also touch on jade carvings and other types of ornament, which testify as well to the increasing interest in sculptural forms during this period. This development was again related to the secularization of ritual art. During the Warring States era, the production of personal ornaments finally superseded that of ritual paraphernalia, not only in number but, more importantly, in the creative energy that they inspired. An early Warring States example of extraordinary workmanship again comes from Leigudun Tomb 1. Forty-eight centimeters long, this beltlike jade ornament consists of sixteen openwork segments lashed together with mortises and bronze hooks. Found next to the head of the deceased, it was probably part of an elaborate headdress. Other jade ornaments of the Warring States period included pendants, garment hooks, and rings, as well as fittings on daggers and swords. Different kinds of dragon pendants, with their gracefully curved bodies and projecting spiral fins, became widespread during the fourth century B.C.E.112 A famous necklace from Jinchun is formed of three such dragons, tubes with scroll patterns, and a pair of dancers. Made of highly polished white jade, the two dancers exemplify the increasing use of human images in personal ornamentation, a phenomenon that parallels the use of bronze figures in interior furnishing.

Like such pendants, garment hooks during the Warring States period were lavishly decorated. The early hooks were small and lacked significant surface decoration. This situation changed dramatically during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., when garment hooks acquired various sculpted shapes, technical finishes, and colors. Some of the most beautiful hooks are said to have come from the Eastern Zhou capital Luoyang; their provenance is confirmed by the recent finding of an extraordinary gilded hook in that area.113 Among the splendid garment hooks found in other places is an example from Guwei village Tomb 5 in Huixian County, Henan, on which intertwined animals, cast in bronze openwork designs, surround three jade rings fitted on the surface. The round back of the object is marked by a large animal mask seen head-on; the hook itself, on the front, represents a slender animal head made of jade.114 Richly inlaid with precious metals and stones and embellished with mythical or realistic animal images, these objects best exemplify the tradition of “extravagant art” at the time. Together with the revolutionary developments in palatial architecture and funerary art, this extravagant artwork provided an essential condition for the advance of sculpture in the Warring States period.

The Qin Dynasty

Historians consider the founding of the Qin dynasty in 221 B.C.E. the single most important event in traditional Chinese history. Not only did the Qin bring about China's territorial unification, but they also redefined the country. China before that time was a society based on clan ties and lineage; afterward, it was an empire governed by a central government. Under different dynasties, this Chinese empire was to endure for more than two thousand years.

The arrival of the Qin marked a turning point in the country's cultural history as well. The bloody battles that made possible the initial unification were followed by a political, social, and intellectual unification on several levels. Relying on his powerful army as well as his administrative genius, the First Emperor of Qin broke down the stubborn regionalism of the Zhou feudal system by replacing it with a bureaucratic system in which the central government had direct control over thirty-six commanderies. Sima Qian, the Grand Historian of the Han dynasty that followed, recorded many other reforms that the First Emperor carried out as soon as the country was unified, including the standardization of laws and regulations, weights and measures, written characters, and the length of carriage axles. This last measure also led to the creation of a system of imperial roads of uniform width. In the intellectual sphere, philosophers and politicians of the Eastern Zhou had all made their own proposals about the coming society; Confucians, Daoists, and members of the other “One Hundred Schools” had all developed their own political visions and theories. The First Emperor dismissed all of these but one — Legalism — a political school whose fundamental agenda was to promote an autocratic state.

All these reforms implied simultaneous construction and destruction, and the new order established by the Qin had one man at its head. The First Emperor personified the new political entity: his ideas were the law, his beliefs were the state religion, and his personal activities were the most important political, religious, and artistic events. As a result, all state-sponsored sculpture projects during this period were by nature linked to the destruction of the old society, the establishment of the new system, and the interests and ambitions of the First Emperor himself. Moreover, because the Qin lasted only twenty-six years and all major sculpture projects were carried out in the capital, the projects were closely linked in time and space and must be examined within a common context. For this reason, this section on Qin
sculpture will not start from a discussion of individual works such as the famous terra-cotta soldiers. Rather, the soldiers will be examined as belonging to a large underground army, which in turn constituted a section of the emperor's mausoleum. The mausoleum, too, was a counterpart to the emperor's palaces in the capital, Xianyang, where huge statues standing aboveground served different functions.

Although no longer extant, the most frequently documented sculptural works commissioned by the First Emperor were not the terra-cotta soldiers but a group of bronze statues known as the Twelve Golden Men (shí'èr jūrén). Sima Qian first recorded their creation in his Historical Records (Shi ji); in 206 B.C.E., after the First Emperor had just successfully united China, "all the weapons in the country were collected and brought to Xianyang. They were melted down to make bronze bells and the Twelve Golden Men. These bronze figures, each of which weighed a thousand catties, were placed in front of his palace."  

The timing of their creation was crucial. Fashioned immediately after the destruction of the rival kingdoms, they commemorated a single historical moment: Qin's victory. Sima Qian listed the making of the Twelve Golden Men among the unification measures that the First Emperor announced on the day he assumed the imperial title. The implication was unmistakable: the country had been pacified and no further wars were necessary. The former Six Kingdoms had been destroyed and assimilated into the new political entity; their weapons had been melted down to make new monuments, just as the rival powers had been transformed into submissive subjects. Standing along the Imperial Way leading to the throne hall of the First Emperor's Xianyang Palace, the Twelve Golden Men formed six pairs of figures, which, one may imagine, represented the six defeated kingdoms. This monument must have also reminded contemporary Chinese of the legendary Nine Tripods, said to have been created in antiquity when Chinese history first began. According to ancient records, these sacred objects were also made of bronze collected from different regions and also symbolized the assimilation of these regions into a political entity, the Xia. But in the case of the Qin, the chief visual signifier of such a political process was not a group of ritual vessels but statues of human figures.

It is possible that the Twelve Golden Men still existed during the Han and were on display in front of the Changle Palace, the throne hall of the Western Han in Chang'an. When the country fell into chaos at the
d of the second century, the warlord Dong Zhuo melted down ten of the twelve figures to make coins. The last two were moved in and out of Chang'an by different regimes and finally destroyed in 384 by Fu Jian, the founder of the Former Qin. During the six hundred years from the Qin to the Former Qin, stories in circulation about the Twelve Golden Men yielded contradictory information on their size, weight, and meaning. Some Han and post-Han writers named them after the Qin general Weng Zhong, or identified them as portraits of some giant "barbarians" who came to China when the First Emperor unified the country. The recorded weight of each statue ranges from 2,400,000 to 3,400,000 jin (about 5.4 to 9.6 tons). Since such records can hardly be taken as reliable historical accounts, the appearance of the Twelve Golden Men can only be imagined, on the basis of some actual Qin bronze figures discovered in recent archaeological excavations. One of the finds is the head of a bronze statuette, discovered in 1982 in Xianyang (fig. 1.27). Its Qin date is secured by an accompanying bronze edict issued by the First Emperor in 221 B.C.E. Although only 11 centimeters tall, this head attests to a major advance in the art of bronze sculpture. It surpasses all pre-Qin three-dimensional figurative sculptures in both technical sophistication and artistic representation. The image does not belong to any established figurative type, and it seems to represent an individual. He has a rounded but well-structured face, with high cheekbones and a broad forehead. Wearing a sensitive, inward-looking expression, he seems to be smiling at the onlooker. The sculptor clearly had a superb understanding of human anatomy; the face was modeled in an unprecedentedly complex way, as a series of hard and soft (convex and concave) surfaces smoothly connected to create a three-dimensional form. The remarkable subtlety of the face contrasts with the figure's slick hair and tall, elaborate headress. The hair is delineated by clear, parallel flowing lines, and the headress, which is angular in contour, is decorated with sharply defined whorls. The unusual shape of this multi-layered headress seems to identify the figure as a man of high rank. Although we can in no way link this work with the Twelve Golden Men, it suggests the high level of artistry a Qin bronze sculptor could master.

Other examples of Qin bronze sculptures have been found next to the First Emperor's grave. These include

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1.27 Head of warrior, bronze with traces of gilding, excavated in 1982 at Xianyang, Shaanxi Province. 3d century B.C.E. 11 × 7.5 cm. Xianyang Museum.

The Sacerdotal Tradition
two amazing bronze chariots, probably the most ambitious and sophisticated bronze sculptures to have survived from ancient China (figs. 1.28, 1.29). The chariots represent two different types of vehicle, even though both have four horses and a driver. The first, 225 centimeters long and 152 centimeters high, is a canopied “lead chariot” (dou che) with a shallow carriage; the second, 317 centimeters long and 166.2 centimeters high, is a closed wagon covered with a broad and slightly rounded roof. The driver of each chariot, also made of bronze, is about half life-size. The driver of the first chariot is 92 centimeters high. Wearing a long robe and a tall cap, he stands under the umbrella in the carriage while holding the reins with both hands (fig. 1.28). The driver of the second chariot also holds the harness, but instead of standing, he kneels in the front of the roofed vehicle before the carriage. The sculptors clearly intended to create highly realistic images of contemporary figures. Not only are the two drivers accurately proportioned, but the modeling of their faces, clothes, caps, shoes, belts, and swords imitates the textures of different materials. Moreover, the driver of the first chariot wears a jade pendant, and both figures were painted in their entirety. Although most of the paint has peeled off, traces have allowed archaeologists to reconstruct their original appearance: each driver wore a green robe over a pink shirt, while their caps, scarves, and trousers were all white.

An important feature of the two chariots is their sectional construction. Unlike a conventional one-piece sculpture, each chariot consists of numerous individual parts, made independently and then assembled. The manufacturing process thus imitated the production of real chariots. The second chariot in particular is a marvel of bronze technology: an assemblage of 3,462 individual parts weighing 1,241 kilograms altogether, it renders with amazing accuracy a fully equipped chariot in half size (fig. 1.29). To replicate in bronze a wooden-structured vehicle, as well as its driver and horses, the sculptors developed a system of extremely complex casting techniques and employed various “cast-on” methods. The driver’s body, head, and cap, for example, were made separately and cast together in three steps. Each horse’s four legs, two ears, and tail were also made individually and then cast onto the body. To make a wheel, the sculptors first fashioned a hub and thirty individual spokes. Next, they assembled them, and finally they cast the loose ends of the spokes into the cog. After casting each part, the sculptors used additional carving to represent details such as the eyebrows and mustache of the driver and the details of the horses’ bodies. Many pieces of the horses’ fittings are inlaid and gilded with — or made entirely of — silver or gold. (The gold parts weigh 3,033 grams, and the silver parts 4,342.1 grams.) The carriage itself is shaped like a small room, with movable windows on either side and a door at the rear. Like the driver, the chariot was originally painted in brilliant colors. The horses were

1.29 Chariot no. 2, bronze with gold and silver inlay and painting, excavated in 1980 from a pit west of the tomb of the First Emperor of Qin, 3rd century B.C.E. 166.2 x 317 cm. Museum of Terra-Cotta Warriors and Horses.
1:28 Chariot no. 1, bronze with gold and silver inlay and painting, excavated in 1980 from a pit west of the tomb of the First Emperor of Qin, Lintong County, Shaanxi Province. 3d century B.C.E. 132 x 225 cm. Museum of Terra-Cotta Warriors and Horses, Lintong County.
entirely white; only the tongue and nostrils were pink. The wagon was decorated with intricate geometric designs and cloud patterns, which are still largely preserved inside the carriage.

One puzzling feature of these bronze chariots is the absence of the passenger in the second vehicle, whose unusually extravagant construction and decoration have convinced many scholars that it must be a bronze copy of the First Emperor’s private sleeping wagon (wentiang dhe). What was the ritual role or religious symbolism of these two chariots? Where in the First Emperor’s grave were they buried, and why? What was their relation to other sculptures from the emperor’s mausoleum? These questions lead us to investigate the overall structure of the First Emperor’s tomb, where many other kinds of sculpture have also been found.

The First Emperor’s necropolis, called the Lishan Mausoleum (ling), is considered the pinnacle of monumental mortuary architecture, which had been in development since the Eastern Zhou. According to Sima Qian, the emperor began building his tomb the very day he mounted the throne. The project employed at least seven hundred thousand convicts, many of whom died while laboring at the construction site. Archaeological surveys and excavations of the Lishan Mausoleum have been carried out at full speed since the mid-1970s. The results have begun to show the general plan of the tomb and also to allow us to speculate on its architectural symbolism (fig. 1.30). Located near Xi’an, north of Lishan and south of the Wei River, the central portion of the mausoleum was a rectangular “funeral park” (ling yuan) surrounded by double walls. (The outer walls measure 2,165 meters north to south and about 940 meters east to west; the inner walls measure 1,535 meters north to south and about 580 meters east to west.) Separated by a wide space, these two walls divided the whole mausoleum into three zones: the central enclosure within the inner walls, the space between the two walls, and the area outside the funerary park.

A huge pyramid-shaped tumulus occupied the southern half of the central enclosure. The grave chamber underneath this artificial hill has not been excavated, but Sima Qian recorded that this secret space was transformed into a physical representation of the universe for the deceased emperor: “With mercury the myriad rivers and ocean were created, and a specially designed mechanism made them flow about. Above were all the Heavenly constellations and below all the creatures on Earth.” A large architectural complex, which stands north of the tomb mount and the grave, has been identified as containing the sacrificial halls where ritual offerings to the deceased emperor were placed. Surrounding the tumulus are many individual storage pits, sometimes connected to the tomb chamber by underground passageways. A walled area in the northeast corner of this central enclosure contains rows of small and mid-size tombs, probably belonging to the emperor’s soulless consorts, who were forced to follow their lord into death.

In the space between the two walls, archaeologists have found foundations of several groups of buildings; pottery vessels unearthed there bear inscriptions such as “the sacrificial officer of the Lishan Mausoleum,” suggesting that these buildings housed ritual administrators and imperial servants. The sections on either side of the tumulus are especially rich in archaeological deposits. Large pottery figurines found in the west section can be divided into two groups with different functions. The first group of figurines comes from two underground structures containing skeletons of several hundred horses. Clearly the structures imitated royal stables, and the pottery figures represented officials in charge of the palace and royal grooms. Figurines in the second group flanked a row of individual pits containing the remains of various animals and birds. These creatures constituted an underground zoo, and the pottery figures represented zookeepers.
To the east of the tumulus, more sculptures have been found in two large underground structures. One group again includes life-size pottery figures. A few of the figures, who are wearing only short skirts, are making dramatic gestures. These characteristics have led the excavators to identify them as acrobats (fig. 1.31). Another unexpected discovery in the First Emperor's mausoleum took place about 35 meters north of the pit containing these pottery acrobats. There, archaeologists found an underground timber structure 130 meters east to west and 100 meters north to south. Amazingly, it contained numerous sets of armor and helmets made of stone lamella in rectangular, square, trapezoid, scale-like, and irregular shapes (fig. 1.32), as well as stone harnesses.

When we synthesize these finds inside the funerary park, it becomes clear that the area within the inner wall was the First Emperor's inner court, and the space between the two walls symbolized his palace. Another unexpected discovery in the First Emperor's mausoleum took place about 35 meters north of the pit containing these pottery acrobats. There, archaeologists found an underground timber structure 130 meters east to west and 100 meters north to south. Amazingly, it contained numerous sets of armor and helmets made of stone lamella in rectangular, square, trapezoid, scale-like, and irregular shapes (fig. 1.32), as well as stone harnesses.

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1.32 Stone armor, excavated in 1998 in the mausoleum of the First Emperor of Qin. 3d century B.C.E. 125 x 43 cm. Shaanxi Provincial Museum, Xi'an.
ministers who were executed in 208 B.C.E., after the death of the First Emperor. Buried in front of the emperor's tomb, these men constituted a special kind of human sacrifice. Slightly to the east of these tombs is another huge underground horse stable, and farther to the east and northeast are the famous underground terra-cotta army and a group of newly discovered pottery figures and bronze birds. All three sites yielded abundant ceramic sculptures of human figures, to which we will return. West of the funerary park, almost symmetrical in layout with the seventeen noble burials and the horse stable on the east side, lay the burials of numerous convicts — some of whom were executed or buried alive.

Against the foregoing general structure of the Lishan Mausoleum we can map the distribution of various groups of sculptures and try to understand their meaning. A number of factors are important for this investigation, including the specific location of a sculpture in the mausoleum and its relative proximity to the First Emperor’s burial chamber; the relation between a sculpture and accompanying burials of animals or objects; and the material, size, and construction method of a sculpture. On the basis of these factors we can classify the sculptures so far excavated from the Lishan Mausoleum into three categories: (1) bronze chariots and drivers possibly made for the emperor’s posthumous journey, (2) stone armor, helmets, and harnesses, and (3) terra-cotta figurines representing administrators and servants in royal stables and parks; acrobats; and generals, officers, and soldiers in the Imperial Guards.

The bronze chariots and drivers were buried within the central enclosure of the funerary park. The underground wooden chamber that housed them was attached to the western ramp of the tomb and was therefore connected to the emperor’s grave. These two chariots, made of bronze, differ not only from the wooden-structured battle chariots in the underground army but also from the chariots buried in the adjacent chambers, which, though elaborately painted, were still made of wood and have almost entirely disintegrated. In fact, it is possible that the bronze and wooden chariots from these adjacent chambers together formed a special procession, stationed immediately outside the First Emperor’s tomb. Ancient ritual books instruct that a funerary procession to a grave should include an empty chariot for the departing soul of the dead; this chariot thus acquired the name “soul carriage” (hun chou).128 Pictures painted or carved in Han-dynasty tombs abundantly illustrate such processions — a validation of this record. Other pictures and actual chariots found in Han tombs, however, disclose an alternative belief that a soul carriage would also transport the soul of the deceased to an immortal world after entombment.129 Significantly, chariages serving this function were always pointed toward the outside of a tomb, as if they were about to leave the burial with the soul. This position is shared by the Qin bronze chariots, which faced west, away from the First Emperor’s tomb chamber. It is possible, therefore, that these two chariots and their drivers belonged to a ritual entourage, and that the roofed wagon was the emperor’s soul carriage. This hypothesis would explain not only the special location, orientation, type, material, and decoration of that chariot but also the absence of any passenger. Chinese archaeologists have recently reported the discovery of a second group of bronze and wooden chariots on the north side of the burial mound.130 Perhaps multiple soul carriages existed. Stationed at all four sides of the tomb, they would have facilitated the emperor’s posthumous journey in any direction.

Sculptures in the second category — stone armor, helmets, and harnesses — were also symbolic. Weighing more than 21 kilograms each, the sets of stone armor with helmets were clearly not created for practical use (see fig. 1.32). It is possible that stone, a durable material denoting immortality and eternity, was considered suitable to equip the army of “stone soldiers” who guarded the emperor’s grave. As we will see later in this chapter, not long after the Qin — during the Western Han — this significance made stone a popular material for funerary monuments and burial chambers.

The first subgroup in the third category of Qin sculpture includes terra-cotta statues of male figures in standing or kneeling-sitting postures. Most of these figures were buried to accompany animals and birds, either sacrificed horses in several subterranean stables, deer and birds in an underground zoo, or bronze cranes in the subterranean water park. Two large stables and the zoo are located to the west of the tumulus between the two walls, while a newly discovered subterranean park is situated northeast of the mausoleum precinct. One stable, 117 meters long, is a wooden gallery containing several hundred horses killed before their burial. Eleven pottery figures found inside this stable are all life-size statues, ranging from 1.82 to 1.9 meters tall. Either holding weapons to guard the place or simply standing and watching, they represent the stable’s administrators of different ranks. In the space between this stable and the inner wall of the funerary park, fifty-one individual pits in three rows constitute the underground zoo. Each pit

From the Neolithic to the Han
in the middle row contained an animal or bird, along with a pottery basin to symbolize the continuing supply of food and drink. Fourteen pottery figures, each buried in a square pit 2 meters deep, were found on either side of the middle row. Clearly representing zookeepers or animal trainers, without caps or any weapon, they all wear simple clothes. A pottery jar buried with each figure perhaps served as a reminder of his duty to feed the animals in the afterlife. In contrast to the rigid arrangement of this underground zoo, the F-shaped subterranean park northeast of the mausoleum precinct seems to have been designed to mimic a natural environment. The timber-framed trench that housed this park has a sloping passage, which may have been used to guide water to the bottom of the structure.

A dozen or so life-size birds, including several cranes and other water fowl, were unearthed there. While animals in the underground zoo were all real creatures, these birds are made of bronze. But they were still accompanied by terra-cotta human figures; this feature differentiates this group of sculptures from the bronze chariots and drivers buried next to the emperor's grave.

Not all terra-cotta figures from the Lishan Mausoleum are life-size. At about 65 centimeters tall, for example, the zookeepers in a kneeling position are considerably smaller than the administrators of the royal stable next to them. (In such a kneeling position, a person 1.85 meters tall would be about a meter high.) Pottery figures in similar sizes and postures have also been found outside the walls of the funerary park (fig. 1.33). Most of them represent stable boys or grooms working in the underground stable on the east side. It is possible that the smaller sizes of these figures correspond to their lower official status. According to an estimate, this stable, probably representing a “government stable” rather than a “royal stable,” consisted of three hundred to four hundred individual pits, each containing a real horse, a pottery groom, or both. As with the zoo, the horses here were buried with pottery basins and jars, and the grooms were accompanied by oil lamps and iron tools. These animals and figures were clearly supposed to continue providing services to the First Emperor after his death. This belief must have underlain the highly realistic images of the grooms. No trace of negligence is detectable in the representation of these low-ranking servants: each figure’s head, hands, and torso were made separately and then assembled.

The sculptural language, too, is both concise and expressive. Quiet and dignified, these figures have inspired more than one modern scholar to praise their “serenity and elegance.”

1.33 Kneeling figure, painted earthenware, excavated in 1973 in the mausoleum of the First Emperor of Qin. 3d century B.C.E. 65 cm. Shaanxi Provincial Museum.
The discovery in 1999 of the life-size acrobats — the second subgroup of pottery figures in the Lishan Mausoleum — was an important event in Chinese art history: the astonishing achievement of ancient Chinese sculptors in representing the human body came to light. These Qin figures challenge a conventional view that traditional Chinese art eschewed any realistic rendering of the human body. Take the statue illustrated in figure 1.31, for example. It represents a powerful male, 171 centimeters tall, standing firmly on his bare feet. The image impresses us with both the sculptor's mastery of human anatomy and his superb artistry; omitting excessive details, he endowed the figure with not only a convincing masculine torso but also an air of inner strength.

The third subgroup of pottery figures found in the Lishan Mausoleum constitutes the famous underground army, separated from the two previous categories by some major differences: this subgroup formed a relatively independent unit at the outer rim of the mausoleum district; not only people but also animals are represented in clay, alongside actual battle chariots and bronze weapons.

Accidentally discovered in 1974 by local farmers, the underground army has become known as the eighth wonder of the ancient world. It is astonishing, first of all, for its sheer scale. The four excavated pits, including an unfinished one, contained some eight thousand lifesize statues of men and horses, each exquisitely sculpted and painted. Different theories have been proposed to identify this army and its components. The prevailing opinion among Chinese archaeologists is that the four pits together formed a replica of the Qin Imperial Guards. Pits 1 and 2 and the unfinished Pit 4 represented the three branches of the guards, called the Right Army, the Left Army, and the Middle Army, respectively, whereas the smaller Pit 3 was the headquarters of the whole army (fig. 1.34).132

The largest military formation in Pit 1 probably imitated the Right Army (fig. 1.35). The enormous rectangular pit, extending 210 meters east to west and 62 meters north to south, was surrounded by a continuous gallery on all four sides.133 Within this rectangle was a series of nine corridors running east to west, each 3.5 meters wide. Separated by thick walls of rammed earth, these tunnel-like subterranean chambers had paved brick floors; their wooden roofs were supported by timber pillars and cross-beams. The terra-cotta legion, some six thousand warriors and 160 horses, were interred standing in a very orderly fashion. Two rows of infantry soldiers dressed in armor or plain clothes protected the regiment on each side. The soldiers in the east gallery, including nearly two hundred sharpshooters equipped with crossbows, formed the vanguard of the whole regiment and were followed by a total of thirty-eight single-file columns of warriors in the nine corridors. The infantry squads, the main components of this pit, were regularly reinforced by battle chariots, each pulled by four terra-cotta horses and manned by a charioteer and one or two soldiers. Some of the chariots, equipped with drums and bells, seem to have been command vehicles. By striking either instrument, the officer riding in such a chariot could order his section of the regiment to advance or retreat. Facing east in uniform, the army seems to be waiting on alert before marching out along the earthen ramps leading to the surface.

Pit 1 contains predominantly an infantry regiment, but the regiment in Pit 2 is a unit of war chariots and cavalry, possibly a representation of the Left Army of the Qin Imperial Guards.144 Situated about 20 meters north of Pit 1, this roughly L-shaped pit held some 939 pottery warriors and 472 horses, divided into four groups: a square group of kneeling archers on the eastern side, a square group of war chariots in the southern half, a rectangular group of chariots and foot soldiers at the center, and a rectangle composed of mounted cavalry in the northern half. Like the horses in Pit 1, the horses found in this pit have their tails knotted. The manes are short, standing straight at the crest of the neck, except for the forelocks, which are left long and parted in the middle to curl around the front of each ear. The ears are set forward and appear tense and alert. The highest-ranking officer found in this pit, probably the head of the regiment, commands a chariot at the rear of the military formation (fig. 1.36). At 196 centimeters tall, he stands to a magnificent height. Wearing a long, double-layer military uniform and an armored vest decorated with tassels, he is also distinguished from other officers by his unique headress, which is in the form of a double-tailed bird, said to be a symbol of bravery and skill on the battlefield. He rests his hand on a bronze sword in front of his abdomen (missing in the photo). Instead of showing him in a more predictable domineering manner, the sculptor represented him in a state of contemplation. Looking slightly downward, he appears resolute, steadfast, and highly intelligent.135

Because the regiment for Pit 4 was never installed, its identification as the Central Army of the Qin Imperial Guards remains hypothetical. Pit 3, the smallest of the four, clearly replicated a military command post, where the commander in chief of the underground army was
1.34 Layout of the underground army at the mausoleum of the First Emperor of Qin. (a) Relative positions of Pits 1–3 and the unfinished Pit 4. (b) Arrangement of earthenware figures in Pits 1, 2, and 3.
Indeed, his war chariot, yoked to four terra-cotta horses, dominated the center of this irregularly shaped subterranean chamber (fig. 1.37). Richly painted with lacquer patterns, this canopied vehicle was originally attended by four unusually tall guards and flanked by sixty-eight officers in two kinds of armor. These officers were stationed in two side rooms that were originally separated by curtains from the central room, which contained the commander’s chariot. Most of the officers held long spearlike weapons with blunt blades, whose function was more ceremonial than practical. Archaeologists have also found animal bones and deer antlers in this pit, possibly left over from certain religious or divinatory practices related to military operations. The figure of the commander in chief, however, was not found in the pit. Some scholars have hypothesized that he is the occupant of a large Qin-period tomb just 15 meters to the west. Another possibility, however, is that this absent commander in chief was the First Emperor himself. As with the empty bronze wagon found next to the First Emperor’s tomb chamber, the emperor’s likeness was beyond representation, and his posthumous existence could be indicated only by his physical absence.

Distinguished by their different uniforms and military functions, the several thousand terra-cotta figures in this underground army included foot soldiers in battle array, archers bending their bows, cavalrymen leading their horses, charioteers driving their chariots, and generals standing at attention, sword in hand. All the men have strong and resolute faces, powerfully structured, with a determined expression that imparts a dignified martial air.

Much research has been devoted to the manufacturing procedures for these sculptures. Generally speaking, each statue was produced by making and then assembling three separate parts of the body: the head, hands, and torso. The torso was molded by hand, while the other two parts were fashioned with molds. Whether modeled or molded, the rudimentary form of each part was formed of a rather coarse, sandy clay. When the rough form had dried slightly, layers of finer clay were applied, in which were then carved the details of hair, beards, eyes, mouths and chins, muscles and tendons, collars, pleats, belts and belt hooks, leg bindings, and armor plates. It was at this stage of production that each figure’s individual features and personality were articulated and the numerous details represented: the varying hairstyles, the tissues and ribbons on the armor, the thousand grooves on a shoe sole. The sculptors demonstrated extraordinary skill in imitating various materials, whether the soft fabric of a gown (fig. 1.38) or the hard surface of leather armor (notice the differences, for example, between figures 1.36 and 1.38). After such modeling and carving, the entire figure was mounted on a base and fired. Finally, it was brilliantly painted in contrasting hues of red, black, blue, white, and yellow and outfitted with real weapons or bronze trappings.

This technical reconstruction helps clarify the representational status of these sculptures: Are they portraits of individual Qin warriors or artistic renderings of generic figure types? The same question arises with the pottery groom and zookeepers found in other sections of the Lishan Mausoleum. It is true that each figure differs from the others, but the production process summarized earlier makes it clear that each statue cannot be an individual portrait. Rather, Qin sculptors used a limited number of molds to produce a repertoire of standardized components. The distinctive appearance of each statue resulted from assembling a different set of components and from hand finishing at the final stage. Thanks to this assembling and modeling process, however, the sculptures are more than mere figure types: although the sculpted warriors fall into several classifications based on their costumes and weaponry, the subtle variations in their faces defy a rigid typology. These figures are therefore “neither realistic portraits of individuals nor idealized types” but correspond to “the goal of creating a reality of a different order,” one that could serve the emperor in death.

This goal, as well as the material and context of the figures, reveals their debt to several regional traditions of pre-Qin funerary figurines. As discussed in the preceding section, it was customary to bury wooden figurines in a Chu tomb together with other grave goods, including real objects made of different materials, to form representations of social life, such as a chariot stable or a kitchen scene. The tradition seems to have had its continuation in the Qin terra-cotta figures, which were also accompanied by real animals, chariots, weapons, and utilitarian objects. In fact, as scholars have pointed out, the Qin terra-cotta figures exemplify one of several modes of representation found in the Lishan Mausoleum. Each mode represents a different degree of figuration — real human
1.37 View of Pit 5, mausoleum of the First Emperor of Qin. 5th century B.C.E. Museum of Terra-Cotta Warriors and Horses.

1.39 Scale drawings of a Warring States figurine from Zhangqiu, Shandong Province (left), and a warrior figure from the mausoleum of the First Emperor of Qin.
and animal sacrifices, clay figures and animals, or bronze figures and horses. Together these real and manufactured images constituted “a reality appropriate for the emperor’s eternal sleep.” It is also significant to note that in this posthumous “reality,” those most closely associated with the emperor — his consorts, courtiers, and relatives — were represented by human sacrifices, while those of lower status who performed more general governmental and military roles were represented by clay statues. We can trace this convention back to some of the Eastern Zhou tombs discussed earlier, in which human sacrifices and clay figures appeared within a single mural context to connote a social hierarchy.

This connection points to the relation between the Qin terra-cotta figures and the northern tradition of Warring States figurines. I have mentioned that most pre-Qin figurines from the north, including those from the pre-dynastic Qin kingdom, were made of clay, but their tiny size — they were often only 7 to 10 centimeters high — allowed only rudimentary representation of faces and costumes. While continuing the tradition of clay sculpture, the terra-cotta figures in the Lishan Mausoleum reflect the First Emperor’s desire to impress — that is, he wish to have the figures both dwarf pre-Qin terra-cotta figurines (fig. 1.39) and astonish human observers with their large size (see fig. 1.35). Indeed, visitors to the site often find themselves surrounded and overwhelmed by the rows upon rows of this enormous army. It is at this juncture that we can link the underground army with Qin politics and the First Emperor’s personal ambitions. In particular, it reminds us of the inscriptions that the emperor engraved on China’s sacred mountains during his expeditions:

[The emperor’s] great rule purifies the folkways; the whole empire acknowledges its sway; it blankets the world in splendid regulation.

All honor his rules and maxims, harmonious, peaceful, and diligent; there are none who do not heed his command.

The commoners are orderly and virtuous, individuals delighting in a common rule, rejoicing in and guarding the great peace.

Posterity will obey his laws, his constant governance knowing no end, like carriages and boats that never overturn.

The officials in his retinue praise his brilliance, begging to inscribe this stone; may its glorious message shine through the ages.

The Western Han Dynasty

The absolute monarchy created by the Qin did not endure long. The death of the First Emperor in 210 B.C.E. was followed by four years of struggle between the two main contenders for the throne. Then, in 206 B.C.E., Liu Bang defeated his rival, Xiang Yu, and founded the Han dynasty; or more precisely, the Western Han, or the Former Han, which remained in power for the next two centuries. The beginning years of the Han were a period of consolidation. The bureaucratic system was restructured; the country’s damaged economy was repaired; and the capital Chang’an was built south of the Wei River, not far from the First Emperor’s Lishan Mausoleum. Of the palaces constructed to symbolize the regime’s mandate from Heaven, none were even remotely comparable to the extravagant architectural projects the First Emperor had pursued a few decades before. The third and fourth Western Han emperors, Wen (r. 179–157 B.C.E.) and Jing (r. 156–141 B.C.E.), especially discouraged costly construction work. During their rule, an economic policy was introduced that drastically reduced taxation and government spending, and Chang’an’s expansion halted. Indeed, the policy gave these two emperors a reputation as frugal sovereigns ready to sacrifice personal luxury for the public good. Emperor Wen, in particular, “made no move to increase the size of the palaces or halls, the parks or enclosure, or the number of dogs and horses, vestments and carriages. Whenever a practice proved harmful, he immediately abandoned it in order to ensure benefit to the people.” We will see later that the two emperors did not exercise quite the same self-control in preparing their own burials, but their public image as moral exemplars may explain the absence of monumental architecture and sculpture during their reigns.

This situation changed dramatically with the enthronement of the next emperor, Wu, who ruled China from 140 to 87 B.C.E. The extraordinary length of his tenure and the abundant wealth accumulated during the peaceful reigns of his predecessors provided him with more than enough time and resources to attain his many goals. It was during this period that the Chinese empire attained a height of power that was to be equaled only by the Tang dynasty in the eighth century. A new kind of energy sent the Chinese armies driving across the wastes of central Asia to the fringe of the Western world. Ambitious efforts were also undertaken in the domains of culture and art. A strong-willed ruler who commissioned many monumental structures,