo manuscripts (*Guōdiàn Chǔ jiǎn* 郭店楚簡) from the Warring States period, see Richter 2006: 132–147.

133 Chén Zhèngxián 2020. Phonological reconstructions are taken from Schuessler 2009: 55, 56, 78, 103, 233.

Zhèng (222 BC), while the writing reform occurred slightly later, between months 3 and 5 of the 26th year of King Zhèng (221 BC).¹³⁴

Unsurprisingly, these two events did not unfold simultaneously. In fact, as Imre Galambos has convincingly demonstrated, the completion of the writing reform may have extended well into the Western Hàn dynasty.¹³⁵ Imre Galambos's argument can be supported by conducting a preliminary examination of the *Lǐyē* text entries under the name Rén 壬. As shown in Tab. 2.1, the name Rén 壬 occurs nine times as a handler of documents. Due to the differing handwriting of the Rén 壬 appearing in the 26th years of King Zhèng (221 BC) (Fig. 2.25), these entries could refer to two distinct individuals. The latter Rén 壬 (Fig. 2.26), active between the 31st and 34th years of King Zhèng (216–213 BC), was likely the “Assistant to Jìng, Incumbent of the Office of Agricultural Fields” (*tiánguān shǒu jìng zuǒ* 田官守敬佐).¹³⁶ His handwriting features curved lines with round elements and an exceptionally consistent brushstroke, showing almost no variation in pressure or execution.¹³⁷ Given that this individual was producing texts in the later stages of the empire, his calligraphic expression and use of small seal script elements challenge Chén Zhèngxián's argument that the writing reform had been universally implemented by this point. In fact, other scribes active in the later years of the empire, such as Shěn 沈 (212–211 BC), Píng 平 (213 BC) and X (pronunciation unknown) 𠂔 (212 BC), also exhibit a diversity of script type, script style and hand. As epigraphical evidence from the *Lǐyē* cache amply testifies, individual characters were written in a variety of ways (Fig. 2.27–2.29 and 2.30–2.32).

Future studies on handwriting in the *Lǐyē* texts will hopefully shed further light on the writing practices of the Dòngtǒng area, as well as the origin of officials, their names, imperial affiliations, educational background, social status and potential for mobility within the Qín hierarchical order. Formal writing criteria could also serve as a powerful tool for identifying and matching unsigned document frag-

134 Alternatively, Katsuya Onishi explains the gradual replacement of ‘tài 太’ with ‘tài 泰’ from a regional rather than a diachronic perspective. ‘Tài 泰’ is a variant of ‘tài 太’ that emerged alongside the Qín notion of political unification (Onishi 2013: 141–142).

135 Galambos 2004, 2006.

136 This is observed on manuscripts 8-764, 8-1574+8-1787 and 8-2246.

137 From *Lǐyē* manuscripts 8-663, 8-1549 and 8-2501, we learn that white bird feathers could be used as writing utensils. On manuscript 8-1549, which is slightly damaged, officials from the ‘Granary’ (*cāng* 倉) sell ‘white feathers for writing’ (*bái hàn yǔ* 白翰羽) to, what appears to be, ‘Section Commanders’ (*zhǎng* 長) and ‘minor girls’ (*xiǎo nǚzǐ* 小女子). For a transcription and translation of manuscript 8-663, see chapter 4.3. For a transcription of manuscripts 8-1549 and 8-2501, see Chén Wěi 2012: 355, 475.



Fig. 2.25, 2.26: Manuscript 8-1516 (l), attributed to Rén 壬, active in the 26th year of King Zhèng (221 BC), and a detail of the *recto* of manuscript 8-756 (r), attributed to Rén 壬, active between the 31st and 34th year of King Zhèng (216–213 BC). Ink on wood. Dimensions unknown.¹³⁸

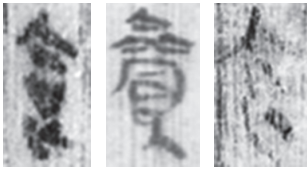


Fig. 2.27–2.29: Variants of the graph for ‘food’ (shí 食): manuscript 5.1 (l), attributed to Yí 屹, active in the 1st year of the Second Emperor (209 BC); manuscript 8-1517 (m), attributed to X (pronunciation unknown) 胥, active in the 35th year of King Zhèng (212 BC); manuscript 8-770 (r), attributed to Jìng 敬, active in the 35th year of King Zhèng (212 BC). Ink on wood. Dimensions unknown.¹³⁹

ments that have yet to be collated, providing clues about scribal training, manuscript production, document circulation and archiving.

‘Fā 發’ is another term in the *Lǚyē* corpus that sometimes requires the addition of a personal name, the name of a government unit or an official title. It is occasionally separated from the preceding text by a slash mark. In most instances, ‘fā 發’

¹³⁸ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2012a: 109, 192.

¹³⁹ *Húnán shěng wénwù kǎogǔ yánjiūsuǒ* 2012a: 3, 113, 192.

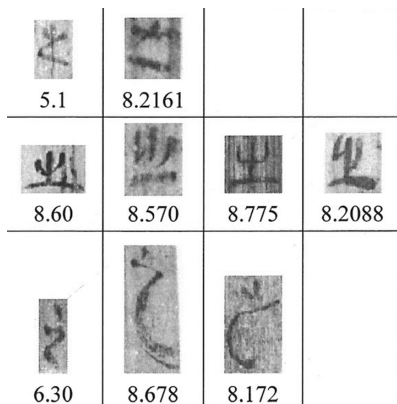


Fig. 2.30: Variants of the graph ‘zhī 之’ on various *Lǐyē* manuscripts. Ink on wood. Dimensions unknown.¹⁴⁰

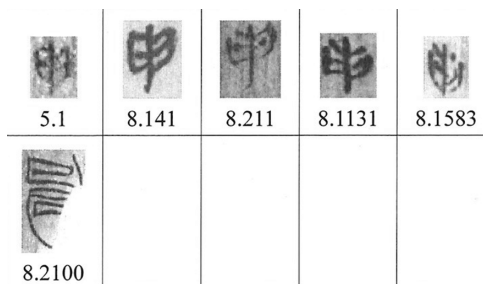


Fig. 2.31: Variants of the graph ‘shēn 申’ on various *Lǐyē* manuscripts. Ink on wood. Dimensions unknown.¹⁴¹

arguably means ‘to send’, ‘to be sent by’, ‘to dispatch’, ‘to be dispatched by’, instead of ‘to open’ or ‘to be opened by’.¹⁴² As shown in the translations below, this reading is supported by the contextual and syntactic attributes found in many *Lǐyē* manuscripts. Furthermore, if ‘fā 發’ exclusively meant ‘to open’ or ‘to be opened by’, one would expect it to appear in most *Lǐyē* documents received and opened by clerical personnel. However, in relative terms, only a minuscule number of documents throughout the entire archive contain a clause featuring a ‘fā 發’ passive. Most of the

¹⁴⁰ Yè Shūshān 2021: 221.

¹⁴¹ Yè Shūshān 2021: 237.

¹⁴² The term ‘fā 發’ is not preceded by a slash mark in instances where the documents or resources were sent by a government unit, or when only an official title, without a personal name, is given. ‘Fā 發’ is generally understood to mean ‘to open’ in other early manuscripts. See Lau and Staack 2016: 280, footnote 1301; Lóng Jīngshā 2001. For more information on the possible readings of ‘fā 發’, see Chén Jiàn 2011a, 2011b.

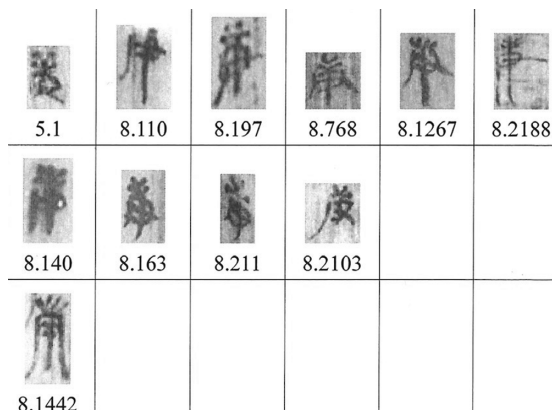


Fig. 2.32: Variants of the graph ‘*gēng* 庚’ on various *Lǐyě* manuscripts. Ink on wood.
Dimensions unknown.¹⁴³

usages likely referring to postal dispatch occur on the ‘postal document strips’, as exemplified on manuscript 8-1130:

8-1130: 酉陽金布發.¹⁴⁴

Sent by the Finance Department of Yǒuyáng (County).

In addition to the verb’s passive usage, manuscripts 6-18, 8-303 and 8-922 demonstrate its transitive usage in other documents exchanged between institutions within Dòngtíng Commandery.

6-18 I–II: 遷陵金布—發洞庭.¹⁴⁵

The Finance Department of Qiānlíng (County)— sends (documents) to Dòngtíng (Commandery).

8-303: 遷陵主簿(簿)發洞庭.¹⁴⁶

The Official in Charge of the Registers of Convicts in Qiānlíng (County) sends (documents) to Dòngtíng (Commandery).

Comment: The document is stained with black ink at the top.

8-922: 遷陵主倉發洞庭.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Yè Shūshān 2021: 269.

¹⁴⁴ Chén Wěi 2012: 281.

¹⁴⁵ Chén Wěi 2012: 23.

¹⁴⁶ Chén Wěi 2012: 131.

¹⁴⁷ Chén Wěi 2012: 249.

The Official in Charge of the Granaries in Qiānlíng (County) sends (documents) to Dòngtíng (Commandery).

This reading of ‘*fā* 發’ as ‘to be sent by’ in the passive voice and ‘to send’ in the active voice is further substantiated by manuscripts 6-18 and 8-1130. These manuscripts pertain to exchanges with the ‘Finance Department’ (*jīnbù* 金布), a government unit primarily responsible for monetary and fiscal policies that also coordinated assets and investments with the County Courts.¹⁴⁸ Whenever a Finance Department sent documents to higher authorities within Dòngtíng Commandery, the manuscripts explicitly mention – where decipherable – to which county the respective department belonged.

Hence, Finance Departments were not part of the Courts, contrary to the assumptions of most modern scholars who erroneously translate the passive clause “*tíng jīnbù fā* 廷金布發” in the *Lǐyē* corpus as “(the) Finance Department of the Court opens (the document).”¹⁴⁹ Instead, phrases like these should be considered inherent to the imperial Qín postal system, leading to the correct translation: “Sent from the (County) Court to the Finance Department.” Finance Departments operated independently from the County Courts and government seats of a commandery, which is why on manuscript 6-18, for example, the Finance Department of Qiānlíng is separated by ‘*fā* 發’ and distinguished from the government seat in Dòngtíng. On manuscript 8-1130, the addressee is missing, with only the Finance Department of Yǒuyáng identified as the sender, turning ‘*fā* 發’ into a passive verb.

The ‘*fā* 發’ in “*tíng jīnbù fā* 廷金布發” should also be read in the passive, and ‘*jīnbù* 布發’ as an individual government unit; thus, the translation: “Sent from the (County) Court to the Finance Department.”¹⁵⁰ The syntactic structure is even more evident on manuscript 8-978, where the “Commandery Governor sends (documents) to the Household Bureau” (*shǒufǔ hùcáo fā* 守府戶曹發). Translating this phrase as “the Household Bureau of the Commandery Governor opens (the document)” would make little sense, as Household Bureaus were units led by Incumbents at a lower administrative level.¹⁵¹

148 For more information on ‘Finance Departments’ (*jīnbù* 金布) and other ‘Bureaus’ (*cáo* 曹) or ‘Offices’ (*guān* 官) in the *Lǐyē* texts, see chapter five.

149 See Sūn Wénbó 2018: 86.

150 The phrase “*tíng jīnbù fā* 廷金布發,” meaning “sent from the (County) Court to the Finance Department,” appears seven times: namely on manuscripts 8-506, 8-799, 8-935, 8-969, 8-1166, 8-1297 and 8-1313. On two other manuscripts, 8-545 and 8-1183, the character following “*tíng jīnbù* 廷金布” is either damaged or missing. Given the parallel structure of many other texts, the missing character is very likely ‘*fā* 發’.

151 For more information on the various government units at the commandery and county levels, see chapter four.

As cited in 17 different manuscripts, only 11 individuals in and around Dòngtíng Commandery can be personally identified for dispatching documents.¹⁵² The individuals Hùn 囷, Jiā 嘉, Lǚ 履, Qì 氣, Què 卻, Rén 壬, Xiè 謝 and Xīn 欣 were, in addition to transcribing conversations or copying written records, simultaneously assigned the responsibility of ‘fā 發’. Although their combined activity, in both concurrent or consecutive years, accounts for over 10% of all *Lǚě* text entries, their official titles are provided in only 32 instances.¹⁵³ When personal names are used, they predominantly identify those individuals sending documents to the government seat in Dòngtíng Commandery.¹⁵⁴

Five distinct government units appear in a total of 24 postal documents, ostensibly belonging to the collection of ‘postal document strips’.¹⁵⁵ Documents, and

152 This includes “Ci, the Official in Charge of Èrchūn District” (*Èrchūn Xiāng zhǔ Cì* 貳春鄉主) (8-1548), Duān 端 (8-173), Hùn 囷 (8-221, 8-1069+8-1434+8-1520), Jiā 嘉 (5-1), Lǚ 履 (8-651, 8-1477, 8-1797), Qì 氣 (8-1559), Què 卻 (8-1317), Rén 壬 (8-1525), Xiè 謝 (8-66+8-208), Xīn 欣 (8-152, 8-157, 8-196+8-1521, 8-1443+8-1455) and Zhù 翥 (8-1523). This and the following information is based on texts transcribed and revised in Chén Wěi 2012. To avoid inaccuracies, instances where ‘fā 發’ is preceded by a missing fragment have not been taken into account.

153 The only exception is the official Xiè 謝, whose service dates are missing in both cases. Some personal names that appear in the *Lǚě* manuscripts, like Pigsty (Hùn 囷) or Pneuma (Qì 氣), are quite peculiar. It may well be that some of these appellations were not given at birth but assigned to convey a person’s physical or moral characteristics, status or life accomplishments. As such, they should be regarded as constructions of “meaningful epithets” (Goldin 2000). It also cannot be ruled out that some of these names may not carry any obvious meaning or may reflect local or regional customs that have yet to be adequately discussed.

154 These occurrences include the official titles ‘Commandery Governor’ (*shǒufǔ* 守府) (8-978), “Official in Charge of the Evaluations at the (County) Court” (*tíng zhǔ kè* 廷主課) (8-2198), “Official in Charge of the Food” (*zhǔ shí* 主食) (8-830+8-1010), “Official in Charge of the Granaries at the (County) Court” (*tíng zhǔ cāng* 廷主倉) (8-1228, 8-1294, 8-1366, 8-1628), “Official in Charge of the Granaries in Qiānlíng” (*Qiānlíng zhǔ cāng* 遷陵主倉) (8-579, 8-922), “Official in Charge of the Households at the (County) Court” (*tíng zhǔ hù* 廷主戶) (8-156, 8-266, 8-1142, 8-1249, 8-1395, 8-1607, 8-1650, 8-1752, 8-1955, 8-2547), “Official in Charge of the Commissioners of Public Works in Línyuán (County)” (*Línyuán zhǔ sīkōng* 臨沅主司空) (8-695), “Official in Charge of the Ordinances” (*zhǔ lìng* 主令) (8-601) and “Official in Charge of the Registers of Convicts in Qiānlíng” (*Qiānlíng zhǔ bù* 主簿) (8-303). On manuscript 8-978, the “Official in Charge of the Granaries in Qiānlíng,” the “Official in Charge of the Commissioners of Public Works in Línyuán (County)” and the “Official in Charge of the Registers of Convicts in Qiānlíng” are mentioned exchanging correspondences with the government seat in Dòngtíng Commandery. Meanwhile, the Governor is mentioned exchanging correspondences with the ‘Household Bureau’ (*hùcáo* 戶曹).

155 This includes the ‘(County) Court’ (*tíng* 廷) (8-1, 8-65, 8-263, 8-283, 8-506, 8-778, 8-878, 8-935, 8-952, 8-969, 8-1166, 8-1292, 8-1297, 8-1313, 8-1451, 8-1741, 8-1834, 8-1859, 8-2507), Qiānlíng (County) (*Qiānlíng* 遷陵) (8-264), the “Finance Department of Qiānlíng” (*Qiānlíng jīnbù* 遷陵金布) (6-18, 8-304), the ‘Reinvestigation Bureau’ (*fùcáo* 覆曹) (8-2550) and the “Finance Department of Yōuyáng (County)” (*Yōuyáng jīnbù* 酉陽金布) (8-1130). According to these manuscripts, the ‘(County)

possibly also messages or goods, arriving from institutions outside of *Lǐyē* were signed not with a personal name, but more generically with an official title or the name of the institution consigning the delivery.¹⁵⁶

Further appearances of ‘*fā* 發’ occur in the official title ‘Crossbow Archer’ (*fānǚ* 發弩) and in the term ‘*zifā* 自發’. The latter arguably means ‘to send/open something on one’s own’ and is often preceded by a personal name.¹⁵⁷ Notably, all three officials sending or opening private correspondences on their own are identified personally, with their names combined with the character ‘*jì* 季’, as seen in Máoji 毛季, Mángjì 芒 or Lǐjì 李季.¹⁵⁸

8-272 I-II: 私進遷陵主吏—毛季自發.¹⁵⁹

The privately submitted document [private letter] is sent/opened by the Official in Charge of the Low-Ranking Officials in Qiānlíng himself, Máoji.

8-1817: 私進令史芒季自發.¹⁶⁰

The privately submitted document is sent/opened by the Prefectural Secretary Mángjì himself.

Another term with usage comparable to ‘*fā* 發’ (*pat) is ‘*bàn* 半’ (*pans), which, in early manuscripts, usually means ‘to halve’ or ‘to split in halves’. In the *Lǐyē* corpus, for reasons still unknown, ‘*bàn* 半’ appears as a signatory expression on manuscripts dated before month 9 of the 30th year of King Zhèng (217 BC) and might refer to the act of breaking the seal of a document or document box.¹⁶¹ At

Court’ exchanged information with the, ‘Household (Bureau)’ (*hù(cáo)* 戶(曹)), the ‘Finance Department’ (*jīnbù* 金布), the ‘Bureau of Ordinances’ (*lìngcáo* 令曹), the ‘Judiciary (Bureau) of the East’ (*yùdōngcáo* 獄東(曹)) and the ‘Bureau for Officials’ (*lìcáo* 吏曹). The government seat in Qiānlíng, the “Finance Department of Qiānlíng,” the ‘Reinvestigation Bureau’ (*fùcáo* 覆曹) and the “Finance Department of Yǒuyáng (County)” also appear to have exchanged documents with the government seat in Dǒngtíng Commandery.

156 This applies, for example, to the ‘(County) Court’ (*tíng* 廷), the ‘Reinvestigation Bureau’ (*fùcáo* 覆曹), the “Official in Charge of the Households at the (County) Court” (*tíng zhǔ hù* 廷主戶), the “Official in Charge of the Commissioners of Public Works in Línyuán” (*Línyuán zhǔ sī-kōng* 臨沅主司空), and many more.

157 The title ‘Crossbow Archer’ (*fānǚ* 發弩) appears on manuscripts 8-141+8-668, 8-159, 8-761, 8-985, 8-1101, 8-1234, 8-1783+8-1852 and 8-1945. ‘To send/open something on one’s own’ (*zifā* 自發) appears on manuscripts 8-206, 8-272, 8-1065 and 8-1817.

158 ‘Máoji 毛季’ appears on manuscripts 8-272, 8-1529 and 8-1694; ‘Mángjì 芒季’ on manuscripts 8-1065 and 8-1817; and ‘Lǐjì 李季’ on manuscript 8-206.

159 Chén Wěi 2012: 126.

160 Chén Wěi 2012: 395.

161 Chén Wěi 2012; Lóng Jingshā 2001. Phonological reconstructions are taken from Schuessler 2009: 237, 261.

the same time, the verbal use of ‘*bàn* 半’, in conjunction with personal names, might also represent an exoative version of its ascribed root ‘*bān* 搬’ (*Cə-pʰan-s), meaning ‘to move’, which would make it similar to my proposed interpretation of ‘*fā* 發’ as ‘to send’.¹⁶² In the overwhelming majority of cases, however, ‘*bàn* 半’ is used in association with units of weight or volume, as seen in “*èr dòu bàn dòu* 二斗半斗” on tally 8-2249, meaning “2.5 bushels.”

Shared responsibilities between officials of equal or differing status are also replicated at the semantic level. The term ‘*xíng* 行’ has a variety of meanings apart from being a personal name. Depending on the context, it can mean ‘to deliver’, ‘to follow up on’, ‘to inspect’, ‘to go’ and ‘to distribute’.¹⁶³ The reasons why both ‘*fā* 發’ and ‘*xíng* 行’ were used to designate certain kinds of postal dispatch or transportation are unclear. Perhaps, sending documents (or goods) in the sense of ‘*xíng* 行’ meant utilizing the early stages of a complex imperial delivery network of ‘postal units’ (*yóu* 郵) that connected Qín counties and commanderies, whereas ‘*fā* 發’ designated a more point-to-point courier service between individuals and government units. On manuscript 8-2550, ‘*xíng* 行’ and ‘*fā* 發’ even appear side-by-side:

8-2550 I-II: 遷陵以郵行—覆曹發 • 洞庭.¹⁶⁴

Qiānlíng uses the imperial postal service to deliver (the documents).— The Reinvestigation Office [then] sends (the documents) to • Dòngtíng.

This reading of ‘*xíng* 行’ as ‘to send’, ‘to deliver’ or ‘to dispatch’ is also supported on numerous manuscripts.¹⁶⁵ Some of these entries are translated below:

5-34 I-II: 酉陽以郵行—洞庭.¹⁶⁶

Yǒuyóu uses the imperial postal service to deliver (the documents) to— Dòngtíng.

5-35 I-II: 遷陵洞庭, —以郵行.¹⁶⁷

From Qiānlíng to Dòngtíng,— use the imperial postal service to deliver (the documents).

¹⁶² My thanks to Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Behr for his comment on the possible link between the verbal usage of ‘*bàn* 半’ and ‘*bān* 搬’.

¹⁶³ *Xíng* 行 is used as a personal name on manuscripts 8-133 and 8-2210.

¹⁶⁴ Chén Wěi 2012: 479.

¹⁶⁵ This includes manuscripts 5-34, 5-35, 6-2, 8-12, 8-32, 8-63, 8-90, 8-413, 8-432, 8-704+8-706, 8-1147, 8-1464, 8-1553, 8-1685, 8-1840, 8-1876 and 8-2550. To avoid inaccuracies, instances where ‘*xíng* 行’ is preceded by a missing fragment have not been taken into account.

¹⁶⁶ Chén Wěi 2012: 15.

¹⁶⁷ Chén Wěi 2012: 16. The graph ‘*tíng* 庭’ on manuscript 8-413 is damaged and cannot be deciphered with certainty.

Comments: This text parallels the structure seen on manuscript 8-978, for example, where the verb is positioned at the end of the sentence, and both the sender and the recipient of the delivery are mentioned at the beginning. Manuscripts 8-32, 8-413, 8-1464, 8-1553 and 8-1685 are identical in this respect.

8-12: 遷陵以郵行 • 洞庭.¹⁶⁸

Qiānlíng uses the imperial postal service to deliver (the documents) to • Dòngtíng.

8-63 V: [. . .] 即走申行司空.¹⁶⁹

[. . .] Then Runner Shēn delivers (the documents) to the Commissioner of Public Works.

‘Runners’ (zǒu 走) who delivered documents (perhaps also messages or goods) are frequently mentioned in the *Lǐyē* corpus and other excavated materials.¹⁷⁰ Their function may have been similar to the ‘Postal Runner’ (yóulìzú 郵利足) cited on *Lǐyē* manuscripts 8-90 and 8-527, or the ‘Light Foot’ (qīng zú 輕足) in the “Statutes Concerning Arable Land” (*Tián lǜ* 田律) in the *Shuǐhǔdì*.¹⁷¹

8-90: 遷陵以郵利足行洞庭, 急.¹⁷²

□ Qiānlíng uses the imperial postal service, rather than a Runner, to deliver (the documents) to Dòngtíng. Urgent.

A closer look at the “Statutes Concerning the Delivery of Documents” (*Xíng shū lǜ* 行書律) in the *Shuǐhǔdì* reveals highly regulated procedures for the transportation of documents within Qín territories. When a document was deemed high priority, the character ‘jí 急’ for ‘urgent’ was added to the entry. An inability to meet the delivery deadline was punished with a fine. Examples in the *Lǐyē* corpus further corroborate the use of this convention, where ‘jí 急’ appears once or multiple times in succession, as seen on manuscript 8-1915. It states:

8-1915 I–II: 遷陵令【若】□¹行急急急急□¹⁷³

Qiānlíng orders【Ruò】□¹ deliver. Urgent, urgent, urgent, urgent □

We also learn from manuscript fragment 8-53 that the reception of documents may have been prioritized.¹⁷⁴

168 Chén Wěi 2012: 31.

169 Chén Wěi 2012: 48.

170 See Lau and Staack 2016: 179. The term appears on manuscripts 8-133, 8-135, 8-373, 8-453, 8-652, 8-657, 8-742, 8-756, etc.

171 Chén Wěi 2012: 50–51.

172 Chén Wěi 2012: 60.

173 Chén Wěi 2012: 406.

174 Chén Wěi suggests that the text on manuscript fragment 8-53 may have been the result of a writing exercise (Chén Wěi 2012: 42). In any case, the limited evidence available does not allow for definitive conclusions about writing exercises, textual intensity markers or similar possibilities.

8-53: 受受受¹⁷⁵

Receive, receive, receive 受

8-704+8-706 rIV: 時都郵人羽行¹⁷⁶

受 time, Postman Yǔ of Dū District delivers (the documents). 受

8-1147 I-II: 貳春鄉¹⁷⁷ 以郵行¹⁷⁷

Èrchūn District¹⁷⁷ uses the imperial postal service to deliver (the documents).

8-1840 I-II: 遷陵以郵行¹⁷⁸ 洞庭¹⁷⁸

Qiānlíng uses the imperial postal service to deliver (the documents) to¹⁷⁸ Dòngtíng.

8-1876: 廖行書遷陵, 因¹⁷⁹

受 Chōu delivers the document to Qiānlíng, and 受

The “Èrnián lǜlǐng” is divided into 28 rubrics, each grouping statutes under specific headings. One of these rubrics is the “Statutes Concerning the Delivery of Documents” (*Xíng shū lǚ* 行書律), which is also present in the *Shuihǔdī*.¹⁸⁰

Individuals delivering documents to government units, or clerks serving these units, in the sense of ‘*xíng* 行’, held various official titles. Those mentioned by personal name are, in most extant cases, ranked as ‘(Commandery) Governors’ (*shǒufǔ* 守府), ‘Assistants’ (*zuǒ* 佐), ‘Postmen’ (*yóurén* 郵人), ‘Runners’ (*zǒu* 走) and ‘(female) Bondservants’ (*lìqiè* 隸妾). In singular or more limited instances, one ‘Military Commandant’ (*wèi* 尉), one ‘Commissioner of Public Works’ (*sīkōng* 司空), ‘(male) Bondservants’ (*lìchén* 隸臣), Members of a ‘Unit of Five People’ (*shìwǔ* (wǔ) 士五(伍)), as well as several names without official titles are recorded.¹⁸¹ These

175 Chén Wěi 2012: 42.

176 Chén Wěi 2012: 207.

177 Chén Wěi 2012: 284.

178 Chén Wěi 2012: 398.

179 Chén Wěi 2012: 402

180 For more information on the delivery of documents in the Qín dynasty as reflected in the *Lǚyē* corpus, see Chén Zhiguó 2008.

181 ‘Governors’ (*shǒufǔ* 守府) appear addressing the ‘(County) Court’ (*tíng* 廷) (8-198+8-213+8-2013), ‘Bureau of the (County) Military Commandant’ (*wèicáo* 尉曹) (8-71), ‘Lesser Treasury’ (*shǎonèi* 少内) (8-60+8-656+8-665+8-748, 8-155) and ‘adjacent counties’ (*páng* 旁) (8-158). The Governors’ names are Áng 印 (8-1525), Chāng 昌 (8-198+8-213+8-2013), Jí 即 (8-768) and Kuài 快 (8-60+8-656+8-665+8-748, 8-71, 8-140, 8-155, 8-157, 8-158, 8-1560). One name is unknown due to a missing character (8-165). ‘Assistants’ (*zuǒ* 佐) appear addressing the ‘(County) Courts’ (*tíng* 廷) (8-164+8-1475, 8-170, 8-890+8-1583) and ‘adjacent counties’ (*páng* 旁) (8-75+8-166+8-485). Their names are Jì 忌 (8-854), Píng 平 (8-1449+8-1484), Qì 氣 (8-75+8-166+8-485), Tián 恬 (6-21), Wǔ 午 (8-175), Xīn 欣 (8-164+8-1475, 8-890+8-1583), Xīn 信 (8-197) and Xuān 宣 (8-170). ‘(Female) Bondservants’ (*lìqiè* 隸妾) appear in four instances. In one

texts typically form part of a longer ‘report’ (*gào* 告), often dated, that was exchanged between superior and inferior government units. The fact that Bondservants were delegated this task supports Hulsewé’s theory concerning *Shuihǔdì* strip 185, which posits that young and trustworthy Bondservants, both male and female, were assigned the responsibility of forwarding documents.¹⁸²

Government units without personal names or titles appear as consignors, specifically the ‘(County) Court’ (*tíng* 廷) of Qiānlíng, Èrchūn District and Yǒuyáng County.¹⁸³ With two exceptions, all recipients of these documents were government units within Dòngtíng Commandery or ‘adjacent counties’ (*páng* 旁). Unlike documents providing official titles and personal names, these manuscripts primarily contain brief one-line or two-line sentences. They are undated and may have functioned as reusable postal strips or text bundles frequently sent to a spe-

case, one “sends documents” (*xíng shū* 行書) to the Governor (8-904+8-1343). Their names are Guī 規 (8-69), Sūn 孫 (8-475+8-610, 8-1538) and Yì 益 (8-904+8-1343). ‘Postmen’ (*yóurén* 郵人) appear in four instances; their names are Chén 辰 (8-664+8-1053+8-2167), Dé 得 (8-154) and Yǔ 羽 (8-704+8-706). In one instance, the Postman is from Dū 都 District, but his name is unknown due to a missing character (8-62). ‘Runners’ (*zǒu* 走) appear in four instances, twice in conjunction with the ‘Commissioner of Public Works’ (*sīkōng* 司空) (8-63, 8-135); their names are Qū 屈 (8-1452), Shēn 申 (8-63) and Yìn 印 (8-657). One name is unknown due to a missing character (8-135). ‘(Male) Bondservants’ (*lichén* 隸臣) appear in three instances, once in conjunction with the ‘(County) Court’ (*tíng* 廷) (8-686+8-973); their names are Fùjiě 負解 (8-686+8-973) and Jù 俱 (8-898+8-972). One name is unknown due to a missing character (8-1524). Two members of a ‘Unit of Five People’ (*shìwǔ* (wǔ) 士五(伍)) appear twice, once in conjunction with ‘adjacent counties’ (*páng* 旁) (8-1516). The peculiar detail about these entries is that they include the provenance of the individuals, for example, “Shùn from (an unknown) township in Zīgūi 秭歸 (County)” (*Zīgūi* □ *lǐ shìwǔ* (wǔ) Shùn 秭歸□里士五(伍)順) (8-1516) and “X a member of a Unit of Five People, from the township of Gāo” (*Gāo lǐ shìwǔ* (wǔ) □ 高里士五(伍)□) (8-75+8-166+8-485). Three individuals are mentioned by name only; Chōu 繆 in conjunction with Qiānlíng County (8-1876), and Gǎn 感 (8-1511) or Zhāo 昭 (8-1510) with no addressee specified. A ‘Military Commandant’ (*wèi* 尉) is mentioned once, also without an addressee (8-1951). To avoid inaccuracies, instances where ‘*xíng* 行’ is preceded by a missing fragment have not been taken into account.

182 Hulsewé 1985: 86. Strip 185 is part of the *Shuihǔdì* text “Statutes Concerning the Delivery of Documents” (*Xíng shū lǚ* 行書律).

183 The ‘(County) Court’ (*tíng* 廷) appears once in conjunction with the ‘Household Bureau’ (*hùcáo* 戶曹) (8-1318). Qiānlíng County appears a total of 25 times, 21 of which are in conjunction with Dòngtíng Commandery (5-35, 6-2, 6-12, 8-32, 8-90, 8-115+8-338, 8-134, 8-182, 8-320, 8-362+8-390, 8-371+8-622, 8-413, 8-432, 8-504+8-563, 8-527, 8-555, 8-1464, 8-1553, 8-1685, 8-1837, 8-1840). Èrchūn District (*Èrchūn xiāng* 貳春鄉) is referenced on manuscript 8-1147, and Yǒuyáng County appears to have exchanged documents with Dòngtíng Commandery (5-34). To avoid inaccuracies, instances where ‘*xíng* 行’ is preceded by a missing fragment have not been taken into account.

cific region.¹⁸⁴ Of the extant 32 wooden strips, 21 were exchanged between Qiānlíng County and Dòngtíng Commandery. Several other documents may also have been exchanged between Qiānlíng and Dòngtíng, though they are damaged, with the sections detailing the sending and receiving units missing.

Instances of ‘*xíng* 行’, meaning ‘to follow up on’, can be found on at least seven manuscripts.¹⁸⁵ A few examples are listed below:

8-159 rIV: [. .] 以洞庭發弩印行事□□ [. .]¹⁸⁶

[. .] use the seal of the Crossbow Archers in Dòngtíng to follow up on the matter □□ [. .]

8-657 IV: [. .] 以蒼梧尉印行事. [. .]¹⁸⁷

[. .] use the seal of the Cāngwú Military Commandant to follow up on the matter. [. .]

Comment: Cāngwú was a commandery adjacent to Dòngtíng Commandery, annexed from Chǔ territory.¹⁸⁸

8-830+8-1010: [. .] 以沅陽印行事.¹⁸⁹

[. .] use the seal of Yuányáng (County) to follow up on the matter.

When used in the sense of ‘to inspect’, ‘*xíng* 行’ mainly appears in the verb-object collocation “to inspect the ancestral temple” (*xíng miào* 行廟), as evidenced on manuscripts 8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523 and 8-681:

8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523 II: 失期. 行廟者必謹視中□各自署廟所質日. [. .]¹⁹⁰

Missed the (right) time. The one who inspects the temple must carefully watch the middle □ each proceeds from the event calendar in the registered temple. [. .]

Comment: ‘Event calendars’ (*zhì rì* 質日) were effective tools for planning, coordinating and supervising the duties of officials during the Qín and Hàn eras.¹⁹¹

8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523 rAII: 十一月己巳[6], 令史應行廟.¹⁹²

In month 11 on a *jǐsì*, Prefectural Secretary Kàng inspects the temple.

184 On the imperial postal system and document delivery in the *Lǐyē* corpus and other excavated texts, see Chén Zhìguó 2008.

185 This applies to manuscripts 8-159, 8-462+8-685, 8-657, 8-759, 8-830+8-1010, 8-1516 and 8-1523.

186 Chén Wěi 2012: 96.

187 Cài Wànjìn 2008; Chén Wěi 2011a; 2012: 193.

188 Yóu Yīfēi 2015.

189 Chén Wěi 2012: 234.

190 Chén Wěi 2012: 78.

191 Chén Wěi 2018.

192 Chén Wěi 2012: 78.

8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523 rAIII: 十二月戊辰[5], 令史陽行廟.¹⁹³

In month 12 on a *wùchén*, Prefectural Secretary Yáng inspects the temple.

8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523 rCIII: 二月壬寅[39], 令史鉤行廟.¹⁹⁴

In month 2 on a *rén yín*, Prefectural Secretary Kòu inspects the temple.

8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523 rDII: 五月丙辰[53], 令史上行廟.¹⁹⁵

In month 12 on a *bǐngchén*, Prefectural Secretary Shàng inspects the temple.

8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523 rDIV: 六月癸巳[30], 令史除行廟.¹⁹⁶

In month 6 on a *guǐsì*, Prefectural Secretary Chù inspects the temple.

The alternate reading of ‘*xíng miào* 行廟’ as “conducting a temple sacrifice” can be challenged on several grounds.¹⁹⁷ Firstly, a commentary by the Later Hàn scholar Zhèng Xuán 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) on a passage in the “Musical Records” (*Yuèjì* 樂記) of the *Book of Rites* (*Lǐjì* 禮記) glosses ‘*xíng* 行’ as ‘to observe’ or ‘to inspect’ (*shì* 視). Secondly, according to the *Shuǐhǔdì* section in “Day Books on the Heavenly Stem Jiǎ” (*Rì shū jiǎ zhǒng* 日書甲種), it was legally inadmissible to perform sacrifices on the ‘3rd day’ (*yín* 寅), or to pray on the ‘6th day’ (*sì* 巳) of each month. This would make the aforementioned reading inconsistent with entries rAII, rCIII and rDIV recorded on manuscript 8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523.

Regarding ritual continuity from the Late Zhōu to the Qín dynasty, manuscripts 8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523 and 8-681 highlight the significance of ancestral temples and the institutionalized obligations associated with them. Manuscript 8-138+8-174+8-522+8-523 lists 14 officials in charge of “inspecting the ancestral temple” (*xíng miào* 行廟) in the 26th year of King Zhèng (221 BC), 12 of whom are identified as ‘Prefectural Secretaries’ (*lǐngshǐ* 令史), while the remaining two are ‘Secretaries’ (*shǐ* 史).¹⁹⁸ Tablet 8-461 records similarities between the sacrifices offered to the Emperor and those offered to the ‘Celestial Thearch’ (*Tiāndì* 天帝). Not only does this suggest the deification of the Emperor, but also indicates that

¹⁹³ Chén Wěi 2012: 78.

¹⁹⁴ Chén Wěi 2012: 78.

¹⁹⁵ Chén Wěi 2012: 78.

¹⁹⁶ Chén Wěi 2012: 78.

¹⁹⁷ Chén Wěi 2012: 79; Fàn Yúnfēi 2016.

¹⁹⁸ The names of the twelve ‘Prefectural Secretaries’ (*lǐngshǐ* 令史) are Chù 除, Fàn 犯, Fù 夫, Gèng 更, Kòu 鉤, Mòyá 莫邪, Qīng 慶, Shàng 上, Wéi 韋, Xíng 行, Yáng 陽 and X (pronunciation unknown) 慮. The names of the two ‘Secretaries’ (*shǐ* 史) are Kòu 鉤 and Róngfū 戎夫.

the Qín dynasty may have been governed on the basis of religious authority or divine right.¹⁹⁹

On manuscript 8-161+8-307, the verb-object collocation “*xíng tián* 行田字” should be understood as “to distribute the farming territory”.²⁰⁰

8-161+8-307 IV: 庚申[57], 潁陰相來行田字.²⁰¹

On a *gēngshēn*, Xiāng of Yǐngyīn (County) comes to distribute the farming territory.

In some *Lǐyē* documents, the character ‘*xíng* 行’ conveys the meaning ‘to go’. Manuscript 8-439+8-519+8-537, an arrest warrant issued for an escaped “convict in a Unit of Five People” (*tú wǔ* 徒伍) named Liáokě 繚可, illustrates this point. Dated to the 25th year of King Zhèng (222 BC), the first line reads:

8-439+8-519+8-537 I: 廿五年九月己丑[26], 將奔命校長周爰書: 敦長買、什長嘉皆告曰: 徒士五(伍)右里繚可, 行到零陽廡谿橋亡, 不智(知) □□□ 𠂔 [. . .]²⁰²

In the 25th year (of King Zhèng) [222 BC], month 9 on a *jíchǒu*, Zhōu, Section Commander with an Emergency Deployment Troop, writes a protocol: Mǎi, Commanding Official of the Emergency Deployment Troop, and Jiā, Commander of a Unit of Ten People, unanimously report: Liáokě, a convict in a Unit of Five People from the township of Yòu, went to the bridge of Wǔxī in Língyáng and absconded. We do not know □□□ 𠂔 [. . .]

The observations above are based on an analysis of the *Lǐyē* texts from layers 5, 6 and 8. Manuscripts found in other layers of well J1, as well as future excavation and research efforts on wells J2 and J3, may either confirm or refute these findings. When interpreting words, individual characters, sentences or passages, it is important to frame the discussion within the context of the *Lǐyē* corpus. It is also crucial to remember that these documents were local to a peripheral region of the empire and thus represent only a small segment of Qín society. Even though direct comparisons with other excavated or transmitted sources from around the same period may prove beneficial, these sources were possibly intended for en-

¹⁹⁹ For a translation and more detailed discussion of tablet 8-461, see chapter 4.1. For discussions on religious authority in the Qín dynasty, see Kern 2000; Puett 2002; Yóu Yīfēi 2015.

²⁰⁰ Chén Wěi 2012: 98. Chén Wěi partly derives this reading of ‘*xíng tián* 行田’ from strip 239 of the “Statutes On Agricultural Fields” (*Tián lǜ* 田律) in the “Èrníán lùlǐng”, where, in a similar context, ‘*xíng* 行’ is understood as ‘to bestow upon’ or ‘to direct’ (*zhǐshòu* 指授). The “Statutes On Households” (*Hù lǜ* 戶律) in the same corpus contain regulations on ‘receiving’ (*shòu* 受) ‘farming territory’ (*tiányǔ* 田宇). The preceding manuscripts are heavily damaged and do not provide additional context.

²⁰¹ Chén Wěi 2012: 97.

²⁰² Chén Wěi 2012: 149.

tirely different purposes or limited in circulation to specific individuals, groups or communities. Such variations in function and accessibility could distort findings in a way that is detrimental to our understanding of these administrative texts. By consciously avoiding, or at least minimizing, such comparisons, we allow for a more exclusive appreciation of the collection as a self-contained entity with its own nuanced modes of interaction that might otherwise be underestimated or overlooked.