

# The Niaozhuan Hu

International Antiques Fair / Hong Kong / May 26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017





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# The *Niaozhuan Hu*

International Antiques Fair  
Hong Kong  
May 26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017

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Deydier Hong Kong Ltd  
4/F Wing Sing Commercial Centre – 12-16 Wing Lok Street  
Sheung Wan – Hong Kong

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Galerie Christian Deydier  
30, rue de Seine 75006 Paris, France  
Tel.: + 33 (0) 1 40 20 97 34 – Fax: + 33 (0) 1 40 20 97 39  
galerie@deydier.com – [www.galeriechristiandeydier.com](http://www.galeriechristiandeydier.com)



# Foreword

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The International Antiques Fair held in Hong Kong every May is the major and most anxiously awaited event of the Asian antiquities market's yearly calendar. The objects displayed by the participants are always among the most beautiful, rare and desirable in the world, making the International Antiques Fair an ephemeral museum created by a group of the world's leading dealers.

This year I must once again try to surpass myself and surprise and astonish collectors and art lovers by showing not only an exceptional, but also an almost unique and extraordinarily beautiful object. It is a great privilege for me, for the first time in my long career, to be able to present an extraordinary Chinese bronze vessel *Hu* inlaid with silver and dating from the beginning of the Han dynasty. If the shape of this vessel was quite common during the early Han dynasty, the decoration using the very esoteric writing known as *niao zhuan* (bird-style seal characters) or *niao chong shu* (bird and insect script) make the vessel one of the only three pieces with such an inscription known in the whole world. This rare and beautiful vessel is truly a masterpiece of the "Bronze Age" of China, and the only such vessel still outside of China and in private hands.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank those who have helped me in the different stages in the preparation and production of this catalogue: Vincent Girier Dufournier, who has so skillfully photographed this exceptional object; Vincent Pradier, who has produced this catalogue; Ed O'Neill for his great help in the research and translation of the inscription and the translation of the catalogue into English, and finally Clémence Artur, my assistant, who has supervised the whole process from beginning to end and has made it possible for me to present this superb catalogue.

Christian Deydier









# *The Niaozhuan Hu*



# The *Niaozhuan* Hu

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**An extremely rare bronze wine vessel in the shape of a *Hu***  
**Bronze inlaid in silver**  
**China, Early Western Han dynasty, 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.**  
**Height: 44 cm, Diameter: 34 cm**

An extremely rare, large, pear-shaped vessel for fermented beverages, topped by a long, gradually outwardly expanding neck and supported on a high, ring-shaped foot.

The body of this imposing vessel is completely embellished with a sumptuous decor produced with finely inlaid thread-like interlacing silver strands forming a variety of intricate, quasi-arabesque patterns, which end at their extremities in spirals capped with stylised birds' heads. On closer inspection, these motif-like patterns are found, in fact, to be a rare and sophisticated form of Chinese characters known as '*niaozhuan*' (鳥篆, literally 'bird-style seal characters') or '*niaochongshu*' (鳥蟲書, 'bird and insect writing').

The upper section of the neck of the vessel is inlaid with a band of fantasized animals interspersed with geometric patterns, all of whose extremities also end in stylised birds' heads.

The neck of the vessel, its shoulder and the lower section of its body are decorated with large bands of elaborate motifs produced with fine silver lines, sometimes single and sometimes doubled, which intersect to form elaborate and complex patterns ending in spirals which often take the form of stylised birds' heads seen in profile, with beaks that are straight or hooked, long or short, or in an entirely different form, and whose heads are sometimes crowned with a long crest.

Each large band of bird and insect script design on the vessel is separated by a smaller band decorated with silver inlays of geometric motifs interspersed with animals, both real and imaginary, but always auspicious creatures such as dragons, tigers and semi-human spirits.

Two *taotie* masks in light relief with moveable ring handles emerging from their snouts are fixed on the shoulder of the vessel, one on each side. The beasts' edges, their eyebrows, noses and eyes are all inlaid with fine strands of silver.

The lower section of the vessel's stomach is inlaid with elaborate but smaller motifs composed of double silver inlaid lines ending in stylised birds' heads, which are also Chinese characters written in *niaochongshu* (鳥蟲書 bird and insect script), but in a simpler form than that used in the upper, main sections of the vessel.

Finally, the vessel's ring-shaped foot is embellished with silver inlaid animal and dragon motifs, with the dragons intertwining in such a way as to produce the impression that they are about to engage in battle with the adjoining animals.

The whole vessel is covered in a pleasant brownish patina.





### The inscription:

On the neck of the vessel, the following eight characters are inlaid in silver in ‘bird and insect script’, with three characters repeated:

壺, 蓋 圓 四 合 . 四 圓 蓋

This phrase roughly translates as: ‘*Hu* vessel, decorated all round with 4 auspicious phrases, all round decorated’, with the character 合 being a homonym for 符, ‘auspicious phrases’ and the first character 壺 being the abbreviated form of the phrase ‘儀尊成壺’, ‘a ceremonial vessel in the form of a *Hu*’, the same auspicious phrase that appears in its complete form on the Jing Wang Liu Sheng 靖王劉勝 inlaid *Hu*, excavated at Mancheng in Hebei Province 河北省滿城 in 1968.

On the shoulder of the vessel, the following 12 characters are inlaid in silver in ‘bird and insect script’, with 6 characters repeated:

成 (盛) 兄 (況) 盛 味 於 閏 (潤) . 成 (盛) 況 盛 味 於 閏 (潤)

These can be translated as: ‘The grandness of the occasion, the richness of the taste (produce) moisture, the grandness of the occasion, the richness of the taste (produce) moisture’.

The stomach of the vessel is inlaid in silver with 15 ‘bird and insect script’ characters, 7 of which are repeated:

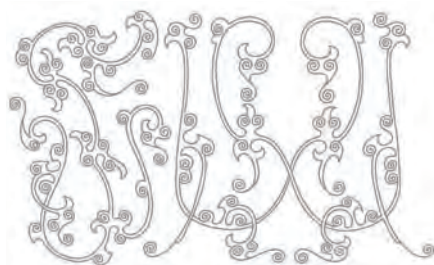
心, 交 閏 (潤) 血 膚, 延 X  
口 . 心, 交 閏 (潤) 血 膚, 延 X

These may be translated as: ‘Heart, moistens the blood (and) skin, increases X flavour. Heart, moistens the blood (and) skin, increases X flavour,’ with the missing character most probably being 壽 ‘*shou*’ longevity.

Finally, the bottom of the vessel’s stomach is inlaid in silver with the following 11 characters in ‘bird and insect script’, 4 of which are repeated:

血 大 (去) 內 (病) 口 八 四,  
血 大 (去) 內 (病) 口 七

These may be translated as: ‘Blood, dispel sickness, taste XX, blood dispel sickness, taste X’, with the characters indicated by ‘X’ merely added for decorative effect and thus untranslatable.







### Why the repetition?:

Then, one might ask, why the repetition of characters in each line of inscription on the neck and body of the vessel?

If we harken back in our mind's eye to the Han and earlier periods of Chinese history, we'll remember that nobles attending official banquets sat on mats arranged along both sides of the banquet hall, with each guest sitting in front of an individual low-lying table on which was served the various dishes, alcoholic beverages, etc. with which his host regaled him.

Oftentimes a longer, higher table was placed lengthwise in the middle of the two rows of seated guests and various beautifully cast bronze ritual vessels containing the food and beverages being served the guests were placed upon this long table to increase the grandeur of the occasion and impress upon the guests the power, sophistication and majesty of the host.

Thus, it is very possible, given the auspiciousness of the inscriptions on this vessel, that the repetition of characters was purposely done to permit guests on both sides of the vessel-laden table to view the intricately formed esoteric bird and insect script characters and take joy in their beauty and in the auspicious meaning of the felicitous phrases they expressed when successfully read.









### Provenance:

- Paul Pelliot Collection, France.
- A. Maisonneuve Collection, France (Mr A. Maisonneuve, a well-known publisher of books on the Orient, was a friend of Mr and Mrs Pelliot. After the death of Mr Pelliot, Mr. Maisonneuve bought a large number of books and other items from Mrs Pelliot).
- Private European Collection.

### Articles about the Pelliot *Hu*:

- Wang Kai Mei, Pelliot's Box, a Western Han 'bird and seal script' inlaid bronze *Hu* from Pelliot's private collection is discovered, Cultural Relics World, Issue 286, April 2015, pages 86 – 89.  
王凯梅, 伯希和的箱子, 伯希和私人收藏之西汉鸟篆文铜壶的发现. 文物天地 总第286期, 2015.4, 第86 – 89页.
- Li Bao Cai, a Western Han 'bird and insect script' inlaid bronze *Hu* from the Collection of Paul Pelliot of France, Wenwu, 2015:11, pages 53 – 56.  
李宝才, 法国伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶, 文物2015:11总第714期, 第53 – 56页.
- Cao Jin Yan, a study of the 'bird and insect script' characters inscription on a Western Han bronze *Hu* from the Collection of Paul Pelliot of France, Wenwu, 2015:11, pages 57 – 61.  
曹锦炎, 法国伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶铭文研究, 文物 2015:11 总第714期, 第57 – 61页.

### Similar pieces:

- Only two bronze vessels similarly inlaid with *niao zhuan* characters are known. Both were excavated in 1968, from the tomb of Liu Sheng, King Jing of Zhongshan 中山靖王劉勝 (circa 154 – 112 B.C.) in Mancheng, Hebei province 河北省滿城.
  - One is inlaid in gold and silver.
  - The other one is inlaid in silver only.

### Notes:

- The esoteric *niao zhuan* (鳥篆 'bird-style seal characters') or *niao chong shu* (鳥蟲書 'bird and insect script') form of writing:
  - This complex, undulating style of writing was first used during the Warring States period 戰國時代 (475 – 221 B.C.) from the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. up to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. by the court scribes of the economically and culturally rich southern states of Wu 吳 and Yue 越, from where its use eventually spread to neighbouring southern states including the powerful states of Chu 楚 and Cai 蔡. At the time, this style of calligraphy was often used to inscribe bronze weapons, bells, seals and ritual vessels.
  - The first known written mention of a style of calligraphy called 'bird-style seal characters' or 'bird and insect script' appeared in the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 and the *Hanshu* 漢書 *The Annals of the Han*, both of which were written during the Eastern Han dynasty 東漢 (25 – 200 A.D.).

### The inscription:

- As on the vessels excavated from the tomb of Liu Sheng, King Jing of Zhongshan 中山靖王劉勝 (circa 154-112 B.C.) excavated in Mancheng, Hebei province, 河北省滿城 in 1968, the inscription:
  - Celebrates the sensory quality of the fermented beverage contained in the vessel and the joy of consuming it while looking at the vessel's wonderful decoration.
  - Praises the benefits to one's health and lifespan that consuming the vessel's contents will bring.
- As the characters employed in the vessel's decoration were extremely sophisticated and understood by only very erudite people of the period, the text was also most probably meant to be a kind of intellectual exercise, a sort of literati's drinking game.

### Who was the owner of this piece?

- This question is quite difficult and, at the same time, easy to answer, as the two other similar pieces recorded were scientifically excavated.
- We know that these were found in the tomb of Liu Sheng also known as King Jing of the Zhongshan Kingdom 中山靖王劉勝.
- But we do not know if those vessels were made for Liu Sheng, or were later presented as gifts to him, or whether they were perhaps confiscated from their previous owner, possibly a prince from another southern state, who may have participated in the Rebellion of the Seven States 七國之亂, circa 154 B.C., as is the case with several other items found in Liu Sheng's 劉勝 tomb, such as the glass-inlaid vessel *hu* bearing an inscription indicating that its previous owner was the King of Chu 楚王.
- Thus it is reasonable to conjecture that the present vessel was owned by a very high ranking member of the Han aristocracy, probably a prince.









## *Niaozhuan* characters





The neck

壺

蓋

圓







The neck

四

合 (符)







The shoulder

盛

兄 (況)

盛









The shoulder

味

於

閨







The stomach

心

交

閏 (潤)







The stomach

血

膚

延









The stomach

甕

口







The bottom

血	大(去)
内(病)	口

八
四
七









## Articles about the Pelliot *Hu*







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铜敦

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地址 北京市东城区东直门内  
北小街2号楼 (100007)

电话 010-84007073  
010-84007078

传真 010-84010698

<http://www.wenwu.com>

E-mail: [wwyk@wenwu.com](mailto:wwyk@wenwu.com)

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# 法国伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶

李宝才(河北省文物局)

2014年,法国书商 A Maisonneuve 家中发现了一件中国古代铜壶,器身饰鸟虫书,王凯梅认为该铜壶与已故法国汉学家伯希和有关<sup>[1]</sup>,故称伯氏壶。笔者从王凯梅处得到相关资料,现将该铜壶略作考述,以正方家。

铜壶为圆壶,壶口微侈,平唇,束颈,溜肩,鼓腹,平底,圈足。口径 16.7、腹径 35、圈足径 19.3、器高 44.3 厘米,重 6 千克(封三:1)。

腹部两侧有兽首衔环铺首,铺首以银线勾勒,鼻纽、衔环满饰错银的云纹(封三:2)。口沿、肩部、中腹、下腹部各饰一周错银纹饰带,带上主要为神兽纹和云纹图案。图案由主纹构成,无地纹,双线表现。口沿纹饰带上是螭龙和鸟首云纹(图一)。肩部纹饰带上是脊部和尾部带云纹的神兽和变形云纹。中腹纹饰带上是螭龙、龟首螭身神兽和变形云纹。动物或神兽图案被直线形云纹隔开,对称分布,云纹图案的某些起始部分与动物或神兽图案相连(图二)。下腹纹饰带上是一种脊背、尾部带羽毛的变形螭龙和奔跑虎状神兽及变形云纹(图三)。圈足上饰错银动物纹一周(图四)。纹饰带上的图案与河北满城西汉中山靖王刘胜及其妻窦绾墓出土的两件鸟虫书铜壶(以下简称“甲壶”、“乙壶”)图案相似<sup>[2]</sup>,略有差异,如甲、乙两壶有凤凰、朱雀等异鸟类,也有鹿、狗的形象,伯氏壶

缺之,然伯氏壶上的龟首螭身怪兽和虎的形象甲、乙两壶则不见。纹饰带图案均由双线主纹构成,无地纹,常见于西汉中期以后铜器。从纹饰上看,伯氏壶与甲、乙两壶的纹饰差别不大,应属同一时期。

纹饰带间饰双线错银鸟虫书,共 4 周 46 字。铭文采用双线书写,笔画起始或收笔时均作双环云纹,用鸟首作笔画起始或收笔时,鸟首眼睛处也为双环云纹。细如发丝的双线条笔画屈曲流畅。双线条间距均匀,文字整体笔画连贯。为避免长笔画书写平淡,笔画中间不断挑出云纹(图五)。释文如下:

壶,盖圆四合。四圆盖。盛兄(况)盛味于闰(润)。成(盛)兄(况)盛味于闰(润)。心,交闰(润)血肤,延陴口。心,交闰(润)血肤,延陴。血大(去)内(病)口八四,血大(去)内(病)口七。

曹锦炎对鸟虫书内容进行了释读<sup>[3]</sup>。铜壶除下腹部 11 字以笔画简单的单字作装饰外,颈部、肩部、上腹部铭文都是有意义的语句。对照甲、乙两壶铭文发现,伯氏铜壶的省字、移字、字句重复较多,但字句内容仍能释读,伯氏壶的铭文内容与甲、乙两壶相似。伯氏壶是继满城中山靖王刘胜墓两件鸟虫书铜壶之后发现的第三件汉代鸟虫书铜壶。若器盖不失,整器的鸟





图一 口沿纹饰



图二 中腹纹饰



图三 下腹部纹饰



图四 圈足纹饰

虫书有可能更多,就目前的材料看,伯氏壶应是目前已知的西汉错金银青铜器中鸟虫书字数最多者。

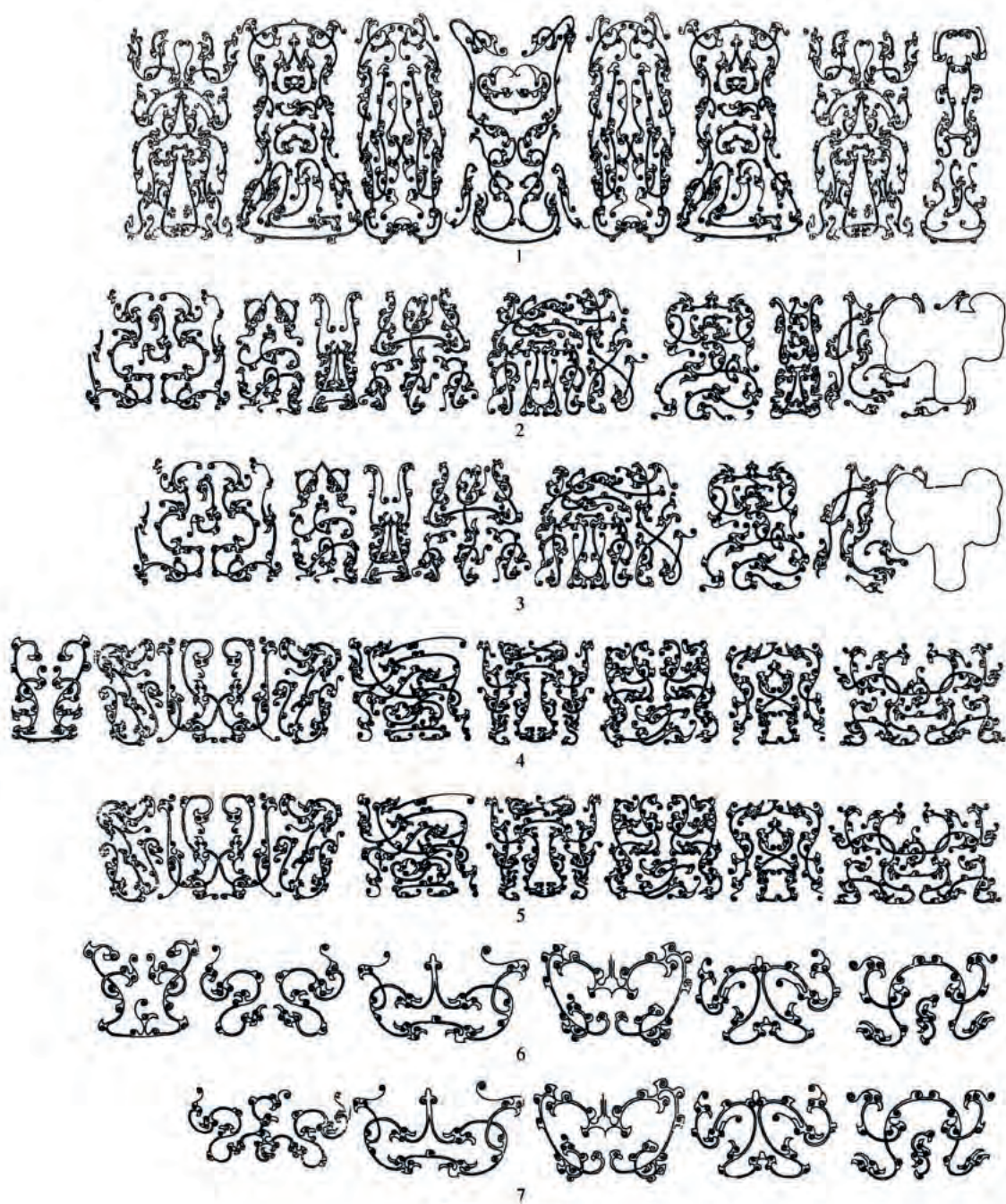
伯氏壶为范铸,先铸衔环,再铸铺首,最后铸壶身。壶身浇口设在圈足底部口沿,从底沿倒浇。在伯氏铜壶照片和X成像技术中发现了大量铜芯撑,如在器物颈部的“合”字与“四”字之间右侧偏下方发现了0.6厘米×0.6厘米的方形芯撑痕迹,X光片中,器物颈部、腹部和底部发现了多片芯撑。但因X光片所拍角度和数量有限,未能准确记录芯撑数量。

曹锦炎认为伯氏壶的错嵌工艺明显优于

甲、乙两壶<sup>[4]</sup>,此说不无道理。伯氏壶的银线细如发丝,难以预先铸槽,于是它一改早期的错金银青铜器在器壁上预先铸好里宽外窄的凹槽,经篆刻修整后在凹槽内镶嵌金银的做法,而是先选好鸟虫书字样,经设计布局后墨书在器身,再用铁凿、刀等专用工具篆刻沟槽,填以银线,捶打嵌牢,最后磨砺抛光。

从伯氏壶铭文内容看,其应为酒器。汉代许多盛酒器都有标准容量,那么伯氏壶是否也是一件标准的容酒器呢?两汉时期,有一种名为“鍾”的器物,“鍾”与圆壶在形制上难以区别,黄盛璋认为“壶不限于圆形,而鍾只限于





图五 铭文摹本

1. 颈部铭文 2,3. 肩部铭文 4,5. 腹部铭文 6,7. 下腹部铭文

圆,壶较钟包括广泛<sup>⑤</sup>。笔者在将伯氏壶与几件类似的西汉铜钟对比时发现,几件器物无论时间早晚,器物的高度、口径、腹径、足径均极为接近(表一)。

除伯氏壶外,所列其他铜钟都有“容十斗”的铭文,这些铜钟应是汉代容量为十斗的容器和量器。伯氏铜壶与几件铭刻“容十斗”的铜钟尺寸相当,也应是一件容量为十斗的酒器。



经观察发现伯氏壶有多处破损修复的痕迹,破损严重的地方采取了焊接修复。凡修复过的器物表面均用褐色的胶、漆涂抹,涂抹处与器物表面颜色有较大区别。这种可辨识性的修复,是流行于20世纪中叶以前欧洲的一种主要文物修复理论和方法,符合伯氏生活的年代。

从器形特点、铸造技术、镶嵌工艺、文字内容、纹饰特点及其与河北满城西汉中山靖王刘胜墓出土的两件鸟虫书铜壶的对比分析判断,伯氏壶是一件不早于西汉中期,也不晚于西汉晚期的器物。它是继满城刘胜墓两件鸟虫书铜壶之后发现的第三件鸟虫书铜壶,而且是目前已知的西汉(含西汉)以前错金银青铜器中鸟虫书字数最多的一件,具有重要的历史、艺术和科学价值,为汉代铜器铸造、错金银技术和鸟虫书的研究提供了实物资料。

鸟虫书临摹:李宝才

- [1] 王凯梅《伯希和的箱子》,《文物天地》2015年第4期。  
[2] 中国社会科学院考古研究所等《满城汉墓发掘报告》,第43、48页,文物出版社,1980年。  
[3] 曹锦炎《法国伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶铭文研

表一 铜壶、铜钟尺寸对照表

名称	高度	口径	腹径	足径	年代	铭文	来源
阳信家铜钟	44.3	16.5	34.2	19.1	西汉中期	阳信家铜钟容十斗重卅九斤	茂陵一号无名冢一号从葬坑 <sup>[6]</sup>
中山内府铜钟	45.3	18	34.5	19.5	西汉中期	中山内府钟一容十斗重(缺文)卅六年工充国造	满城汉墓1号墓 <sup>[7]</sup>
常山食官钟	41.6	16.8	33.6	20.8	西汉中期	常山食官钟容十斗重□ 钧□ 斤	常山王刘舜墓 <sup>[8]</sup>
代食官槽钟	46	18	31.5	20	西汉中期	代食官槽(槽)钟容十斗第十	太原东太堡汉墓 <sup>[9]</sup>
南宫钟	43.7	17.5	33.5	20	西汉中期	南宫钟容十斗重五十一斤天汉四年造	西安三桥镇高窑村 <sup>[10]</sup>
伯希和铜壶	44.3	16.7	35	19.3			法国

究》,《文物》本期。

- [4] 同[3]。  
[5] 黄盛璋《关于壶的形制发展与名称演变考略》,《中原文物》1983年第2期。  
[6] 咸阳地区文管会等《陕西茂陵一号无名冢一号从葬坑的发掘》,《文物》1982年第9期。  
[7] 同[2]。  
[8] 河北省文物研究所等《高庄汉墓》,第34页,科学出版社,2006年。  
[9] 山西省文物管理工作委员会等《太原东太堡出土的汉代铜器》,《文物》1962年第4、5期。  
[10] 西安市文物管理委员会《西安三桥镇高窑村出土的西汉铜器群》,《考古》1963年第2期。

(责任编辑:吴然)



# 法国伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶铭文研究

曹锦炎(浙江大学文化遗产研究院 教授)

伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶的铭文,分布于器身的颈、肩、腹部以及下腹部,以变形云气纹结合凤鸟装饰而成篆文,文字的所有笔画均用银丝错嵌,铭文和纹饰带成环状间隔分布,浑然一体,虽繁复但不凌乱。

与伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶形制和铭文书体风格一致的,见于河北满城西汉中山靖王刘胜及其妻窦绾墓出土的两件鸟虫书铜壶

(以下简称“甲壶”、“乙壶”)<sup>[1]</sup>。刘胜墓出土的甲、乙两壶,尺寸、纹饰和铭文大致相同,鸟虫书铭文以变形云气纹结合凤鸟装饰构成,错嵌金、银丝。但两壶盖部所错嵌的鸟虫书铭文书体有区别,甲壶是以鱼、鸟纹构成篆文,乙壶仍以变形云气纹结合凤鸟装饰而构成篆文。伯希和所藏西汉铜壶,尺寸略大于刘胜墓所出两壶,但由于失盖,其盖部形制和铭文究竟同于甲壶抑



图一 颈部铭文





图二 肩部铭文

或乙壶,已无从得知。

伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶的铭文,除圈足部位外,与刘胜墓所出甲、乙两壶的铭文皆可互参。刘胜墓所出甲、乙两壶的鸟虫书铭文,先后有张政烺、张振林先生做过研究<sup>[2]</sup>,今在他们释文的基础上,对伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶(以下简称“伯氏壶”)的铭文加以讨论。

#### 颈铭

颈部铭文环绕一周8字<sup>[3]</sup>,其中重文3字(图一):

壶,盖圜四合。四圜盖。

从一侧铺首起读,“壶”为第一字。“合”字所占空间横向偏宽,构形装饰笔画较多,上部省去所从的“亼”,故较难辨认。由于文字布局

不当,以致“壶”字、两个“四”字布局空间横向偏窄,尤以“壶”字为甚。

铭文原本左行,若以“壶”字为起点,分别左读、右读,则可成为:“壶,盖圜四合。壶,盖圜四合。”“壶”、“合”二字两读,中间三字的字序仍然相同。若以“盖”字起读,则为“盖圜四合。四圜盖壶。”文义亦能通畅。

甲壶、乙壶颈铭作:“盖圜四符(符),隤(仪)尊成壶。”很明显,伯氏壶颈铭是甲、乙壶颈铭之节录,即省略了“仪尊成”三字而保留了末字“壶”,以致成:“盖圜四合,壶。”另外,甲、乙壶颈铭的“盖圜四符”,伯氏壶颈铭作“盖圜四合”,“符”、“合”义训正同,可以看作是同义字替换。

#### 肩铭



肩部铭文环绕一周 12 字, 其中重文 6 字 (图二):

盛兄(况)盛味于闰(润)。成(盛)兄(况)盛味于闰(润)。

铭文左行环读, 其中六字重复(含“成(盛)”字)。第一个“盛”字因为铺首原因, 使所从之“成”构形有残损, 再加上所占空间横向偏窄, 故将所从之“皿”旁移于左侧。“成”字本应写作“盛”, 由于紧挨铺首, 故右侧笔画省略较多, 并且省略了下部所从的“皿”旁。若把“成”字看作

未省写, “成”读为“盛”也可, 因为“盛”字从“成”得声, 例可通假。两个“兄”字皆当读作“况”, 亦可视为“况”字的简省。两“闰”字皆为倒书。

甲、乙壶肩铭作: “盛兄(况)盛味, 于心佳都, 隤于[口味]”(下衔接的“口味”两字原置于腹铭), 显然伯氏壶肩铭只采用了前六字, 但由于第六字“心”已移于腹铭, 此处改用“闰”字, 而因工匠不小心(或不谙鸟虫书), 又讹误为倒书。

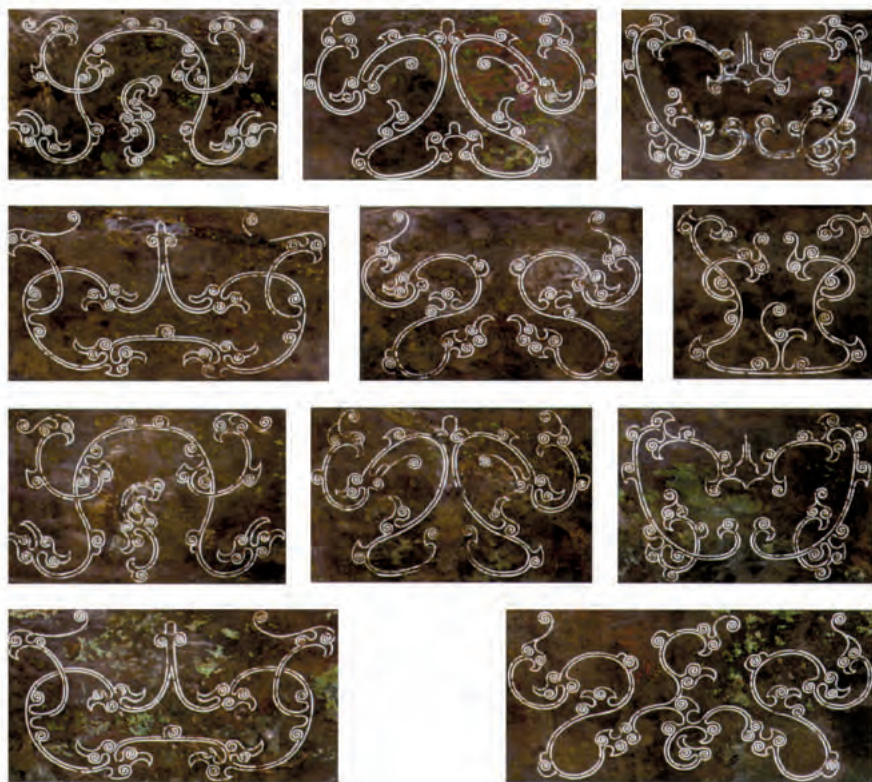
#### 腹铭

腹部铭文环绕一周 15 字, 其中重文 7 字



图三 腹部铭文





图四 下腹部铭文

(图三):

心,交闰(润)血肤,延隄口。心,交闰(润)血肤,延隄。

“心”字构形为了取得左右对称的效果,赘增了下部左侧的笔画。“隄”字构形省略了右侧“合”字上部的“人”旁,由于布局过宽,占据了一个半字的位置,以至使“延”字所占空间横向极窄,不得不省去所从的“辶”旁,成为“正”(亦可视“隄”字右旁所从“卅”的右边借为“辶”旁,其构形可参见甲壶腹铭“延”字的“辶”旁,两者近似),而且“正”字为了对称,将其构形写成几于“隄”字左“阜”旁相似。伯氏壶的腹铭本应排列16字,但由于布局不当,只好减少了一个“口”字。

甲壶腹铭作:“[隄于]口味,交闰(润)血肤,延寿去病,万年有余。”(上衔接的“隄于”两字原置于肩铭。)伯氏壶的腹铭,明显是作了节录,其中“隄”、“心”两字原本应置于肩铭,此处移作腹铭,以致铭文不能得到很好通读。这种节录方式,也见于乙壶,其腹铭作:“[隄于]口

味,交闰(润)血肤,延寿去病。”省去了“万年有余”四字。

#### 下腹铭

下腹铭文环绕一周11字,其中重文4字(图四):

血大(去)内(病)口八四,血大(去)内(病)口七。

下腹铭文鸟虫书构形相对简单,与乙壶腹铭书体大致相近。“血”字构形为倒书,上部短横作竖向的S形弯曲,与腹铭及甲、乙壶腹铭作横向S形有所变化。“去”字下部中间省掉了所从的“厶”,只剩了上部的“大”形,且上部左右两端皆改作向上弯曲。“内”字实为“丙”字之省,即省去上部一横画,对照甲、乙壶腹铭尤其是乙壶腹铭,可以看出乃是“病”字省去了“疒”旁。“口”字构形,与甲、乙壶铭相比变化不大。“四”字上部不作封口形。当然,与上述下腹部铭文其他文字相参考,“八”、“四”、“七”三字,不排除是截去了某些字的一部分而成新的单字,因为此处是用作装饰,所以



不必考虑其原字的构形及成字与否。

下腹铭文,“去病”可以看作是甲、乙壶腹铭“延寿去病”之节录(“延”字已在腹部),但整句文字实际上只起装饰作用,因此无法通读。

总之,从伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶的铭文内容分析,其作用单纯是用作装饰,也就是说,制作铜壶的工匠只是将这些鸟虫书铭文当作图案,所以不去考虑文字内容是否能够通读,甚至个别文字倒书也无妨,更不去计较字形笔画的多寡,或者是截去字形的一部分而另成一体,省写、变形比比皆是。与这种现象相似的是战国晚期的越国石质兵器上的鸟虫书铭文,亦是将文字视作图案,用为装饰<sup>[1]</sup>。

虽然从伯氏壶与甲、乙壶的错嵌工艺看,制作伯氏壶的工匠技术明显优于后者,但是从铭文内容的连贯性及文字的布局特别是每个字的空间分配来看,制作伯氏壶的工匠文化水平不如制作甲、乙壶的工匠,在总体布局的把握上尤显逊色。甲、乙壶出土于西汉中山靖王刘胜及妻窦绾之墓,无疑是刘胜夫妇生前珍爱之物;而铜器上错嵌金或银,是高度精细的工艺,不是简单的“物勒工名”,更由于其是供王室所用,制作前必定有设计好的鸟虫书文字及图案纹饰样稿。但是,作为供一般贵族使用或珍藏的奢侈品而言,其铜器华贵即可,在文字方面可能不会提出太高的要求,况且这类文字

内容仅为当时流行的一般吉语套话而已。

刘胜贵为西汉宗室,其妻窦绾也是当朝窦太后的族人,于他们墓中出土的两件鸟虫书铜壶,不会出于一般工匠之手,很有可能来源于官营作坊甚至是内府。而伯希和旧藏的西汉鸟虫书铜壶,显然出于一般私营作坊。两者在鸟虫书铭文上的最大区别,根源即在于此。

最后,需要指出,我们将伯氏壶铭文与刘胜墓出土的甲、乙壶铭文作对比研究,指出前者是后者的节录,这是着重于从鸟虫书铭文的内容及书体视角去观察,并不是说伯氏壶是抄袭甲、乙壶而成。因为从西汉铜壶的器形演变来看,伯氏壶的制作年代明显早于甲、乙壶。可以肯定,这三件铜壶在制作时都参照了当时流行的、类似的鸟虫书铜壶。

- [1] 中国社会科学院考古研究所等《满城汉墓发掘报告》,第43页,文物出版社,1980年。
- [2] 肖蕴(张政烺)《满城汉墓出土的错金银鸟虫书铜壶》,《考古》1972年第5期;张振林《中山靖王鸟篆壶铭之韵读》,《古文字研究》第一辑,中华书局,1979年。
- [3] 原器文字皆左行环绕,文字图版则按释文先后顺序排列,以下不再注明。
- [4] 详见曹锦炎《鸟虫书通考》(增订版)第六章“越国器(中)”,上海辞书出版社,2014年。

(责任编辑:吴 然)

## 法国伯希和旧藏西汉鸟虫书铜壶



1. 正 视



2. 俯 视



# Summary of the article

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Wenwu 2015.11

A Brief Translation of a Chinese Article by Professor Cao Jin-Yan, Head of the Zhejiang Province Cultural Relics Bureau, author, renowned expert in ancient Chinese characters, professor at Zhejiang University's School of Humanities, Executive Vice-president of the Cultural Heritage Research Institute of Zhejiang University, etc.

This *Hu* from the Collection of Mr Pelliot, which is decorated all over with silver inlaid characters in the 'Bird and Insect Style' script, is not only a great treasure, but is also visibly and aesthetically pleasant. Two pieces with similar 'Bird and Insect Style' Inscriptions were excavated in July, 1968 from the Western Han tomb of Zhongshan Jing Wang Liu Sheng at Mancheng in Hebei province (河北省滿城西漢中山靖王劉勝之墓). The design on both of these pieces is similar to that of the present Pelliot *Hu* and the Pelliot *Hu*'s inscription is, except for the part on the foot of the vessel, basically the same as that inlaid on the two *Hu* excavated from the Western Han tomb of Liu Sheng (劉勝), King Jing of Zhongshan (中山靖王), and can be translated as:

*The grandness of the occasion,  
the richness of the (wine's) taste  
(produce) in the heart, and on the palate,  
the most sublime height of enjoyment.  
Gratifying the palate,  
(thewine) moistens and benefits the blood and skin,  
extends longevity (and) dispels illness  
for more than ten thousand years.*

The characters on the Pelliot *Hu* serve as decorative patterns as well as felicitous phrases, so the craftsmen were not particularly concerned with whether or not the inscription as a whole made perfect sense or whether the characters were perfectly formed, since some characters' radicals are even reversed to produce a more visually pleasing design, as was often done in antiquity.

From the visual effect of the Pelliot *Hu*, we can say that the craftsman or men who created the Pelliot *Hu* was/were more skilled in decorative execution than the craftsmen who produced the Jing Wang Liu Sheng's vessels. However, a close examination of the forms of the characters and the order in which they are arranged show that he or they were not as adept at forming or arranging the characters of the inscription on the vessel as were the Liu Sheng's craftsmen.

There is a very plausible reason for this. We know that the Jing Wang Liu Sheng's bronze *Hu* were made for royalty and were treasured by the Prince and his wife during their lifetimes, so the proper placement of the characters was of utmost importance and the craftsmen would of necessity have spent more time planning the inscription, etc., before actually beginning work and were most probably

given a pattern to work from to ensure accuracy, whereas the Pelliot *Hu* was produced for members of the nobility for whom the total impact and beauty of the piece was of the utmost and sole importance. Thus the inscription needed only to be beautifully executed and be full of auspicious, familiar phrases pleasing to the eye and the ear.

It should be noted that while we are comparing the Pelliot *Hu* with the two Liu Sheng *Hu*, we do not believe the inscription on the Pelliot *Hu* was a copy of the Liu Sheng *Hu*'s inscriptions. Quite the contrary, from the shape of the Pelliot *Hu*, we can see that it was produced even earlier than the two Liu Sheng *Hu*, so the craftsman or craftsmen who made it could not have been copying the Liu Sheng *Hu*'s inscriptions! Moreover, it is evident that the inscriptions on all 3 *Hu* are formed of auspicious words and phrases that were popularly used in *Bird and Insect Style* inscriptions of the Han period.

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- Xiao Yun (Zhang Zheng Lang), *Macheng Han mu chu de cuo jin yin niao-changshu tong hu*, Kaogu 1972 n°5







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# 文物天地

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## 伯希和的箱子

——伯希和私人收藏之西汉鸟篆文铜壶的发现

文/王凯梅

2014年初春，一件显示来源于梅松诺维家族的著名汉学家伯希和旧藏在巴黎现身，引起古董界的好奇和惊诧。藏品放在两只积满尘土的木箱中。木箱一高一矮，长度都在70厘米左右，高的一只68厘米，矮的一只26厘米，由简单的原木板钉在一起，暗黄色的木材透露出箱子的岁月。箱子盖上用蓝色粗体笔写的几个字依稀可辨：一只箱子上写着“54”，另外一只箱子上写着“57”和一个大大的“M”，即法语简写的“先生”，在“M”的下面写着“PELLIOT”。(01-02)

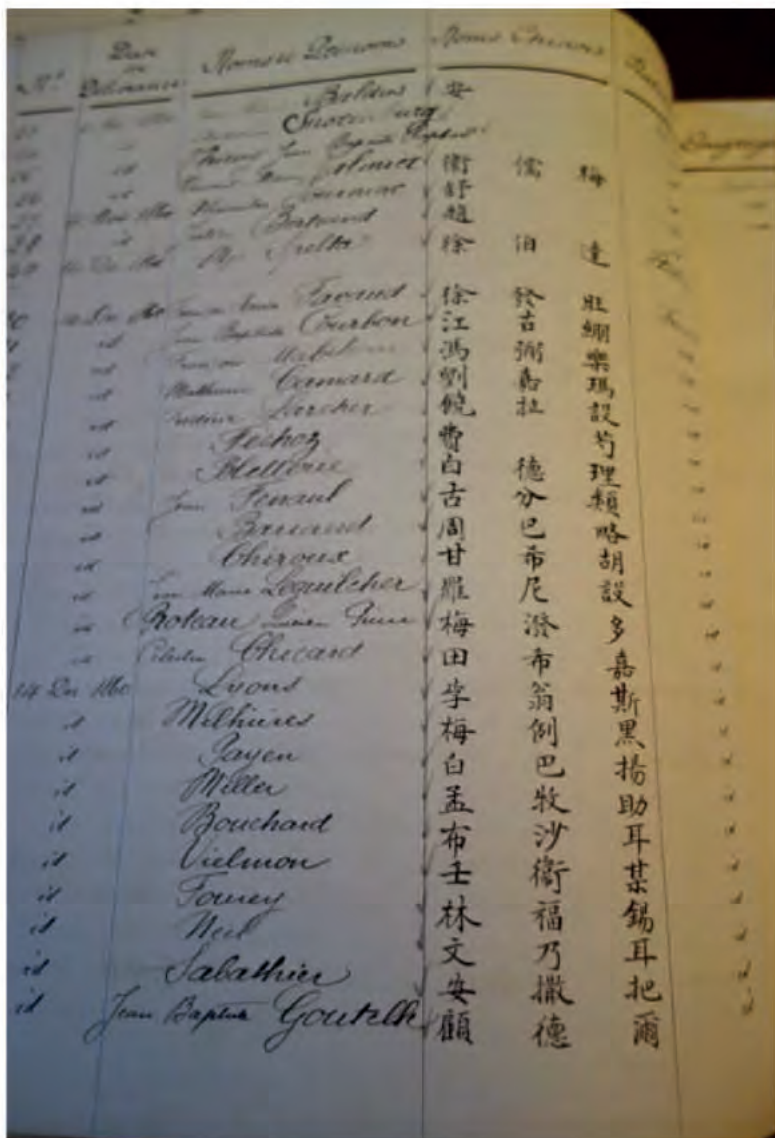
“54”号箱子里是一叠叠书信手稿，纸页虽然发黄，但墨迹清晰，信纸上的签署时间凝固在18世纪晚期到20世纪初，而写信的地点包括北京、上海、天津、香港、澳门等等。这些字体娟秀的法文信件落款 Jean Joseph Marie Amiot 便是旅居中国的法国传教士钱德明（1718-1793年），



02 写着伯希和名字的57号木箱



01 伯希和旧藏西汉鸟篆文铜壶



03 54号箱子中记录法国来华传教士的资料

而收信人正是法国国王路易十五的国务部长亨利·贝尔坦(Henri Bertin, 1720—1792年)。贝尔坦是18世纪法国宫廷盛行的“中国风”的最重要鼓动者,著名的《中国全书》编者,而构成这本对中国意义重大的书的内容就包括钱德明写给贝尔坦的信;还有部分19世纪后期法国新闻媒体对中国时局报道的剪报,如中国对外贸易政策的评述,义和团运动时期在北京亲历者的亲诉;一本汇集了法国在华传教士信息的资料,

包括用端正的楷书书写的每个传教士的中文名字。在这些文件的字里行间可以看到许多铅笔留下的批注，对文件进行了细心分类。“57”号箱子里则是一只包满铜锈的铜壶，当表层的铜锈被轻轻擦去后，露出了嵌刻在铜胎里的错银纹饰，显示着铜壶的高贵身份。这两只箱子的主人便是著名汉学家、卓越的东方学家，全能的语言学家，敦煌学学者，法国军队荣誉勋章获得者，中国中央研究院历史语言研究所研究员，一位充满传奇色彩的



#### 04 伯希和

法国人——伯希和。(03)

1878年5月28日，伯希和，Paul Pelliot，出生于巴黎。他读书时的理想是当外交家，在索邦大学攻读英文专业。他的语言天赋很快显露出来，不到两年时间就完成了汉语学习。1901年，伯希和被法兰西学院之国立远东学院派往越南，研究保存在王室图书馆中的汉文书籍。对书籍和文字的好奇心是伯希和终生的情趣。在1900到1903年三次自河内到北京的往返中，他购藏近2.4万册书籍，包括大批汉文、藏文和蒙文的珍本书籍。在北京期间，伯希和住在法国公使馆内，帮助使馆整理驻华法国传教士的资料信息，也做关于中国时局的剪报，包括中国对外政策和外国媒体对义和团的报道。“54”号箱子内的文件就是伯希和在驻华其间收集的资料，铅笔做的标注即出自伯希和之手。(04)

1906年，伯希和受法国金石和古文字科学院及亚细亚学会委派，担任中亚探险团团长。伯希和的亚洲探险历经了两年多的时间，而让伯希和的名字闻名世界的就是敦煌藏经洞的发现。1909年，在巴黎大学举办的为欢迎伯希和西域探险成功归来的招待会上，伯希和描述了第一次走进敦煌藏经洞的情景：“王道士终于为我打开了那个小龕，整个龕不足3米见方，其中塞满了二三层文书。洞中有各种各样的书本，有汉文的，也有藏文、回





05 位于巴黎拉丁区的梅松诺维书局

鹄文和梵文。一种令人心醉的激动心情涌遍了我的全身。我面对的上远东历史上中国最了不起的一次写本大发现。”

随后的三周时间里，伯希和将藏经洞内藏的1.5万至2万卷写本浏览一遍，编写了藏书简目。在藏经洞摇曳的烛光下，伯希和感叹：“我面对的是远东历史上需要记录下来的中国最了不起的一次写本大发现。我刻不容缓地琢磨，自己是否仅满足于对这些写本瞥一眼，然后就两手空空扬长而去，将这些注定要逐渐受到损坏的宝藏仍遗留在那里。”

伯希和带走了6000册文书、200

多幅唐画与幡以及织物、木制品、活字印字版和其他法器。在敦煌学研究中，这些资料是文化价值和艺术价值最高的精品，至今保存在法国吉美博物馆。

完成西域探险的伯希和返回巴黎，致力于对旅行带回的资料进行庞大的翻译整理工作，这项工作直到他去世都是一件未能完成的事业。从1911年起，伯希和开始主持巴黎法兰西学院的西域语言、历史和考古讲座，同时开始将研究重点转入纯汉学领域，对中国绘画、瓷器、青铜器、玉器开展研究，发表了大量关于中国艺术的论文。

这一时期，伯希和与巴黎梅松诺维 (Maisonneuve) 书局主人阿德里安·梅松诺维 (Adrien Maisonneuve) 结下了友谊。梅松诺维家族是著名书商。在巴黎这个海纳百川、兼容世界文化的艺术之都，书局是重要的传播文化场所，其分类细致而专业，于19世纪中期开业的梅松诺维书局以专营东方学、印度支那和汉学研究的图书而闻名巴黎文化界。对于研究19世纪法国在远东地区殖民扩张历史的知识分子来说，梅松诺维书局拥有着恐怕是全球最丰富的一手资源。在20世纪初期法国考古探险者的亚洲热潮中，梅松诺维书局与从事亚洲西域考察的学者们建立起密切联系，伯希和无疑是其中最突出的一位。(05)

伯希和最终未曾出版过一本堪称论著的西域或汉学专著，但各类汉学课题研究的论文和读书札记是今天研究伯希和不可绕过的重要文献。伯希和返回巴黎后，担任了法国亚洲研究的重要杂志《通报》的主编，使其发展成为世界汉学的重要论坛。第一次世界大战爆发后，伯希和应征入伍，1916年出任法国驻北京使馆武官。

伯希和于1933年和1935年两度重返北京。此时的伯希和已是蜚声世界的东方学学者，他的名字同敦煌藏经洞的发现联系在一起，他的学识被中国学者所敬仰。就连当时的一些大众媒体也不乏对伯希和的报道。如1933年的《东方杂志》在“名人行踪”的栏目下刊登有“天津省主席欢迎法国汉学家伯希和”的照片；一本当年京沪铁路线上的周刊杂志《京沪周刊》将伯希和称为“东方艺术的发掘者”。1945年10月26日，伯希和因长期癌症折磨去世，享年67岁。

伯希和俄国血统的夫人，不明事理却酷爱金钱，拒绝像沙畹、马伯乐、戴密微等汉学家那样将藏书和文稿捐献给法兰西学院等学术机构，而是将伯希和的文稿和收藏零散地抛售给欧洲和美国的科研机构、书商和藏家。今天来自梅松诺维家族の木箱子，既有可能是伯希和在世时出售或赠送给他的出版商兼朋友的礼物，也有可能是在伯希和去世后梅松诺维从伯希和遗孀手中购得的。木箱中的铜



壶和文字资料显示是伯希和研究和探险中给自己留下的收藏品。贝尔坦与传教士的通信于路易十五时编辑成出版物，原始资料由法兰西远东学院保存。鉴于伯希和主持法兰西学院汉学的研究工作，这些资料很可能部分成为伯希和的私人收藏。

经中国学者考证，伯希和木箱中的铜壶系西汉中期所制，通体的银丝是错银工艺制作的46字鸟篆文，分布于器身的颈、肩、腹及下腹部，以变形云气纹结合凤鸟纹装饰，字的每笔每划都用银丝错嵌，且配有环形装饰带将器身分作四个部分。浙江大学教授、古文字学者曹锦炎先生称其“浑然一体，虽然繁复但不致于凌乱，给人以琳琅满目之愉悦”。铜壶高44.3厘米，最大腹径位35厘米，重6千克。品相几乎完好，惜壶盖缺失。壶

身的一些修补露出暗红色的胶质物，为欧洲人在20世纪二三十年对铜器的典型修补方法。类似的铜壶，目前仅知1968年河北满城刘胜墓中出土的一对鸟篆文错金银铜壶，分别收藏于中国国家博物馆和河北博物院。(06—07)

伯希和没有记录铜壶是在何时何地购买的。从他三年的中亚探险及之后多次的中国活动的经历，我们只能推测铜壶是在中国获得的。1908年在完成了敦煌藏经洞的考察后，伯希和一行过嘉峪关，越过万里长城，进入中原地带。在西安，伯希和用一个月的时间采购文物和书籍，包括一口公元前的铜钟，一批铜镜、陶器、佛像造像和大批书籍及拓片。铜壶是这次旅行中伯希和为自己购进的钟爱之物吗？我们只能猜测。同年，伯希和一

行抵达南京，同行的摄影师努埃特拍摄了两江总督端方的藏品。在上海、无锡一带，伯希和接触了江南地区的著名收藏家和古董商。铜壶是在同江南古董商的接触中获得的吗？这也只能是猜测。从伯希和对文字的情有独钟，我们又可以想象铜壶的选择正体现了他的个人爱好和专业兴趣。伯希和最后一次中国之行是在1935年，那时，他被中国考古界视为泰斗级学者。在北京任职的这段时间，伯希和甚至用在国际俱乐部打牌赢得的钱购买古籍文献和艺术品，铜壶是他最后一次中国旅行的重要纪念品吗？这又是猜测。

在伯希和去世后的数十年中，这件铜壶默默栖身于木箱里，直到如今被人们再次发现。❧

(责任编辑：李珍萍)

06 国家博物馆藏满城汉墓出土错金鸟篆文铜壶



07 河北博物院藏满城汉墓出土错金鸟篆文铜壶









## Similar Vessels







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图二六 鸟篆文铜壶 (1:5015)

彩版六 (VI')



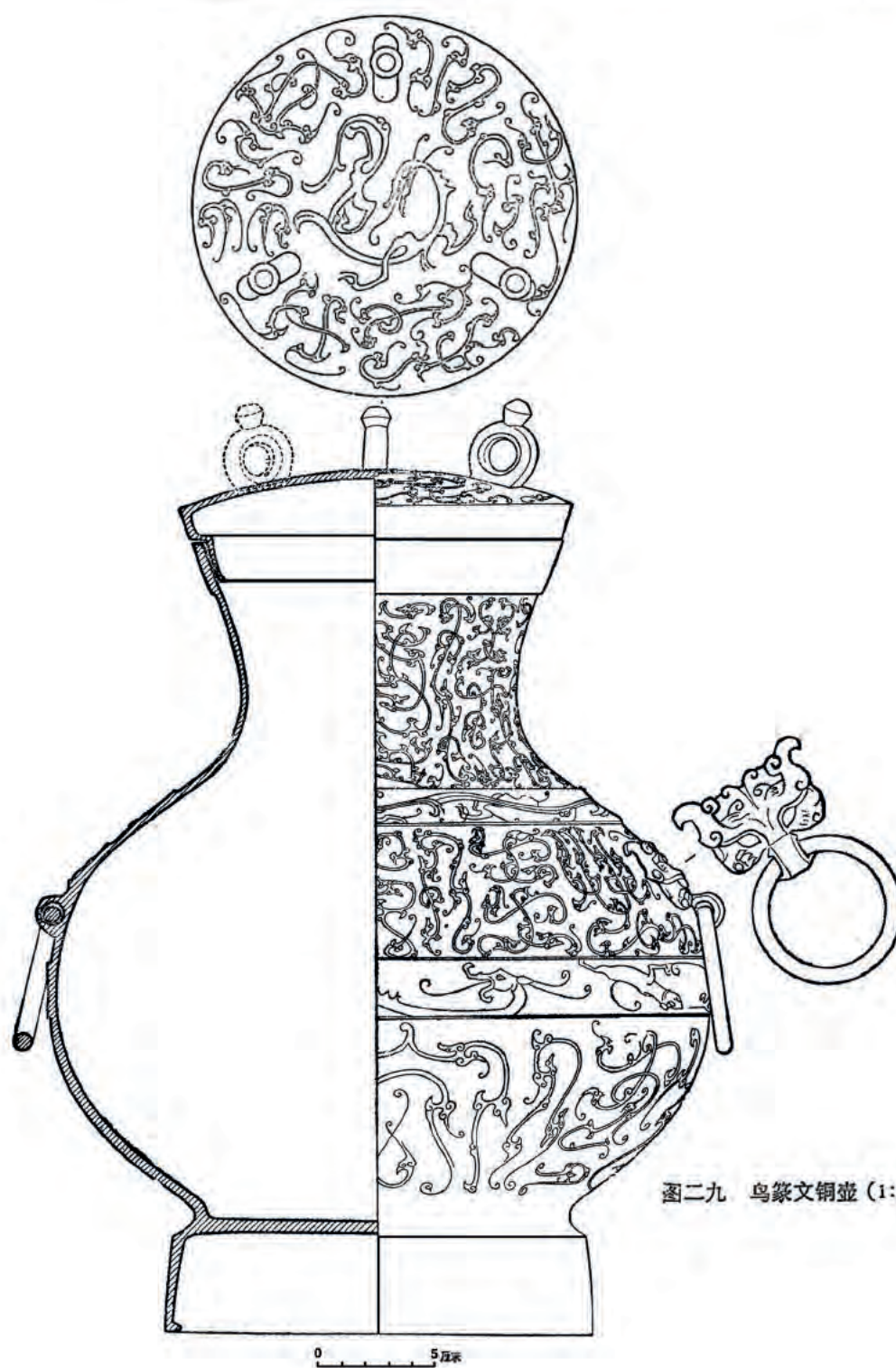
鸟篆文铜壶 (1 : 5015)



彩版七 (VII')



鸟篆文铜壶 (1: 5018)



图二九 鸟篆文铜壶 (1:5018)

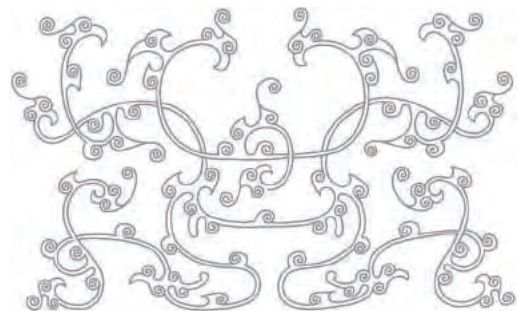






# Study of *Niaozhuan* Characters

*by Mr. Francois Louis*







# Written Ornament— Ornamental Writing

**Birdscript of the Early Han Dynasty  
and the Art of Enchanting**

Ritual vessel, *hu* (vessel A, 1:5015) from the tomb of Liu Sheng, early Western Han, first half of the second century B.C., bronze with gold and silver inlay, h. 44.2 cm, diam. 28.5 cm. Hebei Provincial Museum, Shijiazhuang.

## ABSTRACT

Among the discoveries made in the tomb of Liu Sheng (before 154–113/112 B.C.) at Mancheng, Hebei, were two bronze vessels whose main decoration consists of ornately designed text. Verbal signs here are simultaneously ornamental signs; calligraphy is written text and decorative texture alike. This study recognizes the two vessels as particularly relevant to the larger discourse on ornament in early China. It examines the aesthetic qualities of the vessels, decodes the text, and discusses the objects within their ritual context. It also positions Han birdscript within early calligraphic traditions and finally discusses the provenance of the vessels. As possessions of Liu Sheng, the jars are interpreted as efficacious tools of worship and as historic artworks that offered the prince a means for aristocratic self-representation, religious devotion, and personal delight.

Originally, however, the vessels appear to have been designed as a reactionary political statement of an earlier Han noble, expressing his assertion of newly gained ruling power.

Among the sensational discoveries made in 1968 in the tomb of Liu Sheng 劉勝, King Jing of Zhongshan 中山靖王 (before 154–113/112 B.C.) at Mancheng, Hebei, were two bronze vessels whose main decoration consists of ornately designed text (figs. 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> The characters on these unique jars—written in a style termed “birdscript,” *niaozhuan* 鳥篆, or “bird-and-insect writing,” *niaochongshu* 鳥蟲書—are difficult to read. Not only is their basic sealscript structure obscured by added curves, curls, hooks, and bird and fish images, as well as by missing strokes, but the text is also written around the vessel body, so that it can never be seen fully; particularly in the initial stages of the deciphering process, it is not clear where the text begins. Modern epigraphists, who feel challenged to read this decoration as a written text, therefore resort to drawing the characters on a piece of paper and working from there (figs. 3, 4).<sup>2</sup> Yet an educated member of the Western Han elite who was intimately familiar with sealscript may well have thought that deciphering the text directly from the vessel was a most entertaining and absorbing aesthetic experience. In the deciphering process such a “reader” could enjoy simultaneously the rarity and craftsmanship of the gold and silver inlay, the witty invention and the organic elegance of the characters, and eventually the rhyme and content of the text. And for an occasional respite from interacting with the writing, the narrow registers in between the text, with auspicious animals frolicking about, would offer entertaining distraction.<sup>3</sup>





**1 and 1a** Ritual vessel, *hu* (vessel A, 1:5015) from the tomb of Liu Sheng, early Western Han, first half of the second century B.C., bronze with gold and silver inlay, h. 44.2 cm, diam. 28.5 cm. Hebei Provincial Museum, Shijiazhuang. Drawing after Institute of Archaeology CASS and Hebei CPAM, ed., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao* (Excavation report of the Han tomb at Mancheng), (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 44.

In the ideal case, therefore, reading this particular text can provide multiple types of aesthetic experiences—visual, haptic (while turning the vessel), and audial (once the written text is read aloud)—aside from being intellectually stimulating and fostering a sense of extreme privilege.

That Liu Sheng himself may indeed have been able to enjoy the art on these vessels is amply suggested in the historical record, where he is characterized as a self-professed lover of the sensuous pleasures. His contemporary Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–85 B.C.) recorded him as stating that “a true king should pass his days listening to music and delighting himself with gorgeous sights and sounds” instead of doing the work of clerks and officials.<sup>4</sup> And the *Hanshu* (History of the [Former] Han) describes his presence in 138 B.C. at a reception given by his half-brother, the recently enthroned emperor Wu 漢武帝 (156–87 B.C.; r. 141–87 B.C.), during which a musical performance moved him to weep silent tears and then to explain his emotional reaction in a finely phrased poetic speech.<sup>5</sup> Although ultimately both Sima Qian and Ban Gu characterized Liu Sheng as a morally abject, irresponsible aristocrat who indulged in the superficiality of sensual pleasures, there is no need today to judge Liu Sheng’s aesthetic sensibility based on the moral frame-

work and political struggle of these early historians. Nowadays we call a person like Liu Sheng cultivated, a connoisseur and aesthete, regardless of his political accomplishments or failures.

If we credit Liu Sheng with the ability to appreciate the two vessels as sophisticated aesthetic constructs, we should ask how precisely the art inherent in their design might have functioned. So far, the vessels have inspired two rather independently operating strands of scholarship. Art-historical research has limited itself to brief entries in exhibition catalogues,<sup>6</sup> while more substantial epigraphic research has concentrated on deciphering the inscriptions.<sup>7</sup> The following case study draws on both areas of scholarship in order to discuss the purpose and origin of these vessels as well as the original role and appreciation of the unusual writing that decorates them.<sup>8</sup> The writing here does not function purely as calligraphy, but is an integral part of the object. Verbal signs are simultaneously ornamental signs; calligraphy is written text and decorative texture alike. These vessels can therefore also be seen as particularly relevant to the larger discourse on how to understand ornament in early China, how to tap the communicative potential of ornament, and how to define its purpose in a specific aristocratic context. Because the main ornament here is writing,



**2** Drawing of ritual vessel *hu* (vessel B, 1:5018) from the tomb of Liu Sheng, early Western Han, first half of the second century B.C., bronze with gold and silver inlay, h. 40 cm, diam. 28 cm. After Institute of Archaeology CASS and Hebei CPAM, ed., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao* (Excavation report of the Han tomb at Mancheng), (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 47, cf. color pl. 6.

its primary symbolism is verbalized and can literally be read. Pictorial ornament, in contrast, relates symbolic meaning through a set of visual codes, which are rarely verbalized and which are understood in different ways, depending on the cultural and social framework of cognition. As historians we mainly decode pictorial symbolism by means of iconography—a method which relies on textual sources that are in most cases physically disconnected from images. Because iconographically significant textual sources from the second century B.C. and earlier are extremely rare, the symbolic content and most further interpretation of early Chinese imagery remain largely obscure. The Mancheng vessels, however, not only provide us with a verbally encoded form of ornament; they also offer an exceptionally rich archaeological and biographical context. Hence they promise unusually rich insights into the motivation for and the reception of early Han ornament.

## DECODING THE TEXT

The inscribed text is almost identical on the bodies of both vessels, but it differs entirely on the lids. The

lid of vessel A (1:5015) has long, cloudlike legs and appears to have twelve characters inscribed radially, while the lid of vessel B (1:5018) has ring feet and only three characters written concentrically (see fig. 3). The characters on the two lids also differ stylistically. Those on lid A are thin and spindly, inlaid mainly in gold, and embellished with clearly recognizable fish and bird images. Those on lid B are written in double lines, one inlaid with gold, the other with silver, in the same style as the characters on the vessel bodies. There are no images of entire animals either on this lid or on



**3** Drawing of the inscriptions on the lids of vessels A and B. After Zhang Zhenlin, "Zhongshan Jing Wang niaozhuan hu ming zhi yundu" (Rhyme and pronunciation of the birdsript inscription on the vessels of Prince Jing of Zhongshan), *Gu wenzi yanjiu* 1 (1979).



the vessel bodies, only embellishing hooks and scrolls that occasionally allude to a bird's head but otherwise are nonrepresentational. While the differences between the lids cannot be satisfactorily explained, they suggest not only that different people may have designed lid A and lid B, but also that lid A may originally have belonged to a now-lost vessel with matching design, and that there may once have been several more vessels of this kind.<sup>9</sup>

This section will first examine the inscriptions on the two lids and then those on the vessel bodies. There is only limited agreement on the transcription and translation of these ornamental inscriptions, and the reading of the characters on the lids is especially controversial. Among the eight studies I consulted, four suggest different transcriptions of the text on lid A, and six different translations:

(1) 為蓋蓋, 錯書之, 有言三, 甫金鯨

"This invertable lid was made with inlaid writing in three-word phrases and adorned with golden fish."<sup>10</sup>

(2) 有言三, 甫金鯨, 為蓋蓋, 錯書之

"There are three-character phrases, decorated with gold fish, for the splendid lid, inlaid as writing."<sup>11</sup> Or: "There are three verses, arranged golden fish, to make a grand container for Golden Root Medicinal Wine with inlaid writing."<sup>12</sup>

(3) 為蓋蓋, 錯書之, 有言三, 酬金寶

"To make a *jīn*-type lid, writing was inlaid, there are three words. For drinking, [the emperor] bestowed gold."<sup>13</sup>

(4) 鋪鯨為蓋蓋, 錯書之, 有言三

"Fish were arranged for this precious lid. Writing was inlaid. There are three sentences."<sup>14</sup>

Although there are plenty of scholarly differences on how to transcribe and translate several of the characters on this lid, all interpreters recognize the inscription as being self-referential and describing essentially what one already knows by the time the text is deciphered—namely, that the lid is inlaid with golden writing which is decorated with little fish images and that the inscription should be understood as three-word phrases. Among the more unusual interpreta-

tions is that of Zhou Esheng (proposition 4), who alone reconstructs an eleven-character inscription. All other authors argue for twelve characters, understanding the passage 有言三 as describing "three-word phrases" and assuming that each of the three segments between the legs of the lid should contain four characters to preserve symmetry.<sup>15</sup> Another original, albeit far-fetched interpretation is provided by Zhou Cecong (proposition 2), who understands the cryptic expression *jīn gai* 蓋蓋 as a reference to the intended content of the entire vessel, explaining that *jīn* indicates skull-cap (*scutellaria baicalensis Georgi*), a medicinal plant whose aromatic root is used to treat inflammatory disorders, and that *gai* should be understood as referring not to the lid but to the entire vessel.

In his reading of lid B, Zhou Cecong expands his theory that the vessels were commissioned by Liu Sheng to hold medicinal wine, and he proposes that vessel B was supposed to contain "lizard wine." But the idea of a content label on a lid is not convincing, especially when the words are barely readable. Content labels are useful on a container but not on a lid. Of the three characters on lid B, only *gai* 蓋, which is generally understood as meaning "lid," can be read without problems; on the reading of the other two characters, opinions are widely divided. But again, there is a consensus that the wording has to be taken as a laudatory description of the lid or the vessel itself, and that the modifying word before *gai* 蓋 specifies the kind of lid. The proposed transcriptions for the words on lid B are as follows:

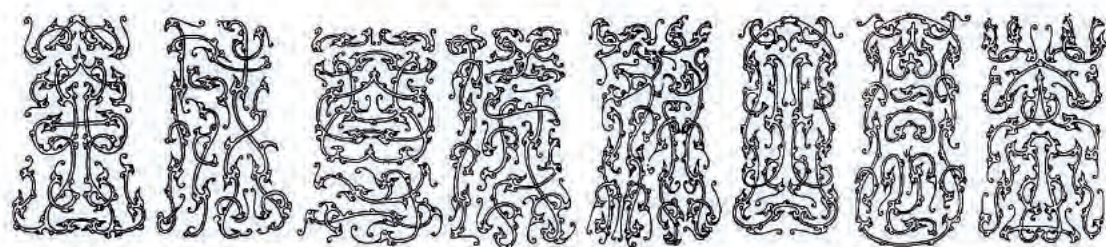
(1) 髹蓋 "Beautifully decorated . . . lid."<sup>16</sup>

(2) 髹罐蓋 "Beautifully decorated lid for a *guan* jar."<sup>17</sup>

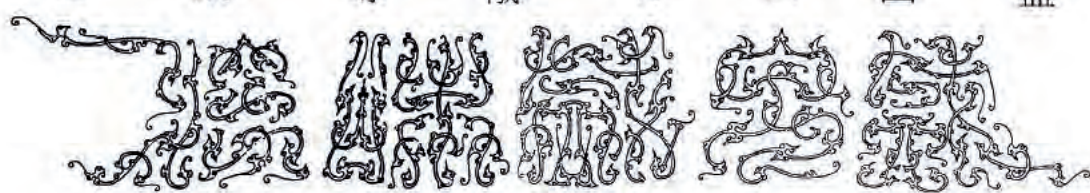
(3) 塑蓋大利 "Lid modeled for great profit."<sup>18</sup>

(4) 髹蜥蓋 "Finely decorated lizard [wine] vessel."<sup>19</sup>

As for the vessel bodies, epigraphists are now in agreement on the transliteration of all but two or three graphs; the very first and still influential reading by Xiao Yun of 1972 has been corrected and should be considered outdated.<sup>20</sup> Both vessels carry the same poetic text, which consists of eight tetrasyllabic verses that form four stanzas (see fig. 4). Every second verse



壺 成 尊 犧 符 四 圓 蓋



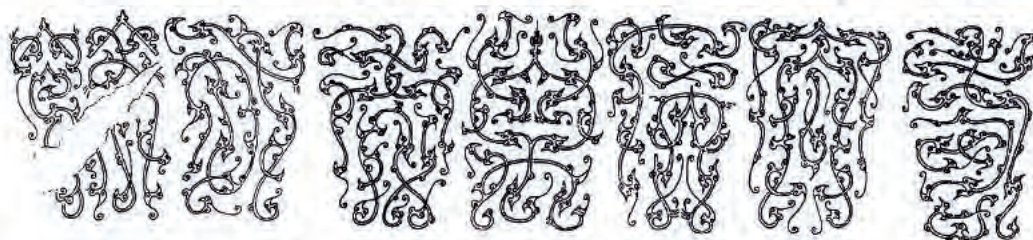
於 味 盛 兄 盛



於 揜 都 佳 心



延 膚 血 閨 充 味 口



餘 有 年 萬 病 去 壽

4 Drawn

Hebei CPAM, ed., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao* (Excavation report of the Han tomb at Mancheng), (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 7–10.



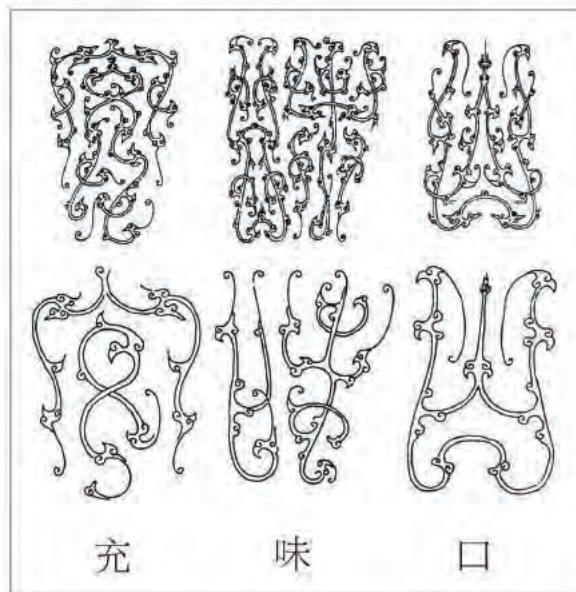
rhymes. Vessel B is missing the last verse (i.e., the last four characters), perhaps because it is 1.5 centimeters smaller in circumference. To cover the vessel surface neatly, the characters in the lowest register on vessel B are stretched into a much wider, looser, and more abbreviated style than those on vessel A (fig. 5). Below is the transcription and translation I would suggest.

#### Vessel A

蓋圓四符	“Encircled by four invocations, <sup>21</sup>
犧尊成壺	What excellent vessel, <sup>22</sup> what perfect vase. <sup>23</sup>
盛兄盛味	May your liquid abound in aroma
於心佳都	And please us to our heart’s content, <sup>24</sup>
揜於口味	Flood the palate full with flavor, <sup>25</sup>
充閭血膚	Imbue with moistness blood and skin. <sup>26</sup>
延壽去病	Prolong life, dispel disease
萬年有餘	For ten thousand years and more.”

If translated in this manner, the text on the vessel bodies, as on the lids, starts out self-referentially, praising the artful design and craftsmanship of the vessels, then celebrates the sensory qualities of the contents, and finally explains what the benefits of consuming these contents should be—the blessings of health and longevity. The precise nature of these contents, is, however, left undisclosed.<sup>27</sup>

This written decoration is a verbal and visual celebration of exquisiteness, which presents us with an exceptional form of synesthesia. Once the ornamental graphs have successfully been translated into words we are, as on the lids, told explicitly what we have already gathered from a quick look—namely, that the vessels impress the viewer with an abundant display of art, skill, and costly materials. We also recognize that what may seem to be an artful play with redundancy in fact serves to intensify the art inherent in both the poetic text and the ornamental design. Like the calligraphy, the poem reveals a remarkable emphasis on sensory experience. Aroma, flavor, and moistness are paralleled with bodily sensors, the heart, the palate, the skin—as if the aesthetic experience of deciphering the precious characters ought to culminate in the stimulation of the gustatory senses. To say it in more profane terms, appreciating the art entices one



5 Comparison of the same words written in the lowest register of vessels A and B.

to drink and thus to procure the blessings of health and longevity. One wonders if the quality of the drink could actually have lived up to the quality of these containers. Or was it not precisely the synesthetically overwhelming exuberance of the containers that made their contents so special?

#### THE RITUAL CONTEXT

Were these two bronze *hu* what we generally call ritual vessels, implying a use in sacrificial ceremonies? Or were they simply elegant treasures that expressed Liu Sheng’s idea of what a “true king” ought to be surrounded with—art that “delights him with gorgeous sights and sounds”?<sup>28</sup> Both possibilities have found scholarly proponents. Some commentators have felt that the invocation of sensuous delight encoded in the written ornament mainly served to enhance Liu Sheng’s reveling in wine;<sup>29</sup> others have understood the vessels as appropriate for ritual use.<sup>30</sup> A close reading of the inscriptions, artful design, and funerary context of the vessels supports the second position.

The explicit request for good health and longevity links the surface poems of the vessels with a long

tradition of prayers to heaven and the ancestral spirits. Countless ritual vessels and bells of the Zhou period are inscribed with prayers that ask for such blessings, although the wording of those earlier invocations of the spirits is somewhat different from that of the Mancheng vessels.<sup>31</sup> In particular, the Mancheng inscription makes no claim to the preservation or virtue of a family lineage, as it does not include a dedicatory statement with the name of the beneficiary of the blessings. Instead, text and vessel praise the refined quality of each other and thus play on the relationship between ornament and container. In its self-referentiality, celebratory style, and emphasis on sensory experience, the Mancheng prayer is reminiscent of some of the liturgical hymns of the Qin and especially the early Han dynasty<sup>32</sup> as well as of a number of songs about sacrificial feasts in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Songs).<sup>33</sup> These ritual texts provide copious references to the sensory enjoyment of fine foods, fragrant wine, beautiful songs, and refined vessels as essential components of sacrifices or the feasts that accompanied them. The irresistibility of the gorgeous offerings was meant to entice the spirits to come and indulge and, in appreciation, assure the worshipers of their support and grant them the desired blessings.<sup>34</sup> For many believers stimulating sensory delight was clearly a means to communicate with the numinous.

While the ceremonial hymns mentioned above concentrate on transmitting such sensory delight to the metaphysical universe, other writings explain the importance of a holistic aesthetic experience for the living performers of a ritual. This view is best known through the writing of Xunzi 詢子 (ca. 310–ca. 220 B.C.), which was still promoted as a standard for the imperial court by Han Wudi's time. Sima Qian's monograph on imperial rites in the *Shiji* (Records of the Historian), for instance, largely paraphrases and quotes Xunzi's views on ritual.<sup>35</sup> Featured prominently in this *ru* 儒 discourse on ritual is the idea that the ornate material environment is essential for a successful ritual and ought to nurture or satisfy (*yang* 養) the senses of those who perform the regal rites. Fine food and drink are listed as necessary to nurture the mouth, fragrances and scents to nurture the nose,

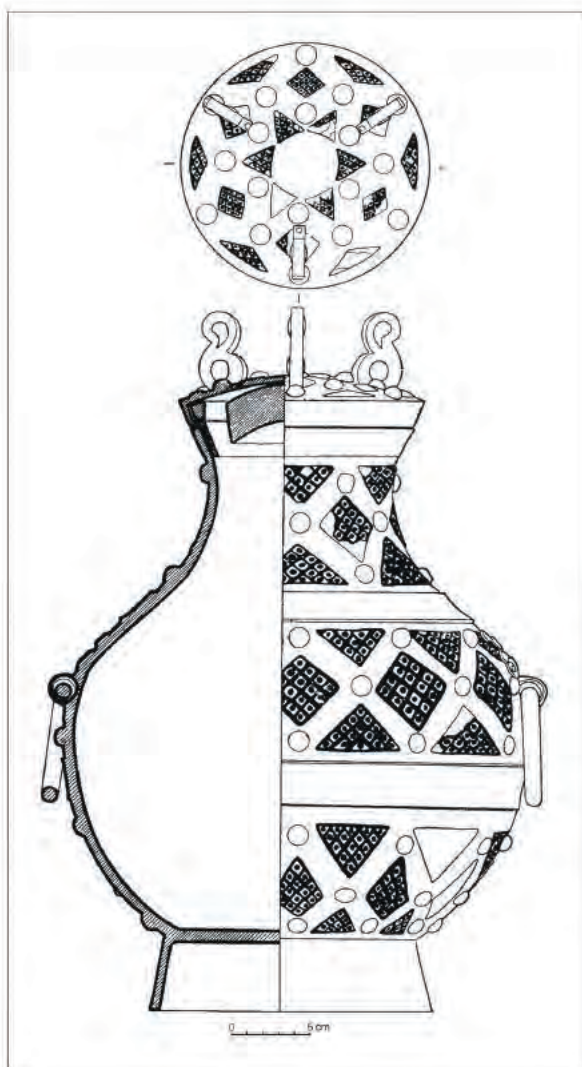
music to nurture the ear, rooms and furniture to nurture the needs of the body, and “engraving and inlay, patterns and designs” to nurture the eye.<sup>36</sup> According to Xunzi, ritual in its broadest sense was (among other things) clearly meant to be an aesthetic experience.

It is easy to imagine that an aesthete such as Liu Sheng would employ artfully designed utensils for the performance of sacrificial rites and in this manner subscribe to the idea of nurturing the senses and aesthetic sensibilities of both the spirits and himself as the ritual performer. Communication with the spirits would thus have been mediated through the art inherent in the design of the ritual utensils. In Liu Sheng's tomb, of course, the utensils are provided for Liu's own spirit, to nurture his desires and material needs, which apparently were believed by many to be largely identical in life and in death. Liu Sheng's tomb indeed has been recognized as one of China's most prominent material sources of evidence for the belief that the living and the spirits have very similar desires and ambitions. Archaeologists have recovered in it a plethora of material necessities for the king's life, from horses, chariots, and arms to furniture, food and drink, medical utensils, cosmetics, and sex implements.

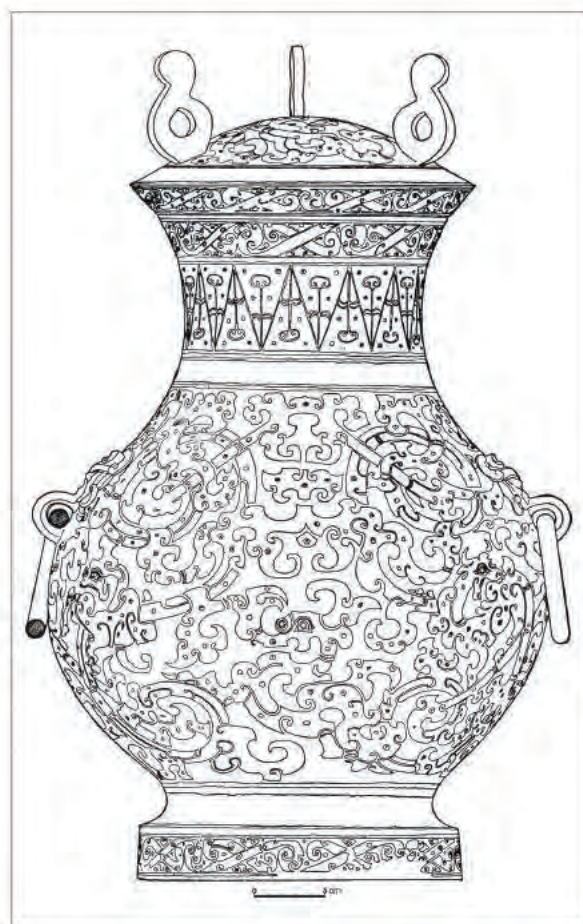
The two *hu* were found in the central room of the rear chambers of the tomb, behind the large reception hall, where they had been placed next to the coffin with two other sumptuous *hu* vessels (figs. 6, 7) on or right next to what used to be a low table (fig. 8).<sup>37</sup> Also on the table were a spoon, a lacquer dish, three pots, *fu* 釜, a white jade seal without inscription, a belt hook, and a sword.<sup>38</sup> On a second, smaller table directly in front of the first stood a lacquer vessel, *zun* 尊, a simple bronze tripod, *ding* 鼎, a lacquer dish and cup, and two animal-shaped ornaments. Near these tables were various types of lamps, swords and other arms, quarrels, coins, toiletries, and a stone figure of an attendant. Near the entrance two more stone attendants waited with lacquer dishes. This space conforms to what is known as a *qin* 寢, a retiring room at the back of a ceremonial hall, *miao* 廟, in aristocratic palaces and ancestral temples of the late Zhou and Qin dynasties.<sup>39</sup> The furnishings of Liu Sheng's eternal retiring room convey an atmosphere of privacy,



luxury, and authority and create an environment to withdraw to, eat and drink, be waited upon, do administrative work, and always find a weapon within easy reach. The setup of the hu vessels is formal, yet the formality is that of private enjoyment rather than public ceremonial. Liu Sheng's descendants had set up an eternal offering for their deceased ancestor that catered to his personal predilections and tastes and at the same time represented his royal status.



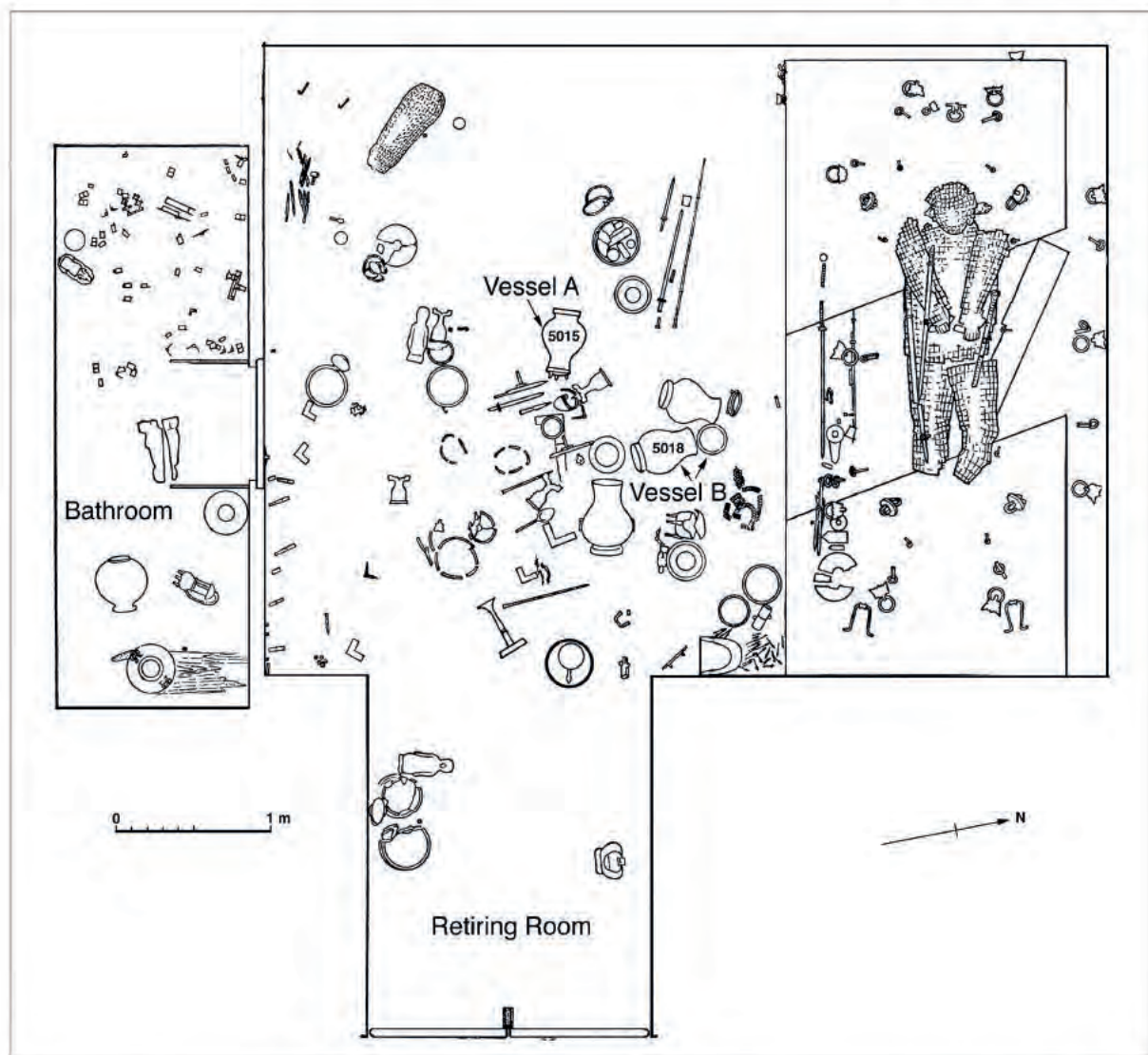
6 Drawing of a *hu* vessel (1:5019) from the tomb of Liu Sheng, gilt and silvered bronze with glass inlay, h. 45 cm, diam. 28.9 cm. Institute of Archaeology CASS and Hebei CPAM, ed., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 39.



7 Drawing of a *hu* vessel with dragon-scroll design (1:5014) from the tomb of Liu Sheng, gilt and silvered bronze, h. 59.5 cm, diam. 37 cm. Institute of Archaeology CASS and Hebei CPAM, ed., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 40.

## THE CALLIGRAPHY

The stylization of the ornamental writing on the Mancheng vessels, especially the addition of bird and fish images to the characters on lid A and the many coils alluding to bird heads and plumes, has led scholars to call this writing “birdscript.” The term is first used in Eastern Han textual sources, but it is not entirely clear what exactly the script referred to in those texts looked like. Xu Shen 許慎 (A.D. ca. 55–ca. 149) mentions in the epilogue of his *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Elucidations of the Signs and Explications of the Graphs) (A.D. 100) that the “eight classes of writing in Qin” also included “insect writing,” *chongshu* 蟲書.<sup>40</sup>



8 Plan of the rear chambers of Liu Sheng's tomb. For the fully annotated map, see Institute of Archaeology CASS and Hebei CPAM, ed., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 31.

According to the *Shuowen jiezi* and the *Hanshu*, *chongshu* was still tested in the imperial academy during the early Han dynasty as one of the “six types of writing,” and later, in the Wang Mang interregnum (A.D. 9–25), this writing also became known as “bird-and-insect writing” or “bird writing,” *niao-chongshu* 鳥蟲書.<sup>41</sup> The reason for the new emphasis on birds in the term is unclear.<sup>42</sup> Xu Shen further reported that during Wang Mang’s time bird-and-insect writing was used mainly for authentication banners and pennants, *fanxin* 幡信, i.e., for formal objects (usually made of

cloth and hung from spears and the like) used for proving legitimacy and identity.<sup>43</sup> Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) commented that insect writing was so called because it resembled worm and bird forms and therefore was used for writing on authentication banners.<sup>44</sup> The *Hanshu*, on the other hand, implies that several official writing styles were used for *fanxin*—a note that finds confirmation in the archaeological discovery of funerary banners and an authentication pennant in Gansu in the 1950s and in 1973 respectively (fig. 9), which apparently were written in a clearly dis-





9 Detail, authentication pennant excavated in 1973 at Jianshui Jinguan, Gansu, late Western Han, first century B.C. h. 21 cm, w. 16 cm. Zhangye Cultural Center, Zhangye County, Gansu.



cernible form of regular sealscript, *xiaozhuan* 小篆.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the sources record that under emperor Lingdi 靈帝 (r. A.D. 168–189) an elegant and technically demanding sealscript style called *niaochongshu* was favored at the court.<sup>46</sup> Yet how closely the birdscrip of the late Eastern Han dynasty was related to the writing on the Mancheng vessels remains unclear. In sum, the early literary sources can be interpreted as describing a type of writing that was practiced during the Qin and Han dynasties, that may have called to mind animate forms of life, more specifically worms or feathered creatures, and that was often used on objects for authentication.

While archaeologically recovered authentication banners are too rare and controversial to illuminate actual styles of Han period birdscrip, seals—another group of authentication objects—provide richer evidence. Based on a corpus of more than one hundred extant examples (most of them without archaeological provenance and preserved in private collections), historians of calligraphy have confidently identified one of the Han seal-writing styles as birdscrip.<sup>47</sup> They traditionally define this style in relation to a wavy form of *zhuan*shu, which is considered to be the *mouzhu*an 繆篆, the “winding sealscript” mentioned in the *Hanshu* and other early sources as one of the six writing styles of the early Han period. Seal inscriptions in which the winding distortion of the characters has become extreme or that include bird and fish motifs are considered to correspond to the *niaochongshu* (fig. 10).<sup>48</sup> The difference between the *mouzhu*an and *niaochongshu* is thus today determined by the degree to which the basic *xiaozhuan* style has been altered. Among the few archaeologically recovered examples with birdscrip are a white jade and a white agate seal of Cao Zhuan 曹饌, the consort of a royal nobleman of Changsha around 140 B.C. (fig. 11).<sup>49</sup> In its distortion of the *xiaozhuan* character structure and the tendency to add swellings and occasional hooks, the writing on these seals is very similar to that on the Mancheng vessels.<sup>50</sup>

Although a detailed chronology of the seals with *mouzhu*an and *niaochongshu* inscriptions is still lacking, the development of their extravagant writing

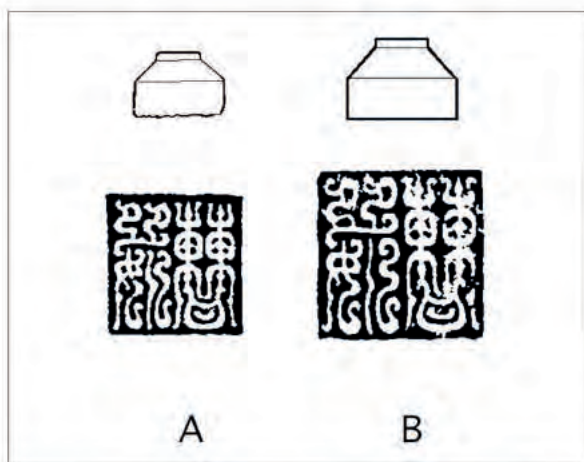


10 Imprints of Han-period seals in two stylistic variations of birdscrip. Transcriptions follow Ha Guoquan, “Niaochongshu lungao” (A discussion of birdscrip), *Gu wenzi yanjiu* 10 (1983).

styles appears to have spanned the entire Han period. Most of the earliest pieces are large and made of jade rather than bronze.<sup>51</sup> The size and material of these early seals clearly imply that their owners stood above the sumptuary regulations that otherwise applied to seals during the Han period.<sup>52</sup> The same aristocratic privilege is expressed by the exceptional skill that was invested in cutting the carefully designed winding characters into the hard jade. The imaginative, unconventional qualities of the *mouzhu*an and *niaochongshu* seals reflect their private use. Many of these seals explicitly state that they are private seals, *siyin* 私印, not suited for official business. The design of these seals must have catered to the individual tastes of their owners, not only through the shapes of the entire seal, which could on occasion be rather playful,<sup>53</sup> but also through the choice of writing style.

Closely related to some of the wavy, scrolling writing on seals and also to the script on the Mancheng vessels is the molded inscription on a rare eaves tile, *wadang* 瓦當 (fig. 12).<sup>54</sup> During the Western and early Eastern Han periods eaves tiles were decorated not only with geometric ornament but also with either the name of their buildings or with auspicious phrases written in a great variety of styles based on the *xiaozhuan*.<sup>55</sup> With these blessings the imperial family and members of the aristocracy, who reserved for themselves the privilege to use them on eaves tiles, asked for dynastic permanence, peace, happiness, and longevity. The inscription of the tile illustrated expresses the wish “to eternally receive good fortune,” *yong shou jia fu* 永受嘉福.





11 Drawing of Cao Zhuan's jade seal (A) and agate seal (B), excavated in 1974 in Changsha, Hunan. Imprints actual size. After "Changsha Xianjiahu Xi Han Cao Zhuang mu," *Wenwu*, 1979, 3:1–16, 3:10.

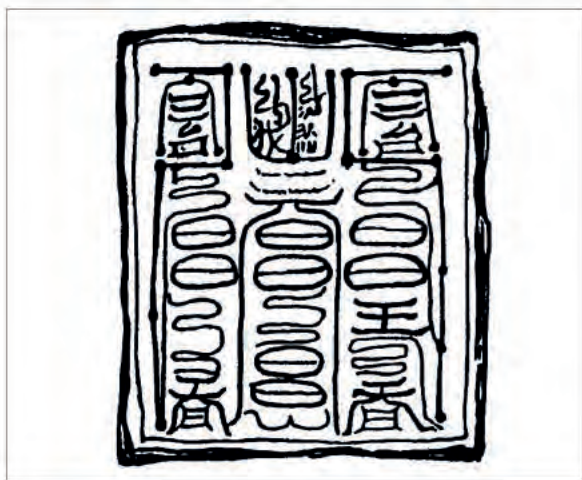
The writing style on this tile, like that on the *hu* vessels and the private seals of Cao Zhuan and others, abandons the conventional and sacrifices readability in favor of visual effect. It thwarts basic premises about the revelatory nature of writing and instead celebrates the language of ornamental design popular during the first half of the second century B.C.<sup>56</sup> Martin J. Powers has eloquently characterized that language as a form of "visual elusiveness," "an uncanny display of calculated confusion, a confusion that reinforces the impression of endless profusion." The art of such a design language lay in its "ability to surprise and tease",<sup>57</sup> its aim was to delight and dazzle, its message that of privilege, luxury, and elegance. The Mancheng birdschrift and related examples on tiles and seals have successfully altered written words into an ornamental pattern, *wenzhang* 文章, which elevated the design to the exuberant standard that was considered appropriate for ritual use at the early Han courts.<sup>58</sup>

Some authors have also recognized a magic component in the encryption of ornamental script, which may be especially fitting when the text asks for blessings such as good fortune, wealth, and longevity.<sup>59</sup> But since such blessings were also written in other *zhuan* styles, connotations of magic would seem to reside either in the word itself or in the *zhuan* style



12 Eaves tile with ornamental script, *yong shou jia fu*, early Western Han, second century B.C., clay, d. 15.4 cm. Kubosō Memorial Museum of Art, Izumi.

style as a whole. Since the Six Dynasties period Daoist charms and amulets consisting of invented composite characters called *fu* 符 promoted the idea that the spirits, for the most part demons that cause harm and disease, could be commanded through such esoteric writing (fig. 13).<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, the character on the Mancheng vessels that most likely refers to the inscription itself can also be read as *fu*,<sup>61</sup> suggesting that early Han birdschrift may indeed have played a role as a predecessor of later Daoist amulets. However, the difference between the earlier ornamental writing and the later talismanic characters is one of aesthetics and social class. While the earlier writing is artistic, the later *fu* are not; while early birdschrift is elitist, later amulets are esoteric. The vessel inscriptions, the names on the private seals, or the invocations on the roof tiles were not written to ban demons but to please spirits and courtiers such as the king of Zhongshan—in life and in death.<sup>62</sup> Implications of magic in such elegant writing would run counter to early Han beliefs in ancestral worship and aesthetic enjoyment. With the disappearance of excessively lavish ritual display in the early Eastern Han period, which also coincided with the abandoning of ornate



13 Fu amulet for curing disease. From the Six Dynasties text *Zhengyi fawen xiuzhen zhiyao* (Essentials of the Practice of Perfection), *Zhengtong daoang* (Daoist Canon) (1445; repr., Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1926), vol. 1003 (CT 1270).

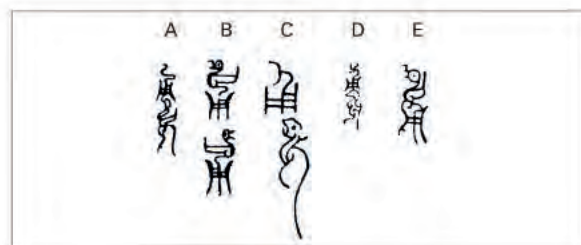
invocations on eaves tiles, the old, cryptic aristocratic writing may have been perceived as magical by people who were not initiated into the aesthetics of the aristocratic world. As a design principle, visual confusion certainly has the potential to express qualities of magic. Ernst Gombrich, for example, recognized it as an essential component in designs that evoke what he called “protective animation.” Yet he warned that without explicit explanations we would not know whether such animate imagery was meant to be funny and delightful or frightening.<sup>63</sup> This article has argued that in the case of the Mancheng vessels, it was the delightful art that was supposed to do the magic.

#### LINKS TO THE SOUTH

At least since the 1930s Chinese epigraphists have been applying the term “birdscript” to the gold-inlaid writing on bronze weapons, bells, and sacrificial vessels produced between the mid-sixth and early fourth centuries B.C. in the southern states of Chu 楚, Yue 越, Wu 吴, Cai 蔡, Song 宋, Qi 齐, and Xu 徐 (fig. 14). This Zhou period ornamental writing came in a great variety of styles that, to a certain extent, must be recognized as an early reflection of individual artistic inventiveness. On the other hand, the increase in archaeological data now allows scholars to match different styles with specific regions and periods.<sup>64</sup>

In comparison to the writing on the Mancheng vessels, these earlier writing styles differ noticeably, most obviously in their proportions. While the Mancheng graphs are well balanced and relatively wide, Zhou characters are narrow and mostly elongated, and their center of gravity often shifts arbitrarily from character to character. Such structural differences are undoubtedly due to the different *zhuanshu* styles on which the ornamental scripts were based. During the Eastern Zhou these were the numerous local script variations, but during the early Han period it was the *xiaozhuan*—the generally accepted display style since the Qin writing reforms.<sup>65</sup> There are also differences in the manner in which the normative characters were altered into ornamental forms. In Zhou birdscript the actual character in many cases remains clearly legible within long garnishing strokes that often transform into birds or dragons (see fig. 14). In other cases the characters are elongated and wavy. Additions of fish or scrolls do not appear in the Zhou period.<sup>66</sup>

Because ornamental writing of the northern Zhou states favored neither extreme waviness nor zoomorphic transformations in their characters, the design language of Zhou period birdscript is easily recognized as a southern idiom. But is this southern idiom also present in the ornamental script we find in the Han period? After all, Cao Jinyan’s exhaustive 1996 study reveals a long and marked break in the tradition of birdscript between the Eastern Zhou and the early Han period. About two hundred years stretch between the Mancheng vessels and the latest known inscribed examples from the Zhanguo period, the swords of the Yue King Buguang 越王不光 (r. 411–376 B.C.).<sup>67</sup>



14 Examples of the character *yong* 用 in birdscript of the Eastern Zhou period as inscribed on bronze weapons of Yue (A, B), Wu (C), Chu (D), and Cai (E). After Ma Guoquan, “Niaochongshu lungao” (A discussion of birdscript), *Gu wenzi yanjiu* 10, (1983):149–52.



Are we then to understand early Han ornamental writing as a conscious revival of an old southern tradition? And if so, was such a revival predominantly practiced in the southern parts of China, or was it instead part of the general fashion for Chu culture fostered at a great many of the early Han courts? And how, then, should we interpret Xu Shen's remarks, that insect writing, *chongshu*, was one of the official writing styles already at the Qin court?<sup>68</sup>

Chinese scholarship on the history of birdscript has so far been unable to produce material evidence from the Qin period to substantiate Xu Shen's record.<sup>69</sup> The material record instead points to a sudden reemergence of a slumbering tradition in the first half of the second century B.C., with the Mancheng vessels as its most splendid point of reference. Unfortunately, archaeological data for the development of early Han ornamental writing are very scarce and still await systematic analysis. Nevertheless, there are at least two indications that during the early Han period birdscript was indeed closely connected with southern China and the old region of Chu. First, an initial survey of early birdscript seals discovered in controlled excavations clusters these finds to the Hunan region.<sup>70</sup> Second, a stylistic analysis of the Mancheng vessels clearly reveals that their ornamental language is that of the south. The elegant linear flow of the Mancheng characters, which pauses at the nodes where flaming scrollwork is added, and the sharp, beaklike tips that revolve out of the scrolls and occasionally continue into a long, thin coil can all be matched most closely with bronze and lacquer designs found in southern tombs. These southern sites include the third-century B.C. Chu tomb 406 at Wulipai, Changsha;<sup>71</sup> tomb 135 at Yangjiashan, Jiangling, Hubei (fig. 15), considered to date to the Qin period;<sup>72</sup> tomb 168 at Fenghuangshan, Jiangling, Hubei, dated to 167 B.C.;<sup>73</sup> tomb 1 at Shazitang, Changsha, dated to 157 B.C.;<sup>74</sup> the tomb of Cao Zhuan in Changsha of ca. 140 B.C.;<sup>75</sup> and the tomb of the marquis of Ruyin 汝阴 in Shuanggudui, Fuyang County, Anhui, dated to 165 B.C. (fig. 16).<sup>76</sup> The design language on several lacquer objects from this last tomb most closely compares to that of the Mancheng vessel. Most of those particular lacquer pieces have



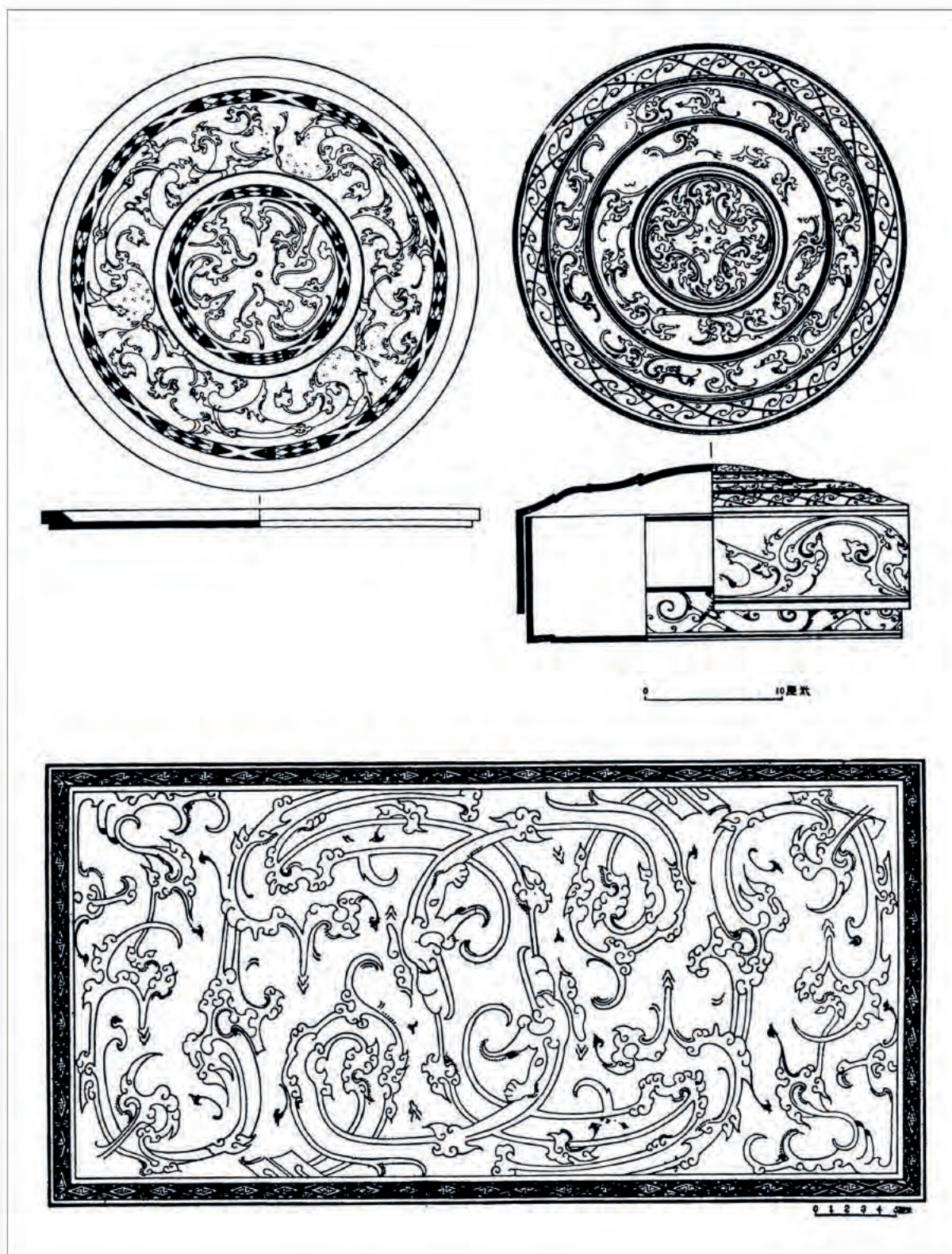
15 Drawing of a painted lacquer dish from tomb 135 at Yangjiashan, Jiangling, Hubei, Qin, late third century B.C., diam. 28.8 cm. After Hubeisheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan, "Jiangling Yangjiashan 135 hao Qin mu fajue jianbao," *Wenwu*, 1993, 8:8.

inscriptions, which date them to the 170s and early 160s B.C. and explain that they were locally produced in Anhui for the marquis of Ruyin.

Such comparisons unequivocally establish a link between the Mancheng vessel ornament and southern design traditions of the early second century B.C.<sup>77</sup> They do not, however, securely explain the provenance of the vessels. Some scholars have suggested that the *hu* were manufactured in the southern parts of the Han empire. Wang Zhongshu summarizes this theory as follows:

Because the bird-pattern seal characters were popular in the South during the Spring and Autumn–Warring States periods, it was likely that [the vessels] were in the collection of the prince of Wu or that of the prince of Chu. They were perhaps given to Liu Sheng after being confiscated from their previous owners as a consequence of the latter's participation in the rebellion of the seven feudatories.<sup>78</sup>





16 Drawings of lacquer designs from tomb 1 at Shuanggudui, Fuyang, Anhui, 165 B.C., Western Han (ca. 180–170 B.C.). After "Fuyang Shuanggudui Xi Han Ruyin hou mu fajue baogao," *Wenwu*, 1978, 8:27–29.



The transfer of precious utensils among the royal nobility was certainly common during the early Western Han period, and several of the most impressive Mancheng finds attest to this practice in their inscriptions. The two other splendid *hu* vessels from Liu Sheng's eternal retiring chamber, for example, both have inscriptions that indicate previous owners. The glass-inlaid vessel (see fig. 6) was once used in the imperial palace in the capital at Chang'an, while the vessel with the dragon scrolls (see fig. 7) once belonged to the household of a king of Chu.<sup>79</sup> Yet, while Wang Zhongshu is certainly correct in dating all four vessels to the first half of the second century B.C. rather than closer to Liu Sheng's death in 113 or 112 B.C., there is little evidence for a significant tradition of gold-and-silver-inlaid metalwork in Hunan.<sup>80</sup> The great majority of such work can be associated with bronze workshops in the Central Plains and in Hebei, the Zhongshan region itself.<sup>81</sup> Among late fourth-century ritual vessels of Zhongshan one even finds prototypes whose entire surface is covered with elegantly designed script.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, murals such as the ones in the tomb at Shiyuan 柿園 at Mount Mangdang 芒碭山 demonstrate that southern-style design was produced locally for the early Han aristocracy in the Henan region.<sup>83</sup> In sum, the Mancheng birdschrift vessels' overt design references to the south may reflect a southern manufacture, but it is equally possible that the vessels were manufactured at a northern court workshop in collaboration with a southern designer.

Jessica Rawson has already demonstrated that southern design idioms held a great appeal for early Han aristocrats throughout their new empire,<sup>84</sup> and Gopal Sukhu has illuminated the political and intellectual background that explains the Han nobility's embrace of the cultural heritage of the south.<sup>85</sup> Sukhu has also shown how profoundly ideologically the promotion of Chu culture could have been interpreted under Han rule. During the early parts of the second century references to a southern heritage could easily be read in political terms that related them to the overthrow of the Qin dynasty and the establishment of a new Han aristocratic culture. In regard to

the Mancheng vessels, which celebrate the southern visuality in the design of ritual paraphernalia precisely during these early decades of Han rule, the ideological charge could hardly have escaped even a semi-educated courtier. Here a southern design idiom is used to alter the normative script forms that had been imposed only decades earlier by the despised Qin.

Some lines from Qin Shihuang's 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 B.C.) ceremonial stele erected in 219 B.C. on Mount Langya 琅琊 in Shandong make clear what ideological potential underlay his standardization policies in the first place: The August Thearch "unifies the minds and integrates the wills. Vessels and implements have their identical measures. One uniformly writes the refined characters."<sup>86</sup> The stele from Mount Langya survives in fragments and allows for a glimpse of the elegant *xiaozhuan* style that the First Emperor had set forth as a standard for ritual display and transcendental communication (fig. 17).<sup>87</sup> The contrast to the writing style on the Mancheng vessels could not have been more dramatic! Yet both inscriptions address the spirits, both emphasize artistic design, and both follow a very similar poetic structure. Until future archaeological data reveal that birdschrift (as we know



17 Rubbing of fragments from the stele inscription of Mount Langye, Qin, 219 B.C.

it from Han-period evidence) was practiced at the Qin court, we may interpret the ornamental writing on the Mancheng vessels as a reactionary statement of an early Han noble to assert political power.

Whether Liu Sheng would have recognized this same ideological message once he obtained the vessels is unclear. His personal interpretation of the vessels would certainly have been motivated by their provenance. Generally speaking, however, luxurious vessels decorated in a southern style possessed by the 110s B.C. all the prerequisites to be controversial centerpieces of political rivalries at the court of emperor Wu, which focused on the appropriate performance of imperial rites and the necessity of lavish display. To quite an extent these rivalries were dominated by two groups: reformist intellectuals of the *ru* tradition on the one hand, who emphasized the worldly benefits of rites

and advocated moderation in ritual display, and the masters of methods, *fangshi* 方士 on the other, who often promoted southern, shamanistic approaches to ritual and who were favored by Emperor Wu when it came to issues of efficacious spirit worship and direct interaction with the transcendental powers.<sup>8</sup> Liu Sheng's siding with the emperor's beliefs is clear from the evidence in his tomb.<sup>89</sup> Over time, *ru* scholars succeeded in curtailing luxurious ritual display. By the beginning of the Eastern Han, extravagant vessels like the ones found in Liu Sheng's tomb were no longer produced and doubtlessly would have been considered tasteless. For Liu Sheng, however, the vessels had still served as efficacious tools of worship and historic artworks for self-representation and personal delight.❖

**FRANÇOIS LOUIS**, Ph.D. (1997) in East Asian art history at the University of Zürich, is assistant professor at the Bard Graduate Center, New York. His recent publications include "The Genesis of an Icon: The Taiji Diagram's Early History," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (2003) and "Shaping Symbols of Privilege: Precious Metals and the Early Liao Aristocracy," *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* (2003).



## NOTES

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1. The vessels are catalogued as vessel A (1:5015) and vessel B (1:5018) in Institute of Archaeology CASS and Hebei CPAM, ed., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao* 成漢墓發掘報告 (Excavation report of the Han tomb at Mancheng) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), 43–48.
2. Ma Guoquan mentions that when the vessels were exhibited in the Wuying Hall of the Palace Museum in Beijing in 1972, a drawing of the inlaid text in red and black was displayed as well. According to Ma, this is the drawing one finds reproduced in most publications. See Ma Guoquan 馬國權, “Niaochongshu lungao” 鳥蟲書論稿 (A discussion of birdschrift), *Gu wenzi yanjiu* 古文字研究 10 (1983): 153.
3. Vessel A has ornamental bands with a meandering landscape featuring various reptiles and monkeylike creatures that walk on two legs. Vessel B has bands with long dragons that wind their way around the vessel.
4. Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the historian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 59.2099; cf. Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), comp., *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the [Former] Han) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 53.2425f. Translation after Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty*, trans. Burton Watson (Hong Kong and New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 1:395:  
*[Liu] Sheng was a man who loved wine and was very fond of women so that, with all his offspring and their families, his household numbered over one hundred and twenty persons. He often criticized his elder brother, the King of Zhao, saying “Although my brother is a king he spends all his time doing the work of his own clerks and officials. A true king should pass his days listening to music and delighting himself with gorgeous sights and sounds.” To his brother the king of Zhao retorted in no uncertain terms: “The King of Zhongshan fritters away his days in debauchery instead of assisting the Son of Heaven to bring order to the common people. How can someone like that be called a bastion of the throne?”*
5. *Hanshu*, 53.2422. Cf. Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods, 221 B.C.–A.D. 24* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000), 354.
6. E.g., William Watson, *The Genius of China: An Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China* (London: Times Newspapers, 1973), no. 167; Jenny So, in *The Great Bronze Age of China: An Exhibition from the People's Republic of China*, ed. Wen Fong (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), 331; Shing Müller, in *China, eine Wiege der Weltkultur: 5000 Jahre Erfindungen und Entdeckungen*, ed. Arne Eggebrecht (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1994), no. 114; Ma Zishu, ed., *National Treasures: Gems of China's Cultural Relics* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1997), 166; Jessica Rawson, in *The Golden Age of Chinese Archaeology: Celebrated Discoveries from the People's Republic of China*, ed. Xiaoneng Yang (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 5, 398–400.
7. Xiao Yun 蕭蘊, “Mancheng Han mu chutu de cuo jinyin niaochongshu tonghu” 滿城漢墓出土的錯金銀鳥蟲書銅壺 (The bronze vessels with inlaid gold and silver birdschrift from a Han tomb at Mancheng), *Wenwu* 文物, 1972, 5:49–52; Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺, “Mancheng Han mu chutu cuo jin yin niaochongshu tonghu jia shiwen” 滿城漢墓出土錯金銀鳥蟲書銅壺甲釋文 (Transcription of the bronze *hu* vessel A with bird-and-insect writing inlaid in gold and silver from the Han tomb in Mancheng), *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史叢論, 1979, 3:1–6; Zhang Zhenlin 張振林, “Zhongshan Jing Wang niaozhuan hu ming zhi yundu” 中山靖王鳥篆壺銘之韻讀 (Rhyme and pronunciation of the birdschrift inscription on the vessels of Prince Jing of Zhongshan), *Gu wenzi yanjiu* 古文字研究 1 (1979): 157–73; Zhang Zhenlin 張振林, Zhou Esheng 周萼生, and He Xuejin 何學今, “Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu niaozhuan shiwen de taolun (san bian)” 關於滿城漢墓銅壺鳥篆釋文的討論(三編) (Three discussions of the translation of the birdschrift on the bronze vessels from the Han tomb at Mancheng), *Kaogu* 考古, 1979, 4:356–59; Zhou Cecong 周策縱, “Yi dui zui gu de yaojiu hu zhi faxian” 一對最古的藥酒壺之發現 (The discovery of one of the oldest pairs of medicinal wine vessels), *Gu wenzi yanjiu* 古文字研究 10 (1983): 418–38; Ma Guoquan, “Niaochongshu lungao,” 139–76.
8. For an insightful positioning of courtly writing styles such as “birdschrift” in relation to Cai Yong's 蔡邕 (133–192) theories on writing, see Michael Nylan, “Calligraphy: The Sacred Text and Test of Culture,” in *Character and Context in Chinese Calligraphy*, ed. Art Museum, Princeton University (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 49–57.
9. In the archaeological record the two vessels from Mancheng are, to my knowledge, unique. But a very similar *hu*, which appeared on the Hong Kong art market in the 1990s, is now owned by the Shanghai Museum. See *Zhongguo wenwu jinghua* 中國文物精華 (Gems of China's cultural relics) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1993), no. 89. Compared to the Mancheng vessels, the Shanghai example is, however, of such inferior quality as to raise doubts about its authenticity. Similarly disconcerting is the fact that the Shanghai vessel has only twenty-nine characters written on it, an odd number, which does not allow for a poetic structure of the text.
10. Xiao Yun, “Mancheng Han mu,” 49; Ma Guoquan, “Niaochongshu lungao,” 161. Zhang Zhenlin understands the last character as a different kind of fish called *fu*, a type of barbel. He argues that the choice of that word might have implied some kind of precious gift. See Zhang Zhenlin, in “Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu,” 356; Zhang Zhenlin, “Zhongshan Jing Wang niaozhuan hu,” 159.
11. He Xuejin, in “Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu,” 359; Institute of Archaeology et al., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, 43 (no translation is offered here).
12. Zhou Cecong, “Yi dui zui gu de yaojiu hu zhi faxian,” 418–27, 436.
13. Fan Xianrong in *Zhonghua wenshi luncong*, 1980, 3, quoted after Zhou Cecong, “Yi dui zui gu de yaojiu hu zhi faxian,” 419.
14. Zhou Esheng, in “Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu,” 358.
15. A visual examination of the inscription shows that there are clear separations between the individual characters, which appear to occupy a field with straight borderlines. In two of the three segments we can readily recognize four characters, but in the third one, there are only two clear separating spaces, which would indicate only three characters. No dividing space is allotted between the *fu* 甫 and *jin* 金 characters. Instead, a crane-like bird with a long, outstretched neck and protruding tail links

- the two parts. What is usually read in four characters as *san fu jin lai* 三甫金鯀 could therefore also be read as *san pu lai* 三鋪鯀. In the latter case, the text should be read beginning with the character *pu* 鋪, as Zhou Esheng proposes. On the body of the vessel, however, there are similar instances in which a character is not neatly placed in an imagined frame, so ultimately I, too, would support a symmetrical twelve-character reading.
16. Xiao Yun, "Mancheng Han mu," 52; Institute of Archaeology et al., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, 43.
  17. Zhang Zhenlin, "Zhongshan Jing Wang niaozhuan hu," 159. Ma reads *gan* 赶 instead of *guan* 罐: Ma Guoquan, "Niao-chongshu lungao," 154.
  18. Zhou Esheng in "Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu," 358, takes *su* 塑 as referring to the modeling in clay during the manufacturing process and recognizes four characters altogether. He does not offer a translation.
  19. Zhou Cecong, "Yi dui zui gu de yaojiu hu zhi faxian," 431–35.
  20. Xiao Yun, "Mancheng Han mu," 49–52. Xiao's article has been translated into English. See Albert E. Dien, Jeffrey K. Riegel, and Nancy T. Price, eds., *Chinese Archaeological Abstracts*, vol. 3, *Eastern Zhou to Han* (Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, University of California, 1985), 1087–89.
  21. Most authors understand this first verse as a description of the vessel, such as "The lid is round and there are four [decorated] registers/bands," meaning the neck, shoulder, belly, and foot (Xiao Yun, "Mancheng Han mu," 51; Zhou Esheng in "Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu," 358), or "Four layers [carry] the round lid" (He Xuejin, in "Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu," 359), or "The lid is all round and ornament surrounds . . ." (Zhang Zhenlin, "Zhongshan Jing Wang niaozhuan hu," 166). Yet the statement that the lid is round seems simply too banal to waste space and labor on two precious characters, especially since the inscriptions on the lid already refer to it in much more complex language. So *gai* 蓋 should here be translated not as "lid" but either as a causative particle ("Because four invocations encircle you") or as "to honor," "to venerate."
- The traditional translations are also not consistent with the actual appearance of the decoration, because there are in fact not four decorated registers on these *hu* vessels; one can distinguish either three registers decorated with writing, or three narrow bands and the footring decorated with animals. If transcribed as *fu* 符 (following Zhang Zhenlin and Ma Guoquan), the last character of this line may be understood as referring directly to the written decoration rather than to the registers of decoration. Xu Shen mentions in the postscript of his *Shuowen jiezi* the carving of inscriptions on tallies and credentials, *kefu* 刻符, as one of the eight writing styles of Qin. See Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, commented by Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 758. More specifically, *fu* may be understood as an engraved, auspicious saying, an invocation. By the Western Han period the character *fu* could certainly imply the idea of auspiciousness, *furui* 符瑞. See Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風, ed., *Hanyu da cidian (suoyin ben)* 漢語大詞典 (索引本) (The Great Lexicon of the Chinese Language) (Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chubanshe, 1997), 5202. Since four *fu* are specified, I believe the reference is to the four stanzas of which the inscription is composed. Each of these can be read as a separate invocation of a blessing.
22. Probably the most important remaining uncertainty in the vessel inscriptions regards the reading of the character before the word *zun* 尊 in the neck register. No fewer than six different transcriptions have been suggested. Problematic is the radical of this character, which can be understood as anything from a simple vertical stroke to a vertical stroke with three small strokes across. Xiao Yun reads the character as *xi* 義 and infers that it should be understood together with the following character as *xizun*, which would describe an classical archaic vessel type. Zhou Cecong modifies Xiao's interpretation and proposes reading the radical as *shou* 手 and transcribing the character as *xi* 犧, which would be a variant of 義. He convincingly supports his reading with numerous early quotations about *xizun* 犧尊, a term that in late Zhou and early Han literature described various types of exquisite *zun* vessels. The sources he discusses suggest that the common denominator of such a *xizun* was its superlative, unusual, and exceptionally accomplished decoration and shape, often said to have been made of ivory or bull's horn. Zhou Cecong, "Yi dui zui gu de yaojiu hu zhi faxian," 423–25.
  - In one article, Zhang Zhenlin ("Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu," 356) suggested reading the character as *mie* 蔑 with a water radical; in another ("Zhongshan Jing Wang niaozhuan hu," 159f.) he reads *yi* 義 with a *fu* 阜 radical. This latter reading is also followed by Ma Guoquan ("Niaochongshu lungao," 153). Both authors understand this character in the sense of 儀, meaning "of fine appearance," translating the line as "what a fine cup, what a great vessel." He Xuejin ("Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu," 358) and the editors of the official 1980 excavation report (*Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, 43) read the character as 儀 too, although He notes that the radical is clearly different from the unmistakable *ren* 人 radical seen a few characters later in the word *jia* 佳. His translation is, however, rather different from that of Zhang and Ma. He understands 儀 as a noun meaning "ritual" or "propriety," reading 尊 instead verbally as "to appreciate, to value," and *cheng* 成, like the other authors, as an adjective meaning "fine," "good," "perfect." According to his interpretation the line would mean "fine *hu* to be honored in ceremony," clearly implying that this is a vessel designed to be used in some kind of ritual context.
  23. Although the vessels are today categorized as *hu* 壺, in this inscription the term must have had a more generic meaning than just referring to vessels of this specific shape. Other vessels of the same type found at Mancheng carry inscriptions that explicitly label them as *zhong* 鍾. See Institute of Archaeology et al., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, 38–48.
  24. Literally: "[May you] contain cool liquid, which abounds in aroma, and is delicate and beautiful to our heart." The word *xiong* 兄, which is usually interpreted as *kuang* 況, is glossed by many early commentators as "cool water" (Zhou Cecong "Yi dui zui gu de yaojiu hu zhi faxian," 427f.).
  25. The reading of *yan* 揜 follows Zhou Cecong, "Yi dui zui gu de yaojiu hu zhi faxian," 428.
  26. The character read here as *chong* 充 may also be transcribed as *jiao* 交. In the abbreviated style on vessel B, the second reading is suggested.
  27. Note that the word "wine" is not mentioned in the inscription. The interpretation of the crucial word *xiong* 兄 as "cool water" (see note 24 above) and the presence of fish on the lid may perhaps point to scented water rather than alcohol—to some form of liquid in any case, rather than dates or other types of fruit that were sometimes also stored in *hu* jars at the time.
  28. See note 4 above.
  29. During the Cultural Revolution, Xiao Yun, for example, wrote that the "vocabulary and contents of the inscription are extremely shallow and filled only with a desire for material enjoyment." Xiao Yun, "Mancheng Han mu," 52. For a more tempered view of the vessels as evidence for the frivolous



- lifestyle of Liu Sheng, see Jenny So, in Wen Fong, *Great Bronze Age of China*, 331.
30. See He Xuejin, in "Guanyu Mancheng Han mu tonghu," 358; Jessica Rawson, in Yang, *Golden Age of Chinese Archaeology*, 400.
  31. Constance A. Cook, "Auspicious Metals and Southern Spirits: An Analysis of the Chu Bronze Inscriptions" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley), *UMI* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1990), 162–211.
  32. Martin Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), 132, 138, 187–88; Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), 142.
  33. Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes: Chinese Text, Transcription and Translation* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), no. 246 "Xing wei," no. 247 "Ji zui," no. 248 "Fu yi," pp. 202–5.
  34. Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 15, 150; Cook, "Auspicious Metals and Southern Spirits," 195, 207.
  35. Shiji, 23:1157–74; Edouard Chavannes, trans. and ed., *Les Mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 3:200–229.
  36. Shiji, 23:1158, 1161. The Xunzi passage is somewhat more explicit when it comes to the description of ornament: "Carved and polished [jade], incised and inlaid [metal], and [fabrics] embroidered with the white and black axe emblem, the azure and black notched-stripe, the azure and crimson stripe, the white and crimson blazon, are what nurture the eye." Cf. John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988–94), 3:55.
  37. Institute of Archaeology et al., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, 31.
  38. The blades of two long and two short spears, as well as two halberds, were also found there, but these were originally standing in the southeast corner and apparently fell on top of the table even before their wooden shafts had decayed.
  39. On the *qin*, see Wu Hung, "From Temple to Tomb: Ancient Chinese Art and Religion in Transition," *Early China* 13 (1988): 95. Wu quotes an informative description of such rooms by Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192):  
*An ancient ancestral temple consisted of a ceremonial hall in front and a retiring hall in the rear; after the manner in which a ruler had a court in front and a retiring chamber in the rear. The ancestral tablet was set in the ceremonial hall and was worshiped during the seasonal sacrifices.*  
*The retiring hall contained royal gowns, caps, armrests, and staffs, like the paraphernalia of the living king, which were used when presenting offerings. The Qin first removed the retiring hall [from the temple] to occupy a position flanking the tomb.*
  40. Cao Jinyan 曹錦炎, *Niaochongshu tongkao* (A comprehensive examination of bird-script) 鳥蟲書通考 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1999), 1f. On Xu Shen's epilogue see Marc Winter, ". . . und Cang Jie erfand die Schrift": Ein Handbuch für den Gebrauch des Shuo Wen Jie Zi (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 557–80.
  41. Ma Guoquan has proposed to understand the term *chong* not only in its narrow sense referring to worms and insects, but in its broader meaning, which during the Han could encompass any specified category of animate creature, including humans. He would therefore translate the term *niaochongshu* as "bird writing." Ma Guoquan, "Niaochongshu lungao," 141; Cao Jinyan, *Niaochongshu tongkao*, 2.
  42. It is widely debated whether insect writing and bird writing were two different styles, or whether the term *niaochong* simply referred to "feathered creature" and designated one and the same style with a more specific term. See Ma Guoquan, "Niaochongshu lungao," 142.
  43. On this type of object, see Li Xueqin 李學勤, "Tan 'Zhangye duwei qixin'" 談張掖都尉榮信, *Wenwu*, 1978, 1:42–43, translated into English by Jeffrey K. Riegel, "A Word on the 'Pennant Credential of the Controller of Zhangye,'" *Chinese Archaeological Abstracts*, vol. 3, ed. Albert Dien et al. (Los Angeles: Institute of Archaeology, University of California, 1985), 1206–9.
  44. Cao Jinyan, *Niaochongshu tongkao*, 1f., 5f.
  45. Hua Rende 華人德, *Zhongguo shufa shi* – *liang Han juan* 中國書法史, 兩漢卷 (History of Chinese Calligraphy—Han Dynasty) (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 68–69; Ma Guoquan, "Niaochongshu lungao," 169–70. There is still controversy over whether the writing on the *qixin* pennant from Gansu is an example of late Western Han *chongshu*. Cao Jinyan has little doubt that it is, while Hua Rende—and I would concur—considers it to be a regular form of *xiaozhuan*. See Cao Jinyan, *Niaochongshu tongkao*, 3; Hua Rende, *Zhongguo shufa shi*, 69.
  46. Nylan, "Calligraphy: The Sacred Text and Test of Culture," 49; Hua Rende, *Zhongguo shufa shi*, 22.
  47. Within the entire corpus of surviving seals from the Han period, these seals still form a very small group.
  48. Willibald Veit, *Siegel und Siegelschrift der Chou-, Ch'in- und Han-Dynastie* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985), 38; Han Tianheng 韓天衡, *Qin Han niaochongzhuan yin xuan* 秦漢鳥蟲篆印選 (A Selection of Qin and Han period birdscript seals) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1987), 1–8; for an abbreviated form of this study, see Han Tianheng, "Qin Han niaochongzhuan yin xian," in *Zhongguo shufa jianshang da cidian*, ed. Liu Zhengcheng (Beijing: Dadi chubanshe, 1989), 1512–13; Ma Guoquan, "Niaochongshu lungao," 162–68; Hua Rende, *Zhongguoshufa shi*, 93–94.
  49. "Changsha Xianjiahu Xi Han Cao Zhuang mu" 長沙咸家湖西漢曹饌墓, *Wenwu*, 1979, 3:1–16.
  50. For an explanation of the characters on these seals, see Ma Guoquan, "Niaochongshu lungao," 168. Cao Zhuan's tomb also included lacquer objects, whose painted designs closely resemble the Mancheng vessels in style, see *Wenwu*, 1979, 3:13, 15.
  51. Veit's study showed that *mouzhuan* was used initially for jade seals and was "transferred to bronze seals only relatively late, probably around the middle of the Western Han dynasty." Veit, *Siegel und Siegelschrift*, 197.
  52. Veit, *Siegel und Siegelschrift*, 197.
  53. In the collection of Mr. Sonoda in Kyoto is a seal in the shape of a coiling dragon, which can be worn as a bracelet. The same collection, however, also includes another private seal with a similarly extravagant handle, but with a very angular inscription in regular sealscript. Veit, *Siegel und Siegelschrift*, table CXCI:1, table CXCI:6.
  54. *Daisanji Kubosō korekushon: Eguchi Jirō korekushon* (The Third Kubosou Collection: Eguchi Jirō Collection) (Izumi: Kubosō Kinen Bijutsukan, 2001), fig. 359. An identical tile was excavated in 1953 in Xianyang, Shaanxi, see Shi Shuqing 史樹青, ed., *Zhongguo wenwu jinghua daquan, jinyin yu shi juan* 中國文物精華大全, 金銀玉石卷 (The Compendium of China's fine cultural relics, volume on gold, silver, jade, stone) (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1994), 355. For a rubbing of possibly the same tile, see Veit, *Siegel und Siegelschrift*, table LXVII:3; Veit's reference to an earlier Chinese publication of that rubbing includes an error and cannot be verified. For a rubbing of a tile once in the collection of the antiquary and connoisseur Wu Dacheng 吳大澂 (1835–1902), see Ma Guoquan,

- "Niaochongshu lungao," 171; Hua Rende, *Zhongguo shufa shi*, 116.
55. Wang Zhongshu, *Han Civilization* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 148–50; Hua Rende, *Zhongguo shufa shi*, 111–18. Most of the tiles decorated with *xiaozhuan*, *mouzhuan*, and *niaochongshu* characters date to the mid- and late Western Han period. During the Eastern Han, eaves tiles with auspicious wishes become rarer and tiles more frequently use the *lishu* style. By the end of the Han and later, the old tiles had apparently already become desirable collectibles of calligraphy enthusiasts. See Hua Rende, *Zhongguo shufa shi*, 117.
  56. Han Tianheng, "Qin Han niaochongzhuan yin xian," 2, has argued that the birdsript style used on seals was a means to beautify ordinary writing, the designer taking recourse to the ornamental tradition of its time.
  57. Martin J. Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 80.
  58. On ritual splendor under Emperor Wu, the ensuing reaction of ritual classicists, and a most insightful discussion of the changing meaning of the term *wenzhang* from "correct and appropriate ornament" to "mere ornament" in the course of the late Western and early Eastern Han period, see Martin Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of *wen* in Early China," *T'oung Pao* 87.1–3 (2001): 43–91, esp. 66f. Kern also demonstrates that the term *wen* only takes on the meaning of text and writing in the course of the debates on ritual reform, beginning in the later part of the Western Han period. The tempting speculation of a conscious play in the early Han birdsript with a possible double meaning of *wen* as "refined ornament" and "refined written text" can therefore be excluded.
  59. E.g., Tseng Yuho, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1993), 41, 80–82; see also Lothar Ledderhose, *Die Siegelschrift (Chuan-shu) in der Ch'ing-Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1970), 43–44.
  60. On such *fu* talismans, see Monika Drexler, *Daoistische Schriftmagie: Interpretationen zu den Schriftamuletten "Fu" im Daozang* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994). See also Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 123–93, esp. 140–43.
  61. See note 21 above.
  62. Hua Rende suggests that Western Han officials well versed in the eight writing styles must have provided the designs for the tile inscriptions, as the archaeologically excavated examples apparently all belonged to imperial monuments. Hua Rende, *Zhongguo shufa shi*, 115. My thanks to Bai Qianshen for directing my attention to this passage.
  63. Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979), 262–63.
  64. For fine recent scholarship on Zhou-period birdsript, consult Cao Jinyan, *Niaochongshu tongkao*. See also Cong Wenjun 叢文俊, "Niao feng long chong shu hekao" 鳥鳳龍蟲書合考 (An examination of bird, phoenix, dragon, and insect scripts) *Shufa yanjiu* 書法研究, 1996, 3:40–80; Ma Guoquan, "Niaochongshu lungao," 139–76.
  65. On the Qin script reforms, see Derk Bodde, "The State and Empire of Ch'in" in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, *The Ch'in and Han Empires*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 56–58.
  66. Ma Guoquan, "Niaochongshu lungao," 142.
  67. Cao Jinyan, *Niaochongshu tongkao*, 5, 88–99.
  68. See note 40 above.
  69. The birdsript tile excavated in Xianyang is occasionally considered to be of Qin date, but no compelling evidence has been cited for such a dating. See Shi Shuqing, ed., *Zhongguo wenzhu jinghua daquan, jinyin yu shi juan*, 355.
  70. Wu Zhefu et al., *Five Thousand Years of Chinese Art: Chinese Seals—Zhonghua wuqian nian wenwu jikan. Xiyin pian* (Taipei: Zhonghua wuqian nian wenwu jikan bian ji wei yuanhui, 1985), 48, 62, 66, 67. The two seals discovered in 1974 in the tomb of Cao Zhuan in Changsha were the first archaeologically excavated examples of birdsript seals that could be clearly dated (see fig. 11). See Veit, *Siegel und Siegelschrift*, 194.
  71. *Changsha fajue baogao* (Excavation reports from Changsha) 長沙發掘報告 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1957), 57f., pl. 107, color pls. 1, 2.
  72. Hubeisheng Jingzhou diqu bowuguan, "Jiangling Yangjiashan 135 hao Qin mu fajue jianbao" (Excavation report of Qin tomb no. 135 at Jiangling Yangjiashan) 江陵揚家山 135號秦墓發掘簡報, *Wenwu*, 1993, 8:1–11.
  73. Margarete Prüch, *Die Lacke der Westlichen Han-Zeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1997), 287. Compare here especially the diagonal ornaments with animals, in Institute of Archaeology et al., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, 45, figs. 27:2, 27:5.
  74. *Wenwu*, 1963, 2:13–24, pls. 2, 3; Prüch, *Die Lacke der Westlichen Han-Zeit*, Figs. 9, 10.
  75. See note 49 above.
  76. "Fuyang Shuanggudui Xi Han Ruyinhou mu fajue baogao" (Excavation report of the tomb of the Western Han marquis of Ruyin in Fuyang Shanggudui) 阜陽雙古堆西漢汝陰侯墓發掘報告, *Wenwu*, 1978, 8:12–31.
  77. For additional comparative examples of animal ornament in southern contexts, see Jenny So in Fong, *Great Bronze Age of China*, 331.
  78. Wang Zhongshu, *Han Civilization*, 101.
  79. Institute of Archaeology et al., *Mancheng Han mu fajue baogao*, 41ff.; Wang Zhongshu, *Han Civilization*, 101.
  80. For late fourth-century Chu bronze vessels with inlay, presumably produced in the Chu capital, see the examples found in Chu tomb 2 at Wangshan, Jiangling, Hubei (*Wenwu*, 1966, 5:33–55), and in Baoshan, Jingmen, Hubei (Yang, *Golden Age of Chinese Archaeology*, no. 115).
  81. Jenny So, *Eastern Zhou Ritual Bronzes from the Arthur M. Sackler Collections* (New York: Arthur M. Sackler Foundation, 1995), 3:56–79.
  82. See So, *Eastern Zhou Ritual Bronzes*, 61; *Gems of China's Cultural Relics*, 1992 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1992), no. 110.
  83. The Shiyuan tomb belonged to a still unidentified member of the early Han aristocracy. See Yan Genqi, ed. 嚴根齊, *Mangyang shan Xi Han Liangwang mudi* 芒陽山西漢梁王墓地 (The tomb of King Liang of the Western Han at Hangyang Shan) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001), fig. 49, color pls. I, II.
  84. Jessica Rawson, "Chu Influences on the Development of Han Bronze Vessels," *Arts Asiatiques* 44 (1989): esp. 84–86.
  85. Gopal Sukhu, "Monkeys, Shamans, Emperors, and Poets: The *Chuci* and Images of Chu during the Han Dynasty," in *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China*, ed. Constance A. Cook and John S. Major (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 145–63.
  86. Kern, *Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang*, 27.
  87. Ledderose, *Die Siegelschrift (Chuan-shu) in der Ch'ing-Zeit*, 27–28.
  88. Sukhu, "Monkeys, Shamans, Emperors, and Poets," 152–57; Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon," 66–68.
  89. One may even read the unflattering debate with the king of Zhao, which Sima Qian chose to record in Liu Sheng's biography as a criticism of the emperor's promotion of luxurious ritual display. See note 4 above.







## Previous Exhibitions





## Previous Exhibitions



December	1985	<i>Chinese Gold, Silver and Gilt Bronze up to the Tang Dynasty</i> , London
June	1986	<i>Ancient Chinese Bronze Vessels, Gilt Bronzes and Early Ceramics</i> , London
December	1987	<i>Opening Exhibition</i> , London
June	1989	<i>Archaic Chinese Bronzes from Shang to Zhou Dynasties</i> , London
June	1990	<i>Imperial Gold from Ancient China</i> , London
June	1991	<i>Imperial Gold from Ancient China, Part II</i> , Grosvenor House, London
June	1991	<i>The Art of the Warring States and Han Periods</i> , London
September	1992	<i>XVI<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
December	1992	<i>An Exceptional Horse from the Han Dynasty</i> , London
November	1994	<i>L'Or des Qin, XVII<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
December	1995	<i>Le Banquet des Dieux, Ritual Bronzes of Ancient China</i> , London
January	1996	<i>Le Banquet des Dieux, Bronzes Rituels de la Chine Ancienne</i> , Paris
September	1996	<i>XVIII<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
February	1997	<i>Arts de la Chine et de l'Himalaya, XIV<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C.–XV<sup>e</sup> s. apr. J.-C.</i> , Paris
January	1998	<i>L'Immortalité de l'Âme chez les Han</i> , Paris
March	1998	<i>Timeless China</i> , New York
October	1998	<i>L'Art et la Matière</i> , Paris
October	1999	<i>Caravanes sur la Route de la Soie</i> , Paris
September	2000	<i>XX<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
October	2000	<i>Twentieth Anniversary</i> , Paris–London
October	2001	<i>Rituels pour l'Éternité</i> , Paris–London
September	2002	<i>XXI<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
September	2004	<i>L'Or des Qidan, XXII<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
September	2006	<i>XXIII<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
April – May	2007	<i>L'Inde Sensuelle : Terres cuites de l'époque Gupta, IV<sup>e</sup>–VI<sup>e</sup> s.</i> , Paris
February	2008	<i>Exposition Inaugurale</i> , Paris
September	2008	<i>XXIV<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
Mar. – Apr.	2009	<i>Treasures from Ancient China–I</i> , New York–Paris
Feb. – Mar.	2010	<i>Treasures from Ancient China–II</i> , Paris–New York
September	2010	<i>XXV<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
Mar. – Apr.	2011	<i>Treasures from Ancient China–III</i> , Paris–New York
September	2011	<i>Extraordinary Animals from Ancient China</i> , Paris
October	2011	<i>The Franck Arts Collection</i> , Fine Art Asia Fair, Hong Kong
March	2012	<i>Treasures from Ancient China–IV</i> , The Gerbe Collection, New York
September	2012	<i>XXVI<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
October	2012	<i>Archaic Bronze Vessels from Private Collections</i> , Fine Art Asia Fair, HK
October	2013	<i>Ancient Chinese Ritual Bronze Vessels</i> , Fine Art Asia Fair, Hong Kong
May	2014	<i>Ancient Chinese Ritual Bronze Vessels</i> , International Antiques Fair, HK
September	2014	<i>XXVII<sup>e</sup> Biennale des Antiquaires</i> , Paris
October	2014	<i>A Masterpiece of the Inlaid Art of Ancient China</i> , Int. Antiques Fair, HK
May – June	2015	<i>International Antiques Fair</i> , Hong Kong
September	2015	<i>Terre Cuite Haniwa : L'Art funéraire au Japon</i> , Paris
May	2016	<i>The 'Oeder' Gui</i> , International Antiques Fair, Hong Kong
May	2016	<i>The Honolulu jia</i> , International Antiques Fair, Hong Kong
September	2016	<i>La Soie : Trésor des sables d'Asie Centrale</i> , Le Rendez-vous, Paris















