

# The Zuling Mausoleum Precinct Site of the Liao Dynasty in Bairin Left Banner, Inner Mongolia

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The research on the imperial burial systems of ancient China is one of the important contents of Chinese Archaeology. The Liao Dynasty, together with the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song Dynasty ruling the southern part of China, formed the second Southern and Northern Dynasties Period and made great contribution to the formation of the Chinese Nationality as a pluralistic integration. Therefore, the in-depth research on the Liao Culture embodied by the imperial burial system and other material carriers are academically important.

The Liao Dynasty had five imperial mausoleum precincts, the Qingling of which built in the middle to late period of the Liao Dynasty was investigated and researched by Japanese archaeologists. In early 1960s, Mr. Jia Zhoujie made reconnaissance to Zuling Precinct, but his estimation to the location of the underground hall of Zuling Mausoleum was clearly wrong. We could draw the conclusion that the archaeological research on the imperial burial system of the early Liao Dynasty is still a virgin ground.

## I. The Geographical Location

The Zuling Mausoleum is the burial of Yelü Abaoji, the first emperor of the Liao Dynasty. It is located to the northwest of Shifangzi Village, Qagaan Qada Süm (Township), Bairin Left Banner, Inner Mongolia. About 2.5km to its southeast is the remains of Zuzhou Prefecture, the attendant town of the Zuling Mausoleum set by the Liao court.

The Zuling Precinct is in a bag-shaped mountain saddle at the south end of Greater Khingan Mountains and surrounded by mountain ridges, only on the southeast side, which is facing the Zuzhou Prefecture seat,

there is a passage 80m or so at the widest place. To the south of Zuling Precinct is Manqiga Mount, on the south side of which looted Liao tombs are seen, and on the north side, there are remains of sacrificial architectures. To the south of Manqiga Mount is flat terrain, through which Shali River flows from west to east. In the valleys on the two sides of Zuling Prefecture, looted Liao tombs are also found.

## II. The Archaeological Surveys and Their Results

In the autumns of 2003 and 2004, we conducted archaeological surveys and trial excavations to the Zuling Mausoleum Precinct, and made important breakthrough in our research issues.

1. The location of the underground hall is confirmed through the surveys and observations to the remains and relics in the Zuling Precinct. The front part of the Zuling Mausoleum is an artificial tumulus built with sandwiched rammed-earth layers and stone block layers and reinforced by retaining walls on the two sides. To the south of the artificial tumulus, two broken stone human statues and a stone squatting dog are unearthed (Figure 1). The rear part of the mausoleum is natural mountain body, and the underground hall would be in the mountain body, which matches the records in *Dili Zhi* (Treatise on Geography) of *Liao Shi* (Liao History) that “for the mausoleum of Emperor Taizu, a hall was hewn out of the mountain”. On the ridge to the south of the underground hall, there were three architectural foundations arranged in an east-west row, from which fragments of Dharani Pillar with Chinese characters and architecture parts are found. This would be the location of the Din-



Figure 1. The Mausoleum Sculptures in situ Nearby the Underground Hall of Zuling Mausoleum

ing Hall recorded in *Liao Shi*, one of the important places to hold sacrificial ceremonies. On the south slope of this ridge is a zigzag mounting path about 5m wide and 300m long. On the left side of the entrance of the mounting path at the foot of the ridge, there is a small-sized architectural foundation.

2. The concrete location of “Heilong Men (Black Dragon Gate)” is confirmed; that of the four burials and five architectural foundations are also defined. In addition, the architectural foundations outside the Heilong Men, including the one on Guifu Hill, are also confirmed. On the hills in the middle of the north foot of Manqiga Mount, there are also three tiers of terrace architectural foundations, which would be tightly related to Zuling Mausoleum.

3. On the ridges surrounding the Zuling Precinct, over 30 loci of artificial stone walls have been found, all of which were built to seal the gaps or as fences on the easier places. The walls are 0.8 to 6m thick on the tops and from less than 1m to more than 9m high. These walls might be also used as boundary marks of the mausoleum precinct, and probably related to the geomancy ideas followed by the designers of the mausoleum.

4. The Zuling Precinct could be divided into the inner and outer zones based on the remains in the precinct scope.

### III. The Archaeological Excavations

To better explore the imperial burial system of the Liao Dynasty and coordinate with the designing of the large site preservation plan of Zuling Mausoleum Precinct, the excavations were conducted since 2007 in the Zuling

area. To date, the Attendant Tomb No. 1 (PM1), Architectural Complex A within the Zuling Precinct and the architectural foundation on Guifu Hill to the east of the precinct have been excavated.

#### 1. Attendant Tomb No. 1 (PM1)

This tomb was on a ridge in the west of the outer zone and only separated from Zuling Mausoleum by a ridge. The size of this tomb (looted before excavation) was very large, and the whole tomb is composed of a passageway facing the southeast (the orientation is  $110^\circ$ ), corridors linking the chambers, an antechamber, a middle chamber, a rear chamber and two side chambers, the whole length at the longest place is 50m (Figure 2). The floors of these chambers were all paved with square bricks; brick-lined drainage system was found in the chambers and passage.

This tomb is cut out of the mountain. The passageway was 17.35m long, 3.78m wide and 5.25m deep at the deepest place. The bottom was flat and the opening of the tomb was slope along the terrain. The walls of the passageway are lined by bricks and plastered with lime stucco, and the tops of the walls were covered with a course of stone blocks. On each of the two side walls at the joint part of the passageway and the antechamber, there is a simulated wooden architecture built of brick, the walls of which were plastered with lime stucco, and the east one had ink-drawn human figures. The roofs of the architectures are decorated with ridge tiles, flat tiles, semi-cylindrical tiles and concave eave tiles, beneath which are red-painted eave rafters carved out of bricks; on the east end of the ridge is a demon-face-shaped ridge-end tile. At the east end between the two architectures there has been a wooden door, but only iron fittings were left. Three layers of square bricks were paved near the entrance of the tomb; the lower part of the sealing wall was built of bricks and the upper part, stone blocks, and coated with lime stucco.

The entrance of the tomb has an arch-shaped top; the wooden ground beam of the doorframe is still kept (Figure 3). The antechamber has a rectangular plan and a vault ceiling, the length (E-W) of which is 9.05m, the width is 3.3m and the height, 2.84m. On the back wall of the antechamber, traces of ink-painted floral designs are seen. Behind the antechamber is the front corridor, which is sealed with ten layers of bricks. On the side walls of the front corridor, there are two recesses near the antechamber. At the rear end of the front corridor, remnant of wooden door bearing is left. The middle, rear

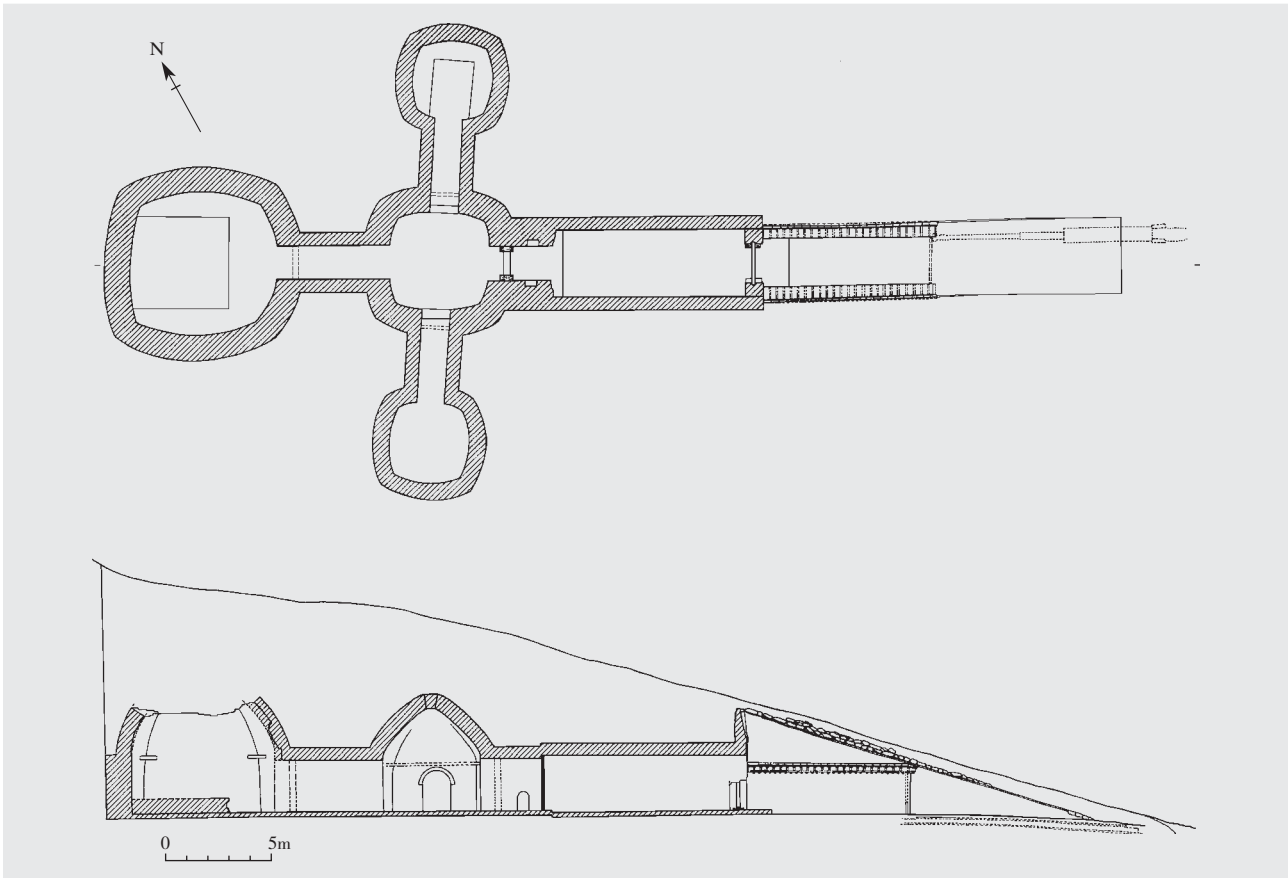


Figure 2. The Plan and Longitudinal Section of Attendant Tomb No. 1 (PM1)



Figure 3. Attendant Tomb No. 1 (SE-NW)

chambers and two side chambers are all in square plan with curved corners and with dome-shaped ceilings. Just like the front corridor, the rear corridor also had brick sealing wall in the front and wooden door remnants in the back. The rear chamber is 6.85m long (E-W), 6.9m wide (N-S) and 5.5m high (remaining height). In the middle of the back half of the rear chamber is the coffin platform built of bricks, the front and two sides of which have color-painted brick arch-shaped shrines and columns. The gold-plated wooden dragon heads unearthed nearby the coffin platform hinted that there would have been burial furniture like house-shaped wooden outer coffin on the platform. The top surface not covered by the outer coffin is decorated with floral designs.

The rear chamber had been looted before excavation, and the skeleton(s) of the tomb occupant(s) were also disturbed and only fragments of skull and jaw were preserved. The remaining grave goods are gilt bronze coins of “*Kaiyuan Tongbao* 开元通宝”, gilt silver double-phoenix ornament (Figure 4), silver ornaments

inlaid with gemstones (Figure 5), glass bowl, green-glazed porcelain washers with dragon and double-phoenix designs (Figure 6), green-glazed porcelain pitcher, white-glazed porcelain jar and basin, etc.

Some pieces of fragments of gilt stone epitaph are recovered from this tomb, but no clues about the name and status of the tomb occupant(s) are kept. The types of the tomb structure and the grave goods showed that this tomb was buried in the early period of the Liao Dynasty. On the ridge to the southeast of this tomb (L1), there is a foundation of sacrificial terrace architecture.

## 2. Architectural Complex A

Located to the southeast of the underground hall of Zuling, on the plain zone to the east of the south ridge, the Architectural Complex A consisted of three architectural units. We excavated the two on the west and north and numbered them as J1 and J2 (Figure 7).

Facing the south, J1 was built on a rammed-earth platform, the four sides of which are lined with rectangular bricks and plastered with lime stucco. A *yuetai* (lit. "Moon Platform", small terrace) paved with stone blocks is attached to the south side of the platform. J1 was a brick-and-timber structure, the floor of which was paved with square bricks. The open-air pillar bases are all in *Fupen* (overturned basin) style and carved with floral designs, the side lengths of the square plinths beneath which are 1m or so. The hidden pillar bases in the brick walls are slightly trimmed irregular stone blocks. The brick walls were 1m or so thick. Large amounts of bricks, tiles and other architecture parts are unearthed from the site, as well as the stone statue of a Buddhist monk (Figure 8), iron stirrup and Northern Song coins. Among the bricks and tiles, the flat tiles with incised inscription of "Fo (Buddha)" and figure of Arhat are more important. This unit might be related to the sacrificial ceremonies of Zuling Mausoleum.

Facing the south, J2 was also a brick-and-timber structure, the east, north and west sides of which were brick walls and the door and windows were set on the south side, and the floor was paved with square bricks.



Figure 4. Gilt Silver Double-phoenix Ornament (PM1:239)



Figure 5. Silver Ornaments Inlaid with Gemstones (PM1:232-1 to 232-4)



Figure 6. Green-glazed Porcelain Washer with Double-phoenix Design (PM1:134)



Figure 7. Architectural Complex A (Top is North)



Figure 8. The Stone Statue of a Buddhist Monk Unearthed from J1 of Architectural Complex A

The whole unit was composed of the subsidiary room on the east (J2E1) and the main hall on the west (J2W1), and the entrance might be set at the subsidiary room (J2E1). The longitudinal length of J2E1 was slightly larger than that of the main hall (J2W1), but it is severely damaged. It was modified or rebuilt for at least one time, and its remains could be identified as containing two phases. The early phase of J2E1 was a semi-subterranean structure with a hearth in the southwestern corner, the firebox and fire tunnel of which were linked to the *Kang* (heatable brick bed) in the main hall. On the north and south sides of the hearth, seven porcelain or pottery jars are found, one pottery jar of which had a small pottery jar and two bronze coins in it. This room might be used as a kitchen. The floor of the late phase is damaged, and the bricks paved on it are all missing; from the ground, iron knives, scissors, arrowheads and other implements were found. To the south of the west wall, a rectangular stone threshold is found with two door frame-bearing stones flanking. A doorway leading to the main hall is found here.

Facing the east, the main hall (J2W1) was linked to J2E1. The façade of it consisted of three bays; windows were set on the south side, and the west and north sides

were brick walls with stone pillar bases built in. In the room, *Kang* were built with bricks and stone blocks along the south, west and north walls; the *Kang* were 1.4m wide and 0.3m high, the top of which was plastered with lime stucco. Three fire tunnels are found under the *Kang* along the north wall, and two fire tunnels are found under the *Kang* along the west and south walls, respectively; in some places, one more tunnel was added under the south and west *Kang*. Traces of funnels are found on the outsides of the west and north walls. Three outdoor hearths which might be set later are recovered to the north and west of the main hall. In the main hall (J2W1), sickles, scissors, cauldron, spearhead, arrowheads and stirrup and other iron implements were found; two exquisite iron swords were recovered in the fire tunnels under the south *Kang*. This room might be used as a temporary lodge for the officials holding sacrificial ceremonies to Zuling Mausoleum.

### 3. The Architectural Foundation on Guifu Hill

Located by the main road from Zuzhou Prefecture to Zuling Mausoleum, the architectural foundation on Guifu Hill is an important site closely related to the Zuling

Precinct.

Facing the south, this architectural foundation was an earth-and-timber structure in rectangular plan. It had three bays in both longitudinal and transverse directions, 13.53m long (E-W) and 9.83m wide (N-S). A doorway about 4m wide is on the south wall, on each side of which was a pillar base pit, the stone pillar bases in which are missing. The walls on the four sides were built of adobes, the thickness of which is 1.25m. The tortoise-shaped stele pedestal is in the center of this architecture foundation and set on a rectangular brick base. Heading the south, the tortoise head is lost, and the remaining length of it is 2.8m and the height, 1.06m. The back of the tortoise-shaped stele pedestal is decorated with tortoiseshell pattern and the socket for erecting the stele is opened in the middle of the back. The stele has been broken into pieces, some of which are recovered in the surrounding accumulations. The stele fragments bearing Khitan large script characters are scattered mostly to the south of the pedestal and the ones bearing Chinese characters are scattered mostly to the north (Figure 9).

Four pillar base pits are found symmetrically on the



*Figure 9. The Architectural Foundation on Guifu Hill*



Figure 10. The Rubbing of a Stele Fragment with Khitan Large Characters Unearthed from the Architectural Foundation on Guifu Hill



Figure 11. The Rubbing of a Stele Fragment with Chinese Characters Unearthed from the Architectural Foundation on Guifu Hill



Figure 12. The Stele Fragment with Chinese Characters Unearthed from the Architectural Foundation on Guifu Hill

four diagonal sides of the tortoise-shaped stele pedestal; engaged pillars are found in the adobe walls on the four sides, four on each side. Outside of the adobe walls, the brick pavements are as wide as 4m. Around the architectural foundation, there were dado stones and brick-paved aprons. According to the pillar arrangement, this architecture on Guifu Hill could be restored as a double-eave building with a hipped roof.

Mounting paths are found on eastern and western sides of this architectural foundation, the east one of which is preserved better. The stele ever erected in the site was a bilingual stele: it had Khitan large script characters (Figure 10) engraved on the front and Chinese characters (Figures 11 and 12) on the back. In the text, the stele mentioned “The fifth year of Tianzan 天贊 Era (926 CE)”, “Shengtian Huangdi 升天皇帝 (lit. The Ascending Emperor – the posthumous name of Emperor Taizu)”, “Lihu Wangzi 李胡王子 (Prince Lihu)” and Emperor Taizu’s expeditions against Youzhou Prefecture and Bohai Kingdom, and so on, which closely match Emperor Taizu’s merits recorded in *Liao Shi*. Based on these records and discoveries, we inferred that this architectural foundation is the remains of the “monument tower, in which a stele was erected in memory of Emperor Taizu’s merit of founding the empire” recorded in *Dili Zhi* (Treatise on Geography) of *Liao Shi*.

#### IV. The Conclusions

The imperial burial system of the Liao Dynasty did not have detailed records in historic literature; through the surveys and excavations, we got some new knowledge on the construction rules of Zuling Mausoleum.

1. Zuzhou Prefecture, the attendant town of the Zuling Mausoleum was set to the southeast of Zuling Mausoleum. Outside the Black Dragon Gate, the monument tower and other sacrificial or memorial architectures were arranged on the east, south and west sides. In

the valleys within and around the mausoleum precinct, there were still many attendant tombs.

2. The selection of the mausoleum precinct obviously referred to the geomancy theories. It is in a bag-shaped mountain saddle and surrounded by mountain ridges, only to its south is a narrow pass, which is the location of the Black Dragon Gate. To the south of the mausoleum are Manqiga Mount and Shali River; the gaps on the ridges surrounding the mausoleum were all sealed with stone walls which were also the boundary marks of the mausoleum precinct.

3. The Zuling Precinct could be divided into the inner and outer zones: the north part where the graveyard of Emperor Taizu is located is the inner zone and the south part where the attendant tombs are scattered is the outer zone. On the “south ridge” running in east-west direction, stone walls were built and linked to the architectural foundations on the ridge, and moreover lead to the Architectural Complex A, all of which formed an east-west boundary separating the two zones.

4. Emperor Taizu’s grave (underground hall) is a stone cave almost exactly in the center of the inner zone. Stone mausoleum sculptures were set nearby the underground hall. Architectural Complex A, one of the most important sacrificial sites, was to the southeast of the underground hall and formed a functional integration together with the zigzag mounting paths and the architectures on the south ridge. To the southeast of Attendant Tomb No. 1 (PM1), another sacrificial architectural site is found.

These discoveries generally match the records in *Dili Zhi* (Treatise on Geography) of *Liao Shi* that “太祖陵凿山为殿，曰明殿。殿南岭有膳堂。以备时祭。门曰黑龙。东偏有圣踪殿，立碑述太祖游猎之事。殿东有楼。立碑以纪太祖创业之功 [for the mausoleum of Emperor Taizu, a hall was hewn out of the mountain, and named ‘Ming Dian (Hall of Brightness)’. To the south of the hall, on the ridge, there was a Dining Hall preparing for sacrifice offering ceremonies. The gate was named ‘Heilong (Black Dragon)’. To the east of the gate was

the Sacred Trace Hall with steles inscribing the hunting and touring stories of Emperor Taizu; to the east of the Sacred Trace Hall was a monument tower, in which a stele was erected in memory of Emperor Taizu’s merit of founding the empire.]”

5. The layout of the Zuling Mausoleum Precinct adopted some essential elements of the imperial burial system from the Han to the Tang Dynasties, while it also has its own features. This style of mausoleum planning was succeeded by the Huailing Mausoleum of the Liao Dynasty, both representing the mode of the imperial burial designing of the early Liao Dynasty.

The results of the architectural surveys and excavations are important discoveries of the archaeology of the Liao Dynasty. They significantly made up the insufficient historic literature, opened up the virgin land of the research on the imperial burial system of the early Liao Dynasty and improved the researches on the imperial burial systems of ancient China and the archaeology and history of the Liao Dynasty.

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Postscript: The original report was published in *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology) 2009.7: 46–53. There are four illustrations and two plates with the original report. The authors of the original report are Dong Xinlin 董新林, Tala 塔拉, Kang Lijun 康立君 and Xiao Huaiyan 肖淮雁; the present version is rewritten by Dong Xinlin and translated into English by Ding Xiaolei 丁晓雷.