The book is substantially edited and expanded. Free University in Berlin, but the current price tag.

Weber has spent five years in Damascus researching his dissertation, supported by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI). Later, another six years at the Orient-Institut in Beirut (OIB) allowed him to refine his study and undertake other projects. (Since 2008, Weber has had a successful tenure as the director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin.) In an era when U.S. government financing of international education continues to be cut, it is difficult to imagine one of our colleagues or students being able to fund the creation of such a book, especially the second volume.

Finally, in addition to providing a new history for the development of modern Damascus, the work is imbued with the humanity of its author and even his sense of humor. Those of us who had the good fortune to overlap in Damascus with Weber, and to accompany him on his architectural strolls through the old city, could not help but conclude that not only did Stefan Weber seem to know every single stone in Damascus, but every stone in Damascus seemed to know him! Weber’s book will productively dispel the widespread notion that Damascus is the quintessential “traditional,” “Islamic” city, showing instead that some of its most beloved spaces are actually modern creations rather than manifestations of La Syrie Éternelle.

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Notes
2. See for example, Jens Hansen, Thomas Philipp, Stefan Weber, eds., The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire (Beirut: Orient-Institut, Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), and Sibel Zandi-Sayek, Ottoman Izmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840–1880 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

Wu Hung
The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs
Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010, 272 pp., 83 color and 147 b&w illus. $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 9780824834265

Within the field of Chinese art history there are few subjects that Wu Hung has not yet tackled. He has published nearly a dozen books and articles on the subject of funerary arts alone. Wu is therefore well positioned to take on the ambitious task of determining which factors “define [the] art and architectural tradition we call Chinese tombs” (16). While some of the arguments Wu presents in this book will be familiar to readers of his previous studies, The Art of the Yellow Springs is by no means a recitation of old material. Rather, it devises a novel and useful conceptual framework in order to identify the persistent patterns among materials spanning a period of almost 3,000 years.

According to Wu, Chinese tombs comprise two independent architectures: above-ground structures that served as landmarks or ritual shrines and underground constructions furnished with grave goods. Wu’s study focuses on the underground part of tombs, as suggested by the term Yellow Springs, the Chinese word for the netherworld, in the title of the book. Wu writes that before the advent of modern archaeology, it was virtually impossible to study individual graves. Although ancient writers frequently described (and often critiqued) the ritual practices associated with burial, few wrote about their specific layout and contents. Once the body was interred and the tomb sealed up, tombs became “solely the domain of the departed soul” (8–9).

Archaeological excavations in the last fifty years have changed this, contributing to a great number of scholarly works in various fields. However, as Wu points out, many art-historical studies of Chinese tombs tend to be formal analyses of individual objects in museum collections, in which little attempt is made to explain an object’s visual characteristics in relation to its original function or symbolism. Following recent trends in Chinese art history, Wu argues that instead of studying
discrete objects—which, he implies, compromises the overall "integrity of a tomb"—we should treat the tomb space, artifacts, and images as part of an interrelated whole. More importantly, because tombs make up a unique category of art specifically designed for the dead, not the living, the scholar must reconsider the utility of employing our traditional art-historical methodologies in analyzing tombs (12–13).

Wu argues that a "fundamental logic" underlies the structure of burials (219), and that only by uncovering this logic can we truly understand Chinese tombs. This thesis is reflected in Wu's decision to arrange the book thematically into chapters that represent what he considers the "three most essential aspects of any manufactured work": spatiality, materiality, and temporality (14). Because he is not bound by the same constraints that accompany the more traditional chronological and individual approaches to studying tombs, Wu is able to draw freely from a large, albeit fragmented, body of material and textual evidence to support his points. A major strength of this book may also be perceived as a weakness: Wu seems to be able to offer explanations for practically all the visual phenomena in tombs. One may question the reliability of such a comprehensive explanation for such an enormous amount of information.

The first chapter, "Spatiality," addresses an age-old problem in the study of Chinese tombs. What factors caused the shift from the pre-Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) practice of burying the dead in wooden caskets set within deep vertical pits to the Han and post-Han preference for constructing chambered tombs positioned along a horizontal axis? Because in casket tombs the objects, not the architectonic space, give the tomb meaning, Wu conceptualizes this transition as moving from an "object-oriented" to a "space-oriented" design, during which time tombs underwent a process of "architecturalization" (32). He attributes the shift to major changes in ancestral worship, conceptions of the soul and the afterlife, and the establishment of an underworld bureaucracy that occurred in or just before the Han. To this point, Wu informs us that whereas in pre-Han times immortality was equated with deathlessness, in the Han period immortality after death was believed possible. As a consequence, tombs were decorated with images of the home, the heavens, and the world of the immortals, thereby embodying "polycentric" spaces that offered the dead a rich variety of realms to inhabit (221).

The second chapter, "Materiality," is predicated on the idea that because tomb artifacts were specifically designed for the dead, they possess specific visual properties—with respect to their material, size, and decoration—directly related to their symbolic functions. Wu observes, for example, that lacquerwares from the Eastern Zhou (770–221 BCE) and Han periods were painted red and black, the colors of coffins; that vessels buried with the dead were often deliberately rendered unusable in some way; and that sculptural figurines were frequently miniaturized. This chapter also includes an important discussion of the many ways that contemporaries tried to "transform" their corporeal bodies in order to escape death.

In chapter three, "Temporality," Wu deploys Paul Ricoeur's concepts of time as an analytical tool to great advantage. Wu writes that images within the tomb such as star maps and animals associated with the cardinal directions align the deceased with the underlying structure of the cosmos in what Ricoeur would call "cosmic time." In contrast, personal objects buried with the dead represent a "lived time." These embody two different forms of time: at the funeral they evoke the past life of the deceased, but once buried in a tomb they cater to the needs of the soul in the present and future. A third kind of time, "historical time," represented by textual and pictorial biographies of the deceased and narratives of important historical figures, reconstructs his or her public persona. And finally, the frequent depiction of chariots on tomb walls represents a journey that enables the deceased to move through time within the tomb.

The Art of the Yellow Springs concludes with a short coda that presents "portraits" of three of China's best-known tombs: Mawangdui Tomb 1 (ca. 168 BCE) in Changsha, Hunan province; Mancheng Tomb 1 (ca. 113 BCE) in Baoding, Hebei province; and the tomb of Zhang Wenzao in Xuanhua, Hebei province (1093). Wu presents these at the end in order to demonstrate the potential advantages of applying the theories outlined in the previous chapters to specific tombs.

Although the clarity with which Wu writes makes this book accessible to non-specialists, he evidently assumes the reader is familiar with China and the subject of tombs. For example, no maps are included, despite frequent mentions made of specific provinces and cities. Additionally, no matter how obscure or technical the terms, he provides Chinese characters in only one instance (128). The reliance on pinyin romanization may make it somewhat frustrating for specialists encountering these terms for the first time to understand them or even to look them up in a dictionary. Oddly, several line drawings and diagrams only employ Chinese characters; it would have been helpful for Wu to translate these. However, these minor shortcomings do not overshadow the overall importance of this book. On account of its remarkably original theoretical approach, The Art of the Yellow Springs is essential reading material for anyone interested in a new interpretation of Chinese tombs.

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Note

Konrad Ottenheym, Krista De Jonge, and Monique Chatenet, editors
Public Buildings in Early Modern Europe

Most buildings in this book will be unfamiliar even to scholars of early modern architecture: these public buildings, such as city halls or market arcades, often count among the happy discoveries of sight-seeing in European cities after visiting