

A Study on the Authenticity of the *Yan Qinli Stele* and *Yan Family Temple Stele*

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Abstract

The *Yan Qinli Stele* and *Yan Family Temple Stele* were spirit-road steles erected by the famous Tang dynasty calligrapher Yan Zhenqing (709-785) in honor of his great-grandfather Yan Qinli (?-661) and his father Yan Weizhen (669-712), respectively. For many years, the *Yan Family Temple Stele* had always been considered a classic example of Yan Zhenqing's regular-script calligraphy. The *Yan Qinli Stele*, on the other hand, had been lost for hundreds of years and did not reappear until 1922, when it was finally ranked alongside the *Yan Family Temple Stele*.

However, scholars have recently indicated that the *Yan Qinli Stele* is actually a fake from the late Qing dynasty based on *Complete Tang Prose* and *Anthology of Yan Lugong* compiled in the Qing dynasty and from the surviving *Yan Family Temple Stele*.

The present study offers a textual analysis of these two steles' contents and an analysis of their styles with side-by-side comparisons of sample individual characters to show that the *Yan Qinli Stele* contents as recorded in *Complete Tang Prose* and *Anthology of Yan Lugong* actually contain many errors and that the *Yan Qinli Stele* appearing later is actually an authentic work erected by Yan Zhenqing in 766. In the development of Yan Zhenqing's "Yan Style," it occupies a key place in following the past and heralding the future, making undoubtedly for a pivotal work.

On the contrary, the *Yan Family Temple Stele* passed down through the ages may well have been a recarved imitation stele from the middle of the ninth century with errors in the text and significant differences in style compared to the now-authentic *Yan Qinli Stele*. In

the past, people had studied the style of Yan Zhenqing's calligraphy from the *Yan Family Temple Stele*, leading to only misunderstandings, but now a reappraisal of these two steles is well deserved.

Keywords: *Yan Qinli Stele*, *Yan Family Temple Stele*, Yan Style, regular script, authenticity

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)