In 1987, a cache of inscribed bamboo slips was recovered from a Chu state tomb outside of Cili, in the far northwest of Hunan province. It was the first time archaeologists in Hunan had encountered a major cache of Warring States era bamboo texts, and their inexperience with such materials, the poor condition of the tomb, and bad weather conditions during excavation all contributed to difficulties in preserving the strips in readable condition and in deciphering and transcribing their contents. Now, over twenty years after their discovery, the manuscripts are almost ready for publication. This presentation will provide an introduction to the discovery of the texts; give an overview of their contents (which include substantial materials matching closely with transmitted texts); and pause to consider some of the important textual, military, and intellectual problems that these manuscripts present.

Particular attention will be paid to three portions of the manuscript cache: one that matches Chapter 8 of the Yi Zhou shu 逸周書, “Dawu” 大武, “The Great Martial,” especially as it is known from testimony in the Tang dynasty compendium, Beitang shuchao 北堂書鈔; another portion that matches closely the Guoyu “Wuyu” 吳語 (Discourses of the State of Wu); and finally a long series of sections that may all bear some relationship to a text known only by its entry in the “Yiwen zhi” (Bibliographic Treatise) of the Han shu as the Ning Yue 靳越 (Pacifying Yue).