

“Traces of History: the Dunhuang manuscripts of Gou Daoxing’s *Soushen ji*”

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Gou Daoxing’s 句道興 *Soushen ji* 搜神記, believed to date to the Tang, is an eclectic text that gathers under one title a broad range of narratives about incidents that are also recorded in earlier texts, ranging from early histories and philosophical texts such as the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 and *Han Feizi* 韓非子, to Gan Bao’s 干寶 (better known) fourth-century *Soushen ji* and other early medieval miracle tale collections. Surviving only in several manuscripts found at Dunhuang, most of them fragmentary, the compilation raises a number of questions about how medieval readers accessed and understood common knowledge about past events. The *Soushen ji* narratives of these events are never identical to those in the earlier sources, either in wording or (in many cases) in detail, but they remain close enough to be easily recognizable as versions of the same story. Comparison of the different versions, as well as analysis of paratextual information on the manuscripts themselves, should yield further clues about how the text was used. My preliminary speculation (yet to be tested, but I’ll have a better idea by the conference!) is that the text was a textbook of certain types of historical knowledge.