The Cache of Valuable Western Zhou Bronzes at Wujunxicun, Fufeng, Shaanxi

Baoji Municipal Institute of Archaeology
Fufeng County Museum

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The Placement of the Cache

Wujunxicun is located in Chengguan Township, 5km to the west of the county seat of Fufeng county, in the province of Shaanxi. In the afternoon of November 8, 2006, while repairing a ditch on a natural rise to the north of the village, a local villager discovered a cache of bronzes (2006FWXJ1, abbreviated below as J1).

The small, nearly round opening of the cache was 130cm below the current ground level. The cache was placed in a pocket-shaped pit measuring 90cm in diameter; the flat floor of the pit measured 104cm in diameter and 80cm from the opening in depth. The wall of the pit had not been smoothed out. The earth filling the cache was comparatively pure and practically identical in texture to that of the surrounding area.

Because the cache was so small, the bronzes were packed quite tightly on the floor and pushed up tightly against the wall (Figures 1 & 2).

Items Recovered

A total of 27 items and/or sets of items were recovered from the cache. By way of bronzes, there were one ding-cauldron, two gui-tureens, two zun-urns, five yongzhong-bells, three dou-ladles, twelve mao-spears, and a single set of horse accoutrements comprising 103 items. A white jade ornament of Han dynasty provenance was also found. The spears, cauldron, dippers, horse accoutrements, jade ornament, and other items were all placed inside the bellies of the bells.

Ding-cauldron with line decoration (J1:2): This vessel, which was placed inside of yongzhong-bell number J1:1, had already broken apart at the time of excavation. It has a sharply angled rim, a slightly inwardly gathered mouth, upright ears, a hanging belly, and three pillar-shaped feet. A comparatively thick layer of soot covered its outer walls and bottom. Its neck bears a ring of line decoration, and it lacks one ear. The bottom of the vessel bears obvious mold marks. It is 16.4cm tall, and its mouth is 16.2cm in diameter (Figures 3 & 4).

Fu Xin gui (J1:9): This vessel has a worn mouth, a deep belly, and a round, bugle-shaped foot. Its neck is decorated with hanging-crested, long-tailed phoenix motifs, and its round foot bears a looping belt motif. The four-character inscription 作父辛□ (“a ?-vessel cast for
Bo Mei Fu gui (J1:10): This gui-tureen was placed in the belly of yongzhong-bell J1:5; the tureen itself in turn contained three dou-ladles. It has a sharply angled rim. The inner and outer surfaces of which both bear raised ridges. It has an obliquely arching belly, a rounded bottom, and a round, trumpet-shaped foot. The belly bears earthen ridges, and the round foot is decorated with double rings. The six-character inscription “白父作宝簋” (“Bo Mei casts a precious bronze”) is cast into the inside bottom of the vessel. The vessel is 14cm tall; its mouth was 19.2cm in diameter, and its round foot was 128cm in diameter (Figure 3:1).

Fifth-year Zhousheng zun (2 vessels): The form, decoration, size, and inscriptions of these two vessels are essentially identical. J1:7 has a slanted, outwardly flared rim, a pinched neck, a deep, angled belly, and a concave bottom. The shoulder of the vessel is encircled by a double ring motif consisting of nested “U” shapes with their mouths facing to the left. The body of the vessel bears a belt of linked triangle decorations against a background of fine, raised, straight vertical lines. The vessel bears four mold seams running from the rim all the way down to the bottom, showing that the outer mold used to produce it consisted of four parts of equal size. The bottom portion was produced with a single mold and bears mold cracks as well as casting faults and mold separation faults. The inner surface was produced using a single large inner mold, and the inscription was cast with a separ-
Figure 4. Fifth-year Zhousheng zun-vessels
1. 2006FWXJ1:7  2. 2006FWXJ1:8 (Scale: 1/6)

Figure 5. Fifth-year Zhousheng zun-vessel
(2006FWXJ1:8)

Figure 6. Rubbing of the Fifth-year Zhousheng zun-vessel (2006FWXJ1:7) (Scale: 7/10)
rate mold chunk that was inserted into the inner mold. The vessel is 32 cm tall, and its mouth is 32.4 cm in diameter (Figures 4:1; 5; 6). The inner wall of the vessel bears an inscription of 113 characters, as follows:

唯五年九月初吉召
姜以新生臣五寻壶
两以君氏命曰余老止
我仆庸土田多刺弋
许勿变散亡余宕其
三汝宕其二其兄公
其弟乃余鍧大璋报
妇氏帛束璜一有司遵
登两扆瑞生对扬朕
宗君休用作召公尊

J1:8 bears paired ring decorations composed of “U” shapes that open to the right. The body was produced with four outer mold pieces of equal size; the bottom was produced with a single mold and bears traces of both the holes used to pour bronze into the mold and the junctions between mold pieces. The inner wall of the vessel bears an inscription of 133 characters, a portion of which underwent casting repairs. The vessel is 31 cm tall, and its mouth is 31.8 cm in diameter (Figure 4:2).

Yongzhong-bells (5 total): The bodies of the bells are

Figure 7. Bronze yongzhong-bells (Scale: 7/10)
shaped like two curved tiles linked together, and their shanks are hollow.

J1:1 has a pillar-shaped shank surrounded by a protrusion but lacking a suspension ring. The stem is decorated with patterns of fine, raised lines interspersed with studs. The upper surface of the bell surrounding the shank is unadorned, while the middle and lower portions of the bell bear fine, raised spiral decorations. The upper part of the bell face and the decorative sections adorning the face are demarcated by a round belt of small studs. The bosses are pointed; the two lines of bosses nearest the upper part of the bell face are seriously worn. The right-hand portion of the striking area lacks a marking for the second fundamental tone. The interior surface of the bell is flat and broad, with no visible traces of scraping. The bell is 53.8cm tall; the shank is 18.4cm long, the flat top section is 23.5cm long, and the walls are 1.1cm thick (Figure 7:1).

J1:3 has both a shank protrusion and a suspension ring; the suspension ring is free from decoration, while the shank protrusion bears patterns of fine, raised lines interspersed with studs. The flat top of the bell is decorated with spiral patterns, while the middle and lower portions bear patterns of fine, raised lines. A round belt of studs demarcates the upper bell face and the decorative sections adorning the face. The bosses are pointed; the two uppermost lines of bosses are seriously worn. The right-hand portion of the striking area lacks a marking for the second fundamental tone. The interior surface of the bell is flat and broad, with no visible traces of scraping. The bell is 49.5cm tall; the shank is 16.5cm tall; the flat top of the bell is 22.4cm across; and the walls of the bell are 0.8cm thick (Figure 7:2).

J1:4 has both a shank protrusion and a flat suspension ring. The flat top of the bell bears spiral line patterns. Patterns of raised lines separate the upper bell face and the decorative sections adorning the bell face. The decorative sections bear qiequ-dragon decorations, while the upper bell face bears a clan insignia. The right-hand portion of the striking face bears a marking for the second fundamental tone in the form of a small bird with a tall crest. The inner surface of the bell is broad and flat, with no traces of scraping. The bell is 49.7cm tall; the flat upper surface is 24.8cm across; the wall of the bell is 0.8cm thick (Figure 7:3).

The decoration of J1:5 is essentially similar to that of the above vessel. The right-hand portion of the drum bears a mark indicating the second fundamental tone. The left and right sides of the interior of the belly of the bell bear matched pairs of six tuning grooves (Figure 8:1).

J1:6 has both a shank protrusion and a flat suspension ring; the flat top of the bell bears spiral line patterns. The shank protrusion is decorated with studs. The flat top portion of the bell bears cloud decorations, while the upper part of the bell face is plain; the area between the seals
bears quanjie-dragon decorations, and the drum of the bell bears modified qiequ decorations. The right side of the drum bears a phoenix decoration where the marking for the second fundamental tone should be. The inside of the belly of the bell bears six tuning grooves. The shank bears an inscription of 17 characters: “□ Zhong Yan casts a precious bell; may Zhong’s sons’ sons and grandsons’ grandsons eternally treasure [it] 仲衍作宝钟仲其万年子子孙孙永宝.” The bell is 49cm tall, and the shank is 16cm long; the flat upper portion of the bell is 25.7cm long, and the wall of the bell is 1.2cm thick (Figure 8:2).

Five of the bells belong to different sets. Two of them are of comparatively early date; the upper bell faces and the decorative insets adorning the faces are divided by a round band of small studs, and the insets are decorated with fine, raised spirals. The right-hand portions of the drums lack a marking for the second fundamental tone. The interior surfaces are flat and broad, with no visible traces of scraping.

Ladles: three items were recovered (J1:11–13). Their shape, size, and decoration are all basically identical. They were placed inside of a gui-vessel with ridge decorations (J10), which was in turn placed inside of one of the yongzhong-bells (J1:5). They have pinched mouths, drum-shaped bellies, and rounded feet. One side of each ladle bears a round ear in the shape of an animal head, and one side bears a long handle. The handles are carved with openwork decorations in the shape of two-headed dragons; a single, small, modified dragon decoration is also found near the side of each handle. The upper belly of each ladle bears a modified cicada decoration, and the lower portion bears ridge decorations. Fish-scale decorations are carved onto the round feet. The ladles are 5.8cm tall with mouths 7.1 × 6.6cm in diameter; the handles are 9.2cm long (Figures 3:3; 9).

Spars: 12 items (J1:14–25). The spears were placed inside of yongzhong-bell J1:4. They are nearly identical in shape with small differences in size. The spears...
are double-edged, with raised spines, sharp points, and round sockets. They range in length from 34.7 cm to 36.5 cm (Figure 10).

Horse accoutrements: one set (J1:27) comprising 103 items, of which 102 are of bronze and one of jade (Figure 11).

“+”-shaped connectors: 3 items. J1:27-1 is in the shape of an animal face; it measures 5 cm by 5.2 cm.

“X”-shaped connectors: 6 items. J1:27-2 is in the shape of an animal face; it measures 5.3 cm long and 4.8 cm wide.

Square containers (?) with animal faces: 5 items. J1:27-3 is in the shape of an animal face with two large ears and a decoration in the shape of a water caltrop in the center of the forehead. The mouth is open, and the teeth are bared. The item measures 1.8 cm by 2 cm.

Skewers (?): 10 items. J1:27-4 is 4.6 cm long and 3 cm wide.

Bronze pipes: 78 items. J1:27-5 is 1.7 cm long and 1.1 cm in diameter.

Bone joint (?): 1 item. J1:27-6 is 32 cm long and 0.7 cm by 1 cm in diameter.

Jade ornaments: 1 item. J1:26, composed of white marble, is 3.6 cm long and 4.7 cm wide at its widest point. Its surface bears five concave grooves. A hole in its center is 2 cm in diameter.

The Dating of the Cached Bronzes and Related Questions

1. The cache and the dating of the bronzes

The cache was found in the Zhouyuan area, in a stratum of earth beneath the local worked soil; the surrounding, reddish-brown soil was comparatively dry and contained white threads of alkaline binding material. For the most part, it seems to have been formed during the Spring and Autumn period. The fact that the opening of the cache was found underneath this layer shows that the cache cannot have been created later than the Spring and Autumn period, but was probably deposited during the Western Zhou. The bronze implements it contained were preserved comparatively well. The variety of vessel types and forms covered a wide chronological range; early-late Western Zhou vessels were all represented.

The five bells found in the cache probably belonged to different sets of bianzhong. J1:1 and J1:3 seem comparatively early, with belts of small studs dividing the decorative insets from the rest of the upper bell face and fine, cloud-shaped patterns of raised lines filling the decorative insets; these bells also lack marks indicating the second fundamental tone. The inner portions are broad and flat, lacking any traces of scraping. These bells are probably of Early Western Zhou date, while the remaining three bells date to the late Western Zhou.

The shape of the ding-cauldron with line decoration resembles that of the Wei ding discovered at Dongjiacun, Qishan, in places, and so it should be dated to the middle Western Zhou.

The Fu Xin gui is probably also a middle Western Zhou vessel. There are received bronze vessels known as the Fifth Year Zhousheng gui (also called the Shaobo Hu gui) and the Sixth Year Zhousheng gui (also called the Shaobo Hu gui); these are generally dated to the reigns of King Li or King Xuan. The Zhousheng mentioned in the inscriptions of the hu recovered from this cache is presumably the same person mentioned in those of these Zhousheng gui; the contents of the various inscriptions are related. Based on this fact, we hold that the hu recovered from the Wujun cache should be dated to the reign of the Western Zhou King Li; the phrase “in the king’s fifth year” found in their inscriptions would then refer to the fifth year of King Li’s reign.

The Bo Mei Fu gui should be dated to the late Western Zhou.

The five bianzhong belong to different periods; two of them are early Western Zhou bells, while three date to the late Western Zhou.

Western Zhou-era spears are rarely found in general and even more rarely seen in Western Zhou bronze caches. Given that their shapes already show some Spring and Autumn-period characteristics, the spears may well be the latest items found in the Wujun cache; they probably date to the late Western Zhou.

2. The depositor of the cache and its academic significance

Five of the vessels excavated from the cache bore inscriptions, including a set of bells bearing a clan insignia. We feel that these bronzes belonged to a single household, and based on the inscriptions, the depositor of the cache may well have been Zhousheng. Zhousheng was presumably a member of a lineage belonging to the Shao clan. The discovery of the Zhousheng zun shows clearly that Zhousheng’s household lived in the area of present-day Wujun, which area fell within the sphere of influence of the Shao clan. The Fifth Year and Sixth Year Zhousheng gui vessels, both handed down to the present day, may well originally have emerged from this area.

The identical inscriptions of the two large-mouthed
zun-vessels record that in order to settle a lawsuit due to “whittling away at servants and land” (仆庸土田多刺), Zhousheng gave gifts to Shao Jiang, and Shao Jiang, in the name of the lineage head, requested lenient handling of Zhousheng’s household. In combination with the received Fifth Year and Sixth Year Zhousheng gui vessels, the Zhousheng zun vessels offer a complete reflection of the process of a protracted lawsuit over “whittling away at servants and land” (仆庸土田多刺) carried out during the reign of the Western Zhou King Li. The vessels have thereby provided additional textual evidence supporting research on the land management system of the Western Zhou period.

In addition, scholars hold that the Ji-surnamed Zhou people generally did not use names based on days of the week, but the inscription of the phoenix-patterned gui contains the phrase 父辛 (“Father Xin”). We consider it a bit too simple to explain this in terms of the exchange of vessels within a household; might there not be another explanation? Shaogong enjoyed very high status and a great deal of influence during the Western Zhou era. Concerning Zhougong (the Duke of Zhou) and Shaogong (the Duke of Shao), the Zhoushu portion of the Shangshu records: “The Duke of Shao was the Protector and the Duke of Zhou was the Marshal, and they assisted King Cheng on his left and right” (召公为保, 周公为师, 相成王作右). The fact that Shaogong appears before Zhougong affords some food for thought. Some scholars hold that Shaogong and Zhougong were older and younger brothers, respectively, but in the “Generations of the House of the Duke of Shao of Yan” chapter of the Shiji, Sima Qian says only, “The Duke of Shao and the Duke of Zhou had the same surname; both belonged to the Ji clan.” The inscriptions of the various early bronzes from the state of Yan, both received and excavated, are not lacking in names based on days of the week. These new material should thereby attract significant attention from researchers examining issues touching on Shaogong and the Shao clan.

Note: The original report was published in Wenwu 文物 (Cultural Relics) 2007.8: 4–27, with 45 illustrations, including 18 photographs and 15 rubbings. The authors were Liu Junshe 刘军社, Hu Shesheng 胡社生, Xin Yihua 辛怡华, Wang Yutang 汪玉堂, and Wang Hao 王颢. The present version is revised by Liu Junshe and translated into English by Nick Vogt.