

Remapping Antiquity: Books and Readers in Early Daoism

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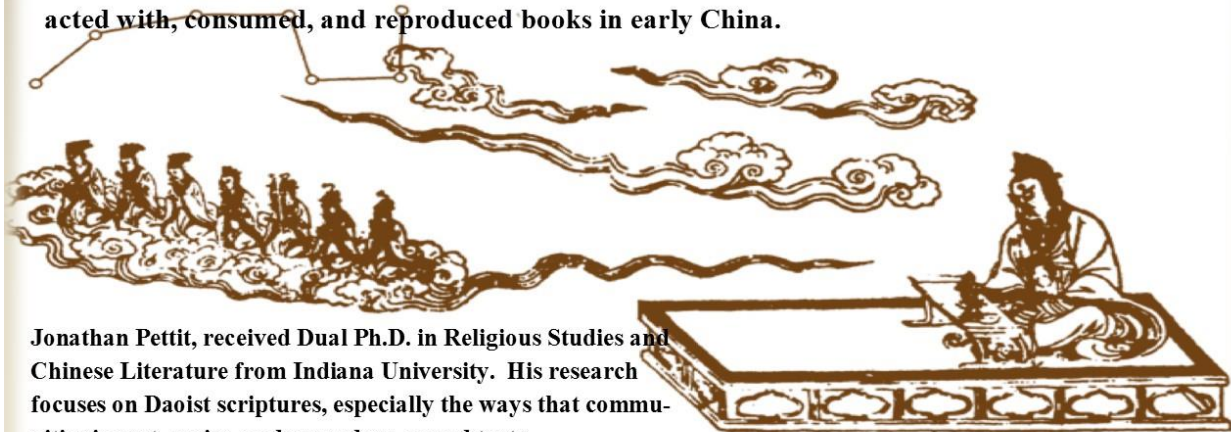
Thursday, January 28, 2016

4:30-6:00 pm

Stanley Coulter Hall, 102



In the first centuries of the Common Era, paper became the dominant material for manuscript production in China. Whereas previous technologies such as bamboo and silk had made text production cumbersome and expensive, paper manuscripts allowed for an increased circulation of books and an expansion of libraries. This talk focuses on the production of religious books in this era, particularly those sponsored by Daoist temples. I highlight the ways in which most manuscripts of this era were not new “texts,” but rather hand-copied collections of passages culled from previously circulating materials. A deep analysis of the editorial layers of these books helps us understand why readers often devoted so much of their resources to copy old hagiographies, scriptures, and maps. Unlike earlier studies, which have understood these books for their devotional importance, I will argue that pastiches of old texts also offered religious institutions great material benefits as well. This kind of “bibliographic” analysis of early Daoist books, I conclude, helps us think about how readers of paper manuscripts more generally interacted with, consumed, and reproduced books in early China.



Jonathan Pettit, received Dual Ph.D. in Religious Studies and Chinese Literature from Indiana University. His research focuses on Daoist scriptures, especially the ways that communities invent, revise, and reproduce sacred texts.