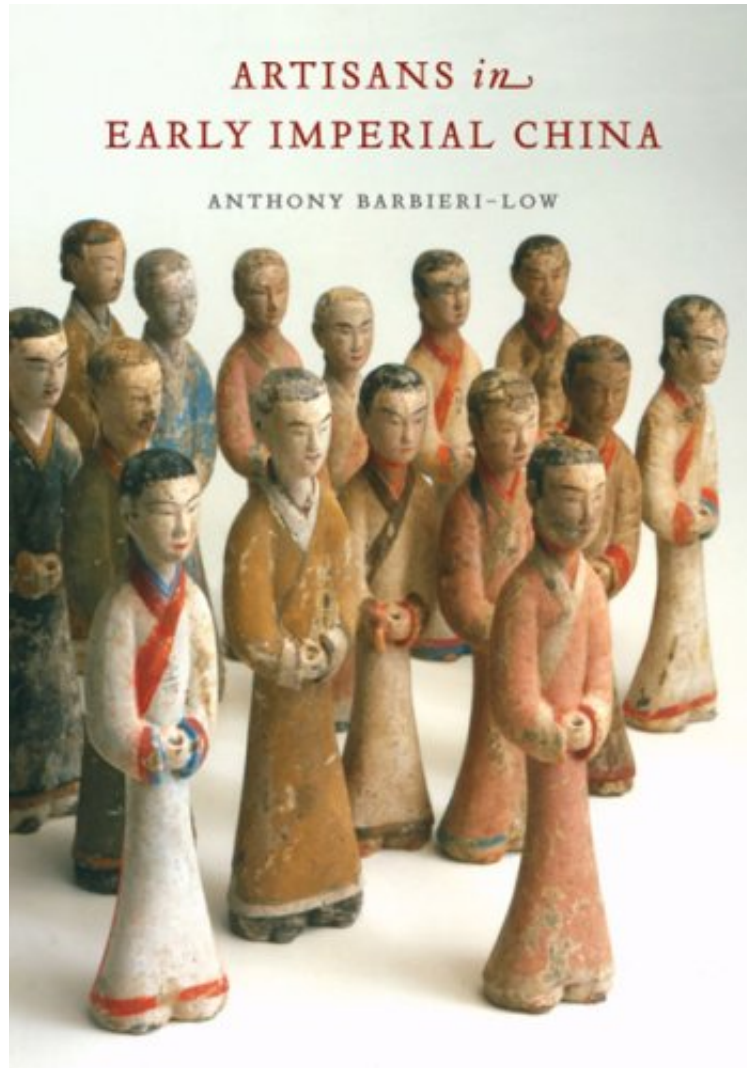


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## Artisans in Early Imperial China

*Anthony Barbieri-Low*  
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Winner of the 2009 International Convention of Asia Scholars Book Award Winner of the 2009 Levenson Book Prize

(for book on pre-1900 China), sponsored by the Association for Asian Studies Winner of the 2009 Charles Rufus Morey Book Award from College Art Association Winner of the 2008 James Henry Breasted Award from the American Historical Association Early China is best known for the dazzling artifacts it has left behind. These terracotta figures, gilt-bronze lamps, and other material remnants of the Chinese past unearthed during archaeological excavations are often viewed without regard to the social context of their creation, yet they were made by real individuals who contributed greatly to the foundations of early Chinese culture. With *Artisans in Early Imperial China*, Anthony Barbieri-Low combines historical, epigraphic, and archaeological analysis to refocus our gaze from the glittering objects and monuments of China to the men and women who made them. This book represents the first in-depth social history of artisans in early China. How did they live? How were they trained? How did they market their products? How free were they? In this engaging and illuminating analysis, Barbieri-Low explores these artisans' lives and careers from a variety of aspects. First, he examines their position within early Chinese society, analyzing their social status, social mobility, and role in the early Chinese economy. Delving deeper, he steps into their workshops to learn how they were trained, what tools they used, and what workplace hazards they faced. Following their wares to the marketplace, he investigates some of the marketing techniques used by artisans and merchants, including such startlingly modern practices as family trademarks, rhyming jingles, and knockoffs of royal products. From the dirt and din of the marketplace, Barbieri-Low enters the rarefied air of the court, with its own visual and material culture and its own professional artisans. This court was constructed upon the backs of yet another class of artisans, the most abject, those found in labor camps and slave markets. These were the men and women who built and decorated many of the great palaces, temples, and tombs of early China. Barbieri-Low compellingly argues that the state used a cold-blooded mathematical formula to optimally exploit these coerced laborers without upsetting the balance of the economy or fostering revolt. *Artisans in Early Imperial China* humanizes the material remains of the past, revealing the men and women who made the beautiful artifacts we know today. This book will appeal to anyone interested in Chinese history, as well as to scholars of comparative social history, labor history, and Asian art history.

"The author has taken the reader . . . into the complexities of the often hidden depths of early Chinese society. Barbieri-Low has opened up a whole new field and raised challenging questions . . . [for] many new areas of research." Jessica Rawson, *Art Bulletin*, September 2011 "Artisans in Early Imperial China is a major contribution to our understanding of ancient China and to the cross-cultural study of craft production. I expect it will provide readers with a new appreciation for the ancient artisans behind the art objects that they see, as Barbieri-Low hoped." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* "Artisans in Early Imperial China fills an important gap in the field . . . Barbieri-Low has produced a solid and insightful work on a topic neglected by scholars in both China and the West." *Labour/LeTravail* "Barbieri-Low pulls off a major achievement: reconstructing the life and work of the craftsmen who created early China's most impressive works of art. Combining artistic, archaeological, and textual evidence, he gives us a finely drawn portrait of how they created objects, how they suffered, and how other strata viewed them . . . The author's rich description of these little-known historical subjects stands out as an exemplary work of social, artistic, and archaeological history." Association for Asian Studies Levenson prize committee "Barbieri-Low's study provides us with a multifaceted perspective of the lives and working conditions of Han artisans . . . By providing a bold and grounded interpretation of the lives of artisans, Barbieri-Low has done much to enhance our understanding of the lives of the men who served the elite. More generally, he has illuminated the social and economic dynamics of the early empire." *American Historical* "Barbieri-Low's book is extremely successful in explicating the social and economic conditions around laborers during China's early imperial period." CAA s "[Barbieri-Low's] history of the people in the early workshops, marketplaces, construction sites and foundries who produced art imbues their activity with a vivid sense of contemporary life and times through a combination of solid research and enthusiastic engagement with his subject." *Orientalia* "Featuring a thoroughly scholarly approach with copious notes, a glossary of Chinese characters, and an exhaustive bibliography, this book presents a wonderfully fresh viewpoint; it is a veritable goldmine for students and scholars of Chinese culture. Essential." *Choice* "A sapient guide through not only the bustling, state-regulated markets, but back down the production line to the small private workshops where many of the goods . . . were produced. . . Barbieri-Low splendidly reanimates [the artisans] lost lives, and gives them due credit for greasing the wheels of China's first empires." *Time Magazine, Asia Edition* "A fresh and magisterial treatment of an important topic: the organization of crafts and industries during the Early Imperial period of Chinese civilization. It is without question the most important book-length contribution in English to Han social and economic history in a quartercentury." Lothar von Falkenhausen, University of California, Los Angeles "A welcome study of aspects of Chinese history that have evaded the attention of traditional Chinese scholars. The author clarifies the social place of the artisan and the effects that official patronage and legal restrictions brought to bear on his work. He shows much about the working conditions in which the masterpieces in our museums were fashioned." Michael Loewe From the Publisher "A fresh and magisterial treatment of an important topic: the organization of crafts and industries during the Early Imperial period of Chinese civilization. It is without question the most important book-length contribution in English to Han social and economic history in a quarter-century." - Lothar von Falkenhausen, University of California,

Los Angeles "A welcome study of aspects of Chinese history that have evaded the attention of traditional Chinese scholars. The author clarifies the social place of the artisan and the effects that official patronage and legal restrictions brought to bear on his work. He shows much about the working conditions in which the masterpieces in our museums were fashioned." - Michael Loewe