ON THE TERMS BAO ZI, YIN GONG, YIN GUAN, HUAN, AND SHOU
WAS ZHAO GAO A EUNUCH?

BY

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The following notes are concerned with the meaning and usage of certain terms in legal contexts in Han dynasty writings. They raise one significant historical question: whether it is correct to assume that Zhao Gao 趙高, closely associated with the fall of the Qin Dynasty, was indeed a eunuch, in so far as the terminology of the texts need not necessarily imply that he was, and as he is believed to have fathered one child. The enquiry also serves to clarify some of the terms used to denote social distinctions in the Qin Empire and early decades of the Han Empire.

We may distinguish three motives for detaining men, women and children under guard in Qin and Han times and perhaps previously. Leaders defending a walled encampment might collect persons who lived outside the walls but were related to those within, thereby saving them from brutal treatment by an enemy; relatives of officers serving in the defence might be taken under control to act as hostages, thereby ensuring the officers’ loyalty; and the close kin of criminals might be apprehended as part of the latter’s punishment and set to work under official supervision. In some cases such punishment may also have included castration. These processes are recorded by the terms bao 褄 (retention as a hostage), yin gong 隱宮 (retention and castration), yin guan 隱官 (retention to work in government offices), huan 宦 (close attendants, subsequently eunuchs), and shou 收 (to take over, or confiscate). Different uses of the term bao may occasion some confusion.
Dictionaries illustrate the use of *bao* (pôg / pâu: / pao)\(^1\) in as many as twelve different ways. It may denote an item or a condition of vegetation, decorative devices suspended from the canopy of a carriage, or the canopy itself, or ornamentations on a drum. The character does duty for 保, 寶\(^2\), 褒 (great, praiseworthy), 包,\(^3\) and 褥 (swaddling clothes),\(^4\) and it appears as a surname. Three of its uses are of particular significance to the present enquiry; first when it acts for 保, and also (a) as ‘conceal’ or ‘store’; and (b) as 堡 ‘fortress’. Examples of the last two include:

(a) Of invisible influences: see *Guanzi* (SBBY ed.) 14 (39 ‘Shui di’ 水地), 4a: 當之水枯旱而運淤濁而雜故其民詐詐葆詐巧佞而好利 ‘The waters of Jin, being bitter and dark, meander; clogged with silt they wander astray; so the inhabitants are given to flattery and hide their thoughts; deceitful and cunning they are given to seeking profit’. *Zhuangzi* (Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi ji shi* 莊子集釋, Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1991) 1B (2 ‘Qi wu lun’ 齊無論), p. 83: 丈焉而不滿酌焉而不竭而不知其所由來此之謂葆光. Graham renders as ‘Pour into it and it does not fill, bale out from it and it is not drained, and you do not know from what source it comes. It is this that is called our Benetnash Star’.\(^5\)

(b) See *Mozi* (SBBY ed.) 15 (68 ‘Ying di ci’ 迎敵祠) 1b: 凡守城之法 縣師受事出葆循溝防築薦通塗脩城 (Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉, *Mozi chengshou gebian jianzhu* 墨子城守各編簡注, Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1958, p. 85) ‘In all systems of defending a walled settlement, the

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\(^1\) Bernhard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1964) [hereafter *GSR*], no. 1057.

\(^2\) In the A text of the *Laozi* from Mawangdui, 豐 is seen where the received versions have 寶; see also *Shiji* [hereafter *SJ*] 24, p. 1201, 55, p. 2048.

\(^3\) *GSR*, no. 1113 pôg / pâu / pao. It is perhaps possible that 包 was doing duty for 豐 in one of the strips from Shuihudi; see Shuihudi Qin mu zhu jian 睡虎地秦墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990) [hereafter *SHD*]. Miscellaneous excerpts from statutes, strip no. 7; A.F.P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch’in Law* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985) [hereafter *RCL*], p. 105.

\(^4\) *SJ* 33, p. 1518.

\(^5\) A.C. Graham, *Chuang-tzû: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzû* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 57. Graham’s version of ‘Benetnash Star’ is based on a variant reading from *bao guang*, which he interprets as ‘shaded light (?)’. 

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