



The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs

Wu Hung

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No other civilization in the pre-modern world was more obsessed with creating underground burial structures than the Chinese. For at least five thousand years, from the fourth millennium BCE to the early twentieth century, Chinese people devoted an extraordinary amount of wealth and labour to building tombs and furnishing them with exquisite objects and images. In art history these ancient burial sites have mainly been appreciated as 'treasure troves' of exciting and often previously unknown works of art. New trends in Chinese art history are challenging this way of studying funerary art: now an entire memorial site – rather than any of its individual components – has become the focus of both observation and interpretation. The Art of the Yellow Springs expands on this scholarship by making interpretative methods the direct subject of consideration. It argues that to achieve a genuine understanding of Chinese tombs we need to reconsider a host of art-historical concepts, including visuality, viewership, space, formal analysis, function and context. Profusely illustrated with many outstanding works of art, this ground-breaking new assessment demonstrates the amazing richness of arguably the longest and most persistent tradition in the entirety of Chinese art.

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