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Jane Portal [with the assistance of Hiromi Kinoshita], ed., *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007. Pp. 240. ISBN 978-0-674-02697-1.

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This handsome and lavishly illustrated book accompanied an exhibition of archaeological finds from areas surrounding the tomb of Qin Shihuangdi, First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty of China (r. 221–210 BC). The massive man-made mound that is the mausoleum of the First Emperor is purported to contain huge amounts of treasures and remains unexcavated. In 1972 a farmer digging a well near the tomb mound (in a suburb of present-day Xi'an city near to the Qin capital Xianyang) hit upon some pottery fragments. Further investigation revealed a huge underground pit containing over 7,000 life-sized pottery infantrymen, war chariots, and cavalry, lined up in battle formation with some 10,000 real, mostly bronze weapons. To date, six hundred smaller pits have been found; they hold horse and human armor made of cut stone pieces, as well as officials, entertainers, birds, horses, and other items made of pottery, stone, and bronze. Excavations continue and more pits associated with the mausoleum may still lie undiscovered.

The unexpected discovery of these underground pits containing items to serve the First Emperor in the next world is one of the most important archaeological finds of the twentieth century, because no record of their existence has survived. It generated worldwide excitement comparable to the 1923 discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamon, pharaoh of Egypt (r. 1352–1344 BC). Many exhibitions of the terracotta army and other artifacts associated with the First Emperor's tomb have toured museums in major cities around the world. This, the most recent, at the British Museum in London, is the largest and most comprehensive, and is accompanied by a catalog of pictures, line drawings, and five chapters of text by historians, art historians, curators, and archaeologists from Britain, the United States, Canada, and China.

The most important accomplishment of the First Emperor was the military unification of China after several hundred years of wars among the feudal states. It ended the Warring States era (403–221 BC) in Chinese history and began the imperial age that lasted until 1911. Since Qin's military achievement made possible his other considerable feats, and since the largest pit at the site of his mausoleum was filled with replicas of a huge army and real weapons, this archaeological find has stirred great interest among military historians. Chapter One of *The First Emperor*, appropriately titled "The Rise of Qin and the Military Conquest of the Warring States," by Robin Yates (McGill Univ.) uses evidence both from this excavation and from other recently discovered Qin-era tombs to confirm, enlarge upon, or discredit previous theories that explained the success of Qin. For example, Yates debunks an idea espoused by some earlier experts that Qin's triumph over its rivals was due in part to its adoption of iron as opposed to bronze weapons. But in fact most of the weapons found in the pits associated with the First Emperor are bronze, while very few are

iron. (Whereas the soldiers, chariots, and horses are made of fired clay, the weapons were used by real soldiers in battle.) Evidence found in these pits and documents found in other Qin tombs, however, show a strict system of command as well as enforcement and quality control in the manufacture of weaponry and everything else produced in the government workshops. While there is no proof that Qin's rival states lacked the needed raw materials or were slack in the way they supervised the fabrication of their weaponry and other manufactures, the meticulous control system in effect in everything associated with the Qin government ensured especially high quality products.

Intense and brutal warfare characterized the late Warring States era as the seven surviving states fought for supremacy. Each created vast armies toward that end. According to historian Chun-shu Chang,<sup>1</sup> "By the third century BC, each of the contending Seven States had built up a huge army: the Ch'in [Qin] army had 600,000 to 800,000 (and possibly up to one million) men, Ch'i had over 400,000, Yen had over 310,000, Ch'u had 800,000 to one million, Wei had over 400,000, Chao had over 450,000, and Han had over 300,000." These enormous armies were the result of the draft universally adopted by the states of the Chinese world. The goal of the wars between the states was to annihilate the enemy and annex his territory. Yates concludes by asking what, since the major Warring States possessed the same technology and adequate resources, accounted for Qin's final success? He suggests a combination of factors, adding that excavated evidence, including contemporary written records will further our understanding, but concludes that perhaps we shall never know.

Chapter Two, "The First Emperor and the Qin Empire," is by eminent Qin and Han historian Michael Loewe and three experts from the British Museum who contributed sections on coins, palaces and architecture, and gold and jade to explain specific artifacts in the exhibition. Loewe succinctly summarizes the institutional innovations that enabled Qin to consolidate its power, centralize its institutions, and expand its economy. As all historians agree, the First Emperor's reign was the culmination of the groundwork laid by his ancestors centuries before. Founded in 777 BC under the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1050–256 BC) as a frontier state to guard against nomadic groups to the west, the early Dukes of Qin ruled a land less advanced and cultured than the feudal states to its east, somewhat like Macedonia in its relationship to the classical Greek city-states. As the ruling Zhou Dynasty declined after the eighth century, the various feudal states asserted their de facto independence and warred against one another, eliminating the smaller and weaker ones. In the fifth century, the larger states, including Qin, called themselves kingdoms, formed unstable and shifting coalitions, and began warring for supremacy.

Like all historians of this era, Loewe gives Shang Yang, also known as Lord Shang (chancellor of Qin from 359 to 350 BC), most credit for reforms that facilitated Qin's rise. He institutionalized a merit-based bureaucracy, freed serfs, promulgated uniform laws applicable to all, and supervised the conquest of two states, Shu and Ba, to the south in the upper Yangzi River valley in modern Sichuan province. The added resources of the new acquisitions greatly enhanced Qin's economy as it prepared for new conquest. Lord Shang's system of government, continued by Han Fei, Li Si, and other leading ministers of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1: *Nation, State, and Imperialism in Early China, ca. 1600 B.C.–A.D. 8* (Ann Arbor: U Michigan Pr, 2007) 47.

Qin, became known as Legalism, whose ideology made Qin the most efficient, wealthy, and militarized state in the late Warring States era.

In 246 BC, an ambitious and charismatic young man named Ying Zheng inherited the Qin throne. With ample resources and able ministers and generals, he launched the final campaigns that eliminated all other states by 221 BC (the Zhou royal house had been easily destroyed by Qin in 256 BC). As a result, Qin became China's national dynasty, the first of the imperial era. No longer satisfied with the designation "king," Ying Zheng assumed the grand title *huangdi*, roughly "emperor," adding the word "shi" which means "first" to *huangdi* (thus Shihuangdi). He called himself the first emperor and stated that his successors would only add the prefix, "second," "third," etc., to their title because henceforth all rulers would be from the house of Qin. With unification, Qin laws, institutions, and administrative regulations applied to the whole land. The remainder of Loewe's essay deals with the despotic rule of the First Emperor, including his persecution of Confucian scholars, his death, and the murderous succession struggles that followed, culminating in the fall of Qin in 206 BC. It ends with reference to writings during the succeeding Han Dynasty that condemned Qin's tyranny, citing this as the reason for its rapid downfall.

History often celebrates great leaders, especially military leaders, because of the transforming part they play in the world. Thus, the many historical works about the First Emperor credit his victories and the government he created with forever and irrevocably changing China. Because this short chapter is associated with the magnificent exhibition of the artifacts excavated from the pits surrounding Qin Shihuangdi's tomb, it naturally emphasizes his revolutionary role in changing the course of Chinese history. However, a number of other works offer a deeper understanding of the evolutionary nature of social and political changes in the preceding centuries that made possible and culminated in the unification of the Chinese world under Qin.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter Three, "Imperial Tours and Mountain Inscriptions," by Martin Kern (Princeton), discusses the First Emperor's grand tours of inspection of his realm: the first one took place one year after the wars of unification and his death occurred during the last tour. This short chapter includes photographs of some of the sites he visited and rubbings of some surviving inscriptions he had carved on stone steles and on mountainsides to record his visits and feats. As Sima Qian (145–87 BC), China's Grand Historian and author of the monumental history of the Chinese world from the beginning to his time, described them, the tours were undertaken to satisfy the ruler's megalomania. This is the only chapter that makes no reference to artifacts in the exhibition.

Chapter Four, "The First Emperor's Tomb—The Afterlife Universe," by Jessica Rawson, a noted art historian of early China, describes the monumental size, construction, and original structures of the tomb complex and the resources and manpower required to build them. The project began right after Ying Zheng became king in 246; work intensified after he became emperor in 221 and was not finished when he died, as evidenced by the fact that some of the accompanying pits are empty. The essay also explores the First Emperor's purpose in building this mausoleum, which was far grander than those of his ancestors and not part of the cemetery where they were buried. Rawson asks whether he saw

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<sup>2</sup> The best short study of social changes preceding the Qin unification is Cho-yun Hsu's *Ancient China in Transition: An Analysis of Social Mobility, 722–222 B.C.* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford U Pr, 1965).

his mausoleum as a commemoration of his life and deeds, or a place to continue his reign after death as ruler of the cosmic order? Lastly, what was the function of the terracotta soldiers? To defend him against the spirit soldiers who represented the men he had killed or to dominate the cosmos just as he had controlled everything in his earthly realm while alive?

Chapter Five, “A Two-Thousand-Year-Old Underground Empire,” by Wu Yongqi, Director of the Museum of the Terracotta Army in China, and two British experts, includes interesting information on the underground dam and other devices that diverted water and prevented seepage into the tomb, technical details on the construction of the main pit for the terracotta soldiers, horses, and carriages, and the quantities of the various materials needed for the project. Based on the names of the foremen engraved in the clay of the terracotta soldiers, Wu estimates approximately 1,000 men worked in teams for twelve years to complete the modeling and firing of the men, horses, and carriages. The single largest raw material item, clay, was the locally available loess soil. There is a fascinating description of one pit designed to entertain the Emperor in his afterlife: it measures 925 square meters and simulates a lake filled with forty-six life-sized, realistically modeled bronze geese, swans, cranes, etc., plus fifteen terracotta musicians with their string and percussion instruments.

An appendix summarizes the results of some scientific tests addressing specific questions on the precise size and current condition of the tomb chamber and other issues. There follows a glossary of Chinese characters and their Pinyin alphabetic transcriptions, an inventory and description of the 134 items in the exhibition, notes, a short bibliography, and a list of works cited.

Though well written by experts in several disciplines, *The First Emperor* suffers from repetitions as each author introduces the same source or explains some fact already known to the reader. Also, inclusion of the Wade-Giles transcription system along with the Pinyin in the Glossary would have been very helpful.<sup>3</sup> While scholars of China are conversant with both systems, most general readers are not, which can lead to confusion. For example, a contributor explains that one reason the Qin Dynasty is important is because the name “China” derives from the word “Qin.” This makes no sense unless one knows that the equivalent of “Qin” in Pinyin is “Ch’in” in Wade-Giles. In any case, approximately 95 percent of the people of China today call themselves the people of Han, which shows that the succeeding Han Dynasty (202 BC–AD 220) left a more enduring legacy. This is because the Qin Dynasty survived a mere four years after the founder’s death, while Han rulers abolished its overly harsh aspects but retained and modified its rational reforms. The longevity of the Han Dynasty ensured the survival of imperial government for two millennia in China.

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<sup>3</sup> The Pinyin system was devised in the 1950s in the People’s Republic of China and adopted in 1979 as the standard Romanization method for modern Chinese by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO); though it superseded the Wade-Giles system that had been prevalent in innumerable works published since the nineteenth century, the latter still continues to be used in many books and articles.