



PLATE I. A horned, horrific beast that constitutes one of the handles of the Chinese bronze vessel shown in Plate II. About 1500 B. C.

UNIVERSITY MUSEUM BULLETIN

VOL. 8

MARCH - MAY, 1940

Nos. 2-3

EXHIBITION OF ARCHAIC CHINESE BRONZES

THE Museum is privileged to be able to display, coincidentally with the current Exhibition of Archaic Chinese Jades, a group of early Chinese Bronze Vessels of extraordinary quality and beauty. These have been lent through the courtesy of Mr. C. T. Loo who has had so large a share in the development of the Museum's Chinese collections.

A volume could without difficulty be written on the ceremonial bronzes included in the group: each has a score of points about which it would be tempting to discourse. Yet, fundamentally, it is best that they should speak for themselves, and so we are here presenting largely a photographic record: those who have familiarity with the subject of ancient Chinese bronzes will, it is felt, prefer such a record to lengthy digressions on stylistic points. And those whose acquaintance has not extended far into this exciting field can derive as much from a study of the present reproductions or be encouraged to come and see the very pieces during the period of this temporary exhibition.

A number of the vessels bear important inscriptions whereby it is possible to fix the dates of their making. This is also possible on stylistic grounds: it could not, for instance, escape anyone that the great basin (Plate V) with its highly elaborated detailed ornamentation represents the work of an epoch much later than that which produced the circular vessel on the square base. (Plate II.) The former was made perhaps as late as 400 B. C.; the latter a good thousand years earlier. The other pieces stylistically can be fairly definitely assigned.

It must be confessed that we know pathetically little about the uses to which these vessels were put. It will doubtless never be disclosed in what strange sacrificial rites they were uplifted to the glory of Heaven or to satisfy the souls of departed ancestors.

Even though these problems were to be solved, such a knowledge would not add a whit to our appreciation of the innate beauty and grandeur of these works which few can deny find a place among man's greatest artistic achievements.

H. H. F. J.

PLATE II.

Bronze Bowl.

Two-handed with square base. Stylized coiled dragons with prominent eyes occupy the main panels. Startled, horned beasts form the rugged handles. Shang Dynasty 1763-1122 B. C.



Detail of dragon panels on one side of the square base.

Underside of the vessel, showing small bell suspended from the centre of the base. Perhaps to summon the spirits to a sacrificial ceremony.

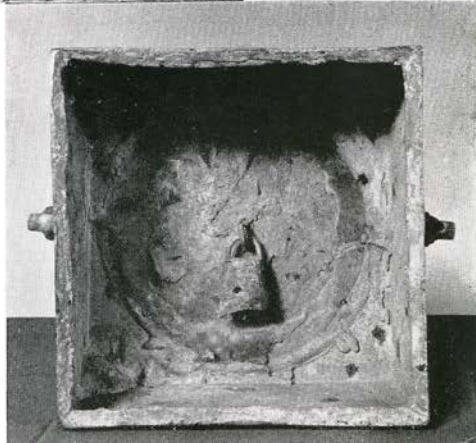


PLATE III.

Covered Tripod.

The ample body on its three stalwart legs is ornamented with three stylized monster-masks separated by heavy flanges. The pairs of twisted-horned animals that form the three high handles are of especial quality.



Both on the inside of the lid and in the bottom of the bowl there is cast a primitive form of the Chinese character *niu*, meaning ox. Inasmuch as *niu* was the family name of Wei Tzu who founded the Sung State about 1123 B. C., it has been thought this vessel pertained to his family. It would, however, seem stylistically to be several centuries earlier.

**Four-legged
Sacrificial Vessel.**

Early Chou Dynasty,
1122-947 B. C.

The decorated bands, filled with stylized animal elements are characteristic of vessels of this epoch. The fine grey-green patina is particularly noteworthy.



Detail of the Vessel.
The monster-mask in the widest band is unusually elaborate; somewhat somnolent beasts fill in the band above which is surmounted by pointed motifs possibly derived from the cicada.





A Noble Cauldron of the Late Eastern Chou. A piece of astonishing intricacy and a masterpiece both of design and casting. The patina is sage green with patches of darker green incrustations. The diameter at the rim is 17 inches. Uninscribed. The monster heads of the ringed handles have a rugged ferocity difficult to find.

PLATE V.

In the body of the vessel the designer would seem to have set himself (and attained) the mark of involving the anatomy of bird and beast in the most complex manner possible.



PLATE VI.

Two Tripod Vessels.

Probably made in the early years of the Chou Dynasty, twelfth century, each has a rich green patina with the details filled with what is supposed to be black lacquer, heightening the decorative effect.



Above:

Ceremonial Vessel.

Late Shang Dynasty.

Left: **Rectangular**

Covered Vessel decorated with the simpler, stronger animal

motives characteristic of the Shang Dynasty.

Right: **Spouted Ceremonial**

Vessel of unusual form, of the same period, but later than

above.





Chimaera-kittens, occupied in nipping their curly tails, provide side supports on the burly tapering handle.

PLATE VII.

Ceremonial Bell.

Of unusually large size. The treatment of the decorative bands on body and handle are characteristic of the Late Eastern Chou epoch. Fine green patina, patched with blue.



The main panel, below the bosses on either side, contains double-bodied monsters which share a single fierce and staring face.