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Bronze Artifacts Unearthed From Han Tombs in Zuocun Village, Nanhe County of Xingtai City, Hebei Province

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Two Han dynasty tombs were successively damaged by villagers in 1976 and 1982 during land leveling in Zuocun Village of Heguo Township in Nanhe County of Xingtai City, Hebei Province. Many fine artifacts were unearthed, some of which were collected by the former Antique Store of the Xingtai area and were later transferred to the Xingtai Municipal Office of Cultural Heritage Administration. The five bronze artifacts in this collection are described as follows.

I

(A) Gilt Bronze *Boshanlu*-Incense Burner With Engraved Coiled-Dragon Base

It comprises five parts, including a tray, a coiled dragon ornament, a persimmon calyx ornament, a burner and a lid. The tray has a large flared opening with a wide rim, a shallow rounded bowl and a flat base. On the base is a coiled dragon with its

Figure 1: Gilt bronze *boshanlu*-incense burner with engraved coiled-dragon base

head slightly lifted and its mouth perforated. Above the dragon is the persimmon calyx ornament with a perforation in the center. The burner has a fitted mouth rim [*zimukou*], a rounded lip, and a bulging belly with concentric incised bowstrings and raised ridges; a cylindrical stem is inserted into the perforation on the persimmon calyx ornament. The lid is in the shape of a mountain peak. The gilding is mostly corroded; parts of it have been stripped away, leaving the motifs obscured. The remaining height of the artifact is 24.2 centimeters, the diameter of the base 23.9 cm and weight 3 kilograms (**Figure 1**).

(B) Long-Necked Gold-Inlaid Bronze *Hu*-Jar With Four Legendary Guardian Beasts and Geometric Patterns

The vessel has a small mouth, a rounded lip, a slender straight neck, a sloping shoulder, a squat bulging belly, and a slightly flared false ring foot. The neck is decorated with cicadas, geometric patterns, birds and beasts, and a wide band. The shoulder is decorated with cicadas, geometric patterns and a wide band. The belly is decorated with cicadas, the four legendary guardian beasts, wide bands, and geometric patterns. The foot is decorated with geometric patterns, and human and animal motifs. The whole vessel is inlaid with gold that has partially corroded. The diameter of the mouth is 5.6 cm, the diameter of the base 12.8 cm, height 28.6 cm and weight 2.8 kg (**Figure 5**).

(C) *Yan*-Steamer Equipped Bronze Stove With Tiger-Head Flue

It comprises three parts, including a *zeng*-steamer, a *fu*-cauldron and the stove. The *zeng*-steamer has a flaring mouth, an everted rim and a deep bowl. The upper part of the belly is decorated with a wide band and two symmetrically positioned *pushou*-animal masks holding rings in their mouths. There are perforated grate holes on the slightly rounded base. The *fu*-cauldron has a small opening, a straight neck, and a bulging shoulder with two symmetrically positioned *pushou*-animal masks holding rings in their mouths (one of which is missing). The vessel has an everted and obliquely contracted belly, and a small flat concave base. The stove body consists of a flue, damper, stove door and other components. The flue is located in the front and has the shape of a tiger head held high with an open mouth and an upright neck. It is hollow and connected to the body of the stove. Smoke would exhaust from the mouth of the tiger. The back end of the stove is a rectangular damper with a dustpan-shaped stove door. There is a round burner in the middle of the stove surface. The full height of the entire artifact is 23.6 cm and weight 5.2 kg (**Figure 2**).

(D) Bronze Warming Burner With *Shang*-Goblet on Three-Wheeled Tray

It consists of a *shang*-cup, a warming burner and a supporting tray. The *shang*-cup, similar to an *erbei*-cup, is oval in shape; it has two crescent-shaped ears and a plain surface. The warming burner is ovoid with straight walls and a flat bottom to which four cabriole feet are soldered. The burner is divided into top and bottom halves by a wide flat ridge. Curved geometric ventilation holes are carved out on the top half, and there is a semi-circular depression on the rim on each side for the convenience of placing the *shang*-goblet (or *erbei*-cup). The lower half has two ventilation holes on each side, and the bottom is engraved with six elongated ash vents. The supporting tray is rectangular, under which there are three oblate wheels arranged in the configuration of the Chinese character 品. On each of the two short sides of the rim is a six-ringed chain with a bow-shaped handle in the middle. There is a dragon head on each end of the handle, biting onto the rings of the chain. The artifact has a creative and ingenious design. The supporting tray is 32.6 cm long and 23.4 cm wide. The full height of the entire artifact is 25.5 cm and weight 10.7 kg (**Figure 3**).

Figure 2: *Yan*-steamer equipped bronze stove with tiger-head flue

Figure 3: Bronze warming burner with *shang*-goblet on three-wheeled tray

Figure 4: Bronze *hu*-jar with wide bands and *pushou*-animal masks holding rings

(E) Bronze *Hu*-Jar With Wide Bands and *Pushou*-Animal Masks Holding Rings

The vessel has a slightly flared mouth, a flat rim with a sharp lip, a long neck, a sloping shoulder, a bulging belly and a tall ring foot. There are two symmetrical *pushou*-animal masks holding rings in their mouths at the inflection point between the shoulder and the belly. The mouth is decorated with one wide band while the shoulder, mid-belly and lower belly are all decorated with two wide bands. The diameter of the mouth is 17.2 cm and the diameter of the base 21.3 cm. The height is 45.6 cm and weight 8.75 kg (**Figure 4**).

II

These five bronze artifacts unearthed from Han tombs at Zuocun Village in Nanhe County, Hebei Province, are of excellent craftsmanship and are elegant in style. Objects such as these have rarely been discovered in archaeological excavations in the Xingtai area. They provide invaluable material for studying the history and culture of the Han dynasty in the Xingtai area. Since there are no inscriptions on the bronzes, they can only be preliminarily dated by typology and by comparing them to related previous archaeological discoveries.

The gilt bronze *boshanlu*-incense burner with engraved coiled-dragon base is similar to artifacts of the same type unearthed in the Western Han tombs in the southern suburban area of Xingtai City;[1] the Han tombs at Wanjigou Village in Yanchi County, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region;[2] the Western Han tomb in Hepu County, Guangxi Province;[3] the Western Han tomb in Maquan Commune [present-day

Figure 5: Long-necked gold-inlaid bronze *hu*-jar with four legendary guardian beasts and geometric patterns

Maquan Subdistrict of Qindu District] in Xianyang City, Shaanxi Province;[4] the Western Han tomb at Hejiayuan Village in Wuhu City, Anhui Province;[5] and in Zibo City, Shandong Province.[6] It should therefore be dated roughly to the late Western Han dynasty. The *boshanlu*-incense burner is a representation of the divine mountain according to the doctrine of the School of Immortality in the Han dynasty. It originated in the Western Han dynasty and rapidly gained popularity, especially among the Han royal family, vassal polities and upper class elites. In the late Western Han dynasty, the *boshanlu*-incense burner was even more widely used; it became more popular among the general population than the upper social class. Even though the *boshanlu*-incense burner gained instant popularity in the Eastern Han dynasty, those of fine craftsmanship are rare; what appeared instead were a large number of pottery *mingqi* [funerary replicas from "real-life" originals] which were simplified versions of the bronze *boshanlu*-incense burner.[7]

The long-necked gold-inlaid bronze *hu*-jar with four legendary guardian beasts and geometric patterns is similar to artifacts of the same type unearthed from the Han tombs at Jingjiashan Village in Nanchang City, Jiangxi Province;[8] the Western Han tomb in Hepu County, Guangxi Province;[9] the Han dynasty hoard of bronze artifacts at Xihe Brigade [present-day Xihe Village] in Fengxiang County, Shaanxi Province;[10] the Han dynasty hoard of bronze artifacts at the Chang'an City site;[11] and the Han tombs at Dongyang Village in Xuyi County, Jiangsu Province.[12] It should also be dated to the late Western Han dynasty. Research has shown that long-necked bronze *hu*-jars originated in the late Western Han dynasty and gradually disappeared during the mid to late Eastern Han dynasty. The shape of the vessel changed during this period – the

ring foot became taller, the neck became longer and the belly was flattened. This type of bronze artifact is mainly found in the Guangdong and Guangxi areas, and it would have been manufactured locally. Those bronze artifacts found outside of the Lingnan area [to the south of the Nan Mountains in present-day Jiangxi, Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan provinces as well as northern Vietnam – **Trans**.], such as in the wealthy areas of ancient Chang'an and Nanyang cities, would have been acquired through purchases or as gratuity. Most long-necked bronze *hu*-jars found in these areas have intricate patterns of fine chisel engraving that are characteristic of premium gifts or expensive commodities.[13] The craft of chisel-engraved decoration was popular in the period between the mid Western Han and late Eastern Han dynasties, which lasted about 300 years. It was particularly in vogue between the late Western Han and early Eastern Han dynasties. Those who were in possession of these bronze artifacts were likely officials or nobility.[14] This long-necked bronze *hu*-jar unearthed at Zuocun Village in Nanhe County has a round and smooth silhouette and intricate and ornate gold inlay with a tight arrangement of well-spaced lines, so it should be a product of the fusion of Northern and Southern chisel engraving craftsmanship.

The *yan*-steamer equipped bronze stove with tiger-head flue is similar in form to the animal-headed stove in the collection of the Museum of Han Dynasty Pictorial Stone Carvings at Lüliang City, Shanxi Province,[15] one in the collection of the Pingshuo Archaeology Team of Shanxi Province,[16] and another in the collection of the Museum of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.[17] It should be dated to the late Western Han dynasty.

The bronze warming burner with *shang*-goblet on three-wheeled tray is similar in form to the wine-warming burner of the Yangxin family in the collection of the Maoling Mausoleum Museum, Shaanxi Province,[18] the wine-warming burner decorated with four legendary guardian beasts in the collection of the Shanxi Provincial Museum [officially renamed the Shanxi Museum in 2005 – **Trans**.],[19] and the wine-warming burner with four legendary guardian beasts in the collection of the Pingshuo Archaeology Team of Shanxi Province.[20] It is dated approximately to the mid to late Western Han dynasty.

The bronze *hu*-jar with wide bands and *pushou*-animal masks holding rings is similar to artifacts of the same type unearthed from Tomb M1 among the tombs of the Western Han dynasty at Sanjiaowei Dike in Tianchang County [present-day Tianchang City], Anhui Province;[21] Tomb M1 of the Han dynasty in Mancheng District of Baoding City, Hebei Province;[22] Tomb M3 of the Western Han dynasty at the Wuzuofen [lit. "Five Tombs"] Mounds in Guanghua County, Hubei Province;[23] and from Yishui County, Shandong Province.[24] It belongs unequivocally to the mid to late Western Han dynasty.

III

In summary, three of these five bronze artifacts from Zuocun Village in Nanhe County, Hebei Province are dated roughly to the late Western Han dynasty, and the other two are from the mid to late Western Han dynasty. Even though it is not possible to reconstruct the relationship and association between these artifacts in their original context, a more conservative date for the two tombs in which they were uncovered should be the late Western Han dynasty. Despite the fact that these Han tombs at Zuocun Village in Nanhe County were repeatedly looted and damaged, many fine artifacts such as these five bronzes were still unearthed. There remains at present a relatively high raised burial mound at the site, suggesting that the tombs' occupants belonged to the higher social elite status.

As documented in the "Treatises on Administrative Geography" in the *History of the Han*, Nanhe County belonged to one of the sixteen counties un-

der the jurisdiction of the Princedom of Guangping during the Western Han dynasty. In the second year of the Yuanshi reign period of Emperor Ping of the Han dynasty [2 CE], there were 27,984 households and 198,558 people in the Princedom of Guangping. The princedom was abolished and the area was renamed as Fuchang Commmandery during the Wang Mang Era.[25] The discovery of Han tombs with bronze artifacts as grave goods in Zuocun Village, Nanhe County offers important information for the study of the history and culture of the Princedom of Guangping during the late Western Han dynasty.

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