

A Typological Study of the Palace Buildings at Zhouyuan and Related Issues

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The Zhouyuan ruins, located in the northern portion of Qishan and Fufeng Counties, Shaanxi, are the remnants of the capital city established by the Zhou headman Gugong Danfu around the end of the 12th or beginning of the 11th century BCE. Later, King Wen moved the capital to the city of Feng, but Zhouyuan remained an important center of Zhou governmental activities until the later years of the Western Zhou Dynasty.

Through several years' effort of the archaeologists, a number of rammed earth foundations associated with palace buildings have been discovered. The principal among these include the building foundations at the four sites of Fengchu in Qishan County; and Shaochen, Yuntang, and Qizhen in Fufeng County (Figure 1).

Based on a summary of the typology of the palace building ruins at Zhouyuan, this article adduces Shang

Dynasty archaeological materials from the Central Plains area to assist in an analysis of the characteristics and development of the Zhouyuan palace buildings, followed by an investigation of the relationship between the Shang and Zhou cultures.

I. The Archaeological Discovery of the Zhouyuan Palace Buildings

1. The Fengchu Ruins are situated atop a large rammed-earth platform measuring 45.2m long from north to south, 32.5m wide from east to west, and approximately 1.3m high. This was a complex of buildings with two courtyards arranged along the longitudinal axis, opening southwards at an orientation of 170°. It was comprised of a gate-screen, two gatehouses, a front hall, a rear building, and two side rooms on the eastern and western sides (Figure 2).

Based on potsherds contained in the oracle bone pits associated with the western side room, the sacrificial pits associated with the front hall, cellar-pits in the western side room and the western portion of the rear courtyard, and other trace remains, it can be determined that the Fengchu buildings were first built in the Proto-Zhou period and that their period of use was nearly identical to the lifespan of the Western Zhou dynasty.

Considering the building style and the long period of use of the Fengchu ruins, the fact that two storage caches in the western side room

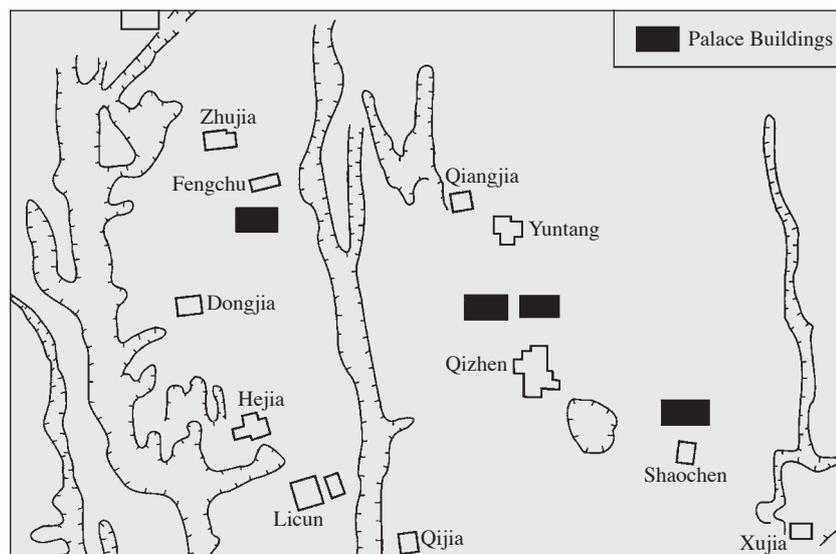


Figure 1. The locations of the Zhouyuan Palace Ruins

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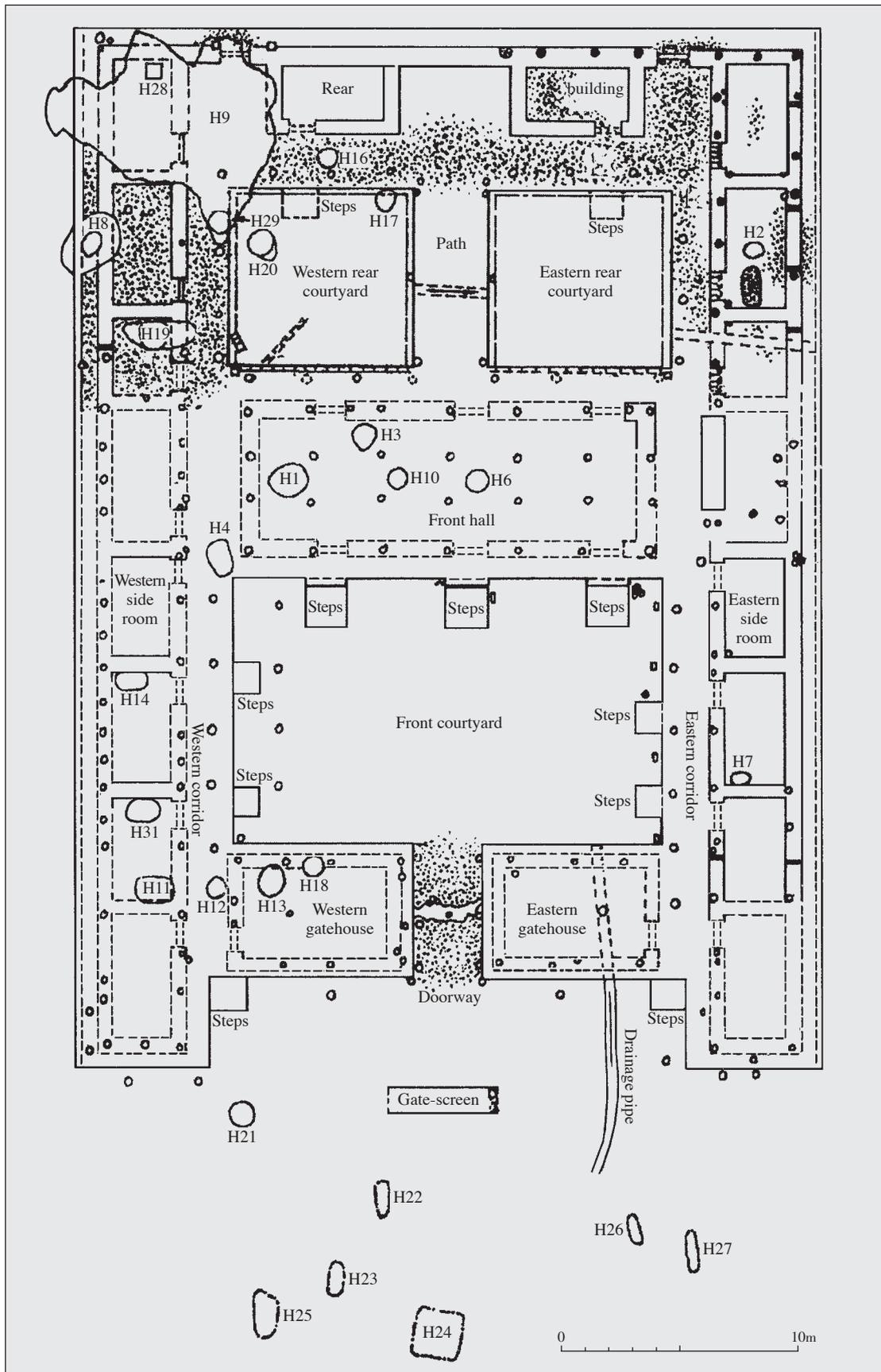


Figure 2. Plan of the Fengchu Building Ruins

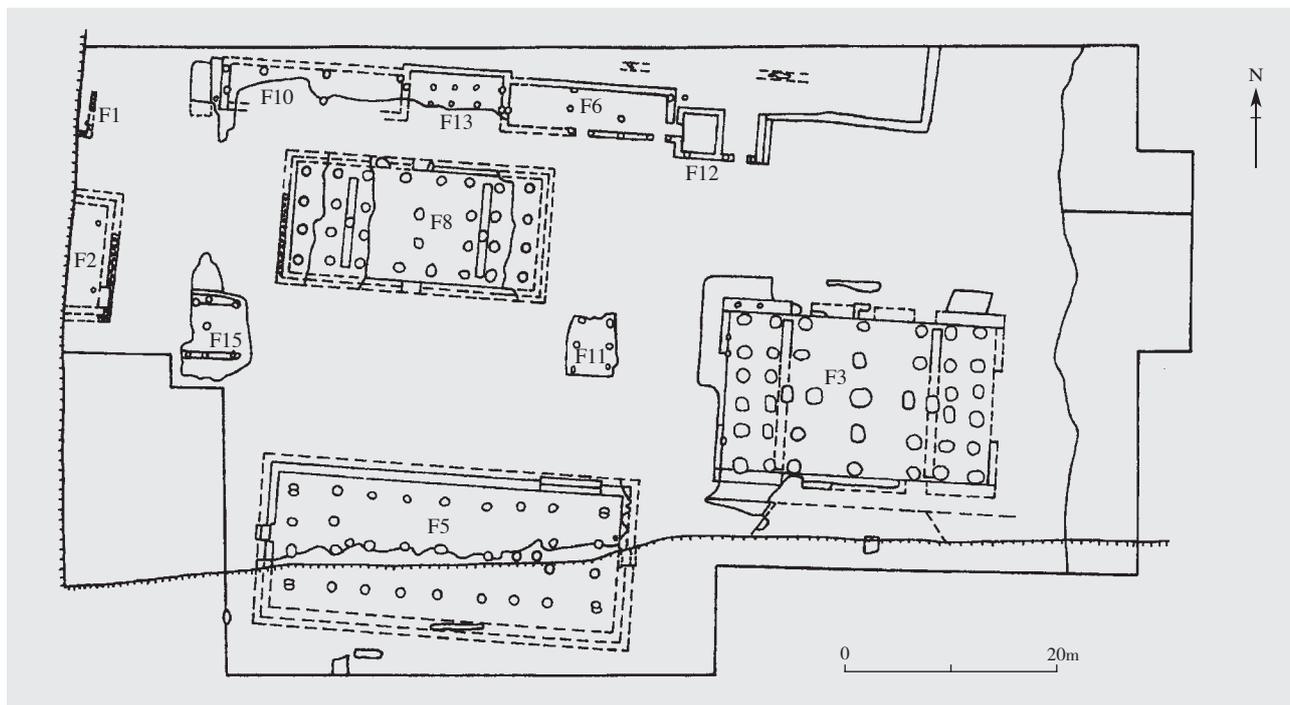


Figure 3. Plan of the Shaochen Building Complex

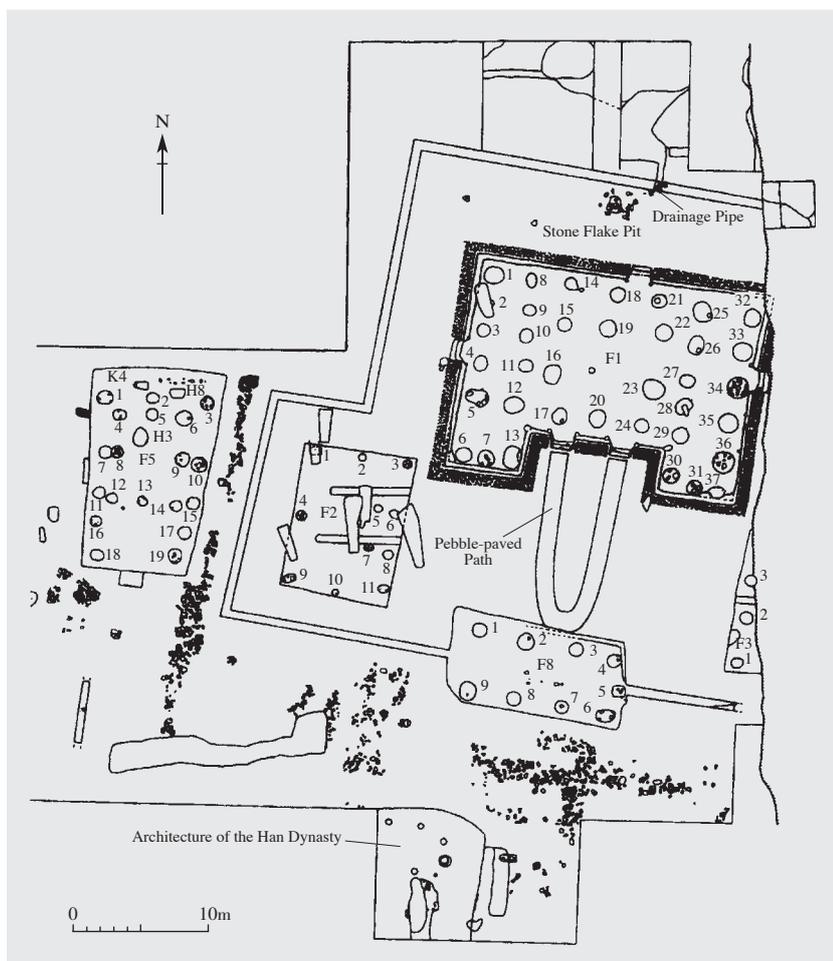


Figure 4. Plan of the Yuntang Building Ruins

preserved large numbers of inscribed oracle bones, and other points, the author is prone to believe that the ruins are those of an ancestral temple.

2. The Shaochen Ruins in Fufeng County are comprised of 15 separate ruins discovered to date, including a lower stratum of 2 buildings (F7 and F9), incompletely preserved; and an upper level of 13 buildings, of which F3, F5, and F8 are relatively large and preserved relatively well (Figure 3).

The ruins that have been excavated at Shaochen to date represent only a portion of the extensive expanse of a palace complex present at one point, and the relations between individual buildings are somewhat unclear. Based on the portions already known, it seems that building F8 was the main body and that it comprised a single architectural unit along with buildings F11, F15, F10, F13, F6, and F12. This complex included a front hall

(F8), left and right wings (F11 and F15), and rear chambers (F10, F13, F6, F12).

Although the central axis of building F5 deviates somewhat from those of F8 and F13, it corresponds with the overall north-south orientation of the above complex. Based on its position, scale, and structure, it may also have been a component of this complex.

As for buildings F1, F2, F4, F14, and others, there is as yet no way to discuss the issue of their likely groupings.

Based on stratigraphic evidence, the excavators surmise that the buildings of the lower stratum might have been built at the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty and were probably abandoned around the latter phase of the early Western Zhou. Those of the upper stratum were probably first built in the Mid-Western Zhou period and abandoned during the late Western Zhou.

Judging from their layout and scale, the buildings of the Shaochen group were probably a palace compound of the Western Zhou era; there can be little doubt concerning this point. Among them, F2, F3, F5 and F8 were probably devoted to political and religious ritual. F5 and F8 seem to have been intended as separate inner and outer courts. F3 is likely to have been intended for ritual activities different from those conducted at F5 and F8. The row of buildings with F13 at its heart was probably used as residential space. Among these, F13 may well have been the “central hall;” F6 and F10, residential rooms; and F12, the eastern kitchen (as it still contains traces of a burnt floor surface, etc.).

3. The Yuntang Ruins include buildings labeled F1, F2, F3, F5 and F8 (Figure 4). These have been divided into two compounds. F1, F2, F3, and F8 have been assigned to one compound, based on the fact that they made up a coherent four-sided courtyard in a 冂-shaped plan. F1 was the main building (i.e., the main palace hall) and was situated on the north side facing south; F2 and F3 were subsidiary buildings (i.e. addi-

tional palaces), while F8 was the gatehouse. Enclosures drawn out from both sides of F8 bent at right angles, forming a 冂-shape enclosing the three palace halls.

F5 was situated on the west side of the compound described above and belonged to a distinct architectural unit.

Judging from stratigraphic evidence, F1-F8 belonged to the late Western Zhou period. The excavators believe that they were the ancestral temple compound of a high-ranking Western Zhou aristocratic family.

4. The Qizhen Ruins: The Western Zhou ruins at Qizhen include buildings F4, F7 and F9 (Figure 5).

This group of buildings belonged to a single architectural complex. F4 was the main hall and was situated on the north side facing south; F9 was a gatehouse oriented northward facing F4; F7, to the southeast of F4, was the east wing. There was probably a corresponding west wing situated to the southwest of F4 and facing F7; unfortunately, it has already been completely

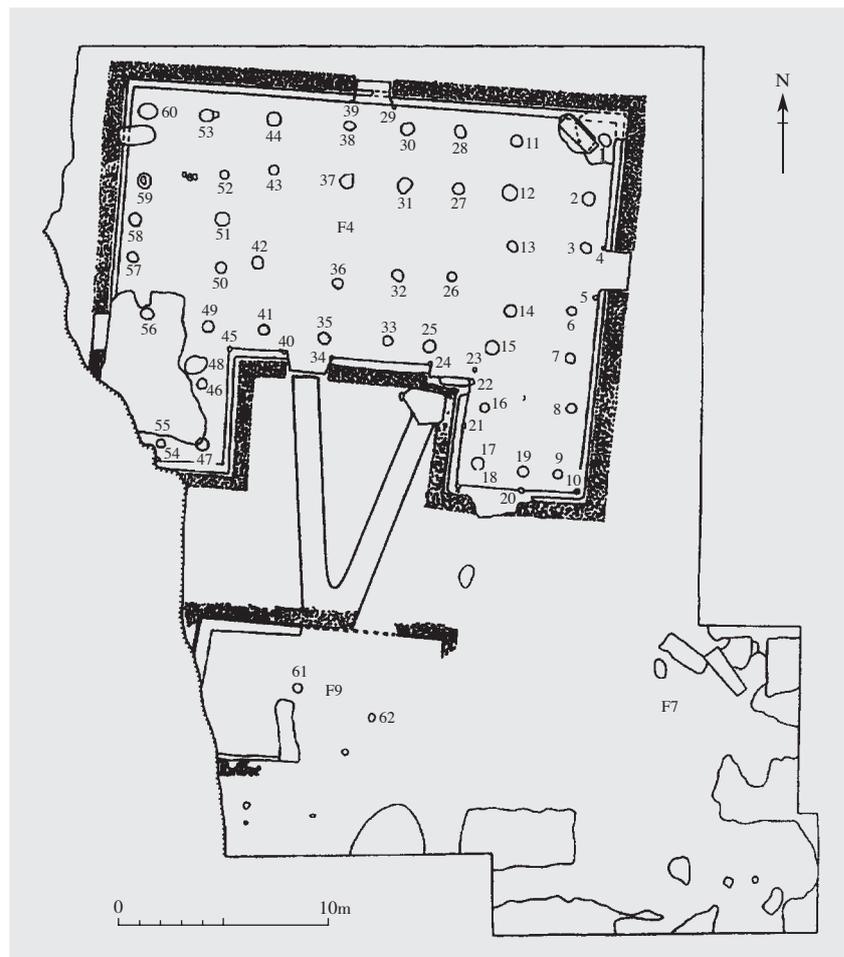


Figure 5. Plan of the Qizhen Building Ruins

destroyed. F6, discovered in this location, is definitely not the ruin of a palace hall.

This group of buildings belonged to the late Western Zhou period; they may have been an ancestral temple.

II. The Types of the Zhouyuan Palace

Buildings

1. Based on the characteristics of the arrangement of the buildings, the four major building ruins discovered at Zhouyuan to date can be divided into two sorts: Sort A, “closely-linked” style and Sort B, “scattered-point” style.

The Fengchu ruins belong to Sort A. They form a quadrangle with front and rear courtyards. The main palace hall was situated between these, with a gatehouse in the front, and a residential area at the rear, and two porticoes on the left and right. The main characteristic of this “closely-linked style” of arrangement is that the main and subsidiary halls are joined closely together as a single unit, forming a closed grouping of buildings and eliminating the need to set up a separate enclosure.

Sort B is represented best by the Yuntang ruins. These form a complete courtyard compound with the main palace situated in the center, accompanying palace buildings on the front left and front right, and a gatehouse in the immediate front. Although the Qizhen architectural complex has been incomplete, one can say without too great error that their arrangement is essentially the same as that of the Yuntang buildings. The main characteristic of this “scattered-point style” of arrangement is that the main building and the subsidiary buildings form a 田-shape, each standing independently rather than linked together, such that a specialized enclosure must be built in order to define the margins of the compound.

The spatial relationships between the various buildings of the Shaochen ruins are somewhat complex. They obviously belonged to the same group of buildings, and F8, F11, and F15 basically form a 田-shaped arrangement. They seem to have constituted a coherent architectural complex, along with buildings F10, F13, F6, and F12, but they lacked a gatehouse; it may be that the entire group of buildings made use of a common gatehouse located still further south. The dimensions of building F5 are larger than those of F8, and it is positioned on a different longitudinal axis than F8; it likely belonged to a different architectural unit. F3 and F2 also likely belonged to different and mutually distinct architectural units. F2, F3, and F5 were clearly all main halls, but because the nearby ruins have been badly

damaged, it is impossible to know whether or not they had subsidiary buildings, and so the shapes of their original plans are also unclear.

There are further differences between the two types described above. First, with respect to the orientation of the buildings, those of Sort A faced southwards with an eastern inclination, while those of Sort B faced southwards with a western inclination. Second, the amounts of roof tiles differed between the two; the buildings of Sort A used very few roof tiles, while those of Sort B used many. Third, the two types handled water diversion and paving differently; in buildings of Sort B, building aprons and paths within courtyards were often paved with cobblestones, a phenomenon that did not occur in Sort A. Were these various distinctions due to differences in period, cultural differences, or some other factor? This question is worthy of attention.

2. With respect to the shape and composition of the structures, the palace buildings discovered to date at Zhouyuan (here we will limit the discussion to the main buildings) can be divided into three types.

Type A is that of the main building of the Fengchu ruins. The foundation was rectangular, with a length-to-width ratio of approximately 1:2.3 (including the 1.2m width of the northern porch outside the wall). A network of pillars was distributed evenly and at equidistant points about the structure, forming a longitudinally and transversely symmetrical pattern. The internal space (taking pillars or walls as boundary lines) was transverse, even, and broken into parallel divisions, such that there was almost no distinction between main hall and rooms.

Type B is represented by buildings F3, F5, and F8 of the Shaochen ruins. The foundations were rectangular, with length-to-width ratios ranging from 1:1.6 to 1:2.2. Pillar networks were arranged in an asymmetrical, non-equidistant fashion. The internal spaces were cut crosswise into three areas, of which the center was a bright, spacious hall forming a rectangle or a near square, while the two sides were cramped, narrow boxes. Naturally, there were some differences between the three buildings. For example, F3 and F8 retained traces of partitioning walls (*Xu*), while F5 did not; moreover, there were differences between the length-to-width ratios of the foundations and the distribution of the pillar networks.

Type C is represented by building F1 at Yuntang and building F4 at Qizhen. The building foundations are in a 卍-shape, with length-to-width ratios of approximately 1:1.3. The pillars were distributed at varying distances

from each other; the distribution was symmetrical along the longitudinal axis but not the transverse one. The interior space was divided into left, right, center, and rear areas; the hall was in the center front area and was broad and spacious, while the left and right areas were narrow and boxy, and the rear was devoted to rooms; all were relatively narrow.

In sum, we can see that the palace buildings discovered at Zhouyuan to date include a lone example of Sort A of building arrangement, while the Sort B is commonly found.

III. Tracing the Origins of the Zhouyuan

Palace Buildings

It is the author's opinion that the palace buildings of Sort A at Zhouyuan mainly exhibited the characteristics of palace constructions of the Central Plains culture, while that of Sort B mainly exhibited those of the cultures of the western reaches of ancient China.

Through comparative analysis of the distribution, grouping, and structure of the buildings, along with other factors, we can discover that the palace buildings of Sort A at Zhouyuan have a great deal in common with the palace buildings of the Shang Dynasty, both in Henan and elsewhere, in terms of layout and structure. There is almost no question that the two modes of construction share a developmental relationship; that is, the Zhouyuan palace buildings of Sort A were built according to the basic system and essential elements of Shang palace buildings (Figures 6 and 7).

Shang Dynasty palace buildings clearly were not the direct forerunners of the Sort B of Zhouyuan palace buildings. With effort, their distant antecedents may perhaps be traced back to the large-scale house ruin F1 of the Banpo Site near Xi'an and the large-scale house ruin F901 of the Dadiwan Yangshao Culture ruins at Qin'an, Gansu. They share the notable characteristic of having two separate use-spaces, a "front hall" and a "back room," set up under the same roof, with clear divi-

sions and a substantial difference in dimensions between the primary and the secondary space.

Based on the materials currently available, it would appear that the Sort B of Zhouyuan palace ruins are representative of a culture of the "Western Lands (Translator's note: the western reaches of the ancient Chinese cultural sphere)."

IV. The Ethnic Attribution of the Fengchu Buildings

Why there have been two different kinds of palace buildings at Zhouyuan? The author is inclined to believe that it was due to distinctions in ethnic attribution. It goes without saying that the Western Zhou palace buildings discovered at Zhouyuan were closely connected with the Zhou people, but not all would agree that some among them were inextricably connected with the Shang. In reality, however, the palace buildings at Fengchu are quite close to those of the Shang in structure, layout, and other aspects.

Not only the Fengchu buildings have Shang cultural characteristics with respect to both arrangement and

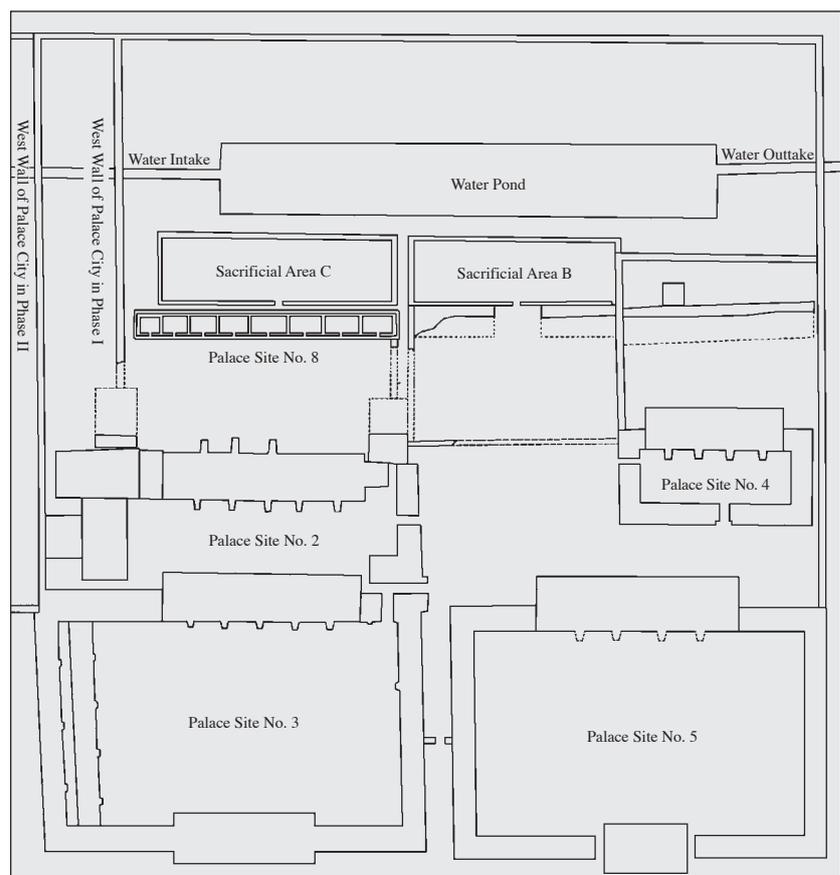


Figure 6. Plan of the Palace City of the Shang City at Yanshi

buildings at Zhouyuan that exhibit characteristics of Shang palace building modes; they were a “special case” of Zhouyuan palace building.

The Fengchu ruins and the palace buildings of the Xia and Shang in the Central Plains area have common characteristics traceable to a shared origin; or we may consider it the case that they were a transplantation of Shang palace buildings to Zhouyuan. The oracle bone inscriptions recovered from storage pits in the Fengchu ruins, based on their contents, word usage, calligraphic style, hole shape, method of bone and shell preparation, and other criteria, were certainly the product of Zhou hands. From these oracle bone inscriptions we learn that before the conquest of Shang, the Zhou established an ancestral temple devoted to the Shang kings at Zhouyuan, where they conducted devotional activities; after the conquest of Shang, the Zhou maintained the temple to the Shang kings at Zhouyuan. From this we can perhaps boldly surmise: The Fengchu palace ruins may be the remnants of an ancestral temple devoted to the Shang kings and constructed by the Zhou based on the palace-building models of the Shang ethnic group. They may first have been built during the time of the Shang King Di Xin and remained in use until the late Western Zhou period. In these temple halls, the historical drama of the Shang-Zhou upheaval was once staged.

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