

Scribes, Assistants, and the Materiality of Administrative Documents in Qin-Early Han China: Excavated Evidence from Liye, Shuihudi, and Zhangjiashan

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As a result of the increasing administrative needs in the early imperial period, the profession of scribes was liberated from being the exclusive reserve of traditional hereditary families and opened to aspirants from non-hereditary families. Based on the excavated legal and administrative texts from Liye, Shuihudi, and Zhangjiashan, this paper explores the complementary nature of the scribes and assistants to understand the opening of the scribal profession. This paper also coins a concept of “administrative literacy,” which suggests that the materiality of written surfaces is a significant factor in understanding the literacy of administrative officials in early imperial China.

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