

in memoriam

Gil Mattos (1939–2002)

Ma Chengyuan 馬承源 (1927–2004)

Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺 (1912–2005)

OBITUARIES

GILBERT LOUIS MATTOS (1939–2002)

Gilbert L. Mattos, whose Chinese name was Ma Jidao 馬幾道, died on December 12, 2002, at the age of 63, of complications from diabetes. With his passing, the scholarly world lost one of the foremost linguists and epigraphers specializing in early China.

Mattos was born on June 24, 1939, in Mill Valley, California, to William and Tessie Mattos. His family was of Portuguese descent (the name Mattos is essentially the equivalent of the English Matthews). Although he had no special exposure to Chinese culture as a child, he became fascinated with it at an early age and resolved even as a teenager to learn the language. After graduating from San Rafael High School in 1959, he spent a year and a half studying Chinese in Taiwan, then returned to the United States and graduated from San Francisco State University in 1964. Aided by a fellowship, he pursued his Ph.D. in Chinese linguistics under Li Fang-kuei and Paul L-M. Serruys at the University of Washington, where he was one of an outstanding group of students that included W. South Coblin, Ken-ichi Takashima, and Ting Pang-hsin. He earned his doctorate in 1973 with a dissertation on the Stone Drums of Qin (which are drum-shaped stones with poetic inscriptions in archaic Chinese).

With his degree in hand, Mattos opted to work for the Central Intelligence Agency instead of seeking a regular academic post. This was the moment when the groundwork was being laid for Richard Nixon's historic visit to China; with an extreme shortage of agents competent in Chinese, the CIA was naturally interested in the services of anyone who could read and translate Chinese documents. After his death, I found among his papers some correspondence—evidently unclassified—from representatives of the American government who were on the ground in China paving the way for the famous summit. Even among his associates in intelligence and diplomatic circles, Mattos must have had a singular reputation as a lover of Chinese antiquities: one of the letters discusses rubbings of bronzes that the other agent had discovered in a used-book shop.

As this anecdote reveals, Mattos was a scholar at heart, and a career as an intelligence analyst lost its appeal before long. Because he enjoyed living in East Asia—he was an inveterate bibliophile, and this was a time when rare Chinese books were still on the market at affordable prices—he

chose again to avoid a conventional academic path, and worked instead as a director of study-abroad programs in Taiwan and later in Beijing. Only in 1990 did he finally take up a professorship in the Department of Asian Studies at Seton Hall University, where he was Chairman at the time of his death.

Mattos's two major publications are *The Stone Drums of Ch'in*,¹ a revision of his dissertation; and a translation, with Jerry Norman, of Qiu Xigui's 裘錫圭 classic *Wenzi xue gaiyao* 文字學概要.² Because Qiu read and approved of the manuscript, and used the opportunity to incorporate many revisions, the English edition supersedes the original and is now the best one-volume study of the subject in any language. Moreover, with its frequent use of technical terms and references to incompletely understood inscriptions, Qiu's masterpiece was in many respects more difficult to translate than it was to compose. Mattos published several other studies and reviews, as well as translations of seminal Chinese articles. In addition, he was instrumental in the publication of the Serruys Festschrift,³ though he took no credit in the front-matter. A complete bibliography of Mattos's works is appended to this necrology.

Mattos worked in his home—where virtually every square inch of wall space was overspread by bookshelves—until late in 2002, when his illness no longer permitted him to live alone. At the time of his death he was involved in two long-term projects. The first was a dictionary of ancient Chinese philosophical terms, an enterprise that he and I decided to take on together on the very day we first met, and which we intended for the ABC Chinese Dictionary Series, published by the University of Hawaii Press and edited by Victor H. Mair. We selected three hundred keywords from Zhou times and envisioned entries in two parts: first, an extensive linguistic and palaeographical treatment of each graph, which was to be his responsibility, and then an analysis of each word's varying usages, which was to be mine. After we had completed about a dozen draft entries, however, other commitments intervened, and Mattos threw himself into the task of producing a one-volume Chinese-English dictionary of the classical language (designed to replace Mathews, Liang Shih-ch'iu, and so on), also for the ABC series. For each term, he planned to include examples from works of diverse periods, with full translations into English. This would have been the finest dictionary of its kind, but he passed away before completing the letter B.

1. *Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XIX* (Sankt Augustin: Steyler Verlag, 1988).

2. *Chinese Writing* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2000).

3. *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977–78).

Mattos kept up to date with the latest archaeological developments in China. Although he never published on them, he was keenly interested in the Guodian 郭店 and Shanghai Museum manuscripts, and was aware that they invalidated some of his earlier theories. For example, one of his cardinal tenets in *The Stone Drums of Ch'in* had been that different graphs in the same text must always represent different words.⁴ He was strongly criticized for postulating this rule in Donald B. Wagner's review,⁵ and before his death he recognized that the Guodian manuscripts (where the same word is sometimes written with two different graphs *on the same strip*) unquestionably refuted it. His notes included detailed studies of the Guodian calligraphy, and it is a pity that he never had the opportunity to organize this research into a publishable statement. I know that he identified several unique hands, and concluded that manuscripts were not typically written from beginning to end by a single scribe; rather, they were composed of slips written by various scribes who may not even have been working in the same room. But I can do no more than repeat this opinion; a theory this bold, and with such broad consequences for codicology, would require an epigrapher of Mattos's stature to defend it.

It is impossible to do justice to his inimitable personality within the confines of a formal obituary; nevertheless, it would also be a mistake not to try to recall it for those who never met him. He was always serious but always jocular, always playing but always working. His research was based on traditional methods refined over centuries, but he was always hunting for ways to apply the latest technologies to his craft. He knew as much about his field as anyone in the world, but also freely admitted everything he did not know. He loved books and was instantly sympathetic to anyone who shared this passion. He could make a friend in a day, and maintain that friendship, with loyalty and devotion, for the rest of his life.

Paul R. Goldin

Bibliography of works by Gilbert L. Mattos

- "Tonal 'Anomalies' in the *Kuo-feng* Odes." *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 9.1-2 (1971): 306-25.
- "The Time of the Stone Drum Inscriptions: An Excursion in the Diachronic Analysis of Chou Script." *Early China* 3 (1977): 36-45.
- "Supplementary Data on the Bronze Inscriptions Cited in *Chin-wen ku-lin*." *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977-78): 62-123.

4. *The Stone Drums of Ch'in*, 130.

5. *Acta Orientalia* 51 (1990), 241-56.

- The Stone Drums of Ch'in*. Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 19. Nettetal, Germany: Steyler, 1988.
- "Eastern Zhou Bronze Inscriptions." *New Sources of Early Chinese History: An Introduction to the Reading of Inscriptions and Manuscripts*. Ed. Edward L. Shaughnessy. Early China Special Monograph Series 3. Berkeley, Calif., 1997. 85–123.
- "The Chen Zhang Fanghu." *Orientalia* 32.2 (2001): 57. [With Yang Hua.]

Translations

- Li, Fang-kuei. "Studies on Archaic Chinese." Tr. G.L. Mattos. *Monumenta Serica* 31 (1974–75): 219–87.
- Lin Qingzhang. "A Synopsis of Studies on the Chinese Classics Published during the Last Fifteen Years." Tr. Gilbert L. Mattos. *Early China* 16 (1992): 235–76.
- Qiu Xigui. "On the Methods of Studying Ancient Chinese Script." Tr. Gilbert L. Mattos. *Early China* 11–12 (1985–87): 301–16.
- Qiu Xigui. *Chinese Writing*. Tr. Gilbert L. Mattos and Jerry Norman. Early China Special Monograph Series 4. Berkeley, Calif., 2000.

Reviews:

- "Two Major Works on Bronze Vessels and Bronze Inscriptions." *Early China* 2 (1976): 11–17.
- Review of Chou Fa-kao, *Chin-wen ku-lin pu*. *Early China* 9 (1983–85): 240–49.