

THE FIRST EMPEROR'S TOMB

THE AFTERLIFE UNIVERSE

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The First Emperor of China controlled a vast territory and wielded enormous power. He ordered 120,000 families to move to the new capital, Xianyang; he summoned 700,000 men to build his tomb and other structures; and he was self-consciously aware of his authority and of the new era that this marked.¹ Long inscriptions carved at his command on mountains in eastern China described his achievements and proclaimed his universal, indeed cosmic, rulership: 'The bright virtue of the August Emperor aligns and orders the whole universe.'²

Yet this powerful ruler was assailed at the same time by his human frailty: he feared conspiracy and death by human or by supernatural forces. He consulted occult specialists and insisted that his whereabouts be kept secret. In search of eternal life, the First Emperor urged his officials and associates to seek out herbs and plants that would enable him to evade death and live for ever. Several fruitless expeditions were sent out into the eastern sea to find the mythical islands of Penglai, Yingzhou and Fangzhang, where these plants were believed to flourish. None of these efforts succeeded.³ How then did the emperor resolve his fears of death and make them compatible with his claims to be a universal and eternal ruler? His solution lay in preparing a great tomb for himself on the slopes of Mt. Li near present-day Lintong to ensure his power on the journey into and throughout eternity.

What the First Emperor created astonishes us today with its haunting lines of soldiers, officials, acrobats and servants to do his bidding, frozen for all time in clay; we are fascinated by the extraordinary technical feats of the exquisite bronze chariots and the intricate sets of stone armour. But it must have been all the more

FIGS 118 & 119
(left and following pages)
Terracotta warriors lined up in Pit 1
with remains of a four-horse chariot.
The warriors guarded the First
Emperor's afterlife empire.



astonishing for his ministers and officials as they laboured at the immense task to bring into being this universe for the emperor. Nothing on such a scale had been attempted before. In death, as in life, the First Emperor was unique.

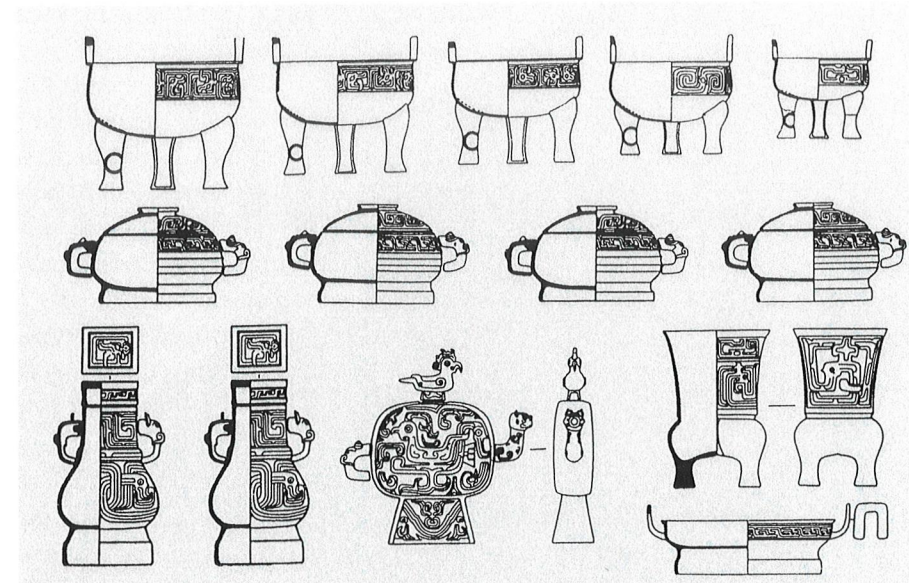
The cosmic ruler and ritual traditions

We are faced with several questions. What was the emperor trying to do and why did he do it? Was the tomb a record of his past powers, namely a monument, or was it a means to extend his rule into the future? What would a world combining buried humans and massed clay soldiers achieve? It is too easy for us, today, to see the clay figures as representations or symbols of a spirit army, or to contemplate concepts of immortality in our own terms as life in a remote paradise. Neither of these notions



FIG. 120
The largest of a set of three *bo* bells excavated from Taigong Temple, Baoji, site of Pingyang, the old capital of the Qin state from 714 to 677 BC. The three *bo* bells were also found with a set of five *zhong* bells (see fig. 48). During the Zhou period, bell music would have accompanied the ritual offerings of food and wine to the ancestors in ceremonies designed to invoke the goodwill of ancestor spirits. The bells are an important discovery as they document the Qin lineage and their mandate to rule. This *bo* bell is inscribed with a 135-character text which begins: 'The Duke of Qin says: My foremost ancestor has received the heavenly mandate, was rewarded with a residence and received his state.' It is thought that Duke Wu (r. 697–678 BC) had the bells cast.
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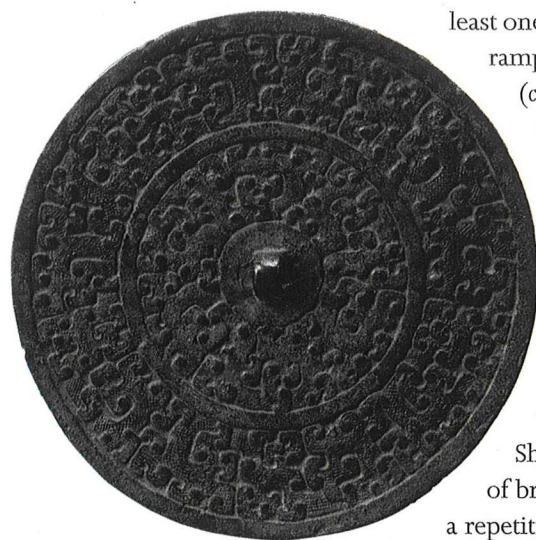
FIG. 121
Line drawing of ritual bronze vessels excavated from Tomb 5 at Bianjiazhuang, Longxian, Shaanxi province.



fits well with the emperor's ambitions. For the emperor saw himself not simply as a ruler of a vast geographic territory but also as a cosmic ruler – the 'First August Thearch', as explained in Martin Kern's article above (pp. 104–13). He had not only unified the states, he had also unified the universe of spirits, drawing them into his control through sacrifices at the northern and southern limits of his world and by inscribing, with records of his achievements, the mountains on the eastern sea coast at the frontier of human territory.⁴ Moreover, the emperor, as his inscriptions stated, had set himself in the line of sage kings who, according to legend, had first paced out and ordered the world.

The emperor went even further in asserting his central position in the historical narrative and in the cosmos. As he built and named his palaces, he mapped them onto the stars, which were at that time understood as the dwellings of a supreme deity and his officials. He designated a palace built south of the Wei River as the Jimiao, or 'Polar Temple', as Kern notes (p. 105), 'to represent the celestial pole, the cosmic counterpart to his own position on earth'. The Wei River was seen as the Milky Way, with other buildings and palaces regarded as the equivalents of astral bodies.⁵ If the structures in and around his capital at Xianyang could be envisaged as paralleling the stars – the dwellings and administrative offices of the spirits – then here, in the physical world, the power of the First Emperor would also replicate that of the spirits. In this same context the emperor must also have regarded his palace for the afterlife as the seat of his future power, equally aligned with the cosmos.

The First Emperor was the inheritor of a long tradition in which tombs were constructed as eternal dwellings. The First Emperor's ancestors, the lords of Qin, had not been modest in their burials. Their tombs were of amazing dimensions. In the Qin funerary park at Fengxiang, to the west of the First Emperor's capital, Tomb M1, prepared for one of the sixth-century rulers, is 40 metres wide, 60 metres long and 24 metres deep.⁶ It is a vertical shaft tomb, in which the coffins, each nested in at



least one outer coffin, are placed at the bottom of the pit reached by two access ramps. This basic form had survived from the ancient dynasties of the Shang (c.1500–c.1050 BC) and the early Zhou (c.1050–771 BC). With the sack of the capital (near the modern city of Xi'an) of the dynasty now described as the Western Zhou, several local lords came to power in states that acknowledged the nominal rule of the Zhou but were otherwise independent. These rulers followed ancient precedents in their burials and beliefs about the afterlife and contributed their own variations.⁷

A widely held belief system was founded on the notion that the dead, as much as the living, were part of a single community. The two communities were joined by the major rituals established by the Shang and the Zhou, that is, by banquets performed with elaborate sets of bronze ritual vessels (fig. 121). In these ceremonies foods were offered on a repetitive cycle to the dead, often accompanied by music, of which bells are the most tangible remains (figs 48 & 120). The dead were deemed present as the offerings were made. Sets of bronze vessels and bells found in tombs seem to have been intended for the dead to use in the afterlife, as they continued to provide food and wine for their ancestors, whom they had now joined in cemeteries as their dwellings.⁸

In the centuries prior to the conquests by the First Emperor, the rituals had changed and the bronzes used were no longer as elaborate as those of the Shang and Zhou. Indeed, by the time of the First Emperor bronze was employed in other forms for communication with the spirits, as incense burners (fig. 124) and as mirrors (fig. 122).⁹ In place of the large sets of ritual bronzes, more lacquers, ceramics and furnishings for daily life were included. A few bronzes imitated the shapes of every-day lacquer pieces. These changes were a product of new views about the relative powers of different spirits. The ancestors as part of the living community remained important. To these were added many local spirits, star deities and immortals, who might inhabit distant mountains.¹⁰

The parallel world of the afterlife

The concept of immortality was, however, different to that in the West. The word in Chinese (*bu si*) means 'non-death'. And this is the immortality that the First Emperor sought. For this reason he sent emissaries to the islands of the Eastern Sea to seek for herbs that would enable him to live for ever. Death was caused by an attack of malign demons and spirits, and these had to be avoided at all costs.¹¹ There is no evidence at this date that the First Emperor, or others of his time, thought that there was a spiritual land beyond the present world that was an alternative to the life on earth. If the correct herbs could not be obtained and it was impossible to live for ever, then the dead formed a community also in this world, but one that abided by a different, if parallel, regime.



FIG. 122 (opposite, above) The interlocking design on the back of this mirror, also found on contemporary jade and gold objects, is characteristic of bronze design from the Houma foundry in Shanxi. Located in the capital of the state of Jin from 585 to 453 BC, the Houma foundry mass-produced bronzes in large scale not only for the Jin state but also for a wider market. Cat. no. 94

FIG. 123 (opposite, below) An inscription on the bottom of the bronze cup and the side of the brazier stand indicates that it comes from the state of Wei, which was absorbed by Qin in 225 BC. This vessel along with a bronze *zhong* were excavated from Ta'erpo, Xianyang. The unusual shape of this oval cup – the projections or tabs on either side are often called 'ears' – was inspired by a lacquer prototype. The four legs elevate the cup allowing its contents, usually wine, to be gently heated by hot embers burning in the brazier. Cat. no. 95

FIG. 124 (right) Incense would have been burnt at ritual ceremonies for the ancestors. This highly ornate incense burner was excavated from the old Qin capital at Yong. Cat. no. 96



To ensure the posthumous existence of their occupants, all Chinese tombs were microcosms of the world known during life. Only those of the very highest elite could provide all the luxuries of life and all the servants needed to support such existences. Sumptuous vessels, bells and lacquers were placed inside the most lavish tombs; servants, warriors and female consorts were killed to accompany their lords in death; chariots, horses and charioteers were buried in separate pits (fig. 126) and were the forerunners of the terracotta warriors. The Zhou started to create subdivisions within the main part of the tomb.¹² The lords of the Qin state, and the rulers of the southern states of Chu and Zeng, carried this practice much further, creating rooms in the larger burials.¹³ While the Qin continued to bury bronzes, horses and chariots in some tombs, pottery replicas were occasionally used.¹⁴ Other rulers, notably those of the northern state of Zhongshan in the fourth century, created numerous separate deposits around major tombs, a procedure that the First Emperor followed.¹⁵

As his conquests of the six states brought all their ritual knowledge within his control, the First Emperor was able to draw on rich and diverse traditions when contemplating ways of extending his life beyond death. While it is tempting to describe such tombs as models, they were much more than that. Being an analogue of life, they were at the same time a realization of the buildings and social structures



FIG. 125
Horses played an integral role in armed warfare of the imperial army as the discovery of the terracotta army pits have revealed. Over 30 chariots, each drawn by 4 horses, were found in Pit 1, while 64 chariots and 108 cavalymen (364 horses) were arranged in battle formation in Pit 2.
Cat. no. 97

FIG. 126
Chariot burial of a Qin tomb excavated from Li county, Gansu province.



for a life after death. Texts demonstrate that these tombs were adjuncts to a whole, generally invisible, society peopled by officials and administrators, as well as by spirits and demons.

From the fifth century BC, if not earlier, we learn from documents buried in tombs that there was a growing sense of the complexities of the spirit world. Anxiety is evident in the spells and charms written on bamboo to defeat demons that might cause bodily decay (see pp. 188–9). And the organization of the afterlife becomes clearer in other documents. Inventories, which accompanied the goods buried, implied a system of checking the objects and were sometimes accompanied in the same document by letters addressed to afterlife officials; over time more almanacs, calendars, divination records and texts on medicine, some including titles of the afterlife officials, were interred. These suggest a hierarchy of bureaucrats in the parallel universe with powers over the dead.¹⁶



FIG. 127
Aerial view of the First Emperor's tomb mound. The First Emperor started building his tomb as soon as he ascended the throne of the Qin kingdom in 246 BC. The site was chosen for its ideal location: protected by mountains in the south (Mt. Li) and west (Qinling mountains) and water to the north (Wei River). The east led to the Great Central Plains, but was protected by the terracotta army. The mound has reduced in size over the years. Current data of its height varies from 55 to 87 metres. Its base measures 350 x 345 metres.

An account found in a tomb at Fangmatan in Gansu province and dated 297 BC describes the afterlife from the perspective of a man who claimed to have returned from death.¹⁷ Here we have mention of officials whom he had encountered and of the notion of a 'life-mandate', a set period given to a person to live. While belief in an afterlife with recognizable officials and an organization may have seemed reassuring, the uncertainties presented by the unknown clearly generated fear, as petitions in later tombs make clear. And these fears were compounded by the recognition of the demons that caused sickness, death and decay. The inner coffin of the fifth-century-BC Marquis Yi of the state of Zeng bears pictures of armed spirits to ward off demons that might attack the tomb occupant (fig. 192). The First Emperor had a special reason to fear the spirit world; he had killed, indeed massacred, the armies of the six states. In a universe where the living continue after death in the roles that they occupied when alive, the First Emperor could imagine that rank upon rank of vengeful spirit soldiers waited for him.¹⁸

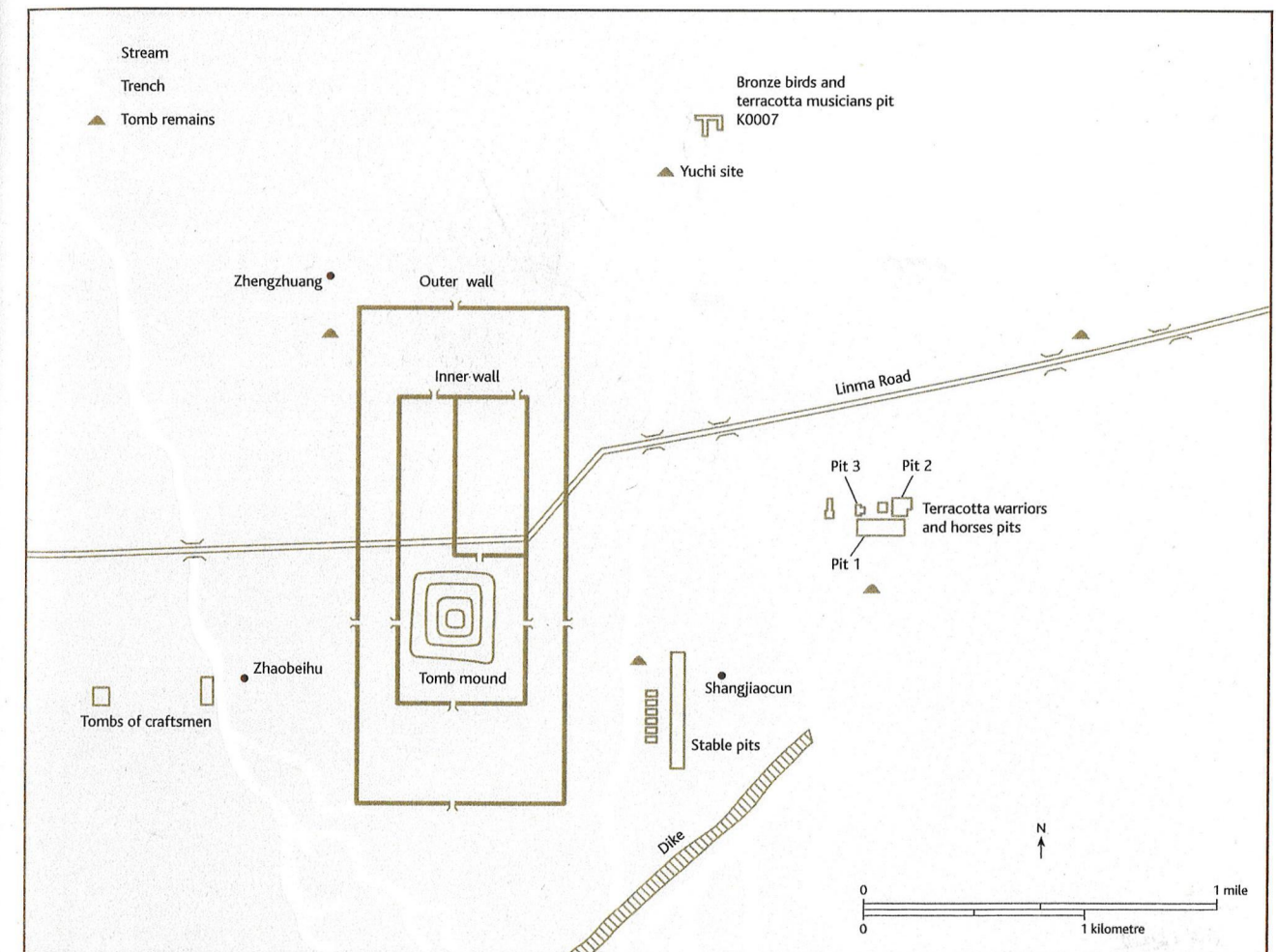
Significance of the tomb site and its occupants

In building his tomb, the First Emperor exploited traditions of the past, but at the same time, as in everything he did, he expanded and reinterpreted these legacies. For, while he shared commonly held beliefs, he had developed, as mentioned earlier, his own understanding of his role in the cosmos. In the first place the emperor chose a site separate from the cemeteries of his ancestors, to demonstrate that he

was not dependent on them for his supremacy.¹⁹ The tomb was not simply a dwelling, it was his palace, his whole court, his army and an entire universe centred on himself.

Set on the slopes of Mt. Li near Lintong, east of Xi'an, the present-day capital of Shaanxi province, the carefully designed tomb complex added new features to the landscape, and this landscape survives today. The artificial hill above the tomb was enclosed by two sets of walls on a rectangular plan, which originally had towers at their gateways. The terracotta army, buried in pits to the east, defends this precinct, facing towards the pass in the mountains through which the enemies in the former states might have been expected to come. Other pits contained pottery figures of officials and acrobats, horses and miniature chariots in bronze, stone armour and bronze birds. But these simply completed a scheme in which human officials, members of the court, real horses and other animals, and the bodies of criminals were essential components of an afterlife existence for the emperor.²⁰ The physical mapping of the all required aspects of an eternal imperial life across a large area was one of the principal ways in which the tomb complex created a whole world. We have a further glimpse of the ways in which this was destined to create

FIG. 128
Plan of the First Emperor's tomb complex. The building of the tomb was recorded by the Han historian, Sima Qian, but the terracotta army pits, located 1.5 km east of the mound, were a surprise discovery when local villagers stumbled upon them whilst digging a well. The tomb and its accompanying burial pits (over 600 have thus far been excavated) cover an area of about 56 sq. km.



the afterlife from an account of the interior of the burial chamber itself by the renowned Han-dynasty historian, Sima Qian (c.145–c.87 BC):

When the Emperor first came to the throne he began digging and shaping Mt. Li. Later, when he unified the empire, he had over 700,000 men from all over the empire transported to the spot. They dug down to the third layer of underground springs and poured in bronze to make the outer coffin. Palaces, scenic towers, and the hundred officials, as well as rare utensils and wonderful objects, were brought to fill up the tomb. Craftsmen were ordered to set up crossbows and arrows, rigged so that they would immediately shoot down anyone attempting to break in. Mercury was used to fashion the hundred rivers, the Yellow River and the Yangtze, and the seas in such a way that they flowed. Above were set the heavenly bodies were, below, the features of the earth. 'Man-fish' oil was used for lamps, which were calculated to burn for a long time without going out.²¹

FIG. 129
The First Emperor's tomb viewed from
the west.

As Sima Qian was writing more than a hundred years after the death of the First Emperor, we do not know how accurate this account is. We should note, however, that Sima Qian does not use the words 'model' or 'imitation' in his writings, although some translations of this famous passage put in these words. Above I have used the word 'analogue' to describe the tomb as both a representation of life and as a functioning dwelling and even universe for the afterlife. Sima Qian also described the tomb mound, once it had been planted with trees, as an analogue of a mountain.²² In the traditions of the day, gods, spirits and people who had evaded death, and thereby become immortal, lived in mountains. Thus this tomb mound was a mountain dwelling for a god-like ruler. By being made as analogues, the mound and the tomb assumed the roles that their creators sought. Further, by placing his eternal palace in a mountain, the First Emperor gave it a geographical position alongside and in parallel with the great mountains of his territory that marked out the directions and the borders of his lands.²³

The emperor had in life already built a large series of life-size buildings at the capital, realizing in captivity, so to speak, the palaces of the states that he had conquered, as Sima Qian recounts:

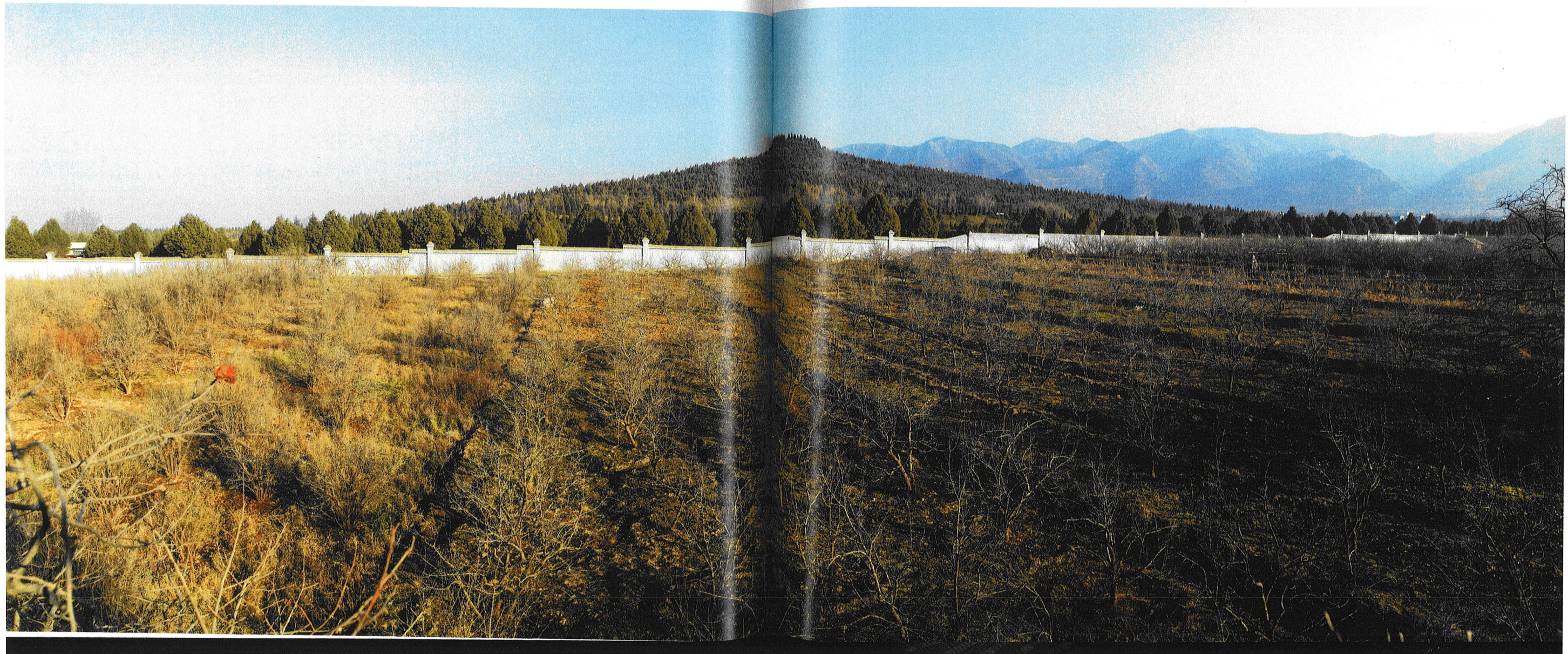




FIG. 130
The *Shiji* records that when the First Emperor created the Qin empire, weapons were collected and brought to the capital, melted down and cast as bells, bell stands and twelve men made of metal. This bronze head is one of the earliest naturalistic figural sculptures in bronze and may have been a decorative finial for a bell stand.
Cat. no. 98

And whenever Qin would wipe out one of the feudal states, it would recreate its halls and palaces and reconstruct them on the slope north of Xianyang, facing south over the Wei. From Yongmen east to the Jing and the Wei rivers, mansions, elevated walks, and fenced pavilions succeeded one another, all filled with beautiful women and bells and drums that Qin had taken from the feudal rulers.²⁴

Here the full extent of the emperor's conquest was, like his eternal palace, mapped onto the landscape of the capital. Moreover, the whole enterprise was of such a scale that the emperor might, if he wished, walk among the buildings and contemplate his triumphs in terms of the looted bells and captured women. This full-size enclave was one of the parallels for the project at Mt. Li, sharing with it immense size and occupants who included many real people. The other occupants, the soldiers and acrobats in clay unknown to Sima Qian, have caused astonishment in the present day. How did the emperor come by the idea of filling some roles of his afterlife universe with figures of clay?²⁵ Sima Qian provides another account that may give a hint of what had provoked this new phenomenon. To commemorate his conquest, the First Emperor had twelve immense bronze figures cast:

Weapons from all over the empire were confiscated, brought to Xianyang, and melted down to be used in casting bells, bell stands and twelve men made of metal. These last weighed 1,000 piculs each and were set up in the palace.²⁶

These were immense sculptures and would have required great skill in modelling and in casting to realize them. The ancient techniques of bronze casting, which required complex ceramic moulds, were the technologies with which the emperor's officials created the great army in clay.²⁷ But life-like figures in bronze of any size were unprecedented in early Chinese culture. Could the emperor have heard, as if in a distant echo, news of the massive sculptures at the courts of the kings in the regions of present-day Iran or even in the Mediterranean area? There is much evidence of contact across central Asia during the preceding and following centuries.²⁸ It seems possible that such contact, and the resulting bronze figures, sowed the seeds of an idea in the minds of the emperor's court that blossomed in the extraordinary army of terracotta warriors.

Construction of the tomb complex

During the last thirty years test digging and excavations at the tomb site have been carried out over a vast area of several square kilometres and no doubt will continue long into the future. Figs 128 and 131 shows the First Emperor's tomb complex. But a single present-day plan of the site obscures the fact that we are looking at three very different landscapes. First in chronological time is the landscape across which workers moved building the tomb, and many of them are now buried south-west of the tomb. Succeeding that landscape in time, following the death and funeral of the First Emperor, there stood the completed mound over the tomb at the centre of

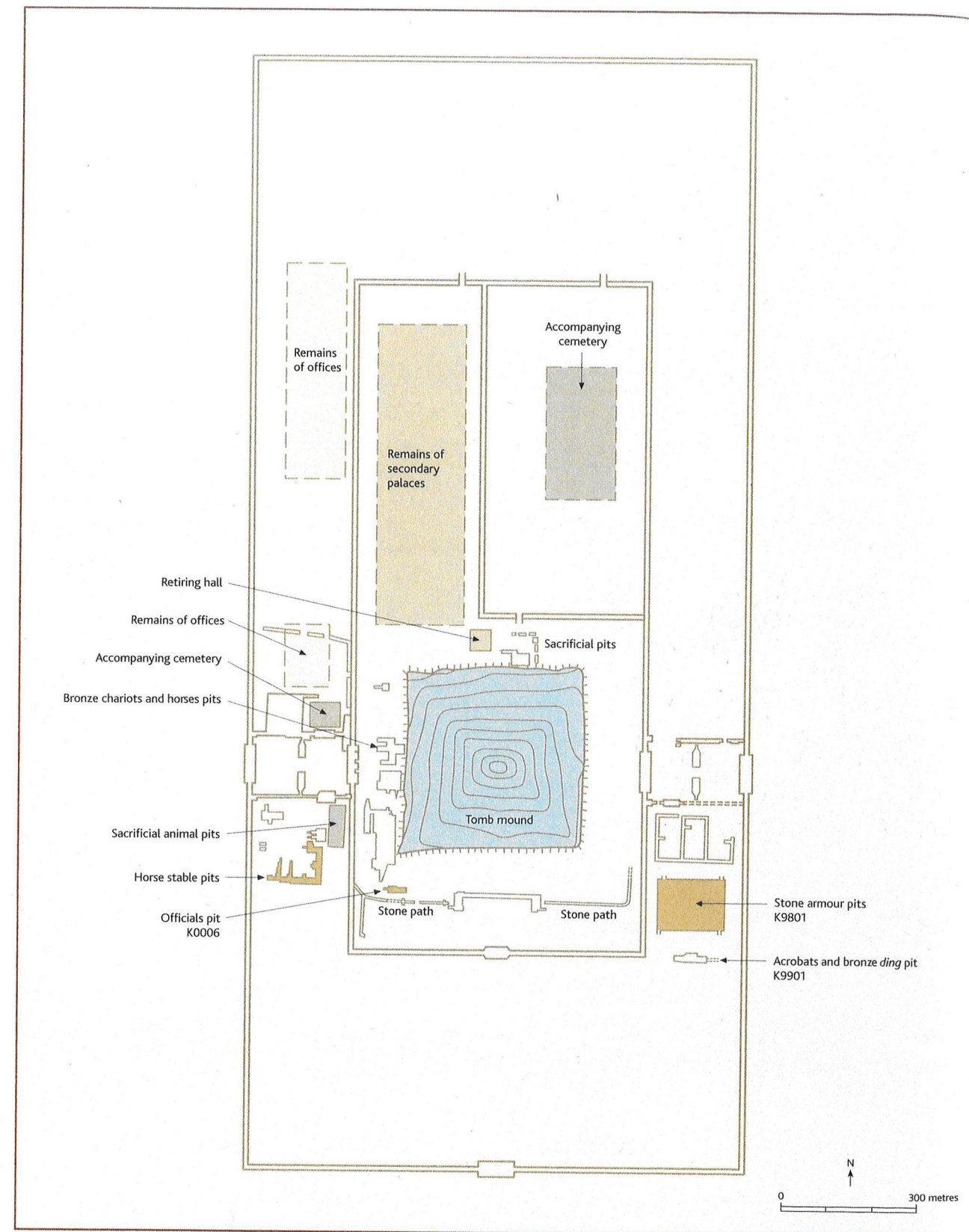
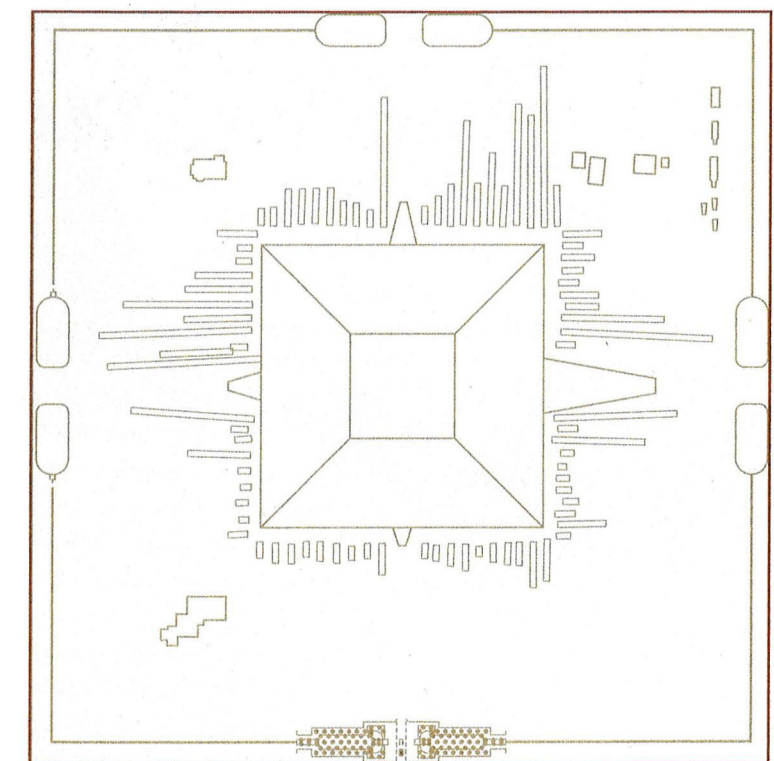


FIG. 131
(left) Plan of the First Emperor's tomb.

FIG. 132
(right) Plan of Yangling, the tomb of Emperor Jingdi (r. 156–141 bc) the fourth ruler of the Western Han dynasty. The tomb mound is in the centre with rectangular pits of varying lengths radiating out from all four sides. The pits contained pottery attendants and animals.

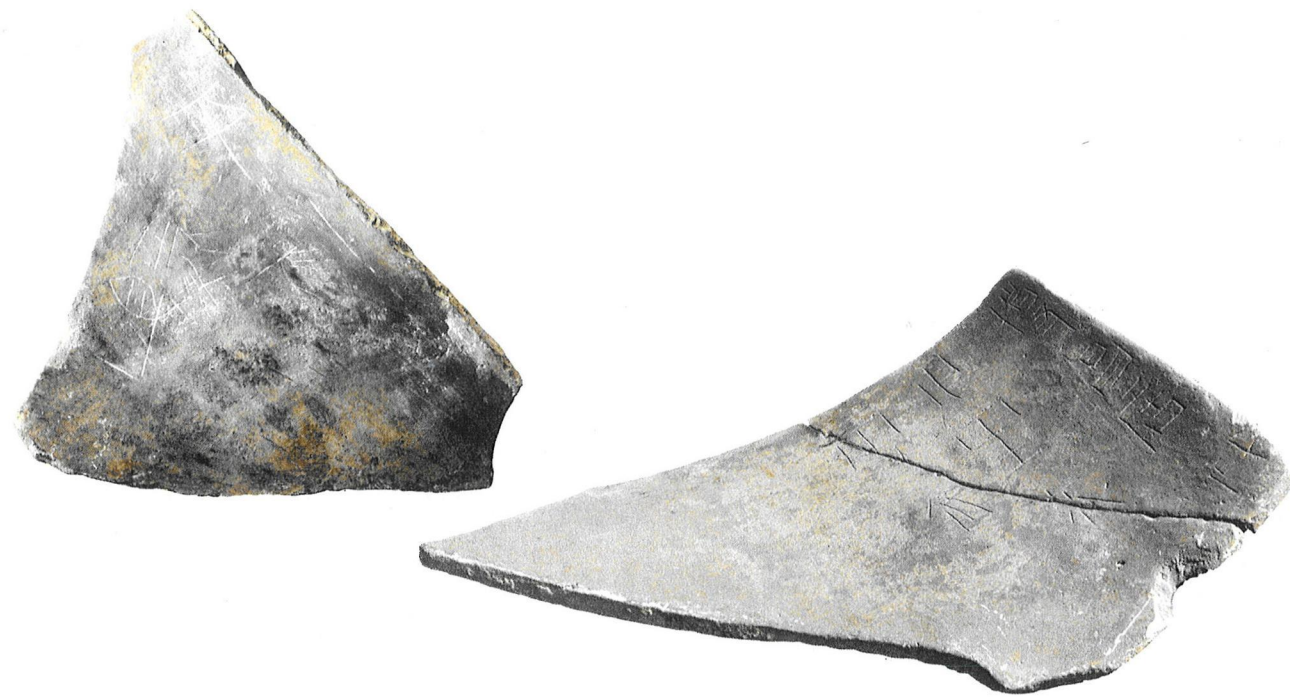


its high defensive walls and surrounded by buildings in which offerings were made by the living to the dead emperor; this was the ritual landscape above ground. Last, but most intriguing, is the landscape of the afterlife, invisible to the living, as its different aspects were buried in pits and underground structures.

We will look at these three landscapes in turn and then consider how that of the tomb provided for the emperor's eternal rule. The three landscapes give us three different perspectives on the ways in which the emperor and his needs were addressed. But we must never think of these landscapes as having been static. All three of them were peopled: the first with administrators, craftsmen and labourers; the second with ritual experts and servants to prepare the offerings for the dead emperor; and the third by the members of the court, the administration and the army in the realm of the afterlife.

Sima Qian (see pp. 24–5) tells us something about the work on the tomb and its final form. Although written at a later date by a strong critic of the First Emperor, his history has provided essential information about the life and ambitions of the First Emperor and is accepted as being a reasonably reliable account. Sima Qian claims that the First Emperor embarked on the construction of his tomb when he came to the throne as King of Qin in 246 bc. It is clear that work intensified after the emperor's triumphal unification in 221 bc, eleven years before he died in 210 bc. Some archaeologists believe that the work was undertaken in the latter, shorter period.

The burial chamber under the tomb mound, probably the largest single component, was a monumental enterprise that surely required diverse administrators,



FIGS 133 & 134
(above) Pottery fragments, some with inscriptions, have been found west of the First Emperor's tomb in Zhaobeihu village, in the graves of labourers, often convicted criminals, who constructed the tomb of the First Emperor. Some inscriptions record the place of origin, the type of sentence, title and name of the person, and reveal how workers were mobilized from all over the country to work on the tomb. The fragment on the left is inscribed Pingyang station, the place where the deceased came from. The fragment on the right, inscribed with nine characters, describes the deceased, surname Yu and title *bugeng* (low-ranking civil servant) as coming from Bochang, a town located in the state of Qi during the Warring States period. He received a sentence to perform labour work in lieu of time in prison. Cat. nos 99 & 100

overseers and craftsmen. Archaeologists estimate that the burial chamber is at least 30 metres and perhaps 40 metres below the original ground surface. To excavate to that depth, a much larger area must have been opened up, with long access ramps allowing workmen to reach the deepest levels to install the outer and inner coffins and place the many grave goods. In addition, to protect the tomb from seasonal flooding, water courses had to be diverted around the southern side of the tomb, creating an artificial lake.

Each underground building would have required a plan, several overseers and many craftsmen. These buildings may have been developed in succession, one after another, rather than as part of a single scheme, as the individual pits are not placed in a symmetrical orderly arrangement, like those of the later tomb of the Han emperor, Jingdi (r. 156–141 BC), at the site of the Yangling (fig. 132). The diverse and elaborate archaeological discoveries make it evident to us today that there was overarching, immense and detailed bureaucratic organization that was responsible for the conception of the complex of different sites and for the detailed execution of them: the faithful arrangement of the different military groups and the several types of stone armour required a formidable understanding of the military arrangements of the day and of ways to map them onto the tomb area; and use of repetitive, even mass, production to create multiple versions of the individual terracotta warriors or the single stone plaques for the armour was a feat of management of a vast labour force. Without a series of plans in the form of some sort of 'blueprint' and strongly coordinated overseers who realized in physical form these conceptions, the end result could never have been achieved.

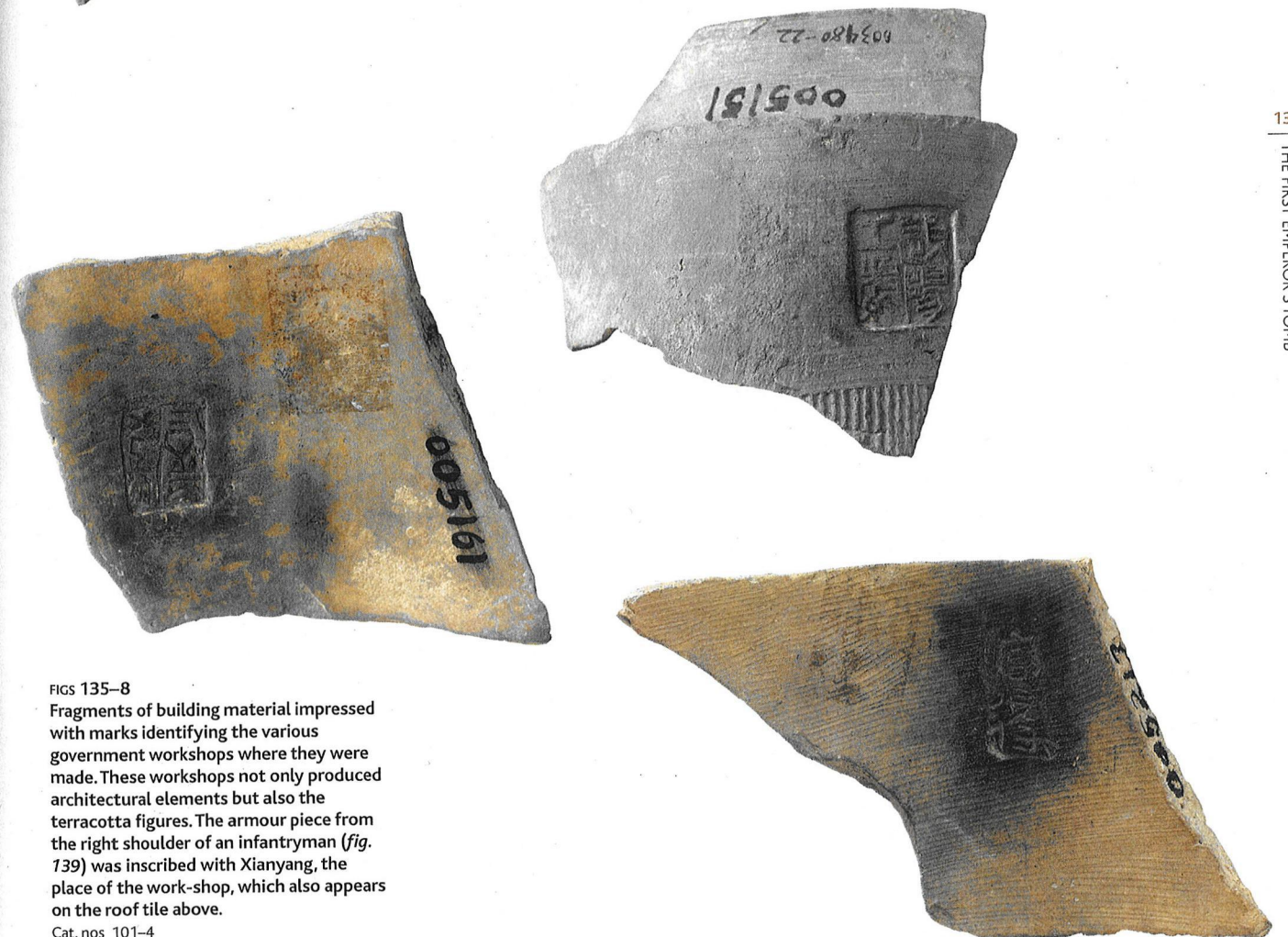
There are many physical traces of the organization of the thousands of workers. We know that labour was drawn from all over the empire from the inscriptions on pottery fragments carved with the names and places of origin of the conscripts. These were often criminals, recruited as forced labour, and, as mentioned already,



many are buried in one of the cemeteries to the west of the main complex (fig. 128).²⁹ They may even have been killed when the work was completed. The pottery fragment illustrated in fig. 133 gives the name of the person and his place of origin. Behind such a large labour force lay a large administration. At the tomb site the workforce had to be organized, fed and in due course buried. Their names and places of origin recorded on the pottery fragments demonstrate that the officials organizing them kept very careful records.

The building materials, especially the roof tiles, carry impressed seals of the workshops that made them (figs 135–8). From these we learn that many different sites were involved, indicating both the scale of the task and the speed with which it had to be undertaken.³⁰ Names of the overseeing craftsmen are also inscribed on the warriors themselves, as a form of accountability and hence of quality control. The foreman of groups of workers was probably responsible for the accomplishment of set tasks.³¹ The same sort of recording may have been used for the stone armour.

We can, therefore, imagine a large body of actual workers and many layers of overseers and administrators at work day after day at the site – living, eating, sleeping



FIGS 135–8
Fragments of building material impressed with marks identifying the various government workshops where they were made. These workshops not only produced architectural elements but also the terracotta figures. The armour piece from the right shoulder of an infantryman (fig. 139) was inscribed with Xianyang, the place of the work-shop, which also appears on the roof tile above. Cat. nos 101–4



FIG. 139
The back shoulder of an armoured
infantryman and the detail of it
inscribed with the characters *Xianyang*.

and, in many cases, dying there. At the capital there are also likely to have been further administrators and planners. In addition, beyond the site itself, there would have been other groups of men ordered to obtain raw materials. These, too, must have been operations on a very large scale.

After the bustle of hundreds, or even thousands, of men, the upheaval of the earth and the creation of deep pits together with the diversion of rivers, the finished landscape following the First Emperor's death would have been much more tranquil. In place of a construction site, with vast pits open for all to see, the ground was restored and the only visible signs of the tomb were the tree-covered mound and its surrounding defensive walls. Within the inner and outer walls were structures for the daily rituals required to sustain the emperor in the afterlife. A small temple-like building was placed behind the mound to the north-west. This, the retiring, or *qin*, building housed imperial gowns, caps, armrests and staffs. Here the food and wine offerings to the dead emperor were made. A subordinate ritual building, the *bian dian*, seems to have been located to the north-west of the *qin*.³² Large numbers



FIG. 140
(below) This pottery lid of a vessel,
found to the west of the tomb mound,
is inscribed *Lishan shi guan*, 'Office of
Food and Drink of Lishan'. Lishan is the
name of the First Emperor's tomb. The
inscription therefore indicates that
there was a special department for
providing food and drink not only for
visitors to the tomb but also for ritual
sacrifices to the deceased emperor.
Cat. no. 105

FIG. 141
(below right) This bell, decorated with
gold and silver inlay, was cast with two
seal-script characters, *yue fu*, on the
side of its loop handle, identifying it as
an instrument made for the emperor's
music department.
Cat. no. 106



of servants and ritual specialists were housed in the area to the west within the outer wall. They probably also occupied the buildings whose remains have been discovered in the northern sector. Within the west section of the outer wall was a building for the supply of food, the *shi guan*, or provisioning office. A number of whole ceramics and fragments have been found here.³³

By contrast with the bustling activity at the construction site that must have preceded it, the ritual attention of the living was governed by a formidable ceremonial decorum. The actual funeral, with a spectacular ritual, was a major event, probably involving hundreds, maybe even thousands, in processions. Deposition of the emperor in his deep tomb must also have been a major feat. But once sealed, and the workmen disposed of, the activities at the tomb area were undoubtedly restricted to smaller groups of people than before. Thus, following the many years of activity, even turmoil, a period of measured organization would have been the main feature of the years after the emperor's death in 210 BC.

The palace underground

While all was regulated above ground, what was happening in the buildings installed below ground? As we have noted already, the Chinese of the day believed that the dead continued to be present among the living and to exert influence over the lives of their descendants. The world that the First Emperor realized for himself was on a scale beyond any of those of his predecessors. Like all afterlives, it was active, with the individuals in it having roles and indeed duties, all taking place within the landscape in and around the mound. The army, for example, was to defend the emperor from an attack or invasion of the spirits of the armies he had massacred.

While some have concentrated on and talked about the army alone, it is perhaps better simply to take the tomb and its surroundings as a totality, recognizing that everything that the emperor did had a universalizing purpose. The palaces of the living mirrored and thus incorporated the authority of the palaces and offices of the spirits of the cosmos. In such an intellectual environment the care with which the tomb was constructed suggests that the emperor once more projected from one context to another, this time from life to the afterlife. The tomb was not a monument but an analogue of life, through which this ruler perpetuated his authority over the known universe into the invisible one of life after death. The world embodied in the emperor's tomb complex was simultaneously a way of understanding the future, a way of determining it and a way of providing for it.

The subterranean burial chamber was the emperor's palace. While we do not know what the interior of the chamber looks like (see the Appendix, pp. 204–7, for details of scientific testing of the First Emperor's burial mound), it almost certainly consisted of several linked rooms, as had the tombs of his ancestors and of other kings of the states. As Sima Qian records that 'the hundred officials', an idiom referring to the officials of the state administration, were interred, this sentence may indicate that actual individuals were forced to accompany the emperor in death into the tomb itself. Servants and workers were certainly buried. Undoubtedly the vessels and furnishings must have been sumptuous. Archaeologists working at the site suggest that within the mound – above the actual burial chamber itself – may have

FIG. 142
(opposite) Pottery figure of an official. Eleven other pottery figures were discovered in the same pit. Eight have been identified as officials by their writing 'tools' – a knife and stone sharpener – which hang from their belt. The other four are modelled with their arms outstretched. Various theories have been put forward as to what they may be doing – they may be charioteers or perhaps low-ranking officials working in the penal and legal department.
Cat. no. 107

FIG. 143
(below) Line drawing of the officials pit (K0006).

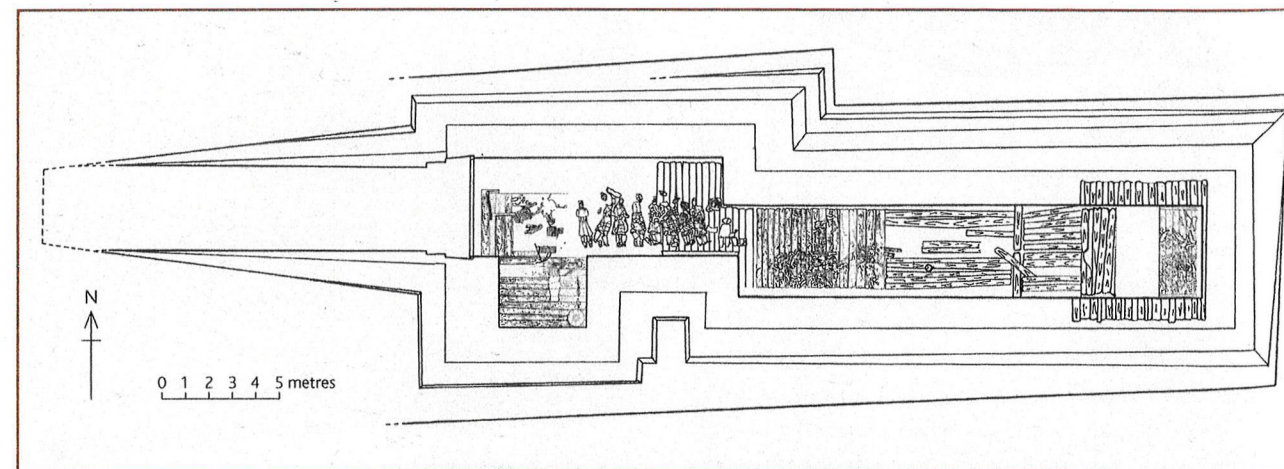
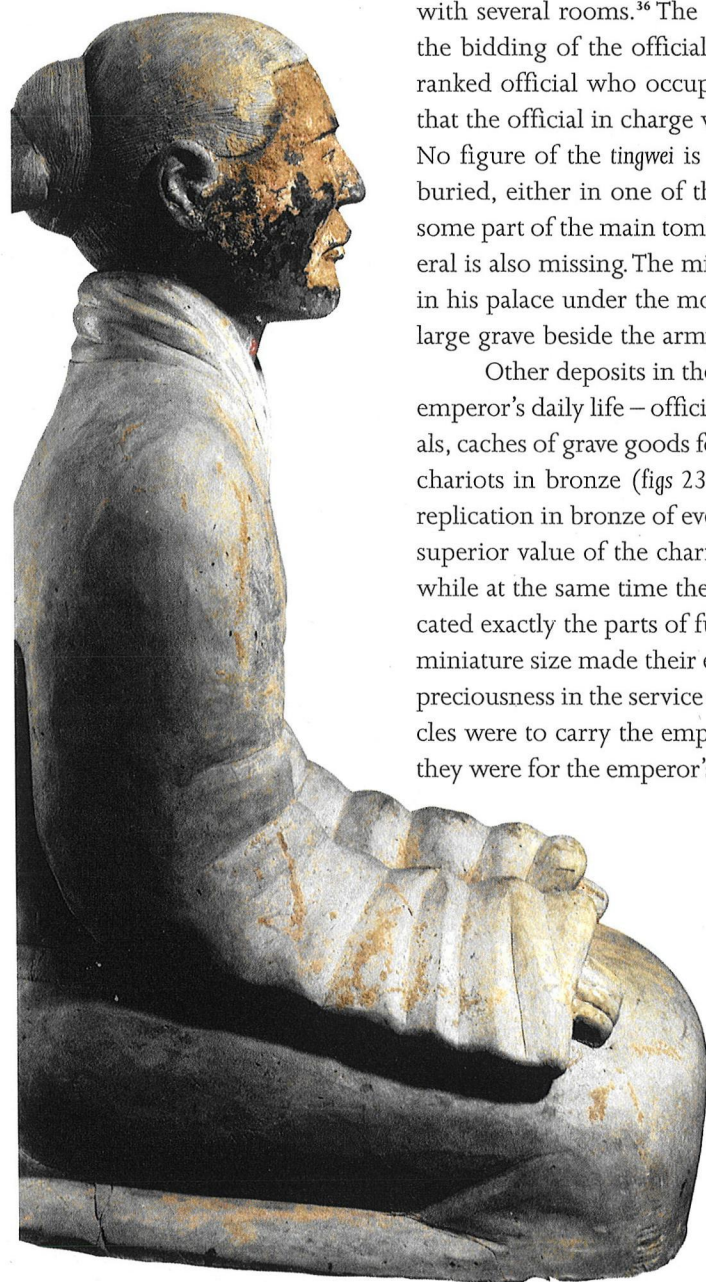


FIG. 144
(below) Kneeling stable boy excavated from the stable pits at Shangjiaocun, east of the First Emperor's tomb. There are thought to be three to four hundred of these pits in total, each one holding a horse skeleton or kneeling stable boy or both. Inscriptions on pottery sherds verify that the horses came from palace stables. The line drawing shows a kneeling stable boy with a horse skeleton.

Cat. no. 108



been terraced structures, with galleries and even towers, perhaps the towers mentioned by Sima Qian.³⁴ If these structures were built, then it is likely that they were intended for the emperor to ascend from his underground palace to view his precincts and the territories beyond. The two walls and their gates bounded the main palace grounds, mirroring the inner and outer court spaces of the palaces of the living.

Archaeologists have not only found the tombs of the convicts who worked at the site (who would have provided a labour force in the afterlife), they have uncovered graves of high-ranking people who accompanied the emperor. A row of tombs lies outside the outer east wall of the compound.³⁵ These held officials and some women. We know that there are further major figures of individuals to be discovered. A pit directly to the south of the emperor's tomb contained pottery figures of officials and charioteers in a wooden building as their office. Actual horses and a chariot were also buried. They seem to have been a part of the Qin central administration. Their building was constructed below ground, as many were, in wood, with several rooms.³⁶ The charioteers and their horses were intended to carry out the bidding of the officials, who in turn would have taken orders from a higher-ranked official who occupied a side room in the structure. It has been suggested that the official in charge was the *tingwei*, who organized prisons and legal affairs.³⁷ No figure of the *tingwei* is in the pit, and it is possible that the human *tingwei* was buried, either in one of the higher-ranking tombs alongside the outer wall or in some part of the main tomb itself. In Pit 3 of the army the central commanding general is also missing. The missing leader was either the First Emperor himself, living in his palace under the mound, or a high-ranking military official also buried in a large grave beside the army or in the actual tomb.

Other deposits in the inner tomb precinct were probably all important to the emperor's daily life – official and private. These included one or more ancillary burials, caches of grave goods for use in the afterlife, and two exquisitely made miniature chariots in bronze (figs 23–4). Their most conspicuous feature is the very faithful replication in bronze of every component of the chariots, piece by piece.³⁸ Here the superior value of the chariots seems to have been guaranteed by the use of metal, while at the same time they were made 'real' by the individual parts, which duplicated exactly the parts of full-size wooden chariots with their bronze fittings. Their miniature size made their exquisite character more pronounced, emphasizing their preciousness in the service of the emperor. It is sometimes suggested that these vehicles were to carry the emperor's soul to an immortal land. It is certainly likely that they were for the emperor's afterlife journeys. However, it seems more plausible that

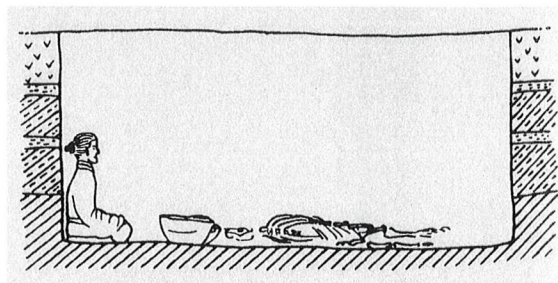
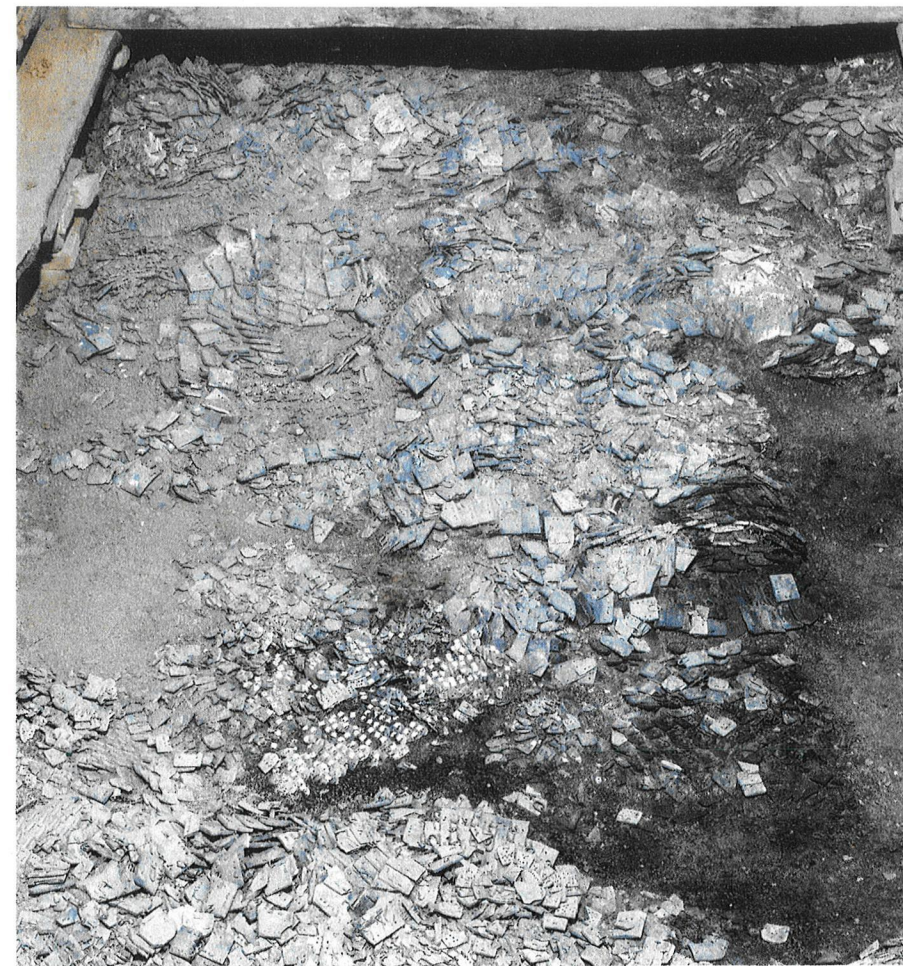


FIG. 145
(right) Limestone armour pieces in the stone armour pit (K9801); see pp. 80–91.

FIG. 146
(below) Pottery coffins containing the bones of animals and birds, as well as clay dishes for food were found in a vertical line of pits to the west of the First Emperor's tomb. Either side of them were pits containing kneeling pottery figures, presumably keepers. The animals and birds may have been rare specimens acquired as gifts and kept in the imperial gardens or the vast imperial hunting park, Shanglin ('Supreme Forest').

Cat. no. 109



journeys to lands of the immortals would have been only some of many journeys that the emperor himself wished to make. The major excursions across his territories marking out the boundaries of his world, described by Kern above (pp. 104–13), were very likely the most essential routes he intended to revisit. Or he may simply have wished to enjoy his pleasure park to the north, where archaeologists have discovered a small artificial waterway with exquisite bronze birds and pottery figures of musicians (see pp. 192–202).³⁹

The outer precinct deposits were less closely linked with the emperor's person. To the west were two groups of animals. A large stable-like structure housed horses, all of them the actual beasts; they were accompanied by miniature, kneeling pottery figures, often supplied with a dish or flask to indicate their roles as

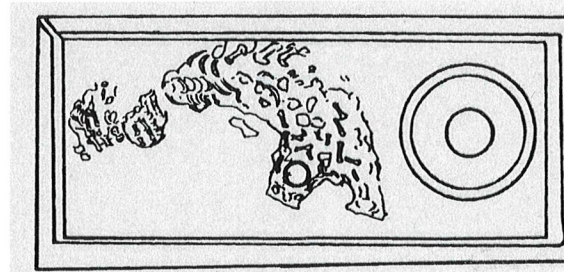


FIG. 147
(opposite, left) The 'long cap', a flattened headdress set at an angle on the head and tied under the chin, identifies this figure as a military officer. The same headdress with a vertical line down the centre would indicate a higher rank.
Cat. no. 110

FIG. 148
(opposite, right) This pottery bare-chested animated figure is thought to be an acrobat by Chinese archaeologists. It was found in a pit near the First Emperor's tomb along with ten other figures modelled in equally animated poses. A massive bronze ritual food vessel (fig. 37) was found on top of the figures. The raised right index finger of this figure has a 12 cm deep hole suggesting that something was inserted into it.
Cat. no. 111

guardians of esteemed creatures (fig. 144). Even more precious, probably, were the wild animals and birds, each buried in a coffin, belonging to the emperor's private menagerie or hunting park (fig. 146). At this period rulers hunted in large artificial parks, which we know from the next dynasty of the Han were configured to represent the entire world, with animals from the different regions placed in corresponding directions within the parks.⁴⁰ To provide the specific qualities, the fleetness of the horses, the ferocity of wild animals or the glorious plumage of exotic birds, the actual beasts had to be buried. In these instances the generic would not have sufficed, as it was specific individuals that were prized.

On the east were two extraordinary pits (fig. 131, K9801). One very large underground building, 100 x 130 metres in size, held many hundreds of sets of armour in stone, mounted on stands that have subsequently collapsed. In the very small sections excavated, eighty-nine sets of body armour, forty-three helmets and one set of horse armour were recovered. The sets were not uniform, but were varied according to rank and function of the soldiers for whom they were made. It would have been far easier and more economical to have buried hundreds of sets of lacquered leather or iron armour. The chief and most important factor must, therefore, have been the stone. It could not have protected against living enemies, as metal would have shattered it. This armour was an aspect of a new fashion for stone as protection against spirits.⁴¹ The armour may even have been the precursor of the jade suits of the next century, as argued by James Lin (pp. 186–9). We should imagine that the armour would have been worn either by the individuals buried with the emperor or, as Lin suggests, by the many Qin soldiers who had been killed in the wars over previous decades who might have been thought to be waiting to join the emperor as an army in the afterlife.⁴²

An adjacent pit contained a group of pottery figures of entertainers, wrestlers and acrobats (fig. 131, K9901). Their most striking feature is their realistic modelling. A massive figure stands with his hands held in front of him (fig. 160). Another much more slender entertainer has a hand raised (fig. 148). A major difference between these figures and those of the officials, mentioned above, and the warriors in the army is the sense conveyed that they are actually moving. Their lifelike gestures and diverse bodies, ranging from very slender to heavy and muscular, are very different from the impassive uniform stance of the officials and the immobility of most of the warriors, who were clearly forbidden to move unless directed to do so by superiors. The craftsmen of the day could readily achieve a sense of movement, but only occasionally was it appropriate. More important, only rarely was such individual realism required for functional purposes. It is evident that at each site different features were emphasized according to the functions required. Acrobats could move, officials were to be impassive, the army imposing.⁴³

What indeed did the army itself provide? First of all, it was a perfectly organized fighting force. In Pit 1 stands the infantry of what is known as the Right Army, perhaps as many as 6,000 soldiers with 160 chariots, set out as thirty-eight columns of single-file warriors, reinforced by their chariots, some with drums and bells. In front were 200 archers with real crossbows. Indeed, the army was equipped throughout with real weapons. In Pit 2 were war chariots, sections of archers and a section of cavalry, all identified by present-day scholars as the Left Army. It included 939





FIG. 149
Generals can be distinguished by their distinctive headdress, called a 'pheasant-tail' cap. Their armour extends down to a point at the front and ends at the waist at the back. Also distinctive are ribbons tied into bows, attached to the front, back and shoulders, which may be a sign of rank. Cat. no. 112

pottery warriors and 472 horses arranged in four groups: a square group of kneeling archers on the eastern side; a square group of war chariots on the southern side; a rectangular group of chariots and foot soldiers in the centre; and a rectangular group of mounted cavalry in the northern part. Here a formidable figure 196 cm high commanded a chariot in the rear. Pit 3 was a command post. The commander-in-chief is not present, but his decorated chariot and four supporters occupy the central position. It is likely that the commander is buried elsewhere, as already mentioned.⁴⁴

Clay seems to have been chosen for the army for one outstanding reason. It made possible the creation of a perfect army. Had a large portion of the fighting force been slaughtered to follow the emperor, a much less complete army would probably have resulted. We can assess the kinds of completeness required from the many different caps, hair styles and beards found among the warriors – these indicate not only rank and function but probably also place of origin (see pp. 144–51). An army modelled in this way was an ideal fighting force. Exceptionally tall individuals could be chosen, each personalized, but without the burdens that come with organizing groups of armed warriors. This army was far easier to control in administrative and military terms than an army of men would have been. In clay, too, a full range of required officers and lower ranks could be mustered, as they could be designated with clearly modelled and painted armour, badges and headdress. The real weapons were equally essential to the functions of the soldiers. If the physical reality of the slaughtered and buried horses and the proper visual presentations of officials and acrobats were essential, then in a similar way we must argue that the clay figures of the army, in which rank and role were accurately achieved, gave them their credibility and functionality as a fighting force. Indeed, the different features emphasized in the various pits around the tomb make it clear that diverse functions were sought after. This was no model but an ordered world in which each part was designed for a special purpose.

Power of the emperor's tomb

The value of keeping tombs and their contents out of human view was well known. It had been and would continue to be the custom of a successful dynasty to destroy the tombs of a predecessor that it had defeated as part of their conquest strategy. The opening of the sealed tomb dwellings and the ransacking of the possessions of the dead seem to have been regarded as the best ways to destroy their universes and eliminate what power the dead might have over the living. Once revealed, the functions of the tomb were destroyed. It is in this context that we can view the destruction of the tomb complex by the rebel leader, Xiang Yu, in the bloody series of wars that followed the death of the First Emperor. The control of life was contested by two claimants, Liu Bang – the ultimate victor and founder of the Han dynasty – and Xiang Yu, in their rivalry for the empire. Xiang Yu did not leave anything to chance and he attempted to destroy the site that would have ensured immortal power for the First Emperor.

The tomb was a work of a supreme conqueror and administrator. The First Emperor claimed in life to have created order out of chaos. He then used the order



FIG. 150
(opposite) Plaited and knotted hairstyle
of a kneeling archer.

FIG. 151
(right) The sole of a kneeling archer. The
shoes of warriors were mainly painted
dark brown with the borders decorated
in vermillion, violet or green with orange
or violet laces.

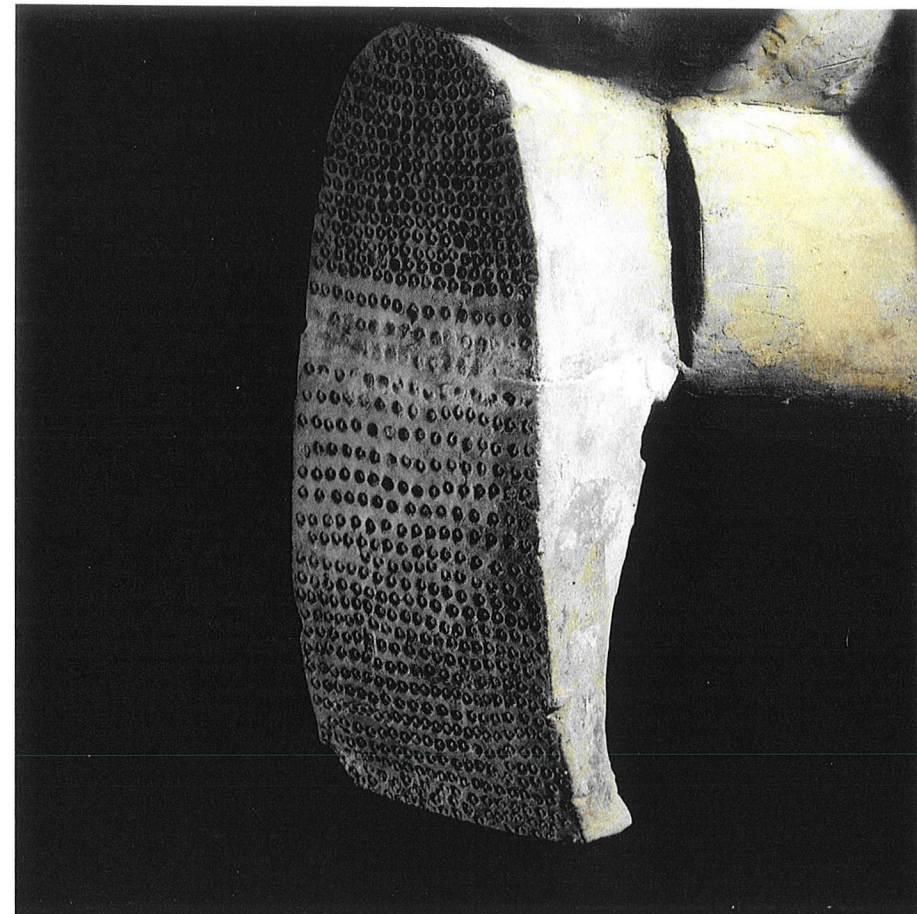
FIG. 152
(pages 146–7) Details of terracotta
figures showing various hairstyles and
headdresses.

On the left-hand page are different round hair-knot hairstyles. Strands of hair are taken from the sides and nape of the neck and plaited, whilst the main bulk of the hair is gathered into a topknot. The acrobat (top left) does not have any plaits but instead the hair is combed back and twisted into a knot.

On the right-hand page, the armoured infantryman and charioteer (top) wear soft caps over their plaited hairstyles. The general (below, left) is distinguished by his 'pheasant-tail' headdress. The stable boy (below, right) has a simple bun at the back of his head with no headdress.

FIGS 153 & 154
(pages 148–9) The light infantryman
on the left has a large nose and a
beard, suggesting a Central Asian
ancestry, while the general on the
right has a more squat nose and
Mongolian features.
Cat. nos 26 & 35

FIGS 155 & 156
(pages 150–1) The cavalryman on the
left has a close-fitting riding cap tied
under his chin, while the infantryman
on the right has a soft hat tied at the
back for easy adjustment.
Cat. nos 17 & 113



generated by his powerful administration and army to replicate them both and perpetuate them into the future. So the realm of the future became peopled by officials, servants and armies, unlike the afterlife populated by gods and spirits described by so many of the world's religions. A new eternal order was thus brought into being by the organization that the emperor had wrought to rule his empire, which it then mirrored.

It is a human quality to pattern the unknown on the known and then to reverse the interpretation and read the known as a true exemplar of the unknown. No one was more adept at this than the First Emperor. In life he set himself in the lineage of the sage kings and took control over the spirits of the regions he dominated. He thereby gave his empire a supernatural dimension and achieved the role of a cosmic ruler. In life he claimed his power by analogy with the powers of the sage kings and of those of the supernatural forces. He gave his tomb the features of life and thus made it a complete analogue, with buried humans, a perfect clay army, hundreds of sets of stone armour and miniaturized bronze chariots. So the First Emperor contrived his power base for all eternity. Here the unknown was created out of the known. But, as in life the emperor claimed a role at the centre of the cosmos, in death he did not relinquish it. His tomb mound reminds us still today that, when buried there – in the embodiment of a mountain – the emperor has created a new space in the revered geography of China, which he had so carefully charted and ordered in his lifetime.⁴⁵ By residing in his tomb, he reconfigured his universe and even added to that of our own time. Few have achieved such power over the minds of those who followed them.

