Reviews

Although the beginnings of pictorial art in China can be traced back some centuries earlier, it is representations from Eastern Han dynasty tombs and shrines (A.D. 25–220) that first show pictorial art to have attained the same level of importance as an art of ritual artifacts.[1] For many centuries in China, Eastern Han pictorial art has been the object of antiquarian studies, to which modern archaeology added its labors from the beginning of this century. Since 1949, however, the flood of new material has been relentless, and the need for monographs and synthetic studies has become ever more pressing. For this reason among others, the two books reviewed here are among the most significant to be published on any aspect of Chinese art history in many years. *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Art*, awarded the 1990 Joseph Levenson Prize of the Association of Asian Studies, is a massively researched and at the same time intensely issue-oriented study of one of the defining monuments of the Eastern Han period.[2] Martin Powers's *Art and Political Expression in Early Imperial China* is the major synthetic study that nonspecialists like myself have been waiting for; it cedes nothing to *The Wu Liang Shrine* in its methodological self-awareness and interpretative ambition. Both works are certain to be points of reference for future scholars of Han art. Leaving the details of research and interpretation to those better qualified than myself, however, this review will speak largely to methodological and theoretical issues that have a broader interest.

The Wu Liang Shrine is a study of a familial shrine dedicated to Wu Liang, located in the Jiaxiang area of Shandong province in northeast China. Erected in A.D. 151, one of a very large number of shrines built during the Eastern Han period, it has long been famous for the pictorial carvings on its three interior walls and ceiling. Wu Hung's book is in two parts, of which Part I documents the shrine as an object of antiquarian, archaeological, and art-historical inquiry. We discover the shrine, therefore, through the history of its construction as an object of study. This meta-art history deserves to find an audience beyond Chinese art specialists, espe-

cially given our current methodological self-consciousness and the emergence of a multi-cultural orientation. Here is a welcome reminder that the historical study of artworks has a long and complex background outside the West. As an introduction to the shrine, on the other hand, the book has the curious effect of gradually dematerializing the monument itself, which in the course of Part I increasingly takes shape as a cultural idea rather than a visual object.[3] I was particularly struck by Wu's review of formal analyses of the shrine in modern scholarship, where he gives most of his attention to modern debates over the history of representation in China in which the shrine carvings figure as an exhibit. This orientation toward the epistemology of representation rather than the phenomenology of style reflects the author's own concerns more accurately, perhaps, than it does the balance of modern art-historical scholarship.[4]

Part II consists of a rich interpretation of the decorative program of the shrine interior, underpinned by an almost one-hundred-page, image-by-image iconographic identification of the images in Appendix A.[5] With his impressive documentation consigned to the Appendix, the author is able to offer a bold and erudite iconographic account that opens up the study to the broader issues of early Chinese art history. In successive chapters, he discusses the ceiling, the gables, and the walls—the decoration corresponding "to an Eastern Han notion of a universe with three integral parts: Heaven, the realm of immortality, and the human world" (p. xxi). The ceiling is decorated with representations of omens as signs of Heaven's will. The author relates these carvings to the omen pictures found in the Ch'u silk manuscript of the 3rd century B.C., where similarly ideographic, isolated motifs are accompanied by written commentaries. He argues that the omen pictures were based on an "omen book," now lost, the text of which was related to the first five chapters of the *Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhai jing)*. The gables, meanwhile, signify the realm of immortality through their representations of the Queen Mother of the West and the King Father of the East. In a fascinating discussion, the author relates these representations to the Han cult of the Queen Mother of the West. He goes on to argue that such iconic depictions of her represent an adaptation of the Buddha icon, which had first been introduced into Chinese art in the second half of the 1st century A.D. Although this may have been the immediate model, the author's definition of iconic imagery—as typified by compositional symmetry and the frontality of the central icon—seems equally applicable

[1] I am defining ritual broadly to include political rituals and the social rituals of the aristocracy alongside religious rituals.

[2] It was "... awarded to the English-language books that make the greatest contribution to increasing understanding of the history, culture, politics, or economy of China."

[3] The author has preferred, for example, to reproduce Wilma Fairbank's flawed 1941 reconstructions of two other shrines at the Wu family cemetery accompanied by his own list of errors in the text, rather than replacing Fairbank's visual reconstructions with corrected ones of his own.

[4] This epistemological orientation is characteristic of the author's attention to visual issues throughout the book, and has its own interest. For the omen pictures on the ceiling, he introduces the concept of a "cataloguing style": "The representation is purely schematic and diagrammatic. . . . these images are intended to present abstract types that, in [George] Rowley's words, are the 'essential ideas of things' " (p. 85).

Later, the author contrasts the iconic images of the gables and the narrative images of the walls in terms of representational approaches. "Pictures possessing these two features, compositional symmetry and the frontality of the central icon, are common in religious art. For convenience, I term this type of composition *iconic*, in contrast to another type of composition termed in this study *episodic*. . . . This type of composition is . . . self-contained; the significance of the representation is realized in its own pictorial context. In contrast to an iconic representation, the viewer is a witness, not a participant" (p. 133).

[5] It is unfortunate that in Appendix A Wu makes such copious use of redrawings of the carvings dating from 1821. In some cases—the omen pictures of the ceiling, for example—these redrawings are the only surviving visual evidence. Elsewhere, however, Wu reproduces the redrawings beneath rubbings from the carvings themselves, even though the rubbings predate the redrawings. By their completeness and undeniable charm, they attract the eye and effectively bury the very different style of the Shrine carvings themselves.

to China's ancient tradition of zoomorphic mask imagery, suggesting deeper, indigenous roots.[6]

Chapter 6 is devoted to the representations of human history on the three main interior walls, the largest component of the decorative program. The author first presents a general reading, explicating the logic behind the sequential and hierarchical placement of the reliefs, and arguing convincingly that the wall program represents a visual expression of the New Text school of Han historiography. In the second part of his discussion, he takes us through the images group by group, from top to bottom and right to left.[7] Wu's discussions of the thematic groups of images *as groups* are the keystone of his interpretation of the monument; among them, his iconographic analysis of the homage scene at the center of the lowest register of the rear wall, as the principal representation in the wall program, is crucial for his entire interpretation. Earlier art historians have variously argued that this image represents the sovereignty of an ancient ruler, an homage to the deceased, and an homage to the deceased with the attributes of sovereignty. Wu develops, instead, the hypothesis that it is a representation of sovereignty as invested in the rulers of Han, specifically the founder of the dynasty, Gaozu. Wu presents compelling evidence of a cult of Gaozu and other imperial family members, and of special links between the Han ruling house and the southwestern area of Shandong province, where all the numerous versions of this scene have been found.[8] Wu's discussion of the wall program concludes with an identification of the final thematic element in the program in the bottom left-hand corner—a county official pays his respects to the ox-drawn carriage of a worthy in retirement—as a metonymic "self-portrait" of the deceased.

The book culminates in the short concluding chapter of Part II, "Epilogue: The Ideology of the Wu Liang Shrine Carvings." Freed from the demands of exegetical argument, the author makes his strongest claims for the monument and for the man whom he believes to be responsible for it, Wu Liang. It is here that theoretical and methodological issues surface most clearly. Wu begins with a bold comparison with European cathedrals, citing Victor Hugo's famous statement, "In the Middle Ages men had no great thought that they did not write down in stone." To this he offers the gloss: "Hugo was not an art historian, but what he intuitively grasped from the carvings in Notre Dame is the essence of medieval cathedrals— their encyclopedic and 'scholastic' character—which art historians have laboriously sought to demonstrate" (p. 218). This is, by and large, what Wu Hung has given us for the Wu Liang Shrine, a characterization of the monument as the visualization of Han scholastic thinking.[9] His ultimate purpose is to establish the shrine as "an outstanding example of Han Confucian art" (p. 228). To do so is at the same time to establish Han Confucian art as a genre and a tradition, neglected by modern art history in favor of Buddhist and

Daoist art traditions. What are the basic features of Confucian art? According to Wu Hung: "The first and perhaps most important feature of Han Confucian art is the portrayal of a self-generating universe, a goal shared by the Wu Liang Ci carvings" (p. 229).[10] The difficulty with this as a diagnostic characteristic is that the belief in a self-generating universe is not so much Confucian as Chinese. The author's second feature of a Han Confucian art, "the iconographical scheme of a cosmic composition" (p. 229), is more useful. The book has shown that the all-encompassing, scholastic representation of a correlative universe has even a place for the non-Confucian iconography of the Queen Mother of the West. To the scholasticism, I would add as a second diagnostic characteristic a feature that his text reveals very well: the imaging of exemplary moral action.[11]

Wu's privileging of the scholastic interpretation in his Epilogue belies the broader understanding of the shrine that he demonstrates elsewhere in his book. I was struck, for example, by the shrine's complex religious character. As part of a shrine, the carvings were fully implicated both in a devotional cult and in the shrine's magical protective function. Within the decorative program, Wu shows that the gable representations are not simply related to the legend of the Queen Mother of the West, but also to a Han cult of this deity. Whereas the Queen Mother as mythological figure fits in well with the Confucian scholastic scheme, as a cult figure she embodies desires of a radically different nature, indissociable from beliefs in the afterlife. One might make a similar point with regard to the iconically central sovereignty scene: is this purely an image of sovereignty, or might it not also be a version of the local religious cult of Han sovereigns discussed by the author? These various religious elements would tend to challenge the status of Confucian art as a distinct genre with scholasticism at its heart. I am reminded of the argument of some Han specialists that it is difficult to make a clear distinction between scholars (*rusheng*) and religious specialists (*fangshi*).

The obverse of the author's argument on Confucian art is his argument on the monument's authorship: "The inscription of Wu Liang's memorial tablet records that the shrine was built by his descendants and that the craftsman's name was Wei Gai. A number of important connections between the pictures and Wu Liang's life and ideas, however, have led me to the conclusion that these carvings were designed by Wu Liang himself" (p. 222). In other words, of the three possible sources of creative input—the craftsman, the descendants who were the effective patrons, and the deceased—Wu considers the deceased to have been decisive. How convincing a claim is this? The author's main point is that the scholastic program as he has reconstructed it corresponds very nicely to what we know about Wu Liang: it shows a degree of learning and a set of ideals that effectively function as a representation of the man to whom it is dedicated. Since this does not in itself logically lead to the conclusion that the representation is a *self*-representation, it would seem important to consider the other possibilities. But it is one of the limitations of this study that the author pursues the issue solely with regard to Wu Liang.

What, then, does he imply by his characterization of Wu Liang as the designer? At times, he seems to suggest that Wu Liang was involved in the process of depiction itself. He notes the emergence of scholars as "individual artists" under the Eastern Han dynasty.

Some famous Confucian scholars, such as Liu Xiang, Cai Yong, and Liu Bao, illustrated well-known literary motifs. Zhao Qi designed the decoration for his own funerary structure and wrote

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[6] In Chang Kwang-chih's famous and controversial hypothesis, the *taotie* mask in Shang bronze decoration is to be associated with the shamanistic journey from this world to the beyond. Its "iconic" features suggest that, on the contrary, it may have more to do with a manifestation from the beyond in this world.

[7] The groups include legendary sovereigns of antiquity, eminent women (embodying the themes of chastity and the continuation of the family line), virtuous men (including filial sons), and loyal subjects (including wise ministers, loyal assassin-retainers, and a virtuous queen).

[8] This raises the question, not fully explored by Wu or Powers, who are more interested in the role of scholar patrons, of the degree to which the pictorial art of the Wu Liang Shrine and other Shandong shrines derives from state monuments.

[9] The Epilogue does qualify this account with a very useful discussion of the ritual function of the funerary shrine as a specifically familial monument, but it might have been more usefully placed at the beginning rather than the end of the book. Wu shows that while the Shrine was less accessible to nonfamily members than other funerary structures such as the tomb and memorial tablets, it, too, had a social purpose: it publicly demonstrated the filial piety of the descendants, and it assured the cohesion of the extended nuclear family.

[10] "*Self-generated* means that such a representation negates any external creator or ultimate cause; it is generated by a cosmic order internal to itself. In Joseph Needham's words, it is an 'ordered harmony of wills without an ordainer.' This characteristic distinguishes Han Confucianism and its art from many other religions and religious arts in the ancient world" (p. 229).

[11] On the Confucian conception of "imaging," see R. T. Ames, "Meaning as Imaging: Prolegomena to a Confucian Epistemology," in E. Deutsch, ed., *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1991.

an eulogy for each image. This last instance provides an exact analogy to the creation of the Wu Liang Ci carvings. None of these scholars' paintings have survived. The Wu Liang Ci is thus our sole material for studying the beginning of individualism in Chinese art (pp. 222–223).

It seems important to add that the textual evidence at best supports a limited activity for the men cited as amateur artists, whereas the pictorial program of the Wu Liang Shrine is, in purely visual terms, as ambitious as anything in the whole of Han art. Nor is the analogy with Zhao Qi quite exact, since Zhao Qi saw his tomb built, whereas the shrine was built after Wu Liang's death.[12] Elsewhere, the author seems to define Wu Liang's role as the "designer" (or "creator" or "individual artist") in more conceptual terms: "The underlying cosmic structure of the Wu Liang Ci carvings . . . can be viewed as a conventional symbolic formula for decorating an Eastern Han shrine. This structure itself fulfilled the basic function of a shrine in funerary rites and did not represent ideas specific to either patron or artist. The individualism of the Wu Liang Ci carvings is found in the selection and composition of motifs" (p. 223). Wu points to two unconventional aspects of the decorative program that fit these criteria. One is the representation of omens with their political overtones rather than the usual heavenly phenomena or celestial beings on the ceiling. The other is the historical scheme of the wall carvings, with its unusual complexity, sophistication, coherence, and clear Confucian moral stance. In a striking formulation, he writes: "At this stage . . . individualism could be realized only through a manipulation of conventional forms. Forms were treated as words and the artist was a rhetorician . . ." (p. 230). Wu Liang is thus the artist by virtue of providing the unifying vision.

If we admit the hypothesis of Wu Liang as designer, how would this have worked in practice? According to the memorial tablet, the shrine was built after his death. Did he consult with the master craftsmen prior to his death? Did he leave drawings? Or did he leave detailed instructions for his descendants? Some very specific involvement of this kind is necessary to sustain Wu's claims for Wu Liang's authorship. Assuming that something of the sort happened, yet without Wu Liang around to supervise the work, someone else must have taken responsibility for turning the plans into a monument, either the head craftsman, or a descendant, or both in consultation. No matter how active an interest Wu Liang took in the monument, it was necessarily a collaborative project: can we simply discount the artistic role of the intermediaries? I think not. If the named craftsman, Wei Gai, and his workshop could not be expected to come up with such a singular decorative program on their own, it is far from obvious that they could not have done so in collaboration with Wu Liang's descendants, who can be expected to have had scholarly skills themselves, and above all to have been attentive to the image of their father as a scholar. If their own learning was limited, they presumably could have turned to their cousins Wu Ban and, particularly, Wu Rong.[13]

As regards the role of the craftsman, Wu Hung at various points mentions stylistic studies by other scholars that have considered workshop questions, but he does not exploit the possibilities of stylistic analysis in his own argument. While throwing light on the desires of the patron (Wu Liang or his descendants), the researches of Martin Powers and Jean James have also revealed the artistic autonomy of the craftsmen who realized his wishes, since the distinctive silhouette-like imaging and geometric substructure of the forms in this style are not limited to the Wu Liang Shrine but are characteristic of a large number of monuments in the Jiaxiang

area.[14] Another way in which the craftsman's role disappears from The Wu Liang Shrine is through the author's omission of the information regarding Wei Gai contained in Wu Liang's memorial tablet, since his partial translation of the text stops just at the point where the craftsman is mentioned. And yet the text is far from uninteresting, starting with the fact that the craftsman's name is mentioned: "The fine craftsman, Wei Gai, engraved the texts and carved the paintings, arranging them for display in rows. He gave full rein to his skill and ingenuity, imparting a proper order to the sinuous curves. They will be transmitted to be seen by the descendants, never to be lost through ten thousand generations."[15] Nowhere in the tablet do Wu Liang's sons make any mention of their father as designer; on the other hand, they are effusive in their praise of Wei Gai's art, describing it here in a way that could be applied to many products of the same workshop or family of workshops. None of this means that Wei Gai rather than Wu Liang was the designer of the Wu Liang Shrine carvings; but it does underline the fact that monuments of this kind were collaborations first and last.[16]

Martin Powers's *Art and Political Expression in Early Imperial China* is in many ways complementary to *The Wu Liang Shrine*. Powers's creative use of stylistic analysis complements Wu's attention to the epistemology of representation. *Art and Political Expression* covers many monuments over a wide geographical area, in contrast to Wu's monographic focus, but it gives particular attention to northeast China, where the Wu Liang Shrine is located. Wu's reconstruction of one variant of Han elite ideology on its own terms is balanced by Powers's ideological critique. *Art as Political Expression* appears in the wake of a long series of articles and unpublished papers that Powers has produced over a ten-year period, and which have already laid the basis of a social history of Eastern Han funerary art. To some extent, the book, too, reads as a series of essays: while there are continuing themes, these are not fully concretized in a distinct, overall conceptual structure, and the relative autonomy of the individual chapters gives the overall argument a somewhat rambling, at times diffuse character. Nevertheless, the book remains engaging throughout, and Powers's major theme is clear: the pictorial art of Han tombs and shrines served political ends. This has much to do with the public character of funeral ceremonies in the Eastern Han: funerals could be heavily attended; tombs and

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[12] See W. Acker's discussion in *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, Leiden, 1974, II, Pt. I, 6–12.

[13] Powers writes here (p. 100): "Wu Liang's inscription proclaims that he 'was most erudite and learned and had an exhaustive understanding of all he studied.' The same claim was made for Wu Rong, who, according to the inscription, had mastered no less than seven classics. This is impressive, considering that the official biographies generally give famous scholars credit for one or two classics."

[14] See, e.g., J. James, "The Dating of the Left Wu Family Offering Shrine," *Oriental Art*, n.s. XXXI, 1, 1985, 34–41; M. Powers, "Pictorial Art and Its Public in Early Imperial China," *Art History*, VII, 2, 1984, 135–163.

[15] Powers (as in n. 14, 152) translates this passage as follows: "The clever workman Wei Gai engraved the text and carved the designs; he arranged everything in its place, he gave free rein to his talent and the gracious curves were exposed to all. The work will be transmitted to the sight of later generations and for ten thousand generations it will endure." In the later *Art and Political Expression*, however, he prefers "famous artist" to "clever workman" (p. 125). The Chinese term is *liangjiang*.

[16] The fact that the omen pictures and other representations in the shrine are accompanied by carved identifying texts also opens up the possibility that the artists were literate. Although Wu does not address this question, it is of some importance for the design of the monument, since a literate artist would presumably have been less simply the agent of the patron, and more likely to have actively participated in the design. A parallel question concerns the cost of monuments. We do not know how much the Wu Liang Shrine cost to build, but the inscription on the Western Pillar tells us that the pillar (which bears carvings) was commissioned by Wu Liang and his brothers at a cost of "150,000 [cash]," from the masons Meng Li and Meng Mao; and that at the same time they paid the sculptor Sun Zong "40,000 [cash]" to carve a pair of stone lions (p. 25). It is hard to imagine that Wei Gai, whose responsibility would seem to have been much greater, was not paid a sum closer to the masons' than the sculptor's. Judging by the discussions of prices of funerary monuments by Wu (pp. 226–227) and Powers (1991, 134), this would mean that Wei Gai was extremely well paid. How would this have affected his artistic autonomy?

shrines were much discussed; and the monuments reflected on the reputation of the deceased and his family.

In interpreting the stone carvings, Powers makes his central argument on the basis of the methodological conviction that style is readable in sociological terms. Style is treated here as a form of discourse. By introducing the analytic concepts of decorum (what I consider social appropriateness) and function (social efficacy to me), Powers is able to define the discourse sociologically as articulating the aspirations and interests of individuals in their public roles; or, when information on the individual is missing, those of the social group whose taste the individual can be inferred (by a rather risky circularity) from the style to have embraced. The discourse of style is thus traceable to social groups through a combination of taste and patronage.

Powers defines his stylistic discourses from four angles: the physical, pictorial, rhetorical, and political. Works of the luxury-oriented "ornamental tradition," for example, are "physically . . . characterized by the extensive and costly manipulation of material (metal, wood, stone). Pictorially, they are characterized by nonmimetic styles of representation. Rhetorically, they typically can be rendered as simple declarations or assertions. Politically, they affirm an inherited status quo" (p. 68). Originally associated with the pre-Han nobility, this tradition was appropriated by the commercial sector in the Western Han (206 B.C.-A.D. 9); in the Eastern Han, it was favored not only by merchants (and presumably the nobility) but also by the newly powerful eunuchs at court. The author's second stylistic discourse is the equally luxury-oriented "descriptive tradition" of naturalistic depiction:

> Physically, the manipulation of material is less important in this tradition than in the ornamental tradition. Pictorially, however, it focuses on the quality of the material. In other words, it is mimetic, aiming at a close imitation of an object's texture, weight, and bulk. Rhetorically, images in this tradition can rarely be rendered as anything more than a simple assertion of fact, and for this reason, politically, they affirm the status quo, albeit an acquired status rather than an inherited one (p. 68).

Powers attributes the emergence of this style quite narrowly to the patronage of merchants and eunuchs. The third great stylistic discourse of Eastern Han, which is Powers's real subject and, in a sense, the "hero" of his story, is the anti-naturalistic, anti-ornamental "classical tradition," so named for "its self-conscious revival of classical sources for imagery and, possibly, style":

> Physically, there is extensive carving, but the carving is shallow and avoids the tortuous turns and dovetailing traceries of the ornamental tradition. Pictorially, moreover, the style denies the existence of material by censoring any reference to weight, texture, or bulk. It relies upon images, rather than physical or pictorial material, to convey its message. Rhetorically, its compositions can be rendered as complex arguments and "if . . . then" statements, rather than simple assertions. For this reason, politically, it is able to convey criticisms of the status quo (p. 69).

This stylistic discourse, that of the Wu Liang Shrine, has the narrowest social base of all: Powers attributes it to the patronage of middle-income scholars in Shandong province in northeast China, who were generally politically opposed to merchant/eunuch/noble interests, but who often shared common interests with the Eastern Han state.

The book opens with three chapters which successively offer an explanation of the author's approach to the sociology of style, an introduction to the ornamental tradition, and a general overview of the market for funerary art. The largest part of the book, however, chapters 4 to 9, is devoted to a long discussion of the classical tradition from different angles. The author begins with a short but fascinating socio-economic analysis of the style, relating workshop

practice to the practice of patronage. Despite cost-cutting devices, stone tombs and shrines were expensive; however, the cost was justified by the opportunities for social advancement that a good reputation created. This helps to put in perspective the high moral tone implied by the deliberate simplicity of the style. The next chapter defines the stylistic discourse in general terms. By placing the art commissioned by scholars in a broader context of competing stylistic discourses, Powers is able to demonstrate that the classical art of the scholars defines itself in opposition to the two other styles, and that underlying this is a rejection and critique of materialism on moral grounds. This art is above all rhetorical, Powers argues, reminding us of Wu Hung's definition of the designer as rhetorician, but he broadens the analysis to encompass the specifically visual dimension of the rhetoric. Among the many visual devices to which the author draws our attention are the revival of earlier styles, the use of geometry in composing forms, and a self-conscious refusal of illusionism. This general discussion is followed by four chapters, in which he analyzes in these rhetorical terms two aspects of the iconography, themes from human history and omens. Powers demonstrates that both lend themselves to the articulation of political arguments and out-and-out political criticism. He closes the book with two chapters devoted to monuments of the descriptive tradition. In chapter 10, he develops his arguments that the naturalistic depictions of scenes of lavish living in the tombs, representing pious hopes for the future happiness of the dead, are the reflection of materialist values alien to the scholars, and can be associated above all with the eunuchs. The final, quite dramatic chapter seeks to identify the so-called Zhu Wei Shrine (which like the Wu Liang Shrine has a long history of study) as a eunuch-commissioned monument that can be seen against the background of the destruction of eunuch-commissioned tombs in A.D. 153 and 169 by provincial officials.

Powers's sociology of style brings a clear order to the development of Han pictorial art, but at a price. Underlying his theory of style as discourse, which is a very helpful addition to the methodology of Chinese art history,[17] is a minimization of patrons as individual historical actors, and of the specific context given by individual patronage, in favor of broad categories. The author states his position in introducing his argument against royalty, and in favor of eunuchs, as those responsible for the stylistic discourse of naturalistic depiction associated with vaulted tombs:[18]

> What kind of people favored and supported the artists at Dahuting and Dongyuancun? The question sounds simple enough. Presumably, one need only determine the patron of one or more vaulted tombs to see if he was a scholar, prince, or a merchant. But in fact this approach could be misleading. It might be, for instance, that some tombs of the classical tradition were commissioned by eunuchs. Some eunuchs, after all, were deeply committed to Confucian values. But we could not say that the classical tradition was fostered by eunuchs because, as a group, they did not promote Confucian values, whereas scholars did. What is really needed is to identify that social group whose publicly projected taste is etched and smeared onto the walls of the vaulted tombs as a group (pp. 305–306).

In passing from the social group, which is an analytic concept constructed by the historian, to the monument, Powers dispenses with the mediating role of the individual patron; the social group,

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[17] The application of the idea of competing stylistic discourses to 18th-century painting, for example, would be helpful in revealing the critique of court painting that is often incorporated in the work of the Yangzhou Eccentrics as stylistic parody and satire.

[18] "Most decorated tombs in the classical tradition, by contrast, have cantilevered ceilings and lack the vaulted central hall. Instead of subordinating all the rooms to the large hall, these tombs tend to dispose two to three fairly large rooms (front, middle, and rear chambers) along a central axis" (p. 282).

via the mechanism of taste, is personified as a historical actor at the level of individual monuments. The author has a very optimistic view of the degree to which individuals internalize the values of groups. At one point, Powers cites Hans Bielenstein's anatomy of Han social structure in terms of distinct categories, but I found my attention going to Bielenstein's caveat at the end of his citation: "The boundaries between all categories were ill-defined and could be crossed" (pp. 188–189).

On the specific point of the role of eunuch taste in the development of the descriptive tradition, Powers's arguments are suggestive but not at all conclusive. He relates the naturalistic depictions of banquets and estate living to descriptions of the eunuchs' lavish life style as it appears in the partisan critiques by scholars. He also points out that eunuchs played an active, supervisory role in imperial spending on art, and that two lavish eunuch tombs attracted enough attention to be destroyed by local officials. On the other hand, only one of the monuments of the tradition that he is anxious to relate to them can be securely attributed to a eunuch patron. Another, one of the Dahuting tombs in Henan province, has been linked by the Chinese excavators to a government official.[19] Among the other possible candidates for patrons of these tombs are royalty, but Powers downplays the relevance of royalty and the aristocracy in general in the Eastern Han period, broadly painting them as "floaters," who followed the cultural lead of either the scholars or the eunuchs and merchants according to their disposition. However, this is difficult to verify independently. The imperial tombs of the Eastern Han period have not yet been excavated; if, when they are brought to light, they reveal a similar style of pictorial art, will this also be credited to the eunuchs on the grounds of their supervisory role? In chapter 11 Powers puts together a case for attributing the Zhu Wei Shrine to a eunuch patron, pointing particularly to figures in the compositions which he identifies as eunuchs. But this could simply imply a palace scene, and may be fanciful. As he himself points out elsewhere, naturalism was harnessed to depictions of extravagant hopes for the afterlife of the deceased. It seems hazardous to promote the eunuch hypothesis too strongly at a time when direct evidence of eunuch patronage is so slight, and patronage in general is not well understood for the monuments in question. The descriptive tradition could also be extended to include three-dimensional funerary art such as pottery tomb models of architecture, making possible a much broader study of patronage.

Since the point of Powers's book is to develop a political interpretation of Han art on the basis of a sociology of style, it would be unfair to ask of it that it also provide an analysis in terms of belief systems. But the author's choice of approach leads him to minimize the importance of the religious dimension of funerary art. One wonders, for example, about the context that the symbolic structure of the monument itself provides for stylistic choices. There is little consideration of decorative programs; the reader soon becomes used to a succession of decontextualized images. The drawbacks of this approach are perhaps most visible when it comes to the many monuments that combine elements from different stylistic traditions. Powers cites a number of decorative programs (Maocun, Shilipu, Yinan) that combine the ornamental and classical traditions (pp. 263–277). Without the assumption of an antagonism between the two discourses, it would be natural to see such monuments as stylistically hybrid: since the ornamental tradition does not only signify aristocratic luxury, but in an iconographic reading also has other, religious meanings, perhaps it is these latter that are reconcilable with classicism and justify its presence. The Yinan tomb, which Powers dates to the 2nd century A.D., demonstrates that the supposedly antagonistic styles of the descriptive and classical traditions were not always irreconcilable. Here, we find naturalistically rendered "genre scenes" alongside classicist representations of

themes from human history.[20] To explain such combinations, perhaps it is necessary to complicate Powers's analysis with the additional concept of symbolic discourse.[21]

One might question whether one factor in the difference between the descriptive and classical traditions is not a difference in their symbolic function as part of a funerary monument, implying different kinds of engagement with the challenge of death. Like all scholars of early China, Powers acknowledges the concept of separate souls, of which one, the *po* soul, took up residence in the tomb, while the other, the *hun*, left the tomb, ideally to reach a paradise realm, often associated in this period with the Queen Mother of the West.[22] Powers acknowledges the prevalence of this and other beliefs about the afterlife in Han society, but he is not convinced that when we see representations that appear to give visual form to such beliefs we can assume "that they represented those things because they believed in them" (p. 58). And he goes further: "Nor is it clear that the rendering of some perceived reality was important in early Chinese concepts of representation" (p. 58). Widespread beliefs in the reality of the afterlife notwithstanding, Powers argues that representations were understood in conventionalist terms. His basic point appears to be that it was the proper performance of the rites, including the construction of tombs and shrines and their decoration with appropriate imagery, that mattered. This justifies his focus on the images of funerary art as displaced representations of socio-political aspirations and interests geared to the public character of the monuments. But can beliefs in the reality of the afterlife be so easily marginalized? Without in the least denying the socio-political dimension that Powers has brought to light, I find the author's evidence for Han skepticism about the reality of the afterlife limited, if not weak. The argument for a generalized Han skepticism depends on his interpretation of passages from the heavily Confucian *Book of Rites* to support an extreme conventionalist view of representation.[23] Even if we agree with the interpretation, it seems unlikely to me that this evidence can be equally applicable to the interpretation of monuments of the ornamental, classical, and descriptive traditions. Surely the monuments of the strongly Confucian classical tradition of north-east China are a more promising locus for a funerary art produced against a background of strong commitment to ritual performance but weak belief in the reality of the afterlife. But even in classical representations, the many images of the Queen Mother of the West suggest that the skepticism did not extend to the *hun* soul. For tombs of the descriptive tradition, meanwhile, the lavish attention to the details of the afterlife awaiting the *po* soul can still be interpreted, I think, to imply an underlying conviction that it was possible for descendants of the deceased to influence that afterlife through the tombs they built, in line with the belief, noted by

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[19] An Jinhuai and Wang Yugang, "Mixian Dahuting Han dai huaxiangshi mu he bihua mu," *Wenwu*, x, 1972, 54–55. I owe this reference to Lydia Thompson.

[20] Powers excludes the Yinan "genre scenes" from his descriptive tradition on the grounds that "the line . . . is clean and unwavering and carries little information about weight and texture as in the vaulted tombs" (p. 372). They are nonetheless naturalistic, in Han terms, and certainly do not resemble Powers's classical style.

[21] On the other hand, this tomb is often thought to be of post-Han date, in which case one might argue that the juxtaposition of the two styles in one monument offers a parallel to the fusion of the two styles in the handscroll *Admonitions of the Instructress* by Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–406 A.D.). Certain panels depict classical themes in naturalistic style, strengthening the comparison.

[22] But, as Anna Seidel points out, ". . . a clear separation of a *po*, appeased with the wealth included in the tomb, from a *hun* departed to heavenly realms is not possible." See "Tokens of Immortality in Han Graves," *Numen*, XXIX, Fasc. 1, July 1982, 107.

[23] The argument rests above all on Powers's interpretation of one passage from *The Book of Rites* (second quotation, p. 60). It should be noted, since Powers does not signal the change, that his translation overturns the standard translation by James Legge, on which it is apparently based, at one crucial point. As a result, the passage is interpreted to mean the opposite of what it had meant in Legge's translation.

Powers, that "the fortune and well-being of the living [were] contingent upon the contentment of the deceased" (p. 52).[24] Part of Powers's argument on Han skepticism is a rationalist view of naturalistic depiction as, above all, cognitive in purpose. Against this, I would like to suggest that a case can be made for locating Eastern Han naturalism within a much longer history of the relationship between naturalism and death.[25] In this alternative view, from the radical naturalism of accompanying-in-death and human sacrifice, through the literal realism of the life-sized pottery warriors of Qin Shihuangdi, to the artful illusionism of the Han descriptive tradition, naturalism remained, as it had always been, the means of assuring that the tomb environment intended for the *po* soul would function as it was supposed to.[26] We might say that, from this angle, its purpose was less cognitive than magical; it pushed the representation to the brink of its intended reality, as it would continue to do at least through the Tang dynasty.[27]

I am not able to do justice to the breadth of the issues raised by these two stimulating books, but one general point should not go unmentioned. In the field of Chinese art history, studies of painting and studies of archaeological material have long inhabited two very different worlds, separated not only by differences of material and method, but also by the lack of major monographs and synthetic studies of Han pictorial art, potentially a bridge between the two. By building such a bridge, Martin Powers and Wu Hung have made a new kind of dialogue possible, and in so doing have put us all in their debt.

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[24] The ornamental tradition lends itself to both interpretations, which may be why it is so often found in combination with the other two traditions.

[25] Although the overwhelming evidence for Han pictorial naturalism takes the form of funerary art, it is sometimes assumed that it derives from the lost wall paintings of palaces and official buildings, and thus has no special connection with death. This seems to me far from certain. Much of the evidence for wall paintings and screen paintings points to the type of didactic subject matter that is associated with Powers's classical style.

[26] I do not wish to suggest a linear history for these three modes of funerary naturalism; the development is much more complex than that, and not possible to summarize here. As David Keightley has argued for the Shang, the practice of burying along with the deceased a representative selection of his retainers and possessions to accompany him in death implies that the boundary between life and death was not at all hard at that time; instead, there was great continuity. (See his "Early Civilization in China: Reflections on How It Became Chinese," in Paul S. Ropp, ed., *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1990, 15–54). However, alongside the use of real people and real-life objects, one also finds, as early as the late Shang, the use of specifically funerary objects as substitutes. In the Han, the emergence of an artful illusionism (as against a literal substitution, such as we see in the Qin pottery warriors) implies a hardening of the boundary between this life and the afterlife. The passages on *mingqi* ("numinous artifacts" specifically made for tombs) from *The Book of Rites* cited by Powers (p. 60) in favor of skepticism about the reality of the afterlife, by my reading confirm this, as seen in the writers' attempt to define the afterlife as a separate but parallel reality, analogous to and yet different from human reality: a numinous as against a tangible world. This would imply a significant secularization, but one that stops short of skepticism. It also offers a suggestive parallel to the emergence of the picture surface as the boundary between the viewer's reality and the reality of the picture, without which pictorial illusionism would not be possible.

[27] This implies that the representation was expected, in some way, to "come to life," though the life in question was the numinous existence of the afterlife. If my suggestion is correct, the mechanism by which tomb representations were activated must have incorporated some combination of infilling (by which the corpse and the tomb representations were consigned to the inner-earth environment), consecration at the time of burial, and continuing worship thereafter.

Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait contained, for Mario Praz, "the quintessence of all the poetry of the conversation piece."[1] The painter's attentiveness to the sheer look of things, he suggested, casts a spell over the ordinary. Description animates. Praz's Arnolfini are an ordinary couple forced to stand side by side, perpetually, inside a picture frame. But like a bourgeois novel, the painting manages to transcend its subjects; it transfigures the meaningless moment. The portrait, whose basic function was banal commemoration, is redeemed precisely by the breakdown of that function.

Congratulations to Praz for managing, in 1971, to ignore Panofsky's mighty essay on the picture—on the principle, presumably, that one good misreading deserves another. Panofsky was equally interested in rescuing the painting from a merely reportorial function. But instead of greeting the portrait as *already* a work of art, he pushed it backward, away from us. Panofsky's Arnolfini Portrait was *not yet* a work of art. The picture did not only represent an event—a private wedding, anything but a meaningless moment in the lives of the sitters—but actually participated in and completed that event. The picture, the physical panel, signed in Latin "Jan van Eyck was here" and dated 1434, was itself the testimonial to the accomplishment of the legal and social union. In effect, the picture was the marriage contract. Panofsky insinuated the Arnolfini Portrait into a tradition of performative images. Like the portraits of Roman emperors that oversaw judicial transactions, or the Christian icons that worked as talismans or palladia, this panel intervened in human affairs through the mere fact of its existence and exhibition.

Such was the élan of Panofsky's essay, which followed the portrait itself by precisely half a millenium, that to this day it holds the entire field in its grip. Even Craig Harbison and Jan Baptist Bedaux, for all their quarrelsomeness, still accept the basic hypothesis of performativity; so do Linda Seidel and Angelica Dülberg in their recent and important publications.[2] It must be confessed that the crucial link between the picture and the event has never really been established. The portrait is clearly *about* marital union, on doctrinal, social, and psychological levels. But it is not at all clear that the picture was connected to an actual wedding ceremony. There is no independent documentary confirmation, for example, that Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami married in the year 1434. No matter: the prestige of Panofsky's hypothesis is still absolutely merited. His Arnolfini essay belongs alongside his essays on Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1923) and Poussin's *Et in Arcadia ego* (1936): splendid and vehement misreadings, each one a high point of art-historical literature in this century. Panofsky was willing to suspend his historicism, within certain limits, in favor of a more dramatic interpretative truth. In his methodological manifesto of 1932, he defended this principle with a quote from Heidegger: "Every interpretation must necessarily resort to violence [*Gewalt*] if it is to wrest what the words want to say out of what they say."[3] That hard-won truth, in this

[1] M. Praz, *Conversation Pieces*, University Park, Pa., and London, 1971, 59.

[2] L. Seidel, " 'Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait': Business as Usual?," *Critical Inquiry*, XVI, 1989, 55–86; A. Dülberg, *Privat portrats: Geschichte und Ikonologie einer Gattung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1990.

[3] E. Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst" (1932), repr. in Panofsky, *Aufsatze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. H. Oberer and E. Verheyen, Berlin, 1985, 92.