

## **“Two Tang-Style Tombs of Turkic Allies in Mongolia: The Value of Textual and Material Analysis”**

**Jonathan Karam Skaff**  
**Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania**

Burial goods and an epitaph recently excavated from two contemporary Tang-style tombs, located only eleven kilometers apart in a semi-arid region of central Mongolia, provide a rich record of political and cultural interactions between Tang and Turkic Tiele political elites in the mid-seventh century. One tomb contained the Chinese-language epitaph of a Tang ally, Pugu Yitu (635-678) and the scattered remains of some grave goods left by looters. The other tomb at Ulaan Khermiin lacked an epitaph, but was undisturbed and so retained a full complement of rich burial objects. Though the epitaph's rhetoric provides only a Tang-centered narrative of Pugu's subservient loyalty to the dynasty, a careful examination of the contents of the two tombs provides evidence of reciprocity and cultural compromises in the relationship. On one hand, the forms of the tombs and many burial goods were typical of the Tang. On the other hand, both funerals have signs of local practices and tastes including cremations, a gold hoard in the coffin of the Ulaan Khermiin tomb, and some unusual wooden and terracotta figurines. These tombs teach a broader lesson about the value of an interdisciplinary methodology. Historians who only consider the content of the epitaph will miss important clues about the cultural orientation of the deceased. Likewise, archaeologists and art historians who concentrate only on material culture or funerary ritual will not understand the social and political context.