

Lü Family Cemetery of the Northern Song Dynasty at Wulitou in Lantian, Shaanxi

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Abstract

The rescue excavation to the Cemetery of Lü Family of the Northern Song Dynasty recovered a family graveyard consisting of the tomb group, border ditches and family ancestor temple. All of the tombs were earthen cave tombs arranged in clear north-south lines and east-west rows. The border ditches were found on the east, north and west sides of the tomb group forming a “Π”-shaped plan. The family ancestor temple was on the extension of symmetric axis of the tomb group and 500m to its south. It was a brick-and-wood architectural complex with three courtyards arranged along the longitudinal symmetric axis. From these tombs, 655 pieces (or sets) of grave goods, most of which were practical utensils made of pottery, porcelain, stone, bronze, iron, tin, silver, gold, lacquer and bone, were unearthed. The cemetery of Lü Family was the most completely preserved family cemetery of the Northern Song Dynasty found to date.

Keywords: earthen cave tombs-Northern Song Dynasty; Lü Dalin (1044–1092 CE)-family cemetery; Wulitou (Lantian County, Shaanxi).

Introduction

In December 2006 to December 2010, the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology carried out excavation at Wulitou Village 2.5km northwest of the Lantian County seat. The excavation discovered there a family cemetery of the Northern Song Dynasty, uncovered 29 tombs of that time, brought to light 665 pieces or sets of artifacts and revealed a family ancestral temple.

Before extensive excavation, the geographical survey of the burial area and interview to the local villagers were conducted, and the location of the graveyard and the present-day inhabitants of the family's descendants are preliminarily determined. Then, the archaeologists carefully collected relevant historic records and archaeological data, extensive surveyed with the total station, and conducted archaeological coring in an area of 16ha, and three times of elaborate detection to the key localities, which resulted in the ascertainment of the scope of the graveyard, the distribution and number of tombs in the cemetery and the location of the ancestral temple.

The tombs

The excavated tombs total 29, namely 20 adult burials and

nine children ones. They are all in the orientation of north by northeast, and the graves measure 8.5–15.5m in depth. In structure every grave consists of a shaft passage and a flat- or vaulted-topped earthen cave, the passage having two columns of triangular step-pits cut in the western and eastern walls respectively to facilitate getting in and going out.

1. Stratigraphical accumulations

There are nine strata in the cemetery. The first stratum is cultivated soil; the second disturbed soil; the third, the Northern Song ground, from which all the tomb-passages are opened, and below which are several primary loess layers varied in color and date. The ninth stratum is about 9.5m deep from the present-day surface; it is formed of calcium concretions mixed with large quantities of pebbles. About 11m below the surface is a compact layer of calcium concretions, in which a great many stone lumps disorderly superimposed on or mixed with each other to form a hard and impervious 0.2–0.3m thick stratum.

2. Children tombs

They are 3–5m in depth, the tomb chamber being small in dimensions and without coffin in most cases but being paved with one or two square bricks on the tomb bottom to support the corpse. In shape they are identical with children tombs of modern and present times. Most of them are furnished with brick or stone epitaphs, which are placed in the earthen layer above their ancestors' tombs.

3. Tombs of adults

These tombs fall into five types, i.e. the single-chambered, tandem double-chambered, parallel double-chambered, main-chamber-*cum*-side-roomed and single-antechamber-with-double-rear-chambered.

Single-chambered tombs total 14. The passage extends southward from the south end of the chamber. It is rectangular or trapezoid in plan with the south narrower than the north and has a level bottom or a slant one higher in the south. The chamber has an arched gateway at the entrance, which has been sealed with rectangular adobes. It is rectangular in plan with the major axis pointing to the north, generally has a niche for epitaph in the northern wall, and measures 2–2.5m in height with the bottom superimposed on the compact layer of calcium concretions. In the center are often two double coffins for a married couple, each consisting of an inner coffin and an outer one, though sometimes the two inner coffins are placed side by side and share the same outer coffin; and clear ashen traces of their wooden planks still remained. The skeletons are laid in an extended supine position; they are all poorly preserved. The grave goods are disposed around the outer coffin, between the outer coffin and the



Figure 1 M14 and M16 of the Lantian Lü Family Cemetery (NE-SW).



Figure 2 M15 of the Lantian Lü Family Cemetery (NE-SW).

inner one, or atop the coffins. They are mostly bronze, iron, porcelain and pottery practical utensils. This type of tomb occurred most frequently, particularly in the early phase (Figures 1-4).

The tandem double-chambered type consists of two tombs. Tomb M1 has a shaft passage with the bottom higher than that of the chambers, making the latter two sunken as pits. The antechamber (main chamber) is built at the northern end of the passage, has a rectangular plan and contains a double coffin in the center. The tomb occupant is a male. Outside the outer coffin are grave goods disorderly scattered, and the human skeleton shows traces of disturbance, which, along with the small-sized oval looting tunnel in the eastern wall of the antechamber, suggests looting in the past. The rear chamber is built behind the antechamber, a little to the northeast; it has a rectangular plan, measures somewhat smaller than the antechamber, with the bottom 0.3m higher than that of the main chamber. A double coffin is placed in the center; judged by the grave goods, the skeleton must have belonged to a female. At the entrance is a 1.6m high,



Figure 3 The grave goods of M12 *in situ* (S-N).



Figure 4 M5 of the Lantian Lü Family Cemetery (SW-NE).

0.2m wide primary soil wall as partition between the two chambers (Figure 5).

Parallel double-chambered tombs were discovered also two, each consisting of a shaft passage, an arched gateway sealed with rectangular adobes and two side-



Figure 5 M1 of the Lantian Lü Family Cemetery (SW-NE).



Figure 6 M25 of the Lantian Lü Family Cemetery (SW-NE).

by-side chambers rectangular in plan and partitioned with a primary soil wall. In either case the chamber is furnished with a double coffin in the center; some coffins were moved and raised owing to the floating action of the underground water. The human skeleton has been partly damaged, head pointing to the north and body lying in an extended supine position. The grave goods are laid around the outer and inner coffins except for a few small-



Figure 7 M26 of the Lantian Lü Family Cemetery (NE-SW).

sized fine practical artifacts placed in the inner coffin. The epitaph is put in the niche of the northern wall. This type of tomb belongs to the later phase (Figure 6).

Main-chambered-*cum*-side-roomed tomb was discovered only one (M26). It has a shaft passage and an arched gateway. The main chamber is rectangular in plan with the major axis pointing to the north, and contains a double coffin in the center. The grave goods are disposed around the outer coffin. On the lower left of the main chamber is a smaller-sized rectangular side room, which is partitioned from the main chamber with a primary soil wall. Its grave goods are few in quantity and are largely placed outside the outer coffin. In either chamber the coffin can be distinguished by the remaining plank ash, and the human skeletons by their impressions (Figure 7).

The single-antechamber-with-double-rear-chambered type is also represented by one tomb (M2). The passage is a shaft with the bottom higher than that of the antechamber, which is larger in size and has a trapezoid plan with the south wider than the north. In the center was a double coffin as known from the remaining plank ash. The human skeleton lies in an extended supine position and has been partly damaged. The grave goods are mostly disorderly scattered between the sides of the outer coffin and the longer walls of the chamber and have largely been damaged, which seems to have resulted from intentional disturbance. The two rear chambers are built

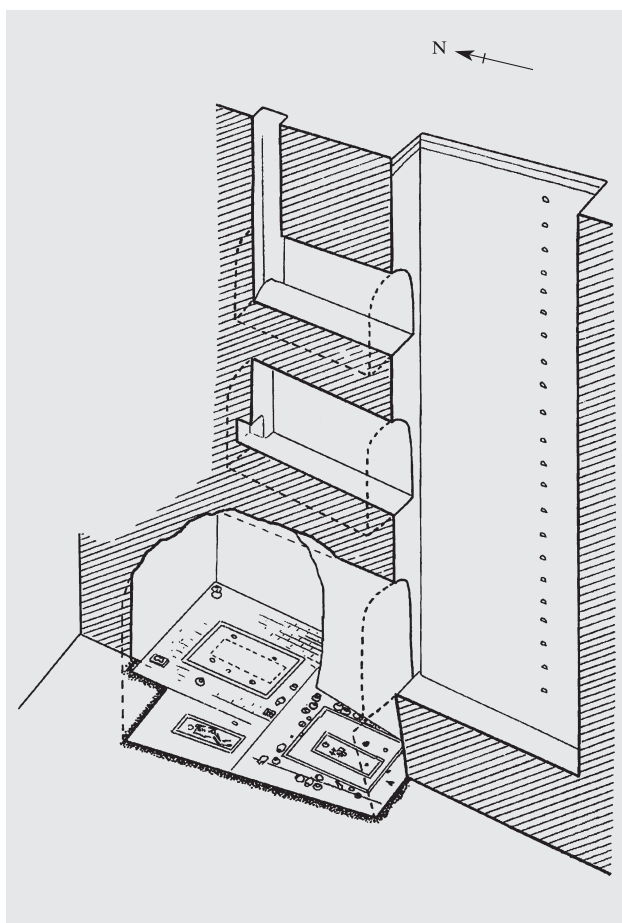


Figure 8 The axonometric drawing of M2 of the Lantian Lü Family Cemetery.

side by side on the northwestern and northeastern sides respectively of the main chamber and are partitioned from each other with a primary soil wall; their bottoms are both a little higher than that of the main chamber. In size the eastern rear chamber is larger than the western one and roughly equals to the antechamber. Its grave goods are more than that of the other two but have been seriously damaged. It is furnished with a double coffin in the center; the skeleton is laid in an extended supine position and is poorly preserved. The western rear chamber is smaller in size. It contains a single coffin in the center, and the human corpse is in a flexed on side position and preserved in a little better condition. Judged by the osteological features and grave goods of the dead, the tomb occupant in the antechamber is a male, while those in the rear rooms are females. On the whole, Tomb M2 is considerably distinctive in type (Figures 8 and 9).

A particular phenomenon was discovered in this batch of tombs, i.e. the structure of a hollow grave. It is a longitudinal cave above the tomb chambers, simple in shape, rectangular in plan, opened in an appropriate position of the tomb shaft-passage's northern wall and having no vestiges or artifacts inside. It may have functioned in two ways: preventing the tomb from



Figure 9 The chambers of M2 of the Lantian Lü Family Cemetery (SW-NE).

robbery and reducing the burden of the tomb chambers from the upper soil. Such structures are seen in three tombs, all of which are in the tomb row of the generation with the members whose given name begins with the “Da 大 (see Figure 8)”.

Border ditches of the cemetery

The graveyard is skirted with border ditches on the eastern, western and northern sides. Functioning as marks of limits as well as tomb protecting and water draining installations, they form an important component part of the cemetery. A selective excavation was made by opening a west-to-east 15 x 2m exploring trench over the eastern ditch, at a point close to the northeast corner. As it was located on the terrain sloping down from the north to the south and played the role of draining the downward flowing natural water, the eastern ditch suffered water washing for about a thousand years, which made its walls collapse repeatedly and become level or gently slant, and its width increase to 13m and its depth to 1.7m. Massive silt has been deposited in the ditch with small amount of contents except for some fine sand on the bottom.

Another exploring trench of the same size was

opened over the western ditch's southern section, which presently measures 8.5m in width and 0.7m in depth, the walls having become gently sloping and bearing traces of collapse, and the interior having little contents but a layer of sandy silt on the bottom. This section of ditch is difficult to clarify as to its original width for it played the same role as the eastern section did and its walls have been damaged by currents and has not repaired since it stopped functioning.

A third trial trench of the same size was opened over the eastern part of the northern border ditch, a little to the east of the middle point. This section of ditch is the best in condition and measures 5m in width for the opening and 1.7m in depth; its walls are kept roughly complete, and its bottom remains rather hard and bears little contents, even no clear sand deposits. It was owing to the horizontal flow of the currents, which much stopped the southward running water pouring into there, that the damage was reduced to a great extent.

Ancestral temple site

The Lü Family ancestral temple site lies 500m due south of the cemetery and presently is used as the buildings of the Wulitou Primary School. It faces to the south and consists of three courtyards of brick-and-timber architectures arranged longitudinally from the front to the back, i.e. the gatehouse, the main hall and the rear quadrangle. The whole complex covers an area of about ten *mu* (0.67ha), and the stratigraphic accumulations measure about 1m in thickness. It was built by Lü Dalin and his three brothers in the Northern Song Dynasty; the related remains are partly preserved in the Cai Wenji Museum in Lantian County, including the stone tablets erected in the Qing Dynasty for amending the ancestral temple and the Northern Song stone tiger and sheep left over from the cemetery; and bluestone column bases and thresholds are abandoned to the present in front of

the gate site. Excavation on the temple site from July to December 2010 revealed seven layers of superimposed house foundations that cover seven periods from the Ming Dynasty to present times. The Northern Song site is covered by the early Ming remains and is being excavated by now.

Unearthed grave goods

Altogether there are 655 pieces or sets of grave goods, which are made of pottery, porcelain, stone, bronze, iron, tin, silver, gold, lacquer, bone and gem-and-shell artifacts. They are all practical articles and can be classified into eight types by usage.

1. Tableware. It consists of numeral types of vessels. The white-glazed plain porcelain products of Ding Ware come first in number, followed by celadon Yaozhou Ware and brown-glazed Ding Ware. In type there are the ring-foot plain bowl with curved deep belly (Figure 10), plain bowl with curved shallow belly and flaring rim (Figure 11), *bo*-bowl with curved belly and incised design (Figure 12) and bowl with shallow belly and incised design (Figure 13).

2. Tea sets. In use they fall into two series: for infusing tea, the pot (Figure 14), tureen with animal-shaped knob and incised design (Figure 15), refuse receptacle with peony design (Figure 16), Persian glass bowl, water pot made of Lishan stone (Figure 17); for cooking tea, the precious exquisite hare's-fur-glazed cup and saucer of Jian Ware, celadon incised design cup and black saucer of Yaozhou Ware (Figure 18), and greenish-white-glazed cup and saucer of Hutian Ware (Figure 19). The related implements include the charcoal spade and the poker engraved with fine design used in association with cooking stoves.

3. Wine vessels. The deep-bellied plain or incised design vase (also called plum vase) is the commonest type (Figure 20). The other classes include the white goblet pure in color and sparkling in effect (Figure 21) and the



Figure 10 White porcelain bowl with curved deep belly (M25:26).



Figure 11 White porcelain bowl with curved shallow belly (M25:23).



Figure 12 Celadon *bo*-bowl with curved belly and incised design (M6:30).



Figure 15 Celadon tureen with animal-shaped knob and incised design (M7:24).



Figure 13 Celadon bowl with shallow belly and incised design (M6:31).



Figure 16 Celadon refuse receptacle with peony design (M6:29).



Figure 14 White porcelain teapot (M2:60).



Figure 17 Lishan stone pot (M6:20).



Figure 18 Celadon teacup with incised design and black porcelain saucer (M14:4).



Figure 21 White porcelain goblet (M6:27).



Figure 19 Greenish-white porcelain teacup and saucer, Hutian Ware (M25:4).



Figure 22 Celadon pitcher and lobed warming bowl (M7:26).



Figure 20 Celadon plum vase with incised design (M2:33).



Figure 23 Greenish-white porcelain censer, Hutian Ware (M2:62).



Figure 24 Bronze perfume spoon (M12:28).

plain heating set with a pitcher and a lobed warming bowl (M7:26), which suggest wine drinking to have been an important part of the then noblemen's life and provided again a piece of doubtless evidence for ascertaining the usage of the lobed deep-bellied bowl of Yaozhou Ware (Figure 22).

4. Perfume and spice vessels, such as the censer, thurible, perfume box and spoon, and spice box, which are rare seen in North China. Their exquisiteness is embodied, for example, on a greenish-white-glazed plain censer of Jingdezhen Hutian Ware (M2:62, see Figure 23), a bronze perfume spoon (M12:28, see Figure 24), a Lishan stone thurible and a perfume box with 卍-shaped signs.

5. Stationeries. The main implements include various types of pottery and stone ink-slabs, ink-sticks, paperweights, ink paste cases and seals. Especially the bean-green Helan ink-stone with natural red margin,



Figure 25 Three-legged black she ink-stone (M4:16)
left. top right. bottom



Figure 26 Celadon case with double lids (M5:13).



Figure 27 Flaring-mouthed celadon vase with incised peony design (M20:10).



Figure 28 Black-glazed pumpkin-shaped porcelain pot with a lobed lid (M25:9).



Figure 29 Bronze kalasa (M4:38).



Figure 30 Stone dui-pot with inscriptions (M2:55).

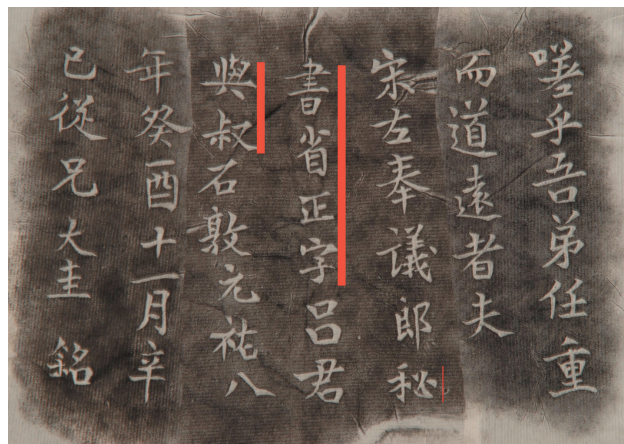


Figure 31 The rubbing of the inscription of the stone dui-pot (M2:55).

three-legged black She ink-stone (M4:16, see Figure 25), and grayish-white Chengni ink-slab belong to the priceless products.

6. Cosmetic utensils. They include the porcelain powder case, silver rouge case with engraved design, celadon plain case with double lids, gold plain hairpin and bronze tailor ruler. Especially delicately made is a celadon plain case with double lids (M5:13). The inner cover consists of two parts and can be opened completely as well as partially by drawing only the smaller central lid and leaving the opening semi-covered. This is a newfound type of product of Yaozhou ware (Figure 26).

7. Storage utensils. These are mainly containers of water, tea, medicines and something powdery or lumpy. M20:10 is a flaring-mouthed celadon vase with incised peony design (Figure 27); M25:9, a black-glazed pumpkin-shaped porcelain pot with a lobed lid (Figure 28); and M4:38, a bronze plain *kalasa* (nectar vessel as carried by certain Bodhisattvas, see Figure 29). Among the other interesting objects are a Lishan stone case and a polished black plain pottery case.

8. Ritual vessels. As Lü Dalin and his brothers were good at studies of ritual, their tombs contain commonly antiquities or their imitations. M2:55 is a pair of Zhou Period stone *dui* round pots engraved with inscriptions on the belly (Figures 30 and 31). M1 yielded an imitation of Western Zhou chime stone with engraved inscriptions on both the reverse and observe and with the word Linzhong 林钟 (eighth of the twelve tones) on an edge. M25 yielded a green-glazed pottery *gui*-turen of the Han Dynasty.

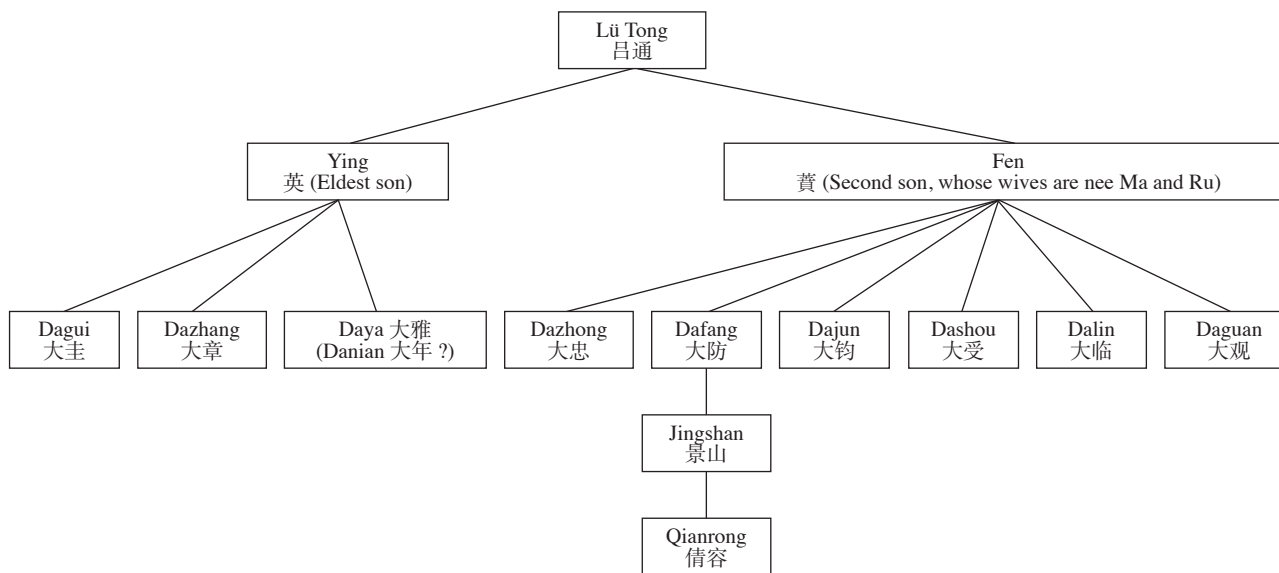
The epitaphs

The graveyard yielded 24 sets of brick or stone epitaphs. They provided rich information on the origin, ancestry, branches and migration of the Lantian Lü Family, the names of most of the tomb occupants, and various data on the government system, imperial examination and famous literati of the Northern Song Dynasty. Thus they left over a batch of rare material written by Song people.

According to the records in the epitaphs, the pedigree of the Lantian Lü lineage can be listed as follows.

The family tree mapped by the layout of the Lü Family Cemetery

The seventh year of Emperor Shenzong's Xining Era to the first year of Emperor Huizong's Zhenghe Era (1074–1111 CE)



Conclusions

1. The Lü Family Cemetery is the most completely preserved family cemetery of the Northern Song Dynasty discovered to date. There remain 29 orderly arranged tombs, the vestige of the border ditch skirting them on the eastern, western and northern sides and the ancestral temple site lying 500m apart from the southern end of the central axis. This plan represents the basic elements and layout of the graveyards of hereditary aristocratic families

in the Northern Song Period.

2. The building of the tombs reflected a certain rules, i.e. the graves of the eldest son and grandson are arranged in a longitudinal series, those of the same generations form transverse rows, while in the same row, the left places from the central axis are taken as higher than the right ones. This layout reflects the Song people's study and understanding of the burial institution stipulated in the *Zhou Li* 周礼 (*Rites of Zhou*).

3. The graveyard is backed against a mountain and facing to waters, with the north higher than the south



and the whole plot surrounded by brooks. This design provided important data for researching into the concept of locating and building family cemeteries in the Northern Song Period.

4. The numerous exquisite practical artifacts unearthed from the tombs reflected the fine life and tasteful temperament of Northern Song Period hereditary aristocratic families. Compared with living in the previous dynasties, the Song people still more cared for material enjoyment and spiritual pleasure.

5. Through a comparative study, Tomb M2 can be preliminary identified as the grave of Lü Dalin. It is located in the burial row of the generation whose members' given names started with the character Da, so the tomb occupant is bound to belong to this generation. There are nine tombs in this row of family members, the

occupant names of eight of whom have been identified, only that of M2 has not been ascertained for the tomb was robbed in early years. Furthermore, among the grave goods is a pair of stone *dui* with the belly inscription containing the name and official position of Lü Dalin. It was a gift the eldest brother Dagui presented to Dalin (Figures 30 and 31), so it could hardly be possible to be placed into the tomb of anyone other than Lü Dalin.

Postscript

The original report written by Zhang Yun 张蕴 and Liu Sizhe 刘思哲 was published in *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology) 2010. 8: 46–52 with 11 illustrations and three pages of plates. The abridged version is prepared by the authors and translated into English by Mo Runxian 莫润先.

