

Newest Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels, 2000–2010

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In 2002, I published a survey of inscribed bronze vessels of the Western Zhou period that had appeared in the course of the preceding decade.¹ The timing was appropriate for at least a couple of reasons. First, the 1990s marked the first flowering of the new Chinese economic expansion; with the dramatic increase in construction activity and with newfound wealth in China came a concomitant rise in the number of ancient bronze vessels taken out of China's earth. Although much of this excavation was unfortunately undertaken by tomb robbers, and the individual bronzes thus lost their archaeological context, nevertheless many of them appeared on the antiques markets and eventually made their way into museums and/or the scholarly press. Second, the decade also witnessed the five-year long Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project (1995–2000). This multidisciplinary inquiry into ancient China's political chronology was funded by the Chinese government at levels hitherto unimagined for humanistic and social science research, and it resulted in numerous discoveries and publications. The chronology of the Western Zhou period, based to a very large extent on the inscriptions in bronze vessels of the period, was perhaps the most important topic explored by this project. The decade witnessed extensive archaeological excavations at several major Zhou states, as well as the discovery of several fully-dated bronze inscriptions that were the subject of much discussion in the context of the "Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project."²

The ten years that have just passed have brought several more extensive archaeological campaigns, several of them unearthing sites and cemeteries of heretofore unknown states within the Zhou realm, as well as many, many more bronze vessels from throughout the Western Zhou period, some of them with truly startling inscriptions. Of these, only two

have yet attracted much notice in the West—the *Bin Gong xu* 鬲公盃, purchased in the summer of 2002 by the Poly Art Museum (Baoli yishu bowuguan 保利藝術博物館) of Beijing,³ and the twenty-seven vessels unearthed from a cache of the Shan 單 family at Meixian 眉縣, Shaanxi, in January 2003.⁴ The inscription on the *Bin Gong xu* begins by invoking the hydraulic works of the legendary culture hero and putative founder of the Xia dynasty Yu the Great 大禹 and includes language strikingly similar to passages from the *Shang shu* 尚書. Its literary form is quite unprecedented within the entire inventory of early bronze inscriptions and will surely claim an important place in all future histories of the development of Chinese literature. The Meixian Shan-family cache, discovered by local farmers, may be of even more wide-reaching significance. It features three different very lengthy inscriptions, including one (on the *Qiu pan* 逯盤) that provides a sketch history of almost the entire Western Zhou period, from the founders Wen Wang 文王 and Wu Wang 武王 down to the penultimate ruler Xuan Wang 宣王, and two other inscriptions (on the *Forty-second Year Qiu ding* 逯鼎 and *Forty-third Year Qiu ding*) that are dated to the final years of Xuan Wang's lengthy reign. Among other notable aspects of these latter two inscriptions, their full-date notations have already served decisively to undermine the results of the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project, which had been announced just two years before these vessels were discovered. As we will see below, there would soon appear other inscribed bronze vessels that would also show that the Chronology Project's absolute dates of the Western Zhou period are almost absolutely wrong from beginning to end. In the following survey of recent bronzes, while I will certainly have occasion to mention their implications both for the chronology of the Western Zhou and for the Chronology Project, I do not intend to discuss these implications at any length. I also do not propose to say anything more about the *Bin Gong xu* or the Meixian Shan-family bronzes, having already published my own studies of all of these inscriptions.

Instead, I will introduce a wealth of other new information about the Western Zhou that has become available in the first ten years of the new century. I will first survey briefly several important archaeological sites that have produced considerable numbers of inscribed bronze vessels. These sites, all cemeteries, represent different periods of the Western Zhou, from the very earliest phase of the dynasty until its very end, and also reflect several different geographical contexts. In introducing the excavations that have taken place at these sites—and in the case of at least

two of the sites, archaeological work is still ongoing—while I will try to indicate the historical significance of the site and highlight unprecedented discoveries of material culture, I will make no attempt to provide detailed reports; others, including other contributors to the present volume, are far more able to do this than I. Instead, I will focus primarily on the inscribed bronzes that have been found at the sites, or occasionally bronzes that have doubtless been robbed from the site or its environs and which have appeared on the antique market. After this archaeological survey, I will then go on to introduce another twenty or so other historically significant inscribed bronze vessels that have appeared over the past ten years, unfortunately all too often as a result of tomb robbing.⁵ I will introduce these vessels more or less in chronological order of their casting, and will say something about the circumstances of their appearance and, when possible, provide photographs of both the vessels and their inscriptions. Nevertheless, my main focus will be on the inscriptions—providing translations, references to prior scholarship, and some discussion of their historical significance. Several of these inscriptions contain graphs and phrasing never before seen in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions and as of yet have resisted definitive interpretation. My own translations should very much be regarded as preliminary; I am simply hoping to call these bronzes and their inscriptions to the attention of a wider reading public.

Archaeological Discoveries

The Tianma-Qucun, Shanxi Site of the State of Jin

The decade's first report of a significant archaeological discovery that featured an inscribed bronze vessel was actually the result of activity at the end of the preceding decade, at the Tianma-Qucun 天馬曲村, Shanxi cemetery of the lords of the state of Jin 晉. Indeed, I already treated this discovery in my previous article since it came in the context of extensive excavations conducted at this cemetery over the entirety of the preceding decade. Since other important new evidence has since come to light with which to understand this discovery and its bronze vessel, I will describe it again here, before going on to introduce that other new evidence.⁶

Once the late Professor Zou Heng 鄒衡 (1927–2005) of Peking University and his team of archaeologists had located the extensive cemetery at this site in the early 1990s, archaeologists were pitted in a battle with tomb robbers to find and open the tombs of the lords and their consorts. Toward

the end of the decade, the archaeologists believed that they had finished their work, with seventeen tombs arrayed in two more or less neat rows, running from east to west. Unfortunately, in the spring of 1998, tomb robbers struck again, blasting their way into a tomb, subsequently numbered M114, located at the eastern end of the cemetery between the top and bottom rows of tombs. When the archaeologists finally salvaged what they could of the tomb, as well as a companion tomb next to it, M113, believed to be the tomb of the lord's consort, they found that they were the earliest of all tombs in the cemetery. In M114, the tomb of the lord, they found the bottom portion of a square caldron that had otherwise been obliterated by the dynamite blast of the tomb robbers. By a stroke of rare luck, it was precisely this portion of the vessel that carried the inscription, which seems to be intact (Figure 5.1). The patron of the vessel is a figure named Shu Ze 叔矢, a name that plausibly refers to Tangshu Yu 唐叔虞,⁷ known from traditional historical sources as a younger brother of Cheng Wang 成王 (r. 1042/35–1006 B.C.) and the founding father of Jin. The inscription commemorates a royal award to Shu Ze after a royal offering and an assembly of lords in Cheng Zhou 成周, but it does not mention any particular action of Shu Ze himself.

Figure 5.1 *Shu Ze fangding* 叔矢方鼎 Inscription; after Liu Yu 劉雨 and Yan Zhibin 嚴志斌, eds., *Jin chu Yin Zhou jinwen jilu er bian* 近出殷周金文集錄二編, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), vol. 1, p. 344, #320.



Shu Ze fangding 叔矢方鼎

佳十又四月王酈
 大禱禱才成周
 咸禱王乎殷畢
 士齊弔矢以分
 車馬貝三十朋敢
 對王休用乍寶
 尊彝其萬
 年揚王光畢士

It was the fourteenth month, the king performed a libation offering, greatly inscribing a prayer at Cheng Zhou. Completing the prayer, the king called out to convene his sires, and awarded Shu Ze with a skirt and jacket, chariot and horses, and thirty double-strands of cowries, [for which Shu Ze] dares to respond to the king's beneficence, herewith making [this] treasured offertory vessel; may for ten thousand years it extol the king's making radiant his sire.

While there is some consensus that the Shu Ze of this inscription can be identified with Tangshu Yu, there is disagreement as to whether this was his tomb or that of his son, Xiefu 燮父. Part of this disagreement hinges on the original appointment of Tangshu Yu, one of the famous stories stemming from the beginning of the Western Zhou dynasty.

When Wu Wang died and Cheng Wang was established, there was a disturbance in Tang 唐. The Duke of Zhou annihilated Tang. Cheng Wang was playing with Shu Yu, and whittled a catalpa branch into a scepter to give to Shu Yu saying, "With this I enfeoff you." Secretary Yi 史佚 thereupon asked to choose a day to establish Shu Yu. Cheng Wang said, "I was just playing around with him." Secretary Yi said, "The Son of Heaven has no playful words; when you speak then the Secretary writes it, the [Master of] Rites completes it, and the [Master of] Music sings it." With that he subsequently enfeoffed Shu Yu in Tang.⁸

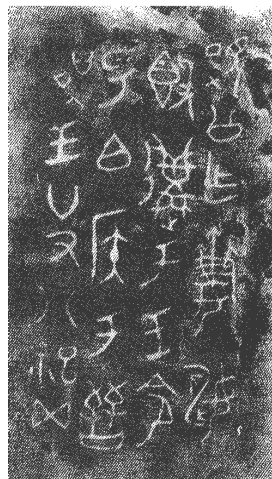
According to this story, Shu Yu was appointed to be lord in Tang 唐, and not in Jin. There are conflicting accounts as to where this Tang was located, with one tradition placing it in Jiangzhou 絳州, Shanxi, very near to modern Houma 侯馬, and another some 75 km to the northwest in present-day Xiangning 鄉寧 county.⁹ Wherever Tang was, the evidence is consistent that it was Shu Yu's son Xiefu who moved to Jin, the site now known from the Tianma-Qucun excavations. The *Shi ji* 史記 or *Records of the Historian* of Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–ca. 89 B.C.) continues its account of the founding of the state by saying simply: "Tang Shu's son was Xie, who was the Lord of Jin" (*Tang Shu zi Xie, shi wei Jin Hou* 唐叔子燮·是為晉侯). The *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年) seems to supply a precise

date for the move: the ninth year of Kang Wang 康王.¹⁰ New evidence has just surfaced to provide firm support for the attribution of the move to Xiefu.

A Hong Kong antique gallery has in its possession an early Western Zhou *gui* 簋-tureen with a brief 22-character inscription. Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚 had the opportunity to see the vessel there, and introduced it to the scholarly world with an article in the journal *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology).¹¹ Although details of the piece's provenance are lacking, it seems likely that it was looted from the Tianma-Qucun cemetery. The inscription certainly concerns the founding of the state there.

As seen in Figure 5.2a, the *gui* features an everted lip, a display band at the neck with alternating whirligigs and dragons and with single prominent animal heads in the center of the front and back of the vessel, a squat S-shaped profile ornamented in vertical ribbing, a fairly high outward-sloping flat ring foot, and two handles surmounted with an animal head and ending with a rectangular pendant. As Zhu Fenghan notes, the vessel is extremely similar in shape and ornamentation to the late Shang-dynasty *Si gui* 肆簋 in the Sackler Collection, though it also shares important affinities with the well-known early Western Zhou *Kang Hou gui* 康侯簋 in the British Museum.¹² The inscription reads as follows (Figure 5.2b):

Figure 5.2a–b *Yao Gong gui* 颯公簋 Vessel and Inscription; after Zhu Fenghan, ed., *Xin chu jinwen yu Xi Zhou lishi* 新出金文與西周歷史 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 2011), front matter, pl. 3.1; p. 35, pl. 4.2.



Yao Gong gui 覲公簋

覲公乍饗姚
 簋遷于王令
 易白侯于晉
 佳王廿又八祀 卣

Yao Gong makes for his wife Yao this *gui*-tureen, meeting with the king's commanding Tang Bo to be lord in Jin. It is the king's twenty-eighth year. Clan-sign

Zhu Fenghan argues convincingly that the “Yang Bo” 易白, i.e., “Tang Bo” 湯 (i.e., 唐) 伯 here should refer to Xiefu prior to his move to Jin: the “Tang” to which Tangshu Yu was appointed to rule, though written in received literature as 唐, is written in all excavated sources as 易 or some variant of it,¹³ and the “Bo” refers to an eldest son, which Xiefu was, as opposed to Shu Yu, who was, as his name indicates, a cadet son, the younger brother of Cheng Wang. In the *Yao Gong gui* inscription, Tang Bo is commanded by the king to “be lord in Jin” (*hou yu Jin* 侯于晉), the standard early Western Zhou formula for the appointment of a lord to rule a new territory, and so this vessel evidently commemorates the move of the ruling lineage to that location. The year notation appended at the end of the inscription, as commonly in early Western Zhou inscriptions, supports this as well; as Zhu Fenghan also argues in his introductory article, this “twenty-eighth year” (*nian you ba si* 廿又八祀) surely refers to Cheng Wang's reign, given in virtually all early sources as lasting a total of 37 years (including 7 years at the beginning of the reign during which Zhou Gong 周公 is said to have ruled as regent).

This date has important implications for the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project. In its absolute chronology of the Western Zhou kings, it assigns Cheng Wang 22 years (1042–1021 B.C.), and his son and successor Kang Wang 25 years (1020–996 B.C.).¹⁴ The *Yao Gong gui* date shows that at least one of these reign lengths is too short. As I mentioned just above, virtually all early sources give Cheng Wang's length of reign as 37 years (including the 7 years of Zhou Gong's regency). Most of these traditional chronologies presumably derive from the *Shi jing* 世經 of Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 B.C.–A.D. 23) as preserved in the “Lü li zhi” 律曆志 chapter of the *Han shu* 漢書.¹⁵ Although it is now known that Liu Xin deduced much of his chronology of ancient China (making demonstrable errors in the process), and so it has no evidentiary value in the aggregate, after his discussion of the reigns of Cheng Wang and Kang Wang he states explicitly that “from Zhao

Wang on there are no year numbers” (*zi Zhao Wang yi xia wang nian shu* 自昭王以下亡年數); this would seem to imply that his sources for Cheng Wang and Kang Wang did contain explicit records for their lengths of reign. Moreover, these lengths for the reigns of Cheng Wang and Kang Wang are identical with those in the *Bamboo Annals*, even if only in the “Current” version of that text,¹⁶ which was still in its tomb at the time Liu Xin was writing and thus would certainly constitute independent corroboration of Liu Xin’s dates.

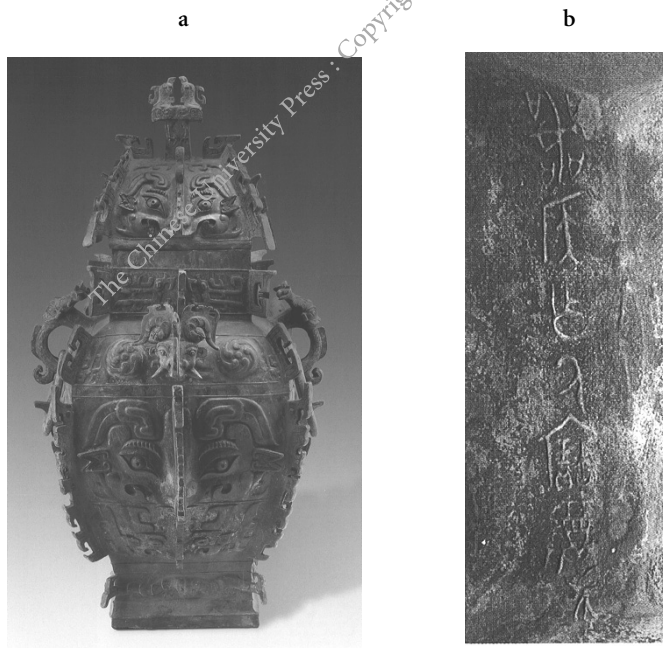
There would seem to be a very firm evidentiary basis for accepting Liu Xin’s reign lengths for Cheng Wang and Kang Wang, as the *Yao Gong gui* inscription confirms yet again. Numerous scholars had noted when the Meixian Shan-family bronzes were discovered in 2003 that the full-date notations in the two *Qiu ding* inscriptions could not be reconciled with the Chronology Project’s dates and indeed called very much into question its chronology (and also the underlying periodization of bronzes based on that chronology) of late Western Zhou. The *Yao Gong gui* inscription now effectively undermines the Chronology Project’s chronology of early Western Zhou. Zhu Fenghan concludes his article by diplomatically noting “research on the dates of the Western Zhou kings, Wu Wang’s conquest of Shang, and the related calendars of bronze inscriptions are scholarly topics that require great caution; the questions that the *Yao Gong gui* inscription raises should have a stimulative role with respect to research on these topics.”¹⁷

The Yangzishan, Hubei Site of the State of E

A second archaeological discovery of an important early Western Zhou tomb has, as far as I know, not yet been reported in scholarly journals. It warrants mention here, even if only in brief. In November 2007, tomb robbers attempted to open a tomb at Yangzishan 羊子山, Anju 安居, Suizhou 隨州, Hubei. Fortunately, they were unsuccessful, and local archaeologists conducted a salvage excavation, turning up an early Western Zhou tomb, designated as tomb number 4. The tomb contained 27 bronzes, which are currently on display in the Suizhou City Museum (Suizhou shi bowuguan 隨州市博物館); they have been published in a catalog of the local archaeological masterpieces: *Suizhou chutu wenwu jingcui* 隨州出土文物精粹 (added English title: *Treasures Unearthed from Suizhou*).¹⁸ The bronzes seem to constitute a complete ritual set, including

three truly extraordinary pieces: a *zun* 尊-vase, a *you* 卣-bucket and a *fangyi* 方彝-square casket with matching animal mask décor.¹⁹ Although the inscriptions on the pieces are simple, that on the *fangyi* does indicate that they were made for a Lord of E 噩侯 (Figure 5.3a–b), apparently indicating that this state was originally located in this vicinity.²⁰ As we will see later in this survey, the seat of the state of E subsequently moved some 150 km up the Han River 漢水 drainage to the vicinity of present-day Nanyang 南陽, Henan, whence it was involved in some of the most momentous events in the history of the late Western Zhou reign of Zhou Li Wang 周厲王. The Yangzishan bronzes show that the history of this Ji 姬-surnamed state went back at least to the beginning of the Western Zhou; when the report on this discovery is eventually issued, it will surely attract great scholarly attention.

Figure 5.3a–b *E Hou fangyi* 噩侯方彝 Vessel and Inscription; after Suizhou shi bowuguan, ed., *Suizhou chutu wenwu jingcui* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2009), pp. 30–31, #35.



The Hengbei, Jiangxian, Shanxi Site of the State of Peng

In April 2004, residents of Hengbei 橫北 village in the western part of Jiangxian 絳縣, Shanxi, just to the south of the Tianma-Qucun Jin cemetery, heard explosions rocking wheat field slopes to the north of the village. They discovered that a large tomb had been blasted open. In November of that year, archaeologists cleared that tomb, which they subsequently numbered M3, finding a few Western Zhou bronzes and jades that the tomb robbers had left behind. The archaeologists then discovered in the vicinity of this tomb two other large tombs, subsequently numbered M1 and M2, which the robbers had missed. Throughout December and into January, archaeologists from the Jiangxian Cultural Bureau (Jiangxian wenhuaju 絳縣文化局), the Yuncheng City Cultural Relics Work Station (Yuncheng shi wenwu gongzuo zhan 運城市文物工作站), and the Shanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology (Shanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo 山西省考古研究所) excavated these two tombs.²¹ Both tombs were midsize to large single-ramp tombs (the tomb chamber of M1 is about 4.5 m wide, 5.5 m long and 15.28 m deep, with a tomb ramp 26.65 m long; the tomb chamber of M2 is about 3.8 m wide, about 5.6 m long, and 6.7 m deep, with a tomb ramp 16.8 m long), both of them having a coffin enclosure (*guo* 槨) and two nested coffins (*guan* 棺), and both were furnished with numerous chariot pieces, pottery, lacquerware, bronze vessels and bells (twenty-five in M1, eight of them inscribed; and sixteen in M2, also eight of them inscribed), and numerous jades, especially belted pendants encasing the deceased.²² In addition, M1 had a textile coffin shroud (*huangwei* 荒帷) draped over the outer coffin, preserved in the mud that had entered into the coffin enclosure when its ceiling collapsed. The existence of coffin shrouds in early China was known from both the *Li ji* 禮記 and *Yi li* 儀禮, but because of the difficulty of preserving textiles they had never before been seen from such an early period. The shroud, bright red and ornamented with phoenixes, was woven from two separate pieces of cloth and covers almost ten square meters.

In the brief excavation report, the excavators surmise that these two tombs were of a husband and wife, and that M1, the larger and somewhat more sumptuously furnished of the two, was that of the wife, while M2 was that of the husband. They also argue that the tomb-master of M2 was the lord of the small state of Peng 棚, which they claim was a state not seen in the received textual tradition. Finally, they argue on the basis of comparisons of the funerary goods, that the tombs should date to the reign of Mu Wang 穆王 or slightly later.²³