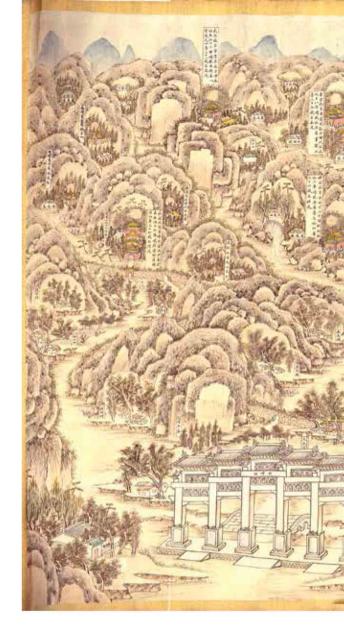


The (B) Tombs of the Masty Dynasty

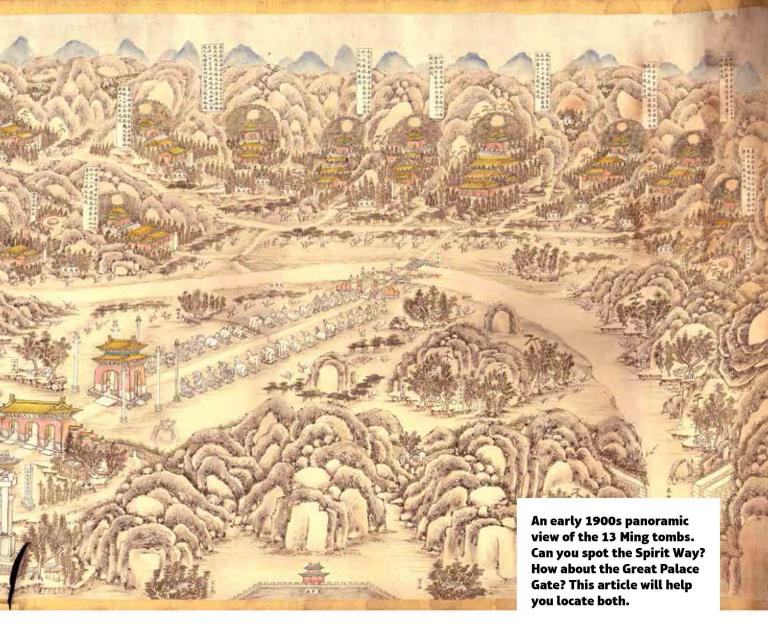


by Patrick Wertmann

30-mile journey north of Beijing will lead you to one of China's most impressive sites. Once there, you will see, carefully placed in front of Mount Tianshou, a cluster of 13 tombs. These were built to house the remains of emperors who ruled one of China's most powerful dynasties, the Ming (A.D. 1368–1644). Some of you may wonder why there are 13 tombs and not 16, since 16 is the actual number of Ming dynasty emperors. Well, here's the story...

OCHOOSING THE SITE

As with so many sites in Beijing, the tale begins with Yongle, the third emperor of the Ming dynasty. In 1402, four years after he ascended the throne, he moved the capital from Nanjing in the south to Beijing in the north. This was a gigantic project, one that affected the lives of many people throughout the empire. When Empress Xu, Yongle's wife, died the following summer, a decision had to be made about her burial place. Yongle had already been spending most of his time in the north, so it seemed only natural that he would bury her somewhere close to the new capital.



Doing so would also help establish Beijing as the new Ming capital. A person well versed in the art of **feng shui** was instructed to find the right place for the imperial tomb. (See also page 19.)

Work on the tomb began in 1409. The site was a secluded valley north of the capital, and the structure was to be one that would hold the remains of both Empress Xu and Yongle. The tomb was still not complete in 1424, when Yongle died suddenly while on a military campaign. It took another three years to finish the mausoleum and place the remains of the imperial couple within. Known as Chang Ling, it is the largest of

the 13 tombs. The last emperor to be buried in this valley was Chongzhen, who hanged himself in 1644 in Jingshan Park immediately to the north of the Forbidden City.

O THE MISSING THREE

Who are the Ming emperors not buried in this valley? There is no mystery here. The first is Hongwu, whose mausoleum was built close to Nanjing, where he had founded the Ming dynasty. The second is Jianwen, who succeeded Hongwu and was later overthrown by Yongle. His tomb has never been found. The third is the



The Ding Ling Tomb

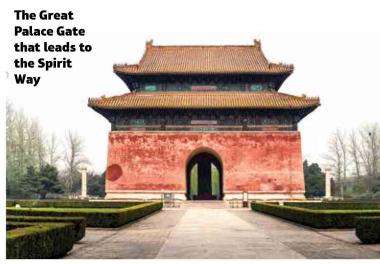
ing Ling is the only Ming tomb to have been excavated so far. Archaeologists have been working at the site since its opening in 1956. In addition to the remains of Emperor Wanli and his wife, thousands of priceless artifacts—especially those fashioned of silk and porcelain—have been found. One that did survive is a small crown that belonged to the empress (below). Tragically, the artifacts were ruined because of inadequate restoration skills at that time and the policies of the Cultural Revolution. In 1966, Chairman Mao Zedong pushed forward his agenda to eliminate all traditional elements from Chinese society. His reasoning was simple: He feared such reminders of the past posed a threat to his Communist ideology. As a result, the Ding Ling was looted by the **Red Guards**. Even worse, the Guards dragged the remains of the

emperor and his wife from the tomb and burned them publicly as an act of **posthumous** condemnation. Luckily, the lessons learned from this savage act led to a new law enacted years after Mao Zedong fell from power. It remains in effect today and prohibits the opening of any

imperial tomb in China.

Red Guards refer to members of a Chinese Communist youth movement in the late 1960s, committed to the militant support of Mao Zedong.

Posthumous means following or occurring after death.



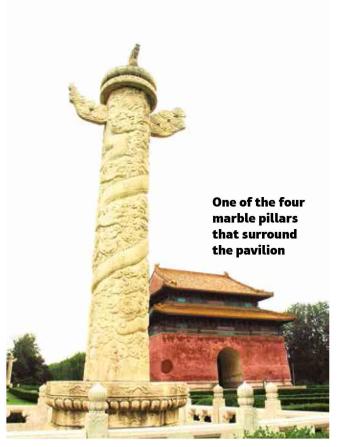
seventh emperor, Jingtai. Considered a dishonourable ruler, he was refused the type of burial given an emperor. Instead, his body was placed in a simple tomb west of Beijing.

O AND, THE LAYOUT

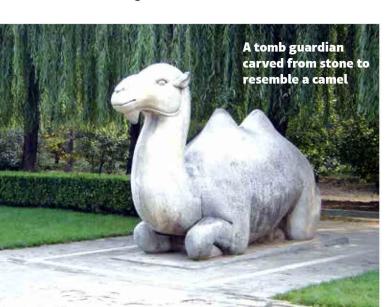
The 13 Ming tombs are similar in design and layout. A four-mile-long path, named Spirit Way (above), crosses the site. It begins south of the tombs with a triumphal archway, known as the Great Palace Gate, and continues through a pavilion with a sculpted, giant, tortoise-like dragon, a mythical creature known as a bixi (see below). On its back rests the largest inscribed memorial stone tablet in China. The tablet is not original to the design. Rather, it was added later during the Qing dynasty. Around the pavilion are four marble pillars (one opposite), each topped by a mythical beast. There are also two additional



Here's a bixi's head close-up



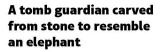
pillars, each carved with a design that resembles clouds. These two pillars were meant to guide the soul of the deceased in the afterlife—that is, they point the way to a road lined with 12 sets of massive stone statues (see one below and three at right). These represent officials, animals, exotic creatures, foreign dignitaries, and imperial warriors. Their purpose was to guard each tomb and to represent an eternal funeral procession. The end of the Spirit Way is marked by the three-arched Dragon and Phoenix Gate.





A tomb guardian carved from stone to resemble a warrior







A tomb guardian carved from stone to resemble a lion

Today, three of these tombs are open to visitors. One is the Chang Ling, with the remains of the imperial couple and Yongle's 16 concubines. A fortified wall encloses Yongle's burial mound, which can be approached after having passed through the Dragon and Phoenix Gate. The second is the Ding Ling, the tomb of the 13th Ming emperor Wanli and his wives. This complex consists of a large forecourt and five underground burial chambers. It appears less impressive than the Chang Ling, but it is the only one that you can enter from the rear side of the mound. The third and smallest among the tombs is the Zhao Ling, the resting place of Longqing, the 12th Ming emperor.