

THE BURRELL COLLECTION

15th March 2002

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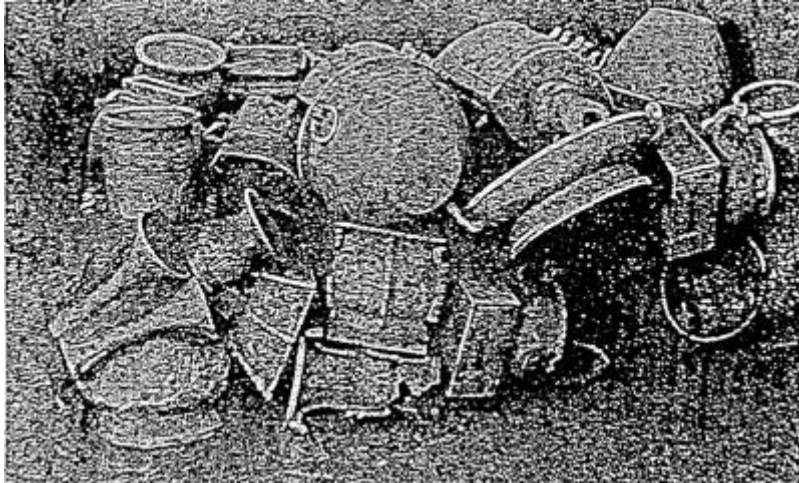
CHINESE BRONZES IN THE BURRELL COLLECTION

Introduction

The discovery of an ancient Bronze vessel in China has always been regarded as an auspicious omen. Throughout China Bronze vessels have been excavated from burials, within the foundations of ancient ancestral temples and various ritual deposits on the hillside in reverence to the spirits of nature. Bronzes have become one of the most precious documents of China's past dating back to the establishment of the first dynasty 3000 years ago. It was during the 11th Century A.D in China that the Imperial family began collecting Chinese bronzes, the Emperors had the largest collection which furthermore stimulated interest in the Western World. Sir William Burrell began collecting Chinese Bronzes with his first acquisition in 1936, he collected a total of 184 Chinese Bronzes each of which vary greatly in type, shape and age. Sir William Burrell's Collection of Chinese Bronzes remains to be one of the two greatest collections in Britain. There are 25 Chinese Bronzes on display in The Burrell Collection of which there are 15 different classified types categorised in accordance with their varying uses.

Fig 1.

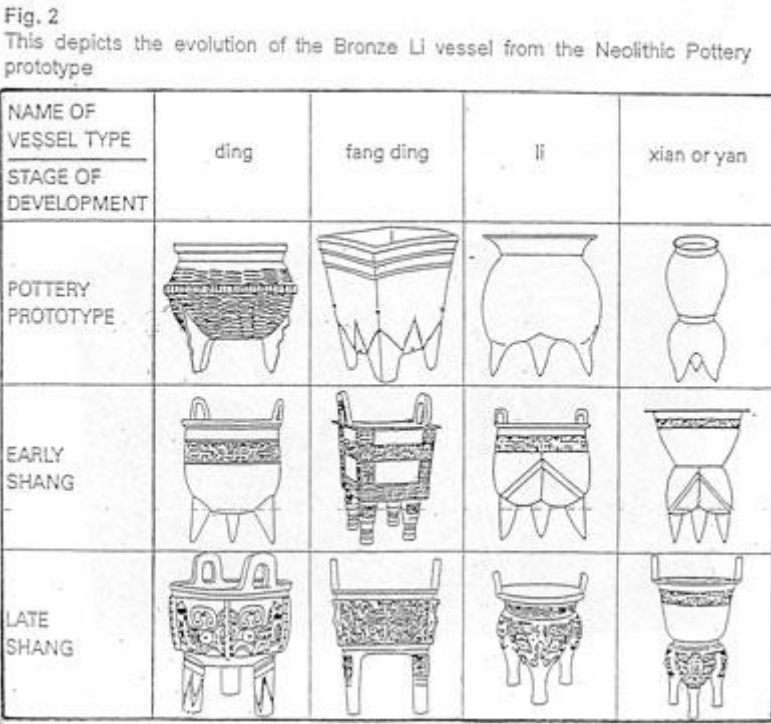
*This Photograph of a ritual deposit which was buried in offering to the ancestors.
All shall be explained at a later stage...*



Pottery to Bronze Sacred Symbolism

The Neolithic pottery Cultures in China provided the prototype for Chinese Bronzes, however the decorations on the Chinese bronzes are vastly different from the lively, playful, pleasant images of the Yangshao painted pottery, Chinese Bronzes on the other hand are rather mysteriously decorated. Pottery making craft in the Neolithic age developed alongside the emergence of the potters wheel and advancements in kiln technology. The Neolithic painted pottery cultures throughout China I believe can be viewed as providing a springboard for bronze manufacturing techniques. Bronze became a fine media for ritual art and ceramics were gradually substituted for metal in both religious and secular contexts in China. Bronze *LIQI* (ritual vessels) dominated Chinese art from the late Neolithic to the end of the three dynasties. The first evidence of a

bronze age culture in China dates back to 1900 B.C. Did Bronze casting technology emerge in China ? The precise origins of Bronze casting in China is still rather controversial. It has been suggested through archaeological excavations that Bronze technology was introduced into China from the West around 1700 B.C. What is certain is that the West cast bronze for warfare, weapons and armour, however the Chinese cast bronze vessels for use in rituals and ceremonies of the deceased. This period of transition from pottery into metal represents a major advance in ritual symbols.



Bronze Casting

Bronze vessels were first cast in China c.1700 BC. Bronze technology lasted 1,500 years until the founding of the Qin dynasty 221 B.C. Detailed information about the artisans, workshops and patrons who commissioned the bronze vessels is not available.

Fig. 3 below demonstrates the main stages of the Bronze casting technology and Fig. 4 depicts the original excavated molds. Fig. 3 is a three legged ding vessel which has been cast upside down, the core of the vessel has been made of either stone or pottery and it is in the shape of the required vessel. The core is then surrounded by normally three or four mold sections. Any decoration on the outer mold would have been done before firing, bands of decoration would have been incised into the pottery mold, Fig. 5 is a fine example of an animal head incised so intricately in stone . The two handles may have been made and incorporated into the mold prior to the final casting so that the vessels metal could run onto them and hold them in place. Bronze : an alloy, a mixture of tin and copper was melted and poured into the mold, where it assumed the shape of the casting space, A high tin content in the molten metal increased hardness and produced a silver effect, a high copper content presents a golden result. After cooling the metal was removed by breaking the mold, during which the bronze shrinks 4- 7%, then it is rubbed with abrasives to make it shiny and beautiful. The original condition of all the bronzes here on display would have been metallic and either shining silver or gold in appearance.

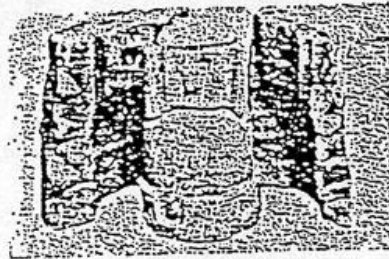
However since the time of burial the earth has transformed bronze into a semi metallic state, the high content of copper transforms the bronze to a bluish green colour, the discolouration effects and erosion of the bronzes in the earth is called patination. Bronzes which are very dark brown or black usually contain a high percentage of tin. In rare case little or no patination has occurred.

Fig. 4

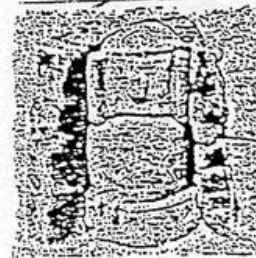
图4 卷耳 卷耳特选字例(二)



1. 卷耳特选字例(二)



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Fig. 3

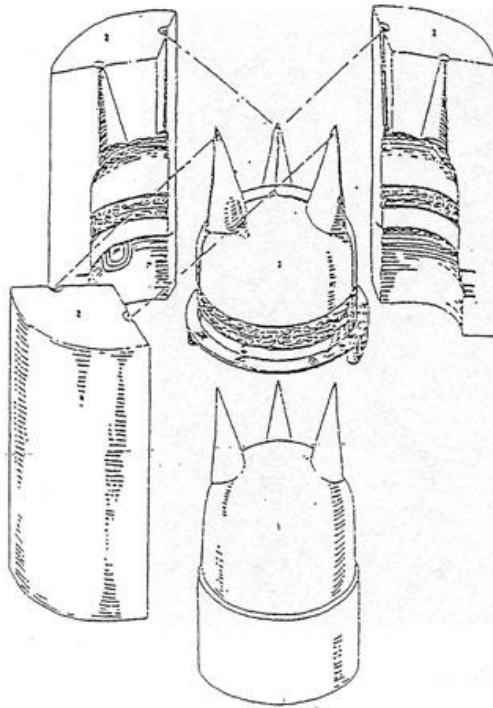
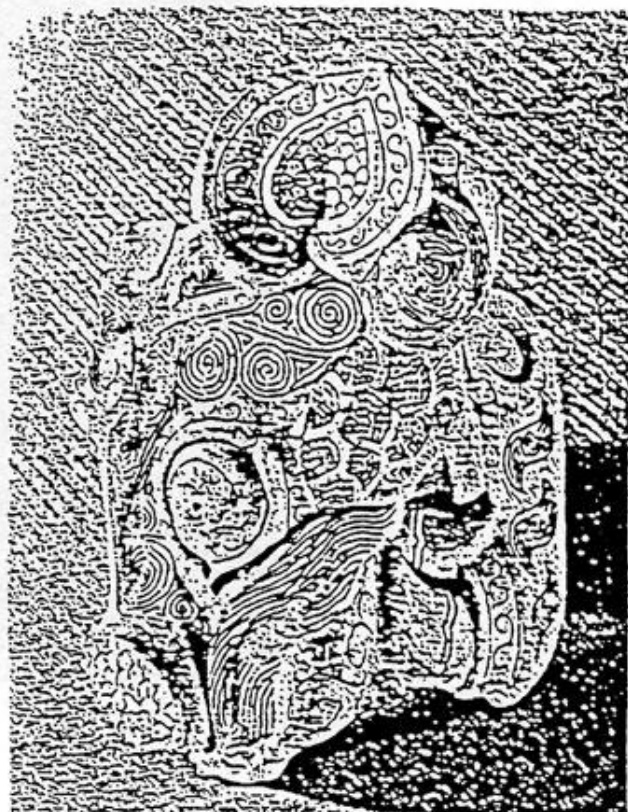
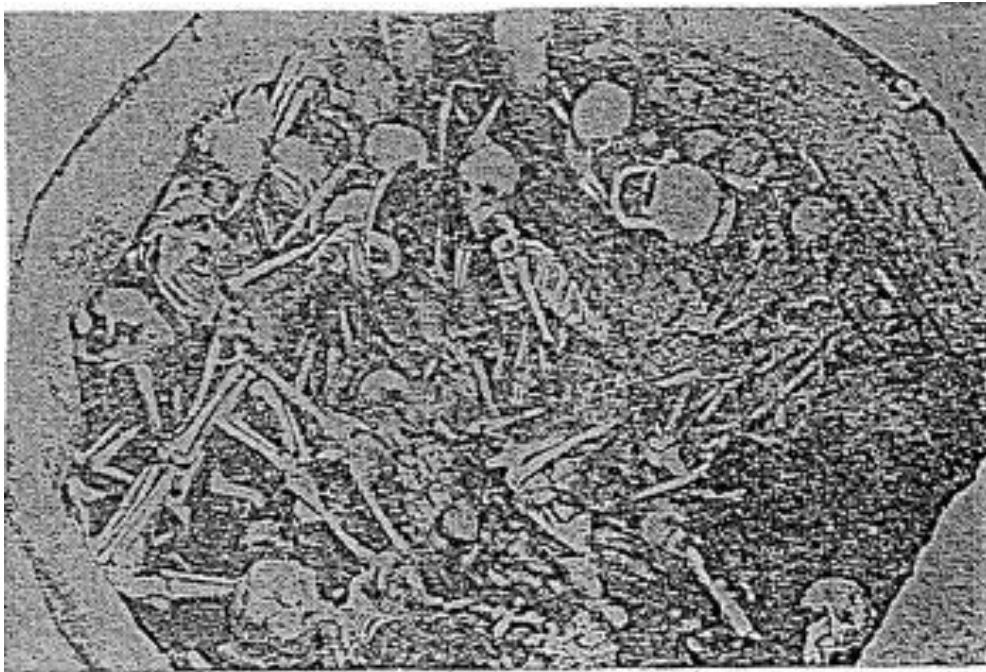


Fig. 5



Ancestral Worship During The Shang Dynasty SHANG DYNASTY: c.1700-1050 BC

The Shang dynasty originated in the Yellow river valley of Henan Province, North West China. Most of the Shang Dynasty bronzes were purchased during the 1930's. The forms of the Shang body and base are very angular and stylistic in form. The Shang people worshipped Shang-di, Shang-di was the supreme Ancestor of the Shang dynasty, the supreme god over lesser gods. The Shang dynasty was ruled by powerful witch doctors who had to consult oracles every day to obtain insights into all sorts of things such as farming , worship, marriage, childbirth and medicine. These witch doctors became the powerful religious and political leaders during the Shang dynasty. The Shang rulers sustained direct contact with Shang-di and regularly communicated from earth to heaven which further helped to strengthen and preserve the Shang dynasty from calamity. Ancestors had the ability to have beneficial or harmful influences upon living descendants, therefore the worship of the Ancestors became part and focus of religious activities during the Shang dynasty. Subsequent dynasties and indeed a great part of the modern day Chinese society continue to share and inherit the worship of ancestors. During the Shang Dynasty contact with the supreme ancestor Shang-di was gained through elaborately complex ritual acts. When, a noble man died during the Shang dynasty he was accompanied by sacrificed animals and servants to the realm of ancestors. Shang dynasty offerings to the spirits were placed in bronze ritual vessels, the vessels contained animals and humans, grain and wine which were offered to the spirits. The number of bronze Vessels used in the burial reflected degrees of ostentation and extravagance. Ding were always placed in odd numbers whereas gui were used in even numbers. Ding were precious vessels symbolising the power of a dynastic regime. See Fig. 6. This is a ritual burial pit containing human sacrifices and ritual bronzes which would have accompanied the deceased.



图三 安阳后冈殷代墓葬出土的圆坑墓

Vessels for Ancestral Sacrifices

There are two main categories of Chinese bronze vessels : Ancient Chinese Bronzes during the Shang Dynasty were cast never for people's convenience rather to serve the principal 'affairs of the state' both in ritual ceremonies and warfare. Food and drink vessels, musical instruments, weapons i.e. axe for sacrifice were all used during ritual ceremonies and cast in bronze. The two main categories of ritual vessels which were used to sacrifice offerings were vessels for containing wine and vessels which contained raw animal meat.

Fig.7 this displays the different types of bronzes which were used in votive services of food and drink at the altars of cosmic deities and or ancestors.

Altar Set - late 11th century B.C.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/76974>



The following list details the Chinese Terms given to the different types of ritual vessels:

FOOD VESSELS: DING, LI, YAN, GUI, FU, XU

WINE VESSELS: JUE, GU, JIA/ZUN, HU, YOU, LEI

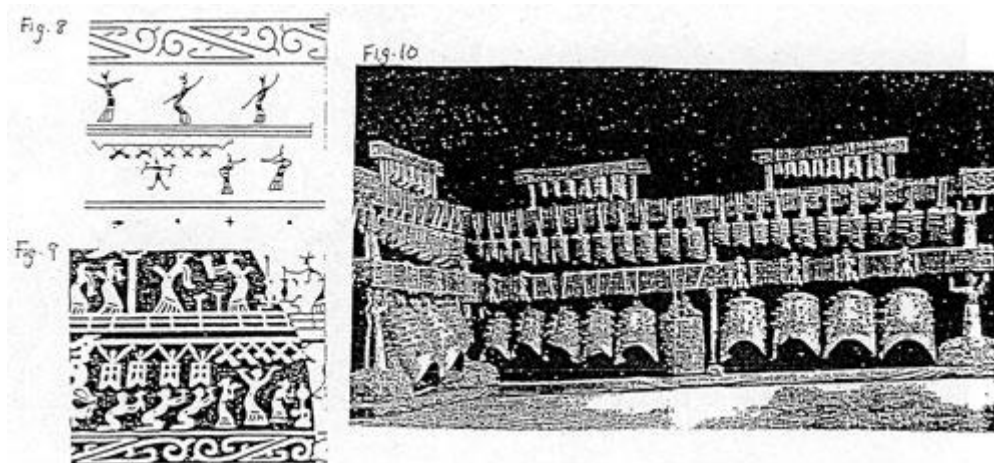
WATER VESSELS: PAN, YI, JIAM .

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS: ZHONG, NAO, ZHENG (BELLS)

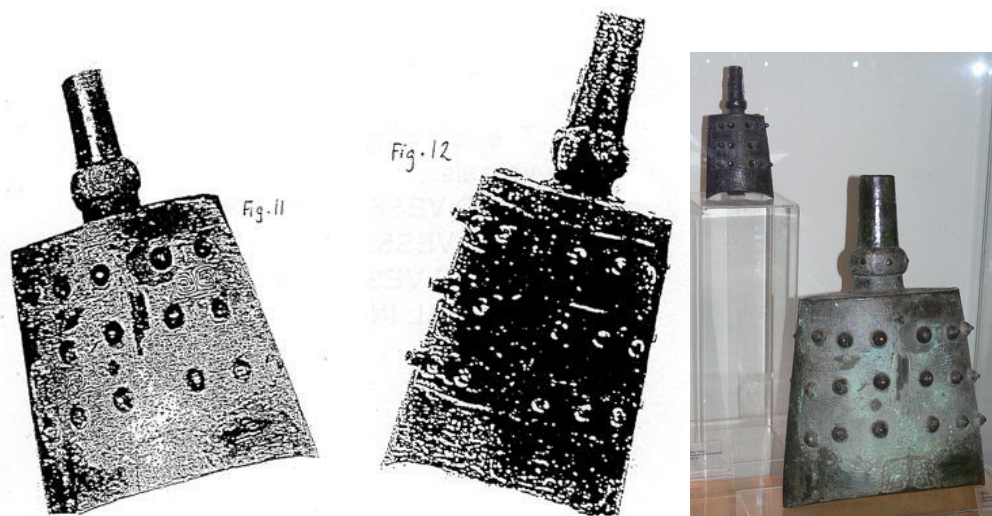
Ceremonial Music Bells

Music was a central component of ancestral sacrifices, ceremonial banquets and the political bronze age culture in China. Bronzes bells have been excavated from tombs alongside other musical instruments such as Bamboo Flutes (di and Chi), panpipes (xiao), mouth organs, and drum and stone chimes. Bells were cast with stone and iron piece molds. During ancient ceremonies the bells used to be consecrated with the blood of a sacrificial animal and then struck with a wooden staff and when struck would radiate the glory of the deceased. No two bells sound exactly alike. The two bells on display at The Burrell Collection have no internal clapper, sound was' resonated when the bell was struck on the central striking platform and also when struck on the lateral edge of the bell. The striking of the bells was subject to regulations which were fixed in accordance with the number of chimes allowed in accordance with each social rank.

See Fig. 8 and Fig 9. These are two details taken from decorated bronze vessels of people striking bells whilst kneeling and standing is an interesting reflection upon the musical tradition in ancient China. Fig. 10 is a complete assemblage of excavated bells which have been mounted on frames.



The ornamentation on bronzes is similar to that of bronzes. The large bell on display at The Burrell Collection Fig. 11, would have been used for tuning purposes. Classes of bells are distinguished mainly by their mode of mounting and shape of rim. The two bells on display here are associated with the Nao type of bells which has an arched, rim and large tubular shranks, see Fig. 12, this is a Nao type bell on display in The Burrell Collection. In the developed form of the decorative scheme the rows of bosses are enclosed with raised ridges (zhuan) separated with two horizontal registers of surface decoration.



Burrell Bronze Bells

Zhou Dynasty; War and Royal Sacrifices

ZHOU DYNASTY: 1050-221 BC, Western Zhou 1100-771 BC, Eastern Zhou 770-256 BC

The Shang and Zhou dynasty went to war 20 Kilometers South of the Shang capital, the overthrown Shang emperor returned to the capital and burned himself to death in the Deer pavilion. After 662 years the Shang dynasty was no more. The chief of the Zhou dynasty established a new capital in modern day Xian in 1121 B.C and this became the Western Zhou Dynasty, after 350 years the capital was moved to Luoyang in East China and was subsequently named the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. The Bronzes of the Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou dynasty differed in form, decoration and use. During the Western Zhou more attention was focused on the

development of food utensils. During the Zhou Dynasty the casting of Bronzes began to be associated with a specific person indicated by his or her name. Bronzes became commemorative objects of the deceased relative. The minister would have awarded the relative with cowries perhaps after a military campaign and this would have funded the creation of the Bronze. The vessel became a symbol of glory and achievement in the deceased's life. The differences in religious practices led to the disappearance of many Shang ritual vessels in Western Zhou dynasty. Philosophy was promoted rather than religion. Bronze ritual vessels in the Zhou dynasty played a role maintaining and manifesting the feudal ranking system. The early Western Zhou dynasty bronzes followed the Shang dynasty bronzes methods of execution and principles of arrangements; consequently the motifs are alike. By the late Zhou Dynasty motifs were less focused upon and inscriptions became more dominant.

See Fig. 13. This is a Zhou Dynasty Bronze Vessel called a Yan it is a steamer which was portable utilitarian vessel which was used by noble men, this vessel would have been taken on military campaigns. Fig. 14 is a Japanese print depicting the usage of such a vessel.



Decoration During China's Bronze Age

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE DECORATIVE MOTIFS ?

I assume that the four basic attributes of a bronze ritual vessel its material, shape, inscription and decoration, all possessed meaning. I would like to concentrate principally on decoration. The vessels, instruments and weapons were often decorated with animals and birds. When examining the function of bronze motifs found on ritual vessels this is the ritualists interpretation. When examining the function of bronze motifs and relating them to moral teaching and social ideas this is the Philosophical interpretation.

The decoration on the Chinese bronzes I believe is the language of the spirit world, so that the boundary between the living and the dead might be crossed and the sacrifice received by the spirits. The creatures depicted on the Chinese Bronzes were to teach the people about spirits and evil forces.

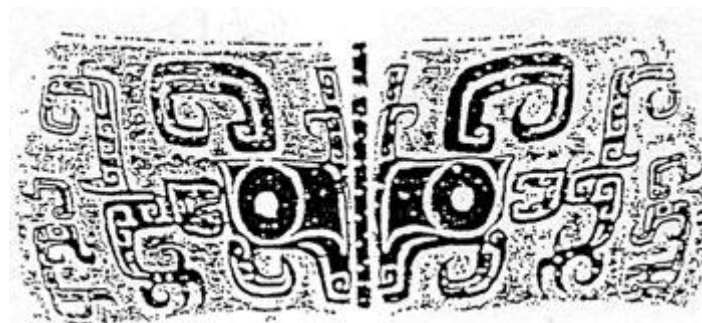
Types of Decorative Motif

The following list below are the Chinese terms for common occurring motifs decorating Chinese Bronzes during the Shang Dynasty and the Western Zhou Dynasty, appearing occasionally in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. The decoration on the Shang and Zhou bronzes is primarily Animal art with large heads. During the Zhou dynasty there was never a uniform style of the period, there is such a variety of decoration from about 1050 to 100 BC, therefore the following notes on the decoration are to be applied to alt dynasties.

LEIWEN : Leiwen is the term given to a tight square coiled thunder scroll design because it ears a remote resemblance to archaic script form of the character for thunder. Leiwen in most cases decorates the-background of the bronze.

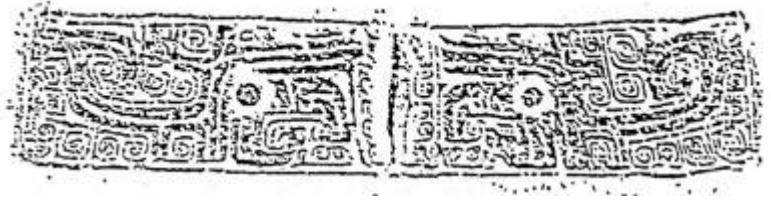


TAO TIE : The term Tao Tie originated from Song Dynasty critics in the 11th Century, almost no two Tao Tie designs are identical. Is it the head of an ox, sheep, tiger, a deer ? Tao tie and dragon are dominant motifs on Shang dynasty bronzes. The Zhou conquered the Shang in 11th Century BC, Tao tie motif disappeared about the end of the Western Zhou, this implies that is wasn't meaningless. Tao tie popular in the Shang and Early Zhou,



GUI DRAGON MOTIF:

May have been the spirit of vegetation, the Gui dragon motif is always depicted in profile.

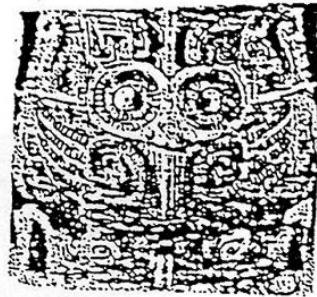


ANIMALS : OXEN, CATTLE:

Decorated in relief upon many of the Chinese Bronzes perhaps alludes to the victim of sacrifice.

BIRDS:

Long tailed birds became a predominant ornamentation on bronze vessels, created by-attaching a birds head and wings to the body of a long dragon. A number of perfectly recognizable species of birds and animals began to appear including owls, fish, serpents, tigers, water buffalo, elephants, hares, cicadas etc. In the Western Zhou Dynasty bird designs became more after mid and late Western Zhou, chain link patterns, wave patterns took over from animal into disuse.

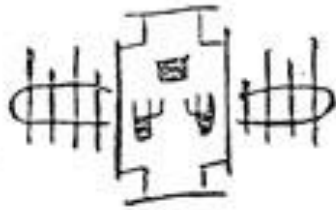


prominent on vessels, patterns, fish scale designs, border fell

The decline in decoration resulted in the increasing dominance of inscription, this resulted in the object becoming one of reading and not viewing.

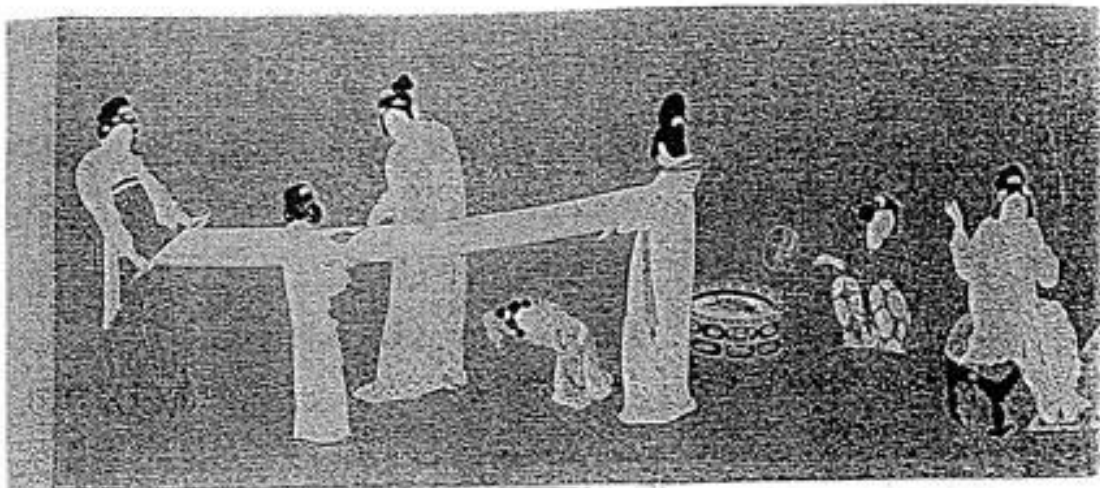
INSCRIPTIONS

Inscribed vessels are a minority, a single ideograph represents a single personal or clan emblem. Inscriptions are cast on the inside of the vessels, on the bottom or near the edge, or in the case of the jue or jia, on a space left clear for the purpose of the inscription. On the Shang and Zhou vessels the characters were sunk below the surface. The Shang dynasty character inscriptions have more straight lines and fewer rounded corners and the tips and ends of -strokes are often sharp and pointed. Shang dynasty inscriptions are limited and the number of vessels with inscriptions discovered is brief and rarely datable. The Zhou dynasty characters became long and rounded, their strokes were smooth and flowing, inscriptions may include the name of the vessel, of the ancestor and frequently the name of the donor. The Zhou inscriptions are a valuable historical source and a useful criteria for dating bronzes. Inscriptions also shed light onto the provenance, ownership and function of the bronze vessels, however they fail to mention how they were used when the ceremony was in- progress-. During the; Late Western Zhou dynasty and Eastern Zhou dynasty inscriptions reflected political claims of the' Kings to nobles and noted honours granted to lesser subjects.



Silk Iron

The Silk Iron on display at The Burrell Collection is a wonderful example of an object which was used in every day life. Unlike the Bronzes which were only ever used because of ritual and ceremonial purposes. There is a small silk worm in relief on the underside of this iron. The ink handscroll below depicts, ladies preparing newly woven silk and is dated to the Song Dynasty early 12th Century, one of the ladies on the left hand side of handscroll is using a silk iron whilst the girl on her left prepares the hot embers for placing inside the silk iron.



12.886

C 35034 (whole)

Asia.

Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk
 Sung period, early 12th CY
 Emperor Hui Tsung China 1082-1135
 ink and colors on silk handscroll
 H.: 37.0 cm. L.: 145.3 cm.