

ODESSA COLLEGE LRC



5 1994 00131854 4









Frontispiece  
Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

BY HUGO MUNSTERBERG

A Short History of Chinese Art  
Twentieth Century Painting  
The Landscape Painting of China and Japan  
The Arts of Japan  
The Folk Arts of Japan  
The Art of the Chinese Sculptor  
The Ceramic Art of Japan  
Zen and Oriental Art  
Mingei: The Folk Arts of Old Japan  
Chinese Buddhist Bronzes  
The Art of the Far East  
The Art of India and Southeast Asia  
The Sculpture of the Orient  
The Arts of China  
Dragons in Chinese Art  
A History of Women Artists  
The Art of Modern Japan  
Die Kunst Asiens  
Dictionary of Chinese and Japanese Art  
The Japanese Print  
The Crown of Life: Artistic Creativity in Old Age  
Symbolism in Ancient Chinese Art  
The Kimono in Japanese Art and Culture  
The Art of the Potter from Prehistoric to Modern Times

*Symbolism in Ancient  
Chinese Art*

**HUGO  
MUNSTERBERG**



# Symbolism in Ancient Chinese Art



HACKER ART BOOKS, NEW YORK, 1986

MURRY H. FLY  
LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER  
ODESSA COLLEGE, ODESSA, TEXAS

LIBRARY

Copyright © Munsterberg, Hugo 1986

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number 84-82430  
International Standard Book Number 0-87817-303-X  
Design by Peretz Kaminsky

All rights reserved

*Printed in the United States of America*

*For my dear wife  
who in her study of bird symbolism  
has been laboring in a similar field.*



# *Preface*

A BOOK SUCH AS THIS would not be possible without the work of many other scholars, both Chinese and Western, who have conducted the excavations at Shang sites, analyzed and interpreted the Shang texts, brought together the folklore materials and studied Shang history and culture. To all of them I am deeply indebted and wish to express my gratitude. It was also my privilege to know the pioneers in this field of inquiry, Carl Hentze, Florance Waterbury and Phyllis Ackerman, and to have been able to discuss these matters with them. While my own conclusions differ from theirs, I have nevertheless benefited from their work. My own interest in this subject was first awakened when I was a graduate student at Harvard where Professor Benjamin Rowland, in discussing ancient Chinese art, suggested that it might have been symbolic in character. This resulted in two articles published some thirty years ago in *Oriental Art* and the *Art Quarterly*. My interest was rekindled during two trips to China when I had the opportunity to visit many of the early sites.

Finally I wish to thank the museums which once again have generously allowed me to reproduce material from their collections, notably, the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., The Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the Royal Ontario Museum and the British Museum. I am also deeply indebted to my wife Peggy, who has shared with me her ideas and insights derived from her extensive study of bird symbolism in English literature and has given many helpful suggestions in looking over the manuscript.

*1982 New Paltz, New York*



# *Table of Contents*

List of Illustrations	13
Introduction	19
1. The Dragon	39
2. The Tiger	67
3. The Owl and the Pheasant	91
4. The Bull and the Ram	113
5. The Cicada	135
6. The Fish, the Tortoise and the Toad	153
7. The Snake	167
8. The T'ao-t'ieh	179
9. The Human Figure in Shang Art	197
10. Sexual Symbolism in Ancient Chinese Art	215
11. Celestial Symbolism	235
12. Conclusion	251
Bibliography	257
Index	261





# *List of Plates*

	Page
Frontispiece Bronze Kuang, Shang Period	
1. Bronze Winged Dragon, Chou Period . . . . .	43
2. Jade Dragon, Shang Period . . . . .	48
3. Jade Bird and Dragon, Shang Period . . . . .	50
4. Bronze Yu, Early Chou Period . . . . .	51
5. Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	52
6. Jade Pi with Dragon, Middle Chou Period . . . . .	54
7. Clay Dragon, Six Dynasties Period . . . . .	55
8. Bronze Dragon, Six Dynasties Period . . . . .	57
9. Tzu Chou Jar, Sung Period . . . . .	58
10. Carved Lacquer Box with Dragon Design, Ming Period . . . . .	59
11. Porcelain Plate, Ch'ing Period . . . . .	60
12. Porcelain Plate, Ch'ing Period . . . . .	61
13. Dragon Robe, Ch'ing Period . . . . .	62
14. Silk Hanging, Ch'ing Period . . . . .	63
15. Marble Tiger, Shang Period . . . . .	70
16. Carved Stone with Tiger Design, Shang Period . . . . .	72
17. Jade Carving of Tiger and Man, Chou Period . . . . .	73
18. Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	74
19. Bronze Yu, Shang Period . . . . .	77
20. Bronze Yu (detail), Shang Period . . . . .	78
21. Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	82
22. Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	84
23. Bronze Kuang (detail), Shang Period . . . . .	85
24. Stone Relief From Wu Liang-tz'u Tomb, Han Period . .	87
25. Marble Owl, Shang Period . . . . .	93
26. Bronze Tsun, Shang Period . . . . .	94
27. Bronze Chih, Shang Period . . . . .	96

28.	Bronze Yu, Shang Period . . . . .	97
29.	Clay Relief Sculpture, Han Period . . . . .	99
30.	Jade Bird, Shang Period . . . . .	102
31.	Bronze Tsun, Shang Period . . . . .	103
32.	Bone Pins with Bird Designs, Shang Period . . . . .	105
33.	Detail of Funeral Banner, Han Period . . . . .	107
34.	Limestone Buffalo, Shang Period . . . . .	115
35.	Bronze Tsun, Early Chou Period . . . . .	117
36.	Bronze Tsun, Shang Period . . . . .	118
37.	Jade Buffalo Head, Shang Period . . . . .	119
38.	Bronze Lei, Shang Period . . . . .	121
39.	Bronze Chiu, Shang Period . . . . .	122
40.	Cover of Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	123
41.	Bronze Tsun, Shang Period . . . . .	125
42.	Bronze P'ou, Shang Period . . . . .	127
43.	Bronze Yu, Chou Period . . . . .	129
44.	Bronze Li, Shang Period . . . . .	138
45.	Bronze Yu, Shang Period . . . . .	139
46.	Bronze Ku, Shang Period . . . . .	141
47.	Bronze Ku, Shang Period . . . . .	142
48.	Bronze Chia, Shang Period . . . . .	143
49.	Jade Cicada, Chou Period . . . . .	145
50.	Bronze P'an, Shang Period . . . . .	155
51.	Cover of Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	157
52.	Jade Turtle, Chou Period . . . . .	158
53.	Jade Toad, Chou Period . . . . .	160
54.	Bronze Yu, Shang Period . . . . .	170
55.	Bronze Fang-Ting, Shang Period . . . . .	172
56.	Bone Spatula, Shang Period . . . . .	174
57.	Leg of Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	175
58.	Bronze Li, Shang Period . . . . .	181
59.	Bronze Tsun, Shang Period . . . . .	183

60.	Bronze Chih, Shang Period . . . . .	184
61.	Bronze Ting, Shang Period . . . . .	186
62.	Bronze Yu, Shang Period . . . . .	189
63.	Bronze Tsun, Shang Period . . . . .	190
64.	Bronze P'ou, Shang Period . . . . .	192
65.	Bronze Chia, Shang Period . . . . .	193
66.	Jade Finial, Chou Period . . . . .	200
67.	Bronze Ho, Shang Period . . . . .	202
68.	Bronze Ho, Shang Period . . . . .	204
69.	Bronze Ho, Shang Period . . . . .	206
70.	Bronze Ho, Shang Period . . . . .	207
71.	Cover of Bronze Ho, Shang Period . . . . .	209
72.	Bronze Square Ting, Shang Period . . . . .	210
73.	Ceramic Basin with Fan Design, Neolithic Period . . . . .	211
74.	Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	217
75.	Jade Ts'ung, Chou Period . . . . .	219
76.	Ceramic Jar, Neolithic Period . . . . .	222
77.	Bronze Li, Shang Period . . . . .	224
78.	Bronze Ting, Shang Period . . . . .	226
79.	Bronze Yu, Shang Period . . . . .	228
80.	Bronze Tsun, Shang Period . . . . .	230
81.	Bronze Li-Ho, Shang Period . . . . .	231
82.	Jade Pi, Chou Period . . . . .	234
83.	Jade Pi, Chou Period . . . . .	236
84.	Bronze Chia, Shang Period . . . . .	238
85.	Bronze Li-Ting, Shang Period . . . . .	240
86.	Yang-Shao Pottery Jar, Neolithic Period . . . . .	242
87.	Yang-Shao Pottery Jar, Neolithic Period . . . . .	243
88.	Yang-Shao Pottery Jar, Neolithic Period . . . . .	245
89.	Cover of Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	247
90.	Cover of Bronze Vessel, Chou Period . . . . .	248
91.	Bronze Kuang, Shang Period . . . . .	249



*Symbolism in Ancient  
Chinese Art*



# *Introduction*

---

**E**ARLY CHINESE RECORDS, such as the *Shu Ching* or *Book of History*, talk of the glorious rule of the Shang kings and the splendid civilization which existed in ancient China, but it was really not until the twentieth century that archaeologists making scientific excavations proved the existence of these rulers and their culture. Starting with the discovery of the last royal Shang capital at Anyang in Honan province by the Academia Sinica in 1928, and continuing to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, numerous excavations have brought to light a wealth of archaeological evidence which proves beyond any doubt that a highly developed civilization existed in China during the second millenium before Christ. New and equally startling discoveries made by the scholars of the People's Republic have enabled us to reconstruct the entire early history of the Shang dynasty, tracing its beginnings to sites such as Erh-li-t'ou and Cheng-chou and culminating with the magnificent finds at Anyang where the finest of

early Chinese archaeological remains were discovered. While there continues to be considerable scholarly controversy about the exact dates of this period of Chinese civilization, there is general agreement that the creative phase of Shang art can be dated roughly between 1500 and 1000 B.C., give or take a few decades. It was during these first five centuries of Chinese historical civilization that much of what we today consider the very essence of Chinese art and culture originated, and there can be no doubt that the ancient Chinese historians were right in assigning such importance to the Shang period.

A wealth of literature has grown up around these finds. It includes archaeological reports, many learned articles by both Chinese and Western scholars and several major books on Shang culture and art. It would be impossible to list even a small part but some of the most significant works should be mentioned. The earliest of these studies were those of Herrlee Glessner Creel, whose *Birth of China* summarizing the early archaeological data appeared in 1937, and Li Chi, whose book, *The Beginnings of Chinese Civilization*, came out in 1957. These were followed by William Watson's *Archaeology in China* (1960) and *Early Civilization in China* (1966), which give a good account of the finds of more recent decades. Among Chinese scholars



now working in the United States, the most outstanding contribution was made by Kwang-chih Chang whose *Archaeology of Ancient China*, (1963, revised edition 1977) and *Shang Civilization* (1980) are the best and most up to date studies of the subject. Another Chinese scholar who spent many years in the West is Te-k'un Cheng, wrote an ambitious four volume work on ancient Chinese civilization, its second volume, *Shang China*, published in 1960. Finally Li Chi, the grand old man among Chinese scholars associated with the early excavations, published an entire volume dealing with *Anyang* in 1977.

While these volumes address themselves to many aspects of early Chinese history and culture, giving a detailed and penetrating analysis of the society and civilization of ancient China, they tend, strangely enough, to neglect one important aspect of the time: the meaning and function of the art. It is true that some of these writers mention the dragon or serpent as being connected with rain and fertility, and others cite literary passages indicating that the tiger was associated with bravery or the phoenix may have had solar significance, but none of them addresses himself seriously to this important subject.

In China itself whatever reference there was to this topic came from later periods when the meaning of the images occurring in Shang art were long forgotten.

Rational, often moralizing, explanations were given for the bronze decorations but they had no relationship to the true meaning of the animal forms seen in the ancient art. This reinterpretation of Shang symbols is already found in late Chou and Han texts in which, for example, the animal mask found on many bronze vessels is called a T'ao-t'ieh, or glutton, and it is said that its purpose was to warn against overindulgence. Even stranger explanations for Shang decorative ornaments are found among Sung and Ming antiquarians who were determined to find interpretations for these ancient designs in terms of much later concepts which had nothing to do with the original meaning of the animal forms. In fact it has only been very recently that Chinese scholars have taken up the systematic analysis and study of the aesthetics and meaning of Shang art.

In Europe at least one scholar of note, the Belgian born German Sinologist Carl Hentze, took up this subject and spent a lifetime studying the meaning of China's ancient art. Starting with his *Mythes et Symboles Lunaires* (1932) and *Frühchinesische Bronze und Kulturdarstellungen* (1937) and ending with his *Funde in Alt-China* (1967), Hentze produced a large number of books and articles expounding his interpretations of ancient Chinese art and thought and relating it to the art of Oceania and ancient America. These publications

bring together a wealth of often fascinating materials and at least raise the right questions. The scope of his inquiry and the knowledge of Professor Hentze are truly impressive, but in the opinion of this author, at least, his conclusions are not convincing, for Hentze is often carried away by his own fertile imagination. He is much given to explaining Shang ideas and symbols on the basis of analogies to similar designs in much later periods and distant places, which seems at best a rather dubious method of procedure. Nevertheless it is Hentze's great merit that he was the first to study seriously this whole complex.

Less ambitious were the American art historians Phyllis Ackerman and Florance Waterbury. The former's *Ritual Bronzes of Ancient China*, published in 1945, attempts to explain Shang symbolism in terms of ancient Near Eastern art, especially Persian art in which Dr. Ackerman was an expert, while the latter in her *Early Chinese Symbols and Literature* of 1952 brings together references to animals and their symbolism in Chou and Han texts. Both books contain valuable material and offer interesting insights but neither really addresses itself to the mentality of the Shang people. Furthermore, they were written during the forties when the wealth of new archaeological material which has come to light between 1952 and 1982 was not yet available.

Confronted with a great variety of animal and some human representations in Shang art, art historians have basically taken one of three positions, namely, that these designs were purely ornamental in character; that they might have originally had some specific meaning but that it is idle to speculate about it; that it is possible to reconstruct their meaning on the basis of Chinese traditions and similar symbols elsewhere. The most eminent spokesman for the first group is Max Loehr who, in his *Ritual Vessels of Bronze Age China*, says: "Seen in the entire perspective of Chinese art history, most of the decorative designs on Shang and Chou bronzes may be characterized as purely ornamental. They were typical creations of the phase that preceded representational art, the art concerned with, and dependent on, reality. The shift toward representation occurred during the Han period. The moment it occurred, the art of ornament—heretofore the art of the greatest consequence—took second place and began to stagnate." Speaking of early Shang ornaments, he describes them as "consisting of nothing but spirals and eyes or pairs of eyes," and he adds "these zoomorphs were by no means abstractions but sheer designs."<sup>1</sup>

Equally dogmatic is Robert W. Bagley in his essay on the Erligang period of Shang art, for in discussing the T'ao-t'ieh, he says:

1. Max Loehr: *Ritual Vessels of Ancient China* (New York: Asia House Gallery Catalogue, 1968), p. 12.

“The history of the motif suggests that Shang decoration is an art of pure design, without any specific symbolism attached to particular motifs.” Later in the same essay he says that “all of the patterns, zoomorphic or not, belong to an art of pure ornament, of matchless intelligence and sophistication.” He further suggests that the type of ornament applied depends on the shape of the vessel and the technique of casting rather than being governed by any magical or spiritual ideas or meaningful symbolism.<sup>2</sup>

While there is probably no specific evidence which could persuade those who see early Chinese art motifs as purely ornamental and who discuss art in general from a purely formal point of view, scholars who have made a study of primitive art and especially those who have studied the mind of primitive man are almost unanimous in believing that for early man all life and art was magic and symbolic in character and that art for its own sake was a late and highly sophisticated phenomenon. Mircea Eliade put it very well when he said: “Systematic research devoted to the mechanisms of primitive mentality has revealed the importance of symbolism in archaic thinking and also the fundamental part it plays in the life of any and every primitive society.”<sup>3</sup> He also notes: “Moreover, this controversy over the legitimate limits of the hermeneutic appraisals of symbols is quite unprofitable. We

2. Wen Fong, editor: *The Great Bronze Age of China* (New York: Metropolitan Museum Catalogue, 1980), pp. 101–102.

3. Mircea Eliade: *Images and Symbols* (New York, 1961), p. 9.

have seen that myths decay and symbols become secularised, but that they never disappear, even in the most positivist of civilizations, that of the nineteenth century. Symbols and myths come from such depths. They are part and parcel of the human being.”<sup>4</sup>

Helmuth Th. Bossert, another scholar who has made a specialty of the study of primitive and folk art, has this to say: “Not only do songs, fairy tales and customs survive, but also unfathomably ancient cultural elements in art are handed down through thousands of years to the present age. Nothing is accidental or without meaning in primitive art. It is only in ‘stylistic art’ that decorative shapes have become lifeless ornaments which have lost their original meaning and significance. Folk art contains innumerable mythological allusions which can undoubtedly be traced back to prehistoric beliefs.”<sup>5</sup>

William Watson and Sherman Lee are the most prominent of the many students of ancient Chinese art who believe that while there may be some symbolical significance to the animal ornaments in Shang art, there is no point in speculating about their original meaning pending the discovery of Shang texts which will explain their symbolism. Watson, speaking of the decorations of Shang vessels, has this to say “Other frequent animal motifs of the Shang style are

4. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

5. Helmuth Th. Bossert: *Folk Art of Europe* (New York, 1953), p. 5.

birds (an unreal crested species and a more natural owl), snakes, cicadas and silkworms. The life cycles of the last two include stages which might be likened to rebirth in this or another world, but there is nothing in Shang texts or Shang traditions as later set down to confirm that this was the meaning in early times.”<sup>6</sup> Lee, in discussing Shang art in his general history of Far Eastern art, says: “Many authors attempted to explain in detail the symbolism of the various animal designs represented on Chinese bronzes. I agree with Alexander Soper, who describes one of these explanations as ‘moon struck.’ We do not know, and will not speculate here.”<sup>7</sup>

It is true, of course, that there are no texts discussing these symbols which can be dated before the Chou period and that there are no Shang inscriptions which specifically refer to animal symbols. However, this is not surprising since the people of the time must have understood the meaning of these designs which not only occurred on the bronzes but were also used in other arts and ceremonies. There were probably large scale paintings with symbolical designs on the walls of palaces and temples, similar ornaments on garments and wooden implements, as well as dancers and shamans dressed as sacred animals. Since the people would have been deeply versed in the magic and mythology which inspired these sym-

6. William Watson, *Style in the Arts of China* (London, 1974), p. 30.

7. Sherman Lee, *A History of Far Eastern Art* (New York, 1964), p. 31.

bols, there would have been no reason to explain them. The fact that we know about these symbols largely from the bronze vessels and jade carvings, and to a lesser extent from artifacts made of clay or bone, is due to the fact that it was these objects which have come down to us. This is pure chance, and had perishable objects survived, we would no doubt discover that the symbolism permeated every aspect of Shang civilization.

The third group of scholars are those who are certain that the animal motifs in Shang art are symbolic in character and must have had some specific meaning and magical function for the people of Shang China. As early as 1937, Creel in his pioneering work on early China concluded that the animal and ornamental designs which seem grotesque to us had “a very definite meaning and function for the people who made the bronzes.” And more recently one of the leading Chinese archaeologists, Ma Chengyuan, the curator of the Shanghai Museum, had this to say in his essay on “The Splendor of Ancient Chinese Bronzes” written for the catalogue of the travelling exhibition of *The Great Bronze Age of China* of 1980: “The bronze decoration characterized by the animal mask motif is a description and a pictorialization of such imagined forces of nature. The principal motifs, such as the dragon and the phoenix, are symbolic, representing such ideas as those recorded in the



*Kaogongji* of the fifth century B.C.; 'Water by the dragon, mountains by the roebuck, fire by the circle.' This is the earliest documentation of the pairing of natural forces with types of decoration. Although the *Kaogongji*, a record concerning building and crafts from the state of Qi, dates to the late Spring and Autumn period, this kind of thinking originated in antiquity. The dragon was the water spirit, and traditional myths report that Yu of Xia used a dragon's tail to furrow the land and control the waters. The roebuck was the mountain spirit, and the circle the fire spirit."<sup>8</sup> Ma concludes his discussion by admitting that it is not only very difficult to explain this type of decoration but that it is also impossible completely to understand it. To his way of thinking, the images appearing on the bronzes are primeval conceptions that suggest the barbaric. As decor they are "straightforward, unconcealed and intense." While Ma unfortunately does not develop his ideas any further, restricting his discussion to the whorl symbol which he relates to brightness and fire, there can be no doubt that he belongs to those who see magic meaning in the art of ancient China.

In trying to come to a proper understanding of the animal motifs on the sacrificial bronzes and other artifacts of the Shang age, there are three major types of data which can be useful. The first consists of the

8. Wen Fong, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

inscriptions which appear on the vessels themselves and on the oracle bones and tortoise shells employed for divination by the Shang people. Thousands of these objects have been recovered. While it is true that none discusses the symbolism of the ornamental designs of Shang art, they nevertheless tell us a great deal about the beliefs and customs of the people of this period. The writing employed, which consists of some three thousand characters, is the ancestor of the Chinese script still used today and gives us many valuable clues. About one thousand of them can be read with certainty and another five to seven hundred tentatively. The inscriptions themselves vary in length. Some of them consist merely of one character, which probably designated the clan for which the vessel was made. Others are longer, but no Shang inscription has more than fifty characters. However, some of the slightly later Western Chou bronzes inscriptions are quite long, with one having an inscription of no less than four hundred ninety-seven characters.<sup>9</sup>

The evidence offered by these inscriptions is important in several respects and sheds considerable light on the possible meaning of the animal motifs in Shang art. First of all, it tells us a great deal about the religion and the beliefs of the Shang people as is clearly demonstrated by Tsung-tung Chang in his excellent study of the religious

9. Kwang-chih Chang, *Shang Civilization* (New Haven, 1980), p. 21.

cult of the Shang dynasty.<sup>10</sup> Certainly such written proof that the Shang people did worship nature deities, the four directions and ancestral spirits, is relevant to the question of whether the decorative motifs appearing on the Shang vessels are symbolic in nature or purely ornamental. Second, the actual form of some of the ancient characters are often pictorial and resemble some of the designs found on the bronzes, such as the whorl, the spiral and the cowry. Third, the animals portrayed in the writing resemble those found in the art of the time.

That many of the animal forms in Shang art can be traced back to prehistoric times was already apparent to such early writers as Carl Hentze and J. G. Anderson, but it has only been fully understood in recent years when more and more material from Neolithic sites has come to light. The most spectacular of these finds was the excavation of an entire prehistoric village at Pan-p'o in the neighborhood of Sian in Shensi province. It dates from the Yangshao phase of Chinese civilization, probably as early as the fifth millennium B.C., and it contained pottery vessels with animal and human designs. Li Chi, in commenting on these artifacts and their ornaments, comes to the conclusion that "the main characteristics of the Shang decorative art were partly inherited from prehistoric times." He notes that "the biological figures such as

10. Tsung-tung Chang,  
*Der Kult der Shang-Dynastie  
im Spiegel der  
Orakelinschriften*  
(Wiesbaden), 1970.

fish, human faces and some plants and horned animals may trace their origin to Pan-p'o."<sup>11</sup> Even more explicit is Te-k'un Cheng who says: "The origin of some of the noteworthy elements of the Shang culture may be traced directly to the Neolithic period. Most of the important Neolithic sites were located in the northern provinces; they set the foundation upon which the Shang culture was erected."<sup>12</sup>

While some earlier writers had suggested that the Shang animal forms had evolved gradually from more abstract, geometric shapes found on Neolithic jars, it would now appear that the opposite was the case, for while the earliest Shang art is indeed very abstract, the earliest phases of Chinese art often used far more realistic forms. In commenting upon this phenomenon, Vadime Elisseeff puts it this way: "Thus it is, that many geometric motifs turn out to stem from an evolutive series of zoomorphic subjects, the various stages of which can be traced; for instance, the fish, bird or frog. We are witnessing a gradual geometrization of motifs, which through successive stylizations, substitutes a set of purely abstract forms for simple figures that, as in calligraphy, are always in harmony with significant models."<sup>13</sup>

Finally, there is a wealth of evidence offered by the folklore, peasant customs and popular beliefs of the Chinese people. While

11. Li Chi: *Anyang* (Seattle, 1977), p. 233.

12. Te-k'un Cheng, *Shang China* Vol. II of *Archaeology in China* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 240.

13. Vadime Elisseeff, *A New Light on Chinese Neolithic* (Cahiers de la Ceramique, du Verre et des Arts du feu, No. 55, 1974.)

none can be definitely traced back to Shang times, we know from the study of other civilizations that traditional concepts often go back to truly primitive, prehistoric times, and that this is the case even in very rational, sophisticated societies. This would, of course, be far truer in a country as conservative as China where the bulk of the population lives in rural villages much as their ancestors did thousands of years ago. The fact that there are Chinese country people who still worship the dragon and believe that a dragon deity inhabits lakes, rivers and clouds and brings rain, or that small children wear a tiger cap to protect them from evil forces, cannot be completely ignored when one attempts to discover what the dragon or the tiger might have meant to the people of the Shang period.

Students of Chinese religion, such as J. J. M. De Groot as well as many others, have commented upon the fact that the Chinese of early times already worshipped their ancestors and the spirits of nature. De Groot says: "As a natural consequence, it is around ghosts and spirits that he groups his religious acts, with the sole intent to avert their wrath and the evil it brings and to insure their good-will and help. The acts, manners and methods by which he tries to realize this dual object, are numerous . . . they are the fruits of the incisive genius of the whole of China through a long series of centuries.

They are the reflection of her wit and intellect, both old and modern, which nothing could illustrate as well as her animistic religion."<sup>14</sup> As late as the early twentieth century, the emperor during the winter solstice sacrifice at the Temple of Heaven in Peking not only still gave offerings to the supreme ruler of heaven, Shang Ti, and his imperial ancestors, but also worshipped the sun, the moon, the wind, the rain, the peaks and rivers as had his predecessors during the Shang period.

14. J. J. M. De Groot, *The Religious System of China*, Vol. IV (Leyden, 1892), p. 464.









*1*

*The  
Dragon*



**S**OME SCHOLARS have suggested that the animals shown in ancient Chinese art are the ones which were sacrificed during the offerings to the spirits of the ancestors and the nature deities. This theory, while no doubt appealing to the modern rational mind, does not accord with the facts of the matter; to judge from the remains of animals found in tombs as well as the inscriptions on the oracle bones, the main animals offered were pigs, dogs, bulls and sheep, none of which are prominent ornamental motifs on the Shang bronzes. In fact, pigs and dogs are never represented, the bulls shown are more commonly water buffaloes, and the rams on the bronzes are not the domestic kind found among the offerings but wild mountain sheep with large, curved horns. As Eleanor von Erdberg Consten rightly points out in her essay on Chinese bronze decoration: "Only a few animals are singled out for frequent appearance on ritual bronzes and other artifacts: we do not know which considerations governed the choice,

but it is safe to assume that it was the special symbolical significance of these few—and this justifies the name given to the group. In the exclusive circle of symbolical animals some appear but rarely and others never, e.g. the pig and the dog.”<sup>15</sup> That we are here dealing not with naturalistic animals which played a prominent role in Shang society but with mythical creatures derived from ancient Chinese legend and belief is best illustrated by the fact that one of the most popular animals in Chinese art is the dragon, or lung, as the Chinese call it, which is a purely imaginary being. In contrast to the Western dragon which is thought of as a negative force, representing evil and the devil, and which is slain by heroes such as Beowulf, Siegfried and St. George, the Chinese dragon is considered beneficial and auspicious, bringing good fortune and abundance.

Just what the source of the dragon myth is and what animal it is derived from has been endlessly debated for many years. Those who wish to find a naturalistic source for every animal motif occurring on Shang bronzes have tried to relate the dragon to the alligator, the salamander or the snake, and some, such as Florance Waterbury, have tried to deny its existence altogether. However, since a dragon-like creature exists in the art of mythology of virtually all early civilizations, it is most unlikely that it

15. Eleanor von Erdberg Consten, “A Terminology of Chinese Bronze Decoration,” *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. XVIII, 1959, p. 245.

is derived from such a naturalistic source. The earliest dragons are those encountered in ancient Mesopotamia, where it is found thousands of years before it appears in China and was already associated with water and fertility. Its origin may indeed be very ancient, going back to the memory of some prehistoric flying lizard which, as Carl Jung would say, had been preserved in the collective unconscious of the human race.

Just when it entered the consciousness of the Chinese people we do not know with certainty. Up to fairly recently, it was believed that the earliest Chinese dragons appeared in Shang art,<sup>16</sup> but in recent years, a primitive form of dragon was found among the decorative motifs on a third millennium amphora excavated at Kan-ku in Kansu province in 1958.<sup>17</sup> It resembles a snake but has feet and is partly hidden by clouds and water, so that in this way it already resembles the lung of later times. That the dragon myth is very ancient is also indicated by the legend which associates it with the earliest Chinese dynasty, that of the Hsia rulers who are said to have preceded the Shang kings. As Marcel Granet says: "The most famous of these symbolical animals is the Dragon. The Dragon, before becoming the symbol of sovereign power, was the emblem of the first royal dynasty, that of the Hsia (or rather, one of the emblems traditionally ascribed to the Hsia). One of the ancestors

16. Hugo Munsterberg, *Dragons in Chinese Art* (China Institute of America Exhibition Catalogue: 1972), p. 9.

17. William Watson, *The Genius of China* Exhibition Catalogue of Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China (London, 1973), p. 53.

of the Hsia transformed himself into a dragon in a Holy Place. This metamorphosis took place after he had been cut to pieces. It is therefore the sequel to sacrifice. Dragons appeared when there was a renewal or decline of the generic virtue by which the Hsia were empowered to reign."<sup>18</sup>

That the dragon was an important symbolic animal in ancient China is clearly indicated by the numerous dragon designs on the bronze vessels, the jade carvings in the shape of dragons and the fact that the dragon character appears in many Shang inscriptions. Its connotation seems to have been twofold. On the one hand, it was a creature of heaven connected with clouds, rain storm and fertility, and on the other hand it was associated with fecundity, especially that of the royal house. Numerous accounts of mysterious dragons appearing in the sky when a great ruler or famous sage are born exist in Chinese history and legend and in some cases it is even said that a dragon literally fathered a royal child. For example, it is reported by Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the great Chinese historian of the Han period, that the founder of the Han dynasty was conceived by a scaly dragon who was seen lying over his mother, Lady Liu. As a result, she became pregnant and bore the emperor Kao-tsu. Another legend has it that a dragon's saliva made a young girl pregnant. It is reported that at the time of

18. Marcel Granet, *Chinese Civilization* (London, 1930), p. 181.



1. Bronze Winged Dragon  
Chou Period  
Collection Stoclet, Brussels

Confucius' birth, a dragon appeared in the sky which was interpreted as an auspicious sign, and when Lao-tzu met Confucius, he remarked to his disciples that he had seen the dragon. It is also said that a dragon emerged from the Yellow River to reveal the famous circular diagram symbolizing the reciprocal play of the Yang and Yin forces. And the most ancient of Chinese oracular texts, the *I Ching*, already mentions the dragon as a beneficial force.

Lewis Hodous, in discussing the folkways of China, summarizes all this very well when he says: "The dragon is one of the most ancient and widely known beings in China. In fact it may be called omnipresent. Whether it be art, religion, social life, or politics, he has occupied and still occupies an important place. The emperor's throne was called the dragon throne. His countenance was the dragon's countenance. When the emperor died he ascended the dragon throne on high. The top of the ancestral tablet is a dragon's head. The bridal robe is embroidered with dragons. Then there are the dragon boat festival and the dragon lanterns. Buddhists still pray for rain to the dragon kings. The dragon idea has intertwined itself into all phases of social and political life and embodied itself in art and finds expression in literature."<sup>19</sup> No other animal occupies such an important place in the thought and art of the Chinese people, a

19. Lewis Hodous, *Folkways in China* (London, 1929), p. 139.



place which it has held for a period of at least four thousand years. Even today at times of prolonged drought the Chinese peasants make images of dragons consisting of bamboo frames covered with yellow paper and cloth; these are carried through the streets accompanied by the beating of drums and gongs in the hope that the dragon god will provide the much needed rain. Often men and boys also carry flags with the words "the rain is coming," or "let it rain." The dragon festival is still being celebrated in Chinese communities throughout the world on the fifth day of the fifth month during which dragon boat races are held.

According to Nicholas B. Dennys, who collected a great deal of material relating to folklore and customs of traditional China during the 1870s, dragons were not only worshipped at that time but were sighted by Chinese people. For example he reports that in 1605 a couple of dragons, found at the Whampo river, tore up several large trees and demolished some houses. In 1608 a dragon was said to have appeared over a pagoda surrounded by clouds and fog. In 1609 a white dragon was seen with a deity standing on its head; in 1652 a dragon is reported to have lifted a boat; while in 1667 dragons were seen fighting in the sky. Similar events also occurred during the eighteenth century: in 1773 a group of dragons are said to have burned a rice paddy and

carried off houses and travellers, while in 1787 dragons are reported to have overturned houses and carried off half a stone bridge.<sup>20</sup> Such sightings were by no means restricted to Ming and Ch'ing China when ancient superstitions would still have been very much alive. As recently as 1931, it was reported that a dragon was seen emerging from the Kan river in Kiangsi province. Dragon deities are still worshipped in Taiwan and offerings to dragons believed to be inhabiting rivers and lakes are still made by Chinese peasants.

There has been endless controversy over the question of the physical appearance of the dragon. According to some Han period accounts, the dragon has wings, a head like a horse, the tail of a snake, and four, or in the case of the imperial dragon, five, claws. It is also said that dragons have the power to change their appearance and size, at times seeming huge and on other occasions very small. However in Shang art and the Shang script, the dragon is never shown in such a bizarre and fanciful manner. Although individual representations differ, the basic form remains pretty much the same, namely, that of a flying lizard or winged serpent with prominent eyes, a scaly body, a tail and feet ending in claws. Bernard Karlgren, who made a thorough study of the dragon motif, distinguished between various kinds of dragons, such as winged, feath-

20. Nicholas B. Dennys, *The Folklore of China* (Hong Kong, 1876), p. 127.

ered, gaping, and trunked dragons,<sup>21</sup> but there seems little point in making such precise distinctions since no doubt the same creature is represented in all cases. Others, pointing out that there is a reference in Chinese texts to a creature called k'uei which is described as a one legged monster, suggest that many of the so-called dragons in Shang art should really be considered k'ueis, but this, too, seems rather far fetched, since these dragons have only one leg because they are shown in a side view. Still other authors refer to dragons called "li which are hornless dragons who live in the ocean and chiao dragons which are said to be scaly and reside in marches and dens in the mountains."<sup>22</sup> In light of the fact that all these very imaginative explanations of what dragons look like come from much later times, they probably do not apply to the Shang period, when dragons were not as yet so clearly differentiated.

In Shang art the dragon is one of the commonest and most important of the animal symbols. A good example of a dragon dating from this period is a jade carving excavated at tomb no. 5 at Anyang and now in the collection of the Archaeological Institute in Peking. It shows a lizard-like creature with large teeth, prominent eyes, phallic horns and an elongated body ending in a curled up tail. The body is decorated with a diamond pattern and has a notched flange

21. Bernard Karlgren: *Yin and Chou in Chinese Bronzes*, BMFEA, no. 8, 1937.

22. C. A. S. Williams: *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives* (Shanghai, 1941), p. 133.



2. Jade Dragon  
Shang Period  
Institute of Archaeology  
Peking

Plate 3 on page 50  
Plate 4 on page 51  
Plate 5 on page 52

along its spine which probably is meant to represent feathers. A similar dragon, this one combined with a bird, was found in the same tomb, suggesting that the dragon was a popular motif at the time. Again the creature is portrayed as having a long, curved body covered with a diamond and lozenge pattern, but in this example, cowry shell designs and large eyes are also added.

Far more common are the numerous dragons appearing on the surfaces of the bronze vessels. In some cases they are the main ornamental motif but usually they are part of a more complex iconographical whole. Such dragon forms appear especially on wine buckets and containers of all types, on which bands of dragons are a common decorative motif. A good example of such a vessel is the Yu-shaped bronze of the Early Western Chou period in the Royal Ontario Museum, on which bands of stylized dragons form the main ornament. Again the long body, the large eye, the prominent jaw and the feather-like projections are the characteristic features of this animal.

The dragon often appears on the surface of a bronze in conjunction with a variety of other animals. A superb vessel of this kind is the Late Shang kuang in the collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Here a dragon, clearly recognizable by its curving body, coiled up tail, clawed foot and large eye and jaw, is seen



3. Jade Bird and Dragon  
Shang Period  
Institute of Archaeology  
Peking



4. Bronze Yu  
Early Chou Period  
Royal Ontario Museum  
Toronto



5. Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Asian Art Museum  
of San Francisco



Plate 6 on page 54  
Plate 7 on page 55

together with birds, tigers, a ram, an elephant and a T'ao-t'ieh mask, all of which form an elaborate and complex decorative design.

Since many ornamental designs on Shang bronzes are composite in nature and there are imaginary beasts made up of elements derived from various animals, it is not surprising that there should be dragons with the trunk of an elephant, phallic horns, ears or wings derived from bird forms. In other cases, a small dragon may be used as one of the elements in a larger animal design, as in a kuang in the collection of Freer Gallery of Art in Washington in which two dragons form the curved horns of a bull. In still other examples, only the head of the dragon is shown, the body either reduced to a few simple forms or eliminated altogether. While the features of the dragons portrayed differ greatly, there can be no doubt that the dragon in one form or another was very significant in the art of the Shang and Early Chou period and must therefore have had an important role to play in early Chinese culture.

Unfortunately no texts dating from this period tell us what the dragon looks like or what function it had in the cosmology of the Shang people. However, Chinese civilization is a very conservative one in which old traditions, customs, legends and myths often existed over many millenia so that on a



6. Jade Pi with Dragon  
Middle Chou Period  
Seattle Art Museum



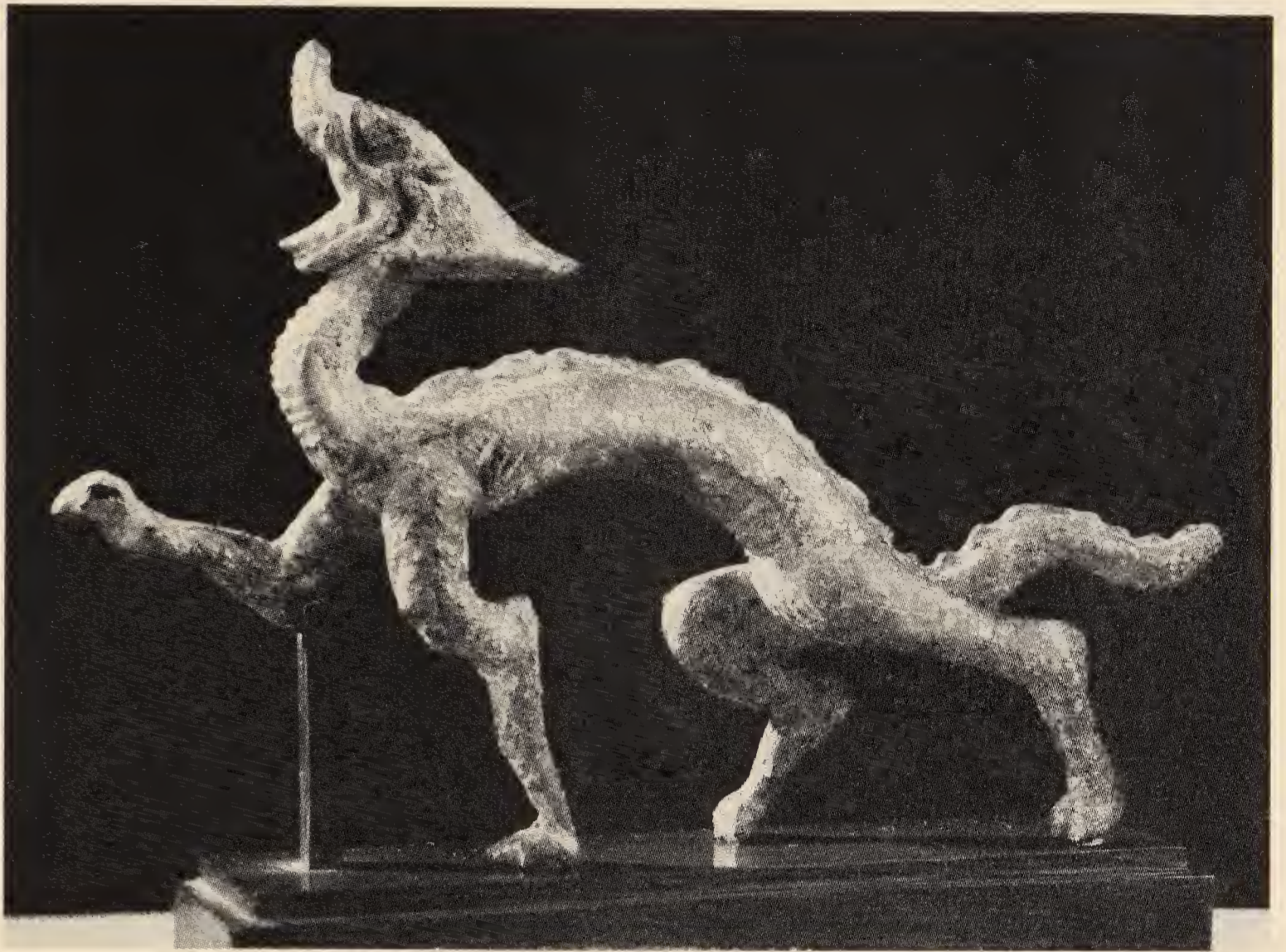
7. Clay Dragon  
Six Dynasties Period  
Art Museum of  
Princeton University

folk level ideas which go back to the very beginnings of Chinese civilization may survive into modern times. Even though commentators as early as the Chou and Han times often distorted the stories and reinterpreted them to conform to their moralistic Confucian world view, nevertheless beneath all these later accretions there are basic elements which reflect beliefs going back to Shang or even prehistoric times. Among these very ancient ideas is no doubt the concept of a supernatural, mythical dragon which inhabits the sky and the waters and is connected with clouds, rains and fertility on the one hand and the royal ancestors and the kings and emperors on the other hand.

Those who interpret the dragon in ancient Chinese bronze decoration as merely a formal, ornamental element with no particular magic or symbolic significance would have to explain why there is such a wealth of dragon myths and legends, for they indicate clearly how deeply embedded the dragon concept is in the subconscious of the Chinese people.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps we will never know their exact meaning, but there can be no doubt that the dragons in early Chinese art had some magical significance connected with fertility and fecundity which as can be seen in the art of the later periods lived on right into modern times.

Plates 8 through 14  
on page 57 through 63

23. M. W. De Visser, *The Dragon in China and Japan* (Amsterdam, 1913; reprinted Wiesbaden, 1969).



8. Bronze Dragon  
Six Dynasties Period  
Art Museum of  
Princeton University



9. Tzu Chou Jar  
Sung Period  
Ex-Collection Warren Cox



10. Carved Lacquer Box  
with Dragon Design  
Ming Period  
Private Collection, New York



11. Porcelain Plate  
Ch'ing Period  
Falk Collection, New York





12. Porcelain Plate  
Ch'ing Period  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



13. Dragon Robe  
Ch'ing Period  
Brooklyn Museum of Art



14. Silk Hanging  
Ch'ing Period  
Brooklyn Museum of Art



2

*The  
Tiger*





**N**EXT TO THE DRAGON, the animal which occurs most frequently in Shang art is the tiger. Like the dragon, it has been worshipped and regarded as an auspicious emblem since ancient times. Its role in Chinese thought is similar to that of the lion in the Western world, for it is considered the king of the animals and the ruler of the earth (in contrast to the dragon, who is looked upon as the ruler of the sky). To this day children wear tiger caps to protect themselves against evil demons. Tiger helmets were worn by the warriors of Shang times. Tiger uniforms were worn by Chinese soldiers in order to terrify their enemies. Tigers were painted on the shields, portrayed on banners, represented on the portholes of warships and shown on the bows of revenue cutters to scare smugglers. Tiger images were pasted on walls and doors to ward off evil influences. Tiger amulets were worn as a protection against harmful spirits which caused diseases, and the magic of the tiger was believed to be so potent that learned

men advised people suffering from obstinate fevers to cure themselves by reading treatises on tigers.<sup>24</sup>

In traditional Chinese cosmology, ever since Han times, the tiger has been a symbol of the West, the direction of the setting sun, for it is one of the animals of the four directions along with the dragon of the East, the bird of the South and the snake and tortoise of the North. Tiger shaped jades were often buried with the dead where they were placed to the right of the corpse facing the West. A Chou period commentator remarked that the tiger's ferocity symbolizes the severity of the autumn. In the *Li Chi* it says: "They met the (representatives of the) cats, because they devoured the rats and mice (which injured the fruits) of the fields and (those of) the tigers, because they devoured the wild boars (which destroyed them). They met them and made offerings to them."<sup>25</sup> While this rational explanation for the worship of the tiger dates from the Chou period and no longer reflects the thinking of the Shang age (when the tiger was no doubt worshipped as a nature and fertility deity), it nevertheless shows that some idea of the auspicious nature of the beast survived into the later age.

That the notion of a protective tiger deity goes back to very ancient times is clearly indicated by a prehistoric find of J. G. Anderson at the Sha Kuo-t'un cave in

24. De Groot, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, pp. 963-964.

25. *Li Ki*, translated by James Legge (Oxford: 1885), p. 432.



Manchuria.<sup>26</sup> Here, along with Neolithic pottery of the Yang Shao type, suggesting a date somewhere during the third millennium B.C., was found a marble figure with a human body and a tiger face; the latter was probably worn as an amulet since the body of the creature is pierced with a circular hole. It would thus appear that the concept of the tiger as a protector predates even the Shang period, and in prehistoric times must already have played a role in China similar to that of the lion in early Iran, the jaguar in Pre-Columbian Mexico, the puma in ancient Peru, and the leopard in ancient Africa. While the species of these large cats differs from one region to another, the idea that the big, ferocious feline animal had magic power and was sacred is almost universal and can be traced back to the Old Stone Age.

In the Shang period, the tiger was one of the most popular of all the symbolic animals. Thousands of representations of this beast are found among the carvings and bronze ornaments, leaving no doubt that the tiger deity had a dominant role in Shang mythology. Interestingly enough, it never appears among the animals offered in the ceremonies or buried in the tombs in spite of the fact that there were tigers in ancient China. That it must have some special sacred meaning is clearly indicated by the fact that one of the most spectacular finds from Anyang consists of a large marble sculpture

26. J. G. Anderson, *Researches Into the Prehistory of the Chinese* (BMFEA No. 15, 1943), p. 152.



15. Marble Tiger  
Shang Period  
Academia Sinica  
Taipei

Plate 16 on page 72  
Plate 17 on page 73  
Plate 18 on page 74

representing a tiger in an upright position kneeling like a human being. Tiger carvings are also seen on the stone platform in the main tomb chamber at the Hou Chia Chuang cemetery, suggesting that the tiger was connected with the earth and with burial.<sup>27</sup> Other tiger images made of clay were excavated at Anyang and tigers carved of jade have been found at various sites. No other animal appears in Shang art as frequently as the tiger.

Representations of the tiger are most common on bronze vessels. Florance Waterbury goes as far as to say that most of the T'ao-t'ieh masks occurring in Shang art should be interpreted as tiger images.<sup>28</sup> While this claim seems exaggerated, as the discussion of the T'ao-t'ieh will show, she is certainly correct in maintaining that the tiger was very prominent in ancient China. This is demonstrated by the fact that sometimes the vessel itself takes the form of a tiger, as in the splendid kuang shaped wine vessel in the collection of the Freer Gallery in Washington in which the tiger's eyes, ears, nose, and teeth are forcefully portrayed. In many other examples the tiger is rendered in sculptural form as in the pair of celebrated Freer bronze.

27. Judith M. Treistman, *The Prehistory of China* (New York, 1972), p. 113.

28. Florance Waterbury, *Early Chinese Symbols and Literature* (New York, 1952), p. 2.

In other instances only some features of the tiger are employed, in composite designs combined with forms from other animals, such as fangs, claws, teeth or large staring



16. Carved Stone  
with Tiger Design  
Shang Period  
People's Republic of China



17. Jade Carving of  
Tiger and Man  
Chou Period  
Seattle Art Museum



18. Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

eyes. While the face may be that of a tiger, the ears may consist of a bird's wings or a cicada, or, instead of ears, the tiger may have the horns of a ram or bull. The body of the tiger may be ornamented with all sorts of designs, such as the lei-wen thunder pattern, the spiral design, or cowry shells which were looked upon as symbols of prosperity. In p'an shaped water basins, the tiger is seen in conjunction with a bird and a fish; these may well have represented the three elements—earth, sky and water.<sup>29</sup>

Here again, unfortunately, there is no Shang text which explains just what the meaning of the tiger was. While the character for tiger is often encountered in Shang inscriptions, there is no indication of the symbolic or magic meaning associated with it. The oldest surviving text which may give us some clue is the late Chou Li Chi which has the following passage: "The king, for all the people, erected an altar to the spirits of the ground, called the grand altar, and one for himself, called the royal altar." In another passage, the book says: "the site for the spirits of the land and grain was on the right; that for the ancestral temple on the left,"<sup>30</sup> that is to the west and east of the royal palace. It is also reported that during late Chou times, the tiger was associated with the harvest festival, for celebrants impersonated cats and leopards during the Pa Cha which was celebrated at that time of year.<sup>31</sup>

29. Hugo Munsterberg, "Symbolism of the Four Directions in Chinese Art," *Art Quarterly*, Spring, 1951, p. 43.

30. *Li Ki, op. cit.*, p. 206 and 235.

31. Marcel Granet, *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China* (New York: 1932), p. 170.

It would thus appear that the tiger became associated with the West because its altar was located to the west of the palace. (In contrast to the royal altar which was located in the East, the direction which at least since Han times was symbolized by the dragon, associated with heaven and the royal ancestors). These later explanations, however, do not apply to the earlier period when more primitive cults worshipped on an altar located in the westerly direction. While the belief in the tiger as a powerful and beneficent being continued into modern times, the original meaning of the animal was lost in later, more rational periods. Only in popular folklore did the tiger continue to be linked with harvest, the earth and the mountains, showing that the role the tiger had once played as the chief agricultural deity of ancient China survived among simple country people.

Finally, there are two Shang bronzes, each showing a tiger clasping a human figure, which have aroused a great deal of interest ever since they were discovered in the early twentieth century. Today, one of them is in the Musée Cernuschi in Paris, while the other is in the Sumitomo collection in Kyoto. They are obviously among the masterpieces of ancient Chinese bronze art and have an iconographical complexity not found in any other works of this period. The Cernuschi piece is described as follows





19. Bronze Yu  
Shang Period  
Musée Cernuschi, Paris



20. Bronze Yu (detail)  
Shang Period  
Musee Cernuschi, Paris

by Vadime Elisseeff in his excellent catalogue of the collection: "This is the image of a tigress hugging a child, supported on the three points formed by its hind legs and tail. The ornament is divided into four zones: the lower part consisting of the feet is lightly decorated and is separated from the upper part by a groove. The lateral parts are occupied by the forelegs stretching before the animal. The dorsal part is decorated with a mask separated by a simple ridge broken by a scroll-shaped raised tail. The front part is occupied by the face of the tigress and the child. The lid, also with a ridge, is crowned by a little deer.

"The gaping mouth of the animal whose lower jaw is not visible is on the frontal zone and is here identified with the t'ao-t'ieh mask. The child with hands and feet, pierced ears, and hair drawn back, is wearing a garment with a collar decorated with circles, and breeches with two sinuous round-headed snakes with their heads turned back whose bodies are also depicted on a square ting (in the collection); here and there from the head, two snakes with triangular heads cover the breast of the animal whose two front paws are hugging the child. On the arms of the child are two kuei dragons. Two wild dragons with rolled-up tails spread themselves over the lower zone: they have heartshaped horns and are arranged face to face. Their bodies are spotted like the deer

on the cover and flanking them from behind on each side is a small dragon with clawed feet but without spurs, of the type that one sees on the appendages of the handles. On the upper part is an open-mouth dragon in profile, like the one on the foot. It has a mushroom-shaped horn flanked by a large projection. On its back and above it are three little dragon reptiles, perhaps its young.

“The dorsal zone shows a t’ao-t’ieh mask with an elephant’s trunk, assimilated into a long beak with a complex horn and a diamond ornamented chamfrain. On the lid and around the feet of the deer are two kuei dragons with their tails in the air and with gaping mouths. The handle has a hemispheric cross-section and is covered with dragon-reptile decoration ending in buttons with pseudo-elephantine heads.”<sup>32</sup>

While the bronze vessel in the Sumitomo collection shows minor variations in the iconographic scheme, there can be little doubt that the two bronzes which appeared on the art market at the same time were originally made as a pair. In any case they both contain exactly the same motif, namely, that of the tiger with a human figure held close to it whose head is covered by the jaw and teeth of the animal. Many different explanations for this striking imagery have been offered, ranging all the way from the simple naturalistic view that it

32. Vadime Elisseeff, *Bronzes Archaiques Chinois au Musee Cernuschi*, Vol. I (Paris: 1977), p. 122–126.

shows a tiger devouring his victim, to mythological ones, such as the idea that it represents the legend of Tsu-wen who is said to have been suckled by a tigress. Even the most determined formalists have never claimed that this very complex iconographic scheme was created as pure ornament.

That this is not a narrative depiction showing a man devoured by a monster is self-evident, for far from showing anguish or terror, the man—or as Elisseeff would have it, the child—looks completely serene and indeed clings to the tiger as a protector rather than an adversary. It would not be far off to suggest that the human being is emerging out of the mouth of the tiger rather than being eaten by him. This is a motif which occurs in at least two other remarkable Chinese bronzes which, like the Sumitomo and the Cernuschi vessels, are among the most famous and elaborate of Chinese ancient bronzes. One is the magnificent kuang, formerly in the collection of Agnes Mayer of Washington, D.C., and now in the Freer Gallery; and the other is the huge Ssu Mu Wu ting excavated at Wu-Kuan-ts'u in the Anyang district of Honan in 1946.<sup>33</sup> In the former, two of the legs of the vessel are shaped like a human figure whose lower body either has a snake wrapped around it or consists of a coiled up snake. Each of these strange figures is suspended from the mouth of a tiger. In the large ting, a human face is

33. Ternkozu Akiyama and others, *Arts of China, Recent Discoveries* (Tokyo: 1968), plates 9 and 10.



21. Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

Plate 22 on page 84  
Plate 23 on page 85

seen emerging between two upright tigers which form the lug-handle of the bronze vessel. Here again, purely rational explanations have been offered which show no understanding of the magical world view held by the Shang people. The key to this motif may be found in the snake shaped body of the human figures in the Freer kuang and the snake ornaments covering the legs of the man in the Cernuschi and Sumitomo bronzes, for there is a very ancient Chinese legend that the ancestors of the Chinese race, Fu Hsi and Nü Kua, were creatures with human heads and snake bodies.

The most famous representation of the divine couple is that found on the relief sculptures from the Han tomb at Wu-liang-tzu where the Adam and Eve of Chinese mythology are portrayed as half human and half snake.<sup>34</sup> While it is true that this relief and the literary text relating the story go back only to the Han period, the oral tradition must be much older: it was probably accepted quite literally, for in many early civilizations it was believed that some sacred totem animal was the ancestor of the tribe or at least cohabitated with a human ancestor. If this is so, the most likely interpretation for the motif represented in these four major Shang works would be that they represent the Chinese creation myth of the earliest man emerging out of the jaws of the tiger, the sacred earth and fertility deity

34. Otto Fischer, *Die Kunst Indiens, Chinas und Japans*, (Berlin: 1928), plate 318.



22. Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



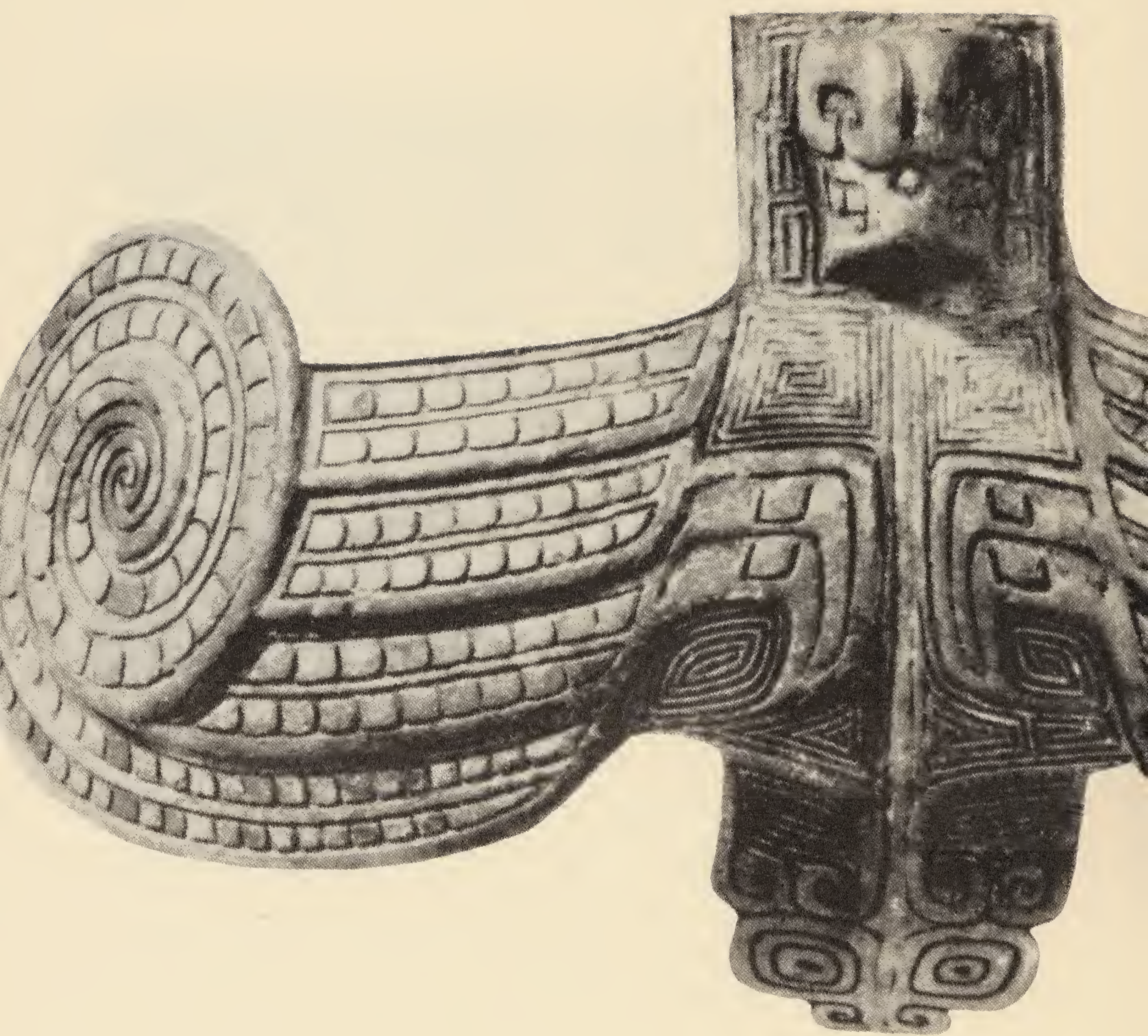


23. Bronze Kuang (foot)  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

whom the Shang people depended upon both for protection and for the continuation of the race. Certainly the idea that this complex iconography, which is represented on four of the largest and most remarkable works of Shang art, is nothing but some kind of descriptive realism is inconceivable. Indeed, since the two main objects of religious worship during the Shang period were the forces of nature and the ancestors, to combine these concepts by showing the earliest man emerging from the powerful earth spirit would be very much in keeping with the world view of the Shang people.



24. Stone Relief from  
Wu Laing-tz'u Tomb  
Han Period  
Shantung



3

*The Owl  
and the  
Pheasant*





**F**ROM THE EARLIEST TIMES, birds occupied an important place in the art and mythology of China, much as they do in almost all other civilizations. Already among the Neolithic remains of the Yang-shao and Lung-shan cultures, there are numerous representations of birds, both in the form of sculpture as well as in pictorial designs decorating ceramic vessels. The two most famous early examples of bird carvings are the green nephrite bird sculpture in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Gallery of Art in Kansas City<sup>35</sup> and the tiny bird carving in the Avery Brundage collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.<sup>36</sup> Both are very abstract, resembling a Brancusi sculpture, and it is impossible to identify the species of bird depicted. The same is true of the bird shaped knobs on Black pottery vessels, which are the earliest examples of birds executed in clay. It is also very difficult to identify the various types of bird designs painted on the jars and bowls of the Yang-shao culture. However, with the

35. Hugo Munsterberg, *Sculpture of the Orient* (New York: 1972), plate 56.

36. Rene-Yvon Lefebvre d'Argence, *Chinese Treasures from the Avery Brundage Collection* (New York, 1968), p. 48.

beginning of the Shang period, the situation changes and it is possible to recognize certain kinds of birds.

Plate 25 on page 91  
Plate 26 on page 94

To judge from Shang art and inscriptions as well as traditional myths and legends, the two birds which were most important in Shang times were the owl and the pheasant. Various other birds also occur, although much less frequently. Among them is the swallow, which appears as the main decorative motif on a Shang bronze in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In ancient Chinese literature, it was referred to as the Dark Bird and was associated with the birth of Hsieh, the ancestor of the Shang dynasty.<sup>37</sup> Other birds used in Shang art are the duck, the cormorant, the goose, the dove, the peacock, and the hawk, most commonly in the form of jade carvings, but none seems to have had any really substantial role.

The most important bird, and one of the most significant symbolic animals in both Shang art and traditional mythology, was the owl. The oldest representation of this bird was found among the Neolithic remains excavated in the Hua district of Shensi province in 1959, where a ceramic mask in the shape of a clearly recognizable horned owl was discovered. The best known and most impressive owl from the Shang period is the large marble one found at Anyang by the Academia Sinica which is now on display

37. Waterbury, *op. cit.*,  
p. 51.





25. Marble Owl  
Shang Period  
Academia Sinica, Taipei



26. Bronze Tsun  
Shang Period  
Dumbarton Oaks  
Washington, D.C.

Plate 27 on page 96  
Plate 28 on page 97

at the National Palace Museum in Taipeh. A major work of stone sculpture and a companion piece to the large marble tiger mentioned earlier, it shows that owl was not an ornamental motif but something which must have been considered a very powerful symbol. That this was, indeed, the case is also indicated by the numerous owl shaped bronze vessels, notably the splendid example in the Dumbarton Oaks collection in Washington, D.C. This owl can be identified by the flat circular areas which surround its eyes and by its curved beak. Owls also appear on bronze vessels, a good example being the owl which forms the main decorative motif on the chih shaped wine container in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Sometimes the owl is used as an element in a larger composition, while in other cases different parts of the owl appear in composite designs combining parts of various animals.

In the light of the prominence of the owl in Shang art, it must have had an important function in the religion of the Shang people. Although there are no Shang texts which explain its meaning it would appear that the owl was associated with darkness and night. Owls as well as tigers and oxen were used to decorate a stone platform on which the coffin of the dead rested at the Hou Chuang Cemetery<sup>38</sup> and owls are seated on the back of tortoises in the famous silk funeral banner

38. Treistman, *op. cit.*,  
p. 113.



27. Bronze Chih  
Shang Period  
Asian Art Museum  
of San Francisco



28. Bronze Yu  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

found at the Han period tomb at Ma Wang-tui at Changsha.<sup>39</sup> Their function is clearly that of presiding over the realm of the dead in the underworld in contrast to the dragon which is shown together with the sun, the moon and the stars in the celestial realm. Florance Waterbury is certainly correct when she says that the ancient Chinese saw the owl "as the protector of the beloved dead in the darkness of the grave."<sup>40</sup>

The owl is still associated with death in modern China where it is considered a bird of evil omen whose cry is heard with dread, because it is believed to be the harbinger of death. This superstition is a very ancient one which was common in many early civilizations. In Egypt, for example, the hieroglyph formed by the owl stood for night and death,<sup>41</sup> and in Mesopotamia the owl was associated with Lilith, the goddess of the underworld. The same was true in Medieval England where, as Chaucer says, the owl "of deth the bode bryngeth."<sup>42</sup> There was also a traditional Chinese belief that the sound of the owl's voice resembled that of the digging of a grave and that when its cry was heard in the neighborhood, the bird was calling out, dig, dig. Another tradition has it that the owl is an unfilial bird because the young are said to eat their mother. However, these legends are no doubt much later than the Shang period when the owl presumably occupied an honored position.

39. *New Archaeological Finds in China* (Peking: 1973), plate 42.

40. Waterbury, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

41. Gerd Heinz-Mohr, *Lexicon der Symbole* (Düsseldorf-Köln: 1971), p. 97.

42. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by F. N. Robinson (Boston: 1961), p. 314.



29. Clay Relief Sculpture  
Han Period  
Museum für Volkerkunde  
Munich

That the owl should make such a profound impression on the peoples of all early civilizations is not surprising. In a time when there were no lamps or electric light and man was surrounded by darkness at night, the owl's ability to see would make it seem like an uncanny and magical bird. Then, too, the eerie voice of the owl must have reinforced the idea that the bird possessed some magical supernatural power. While the Shang texts suggest that the Yang and Yin philosophy was not fully developed, a more primitive form of this dualism of light and darkness may have already existed in Shang times—with the owl, of course, representing darkness and night. From this notion, it would be only a small step to the idea of the owl as a messenger of death.

The counterpart of the owl in Chinese mythology is the pheasant. According to Florance Waterbury, there are more references to the pheasant in ancient Chinese literature than to any other bird.<sup>43</sup> Unlike the owl which can be easily identified by its unique eyes, the pheasant is more difficult to recognize. Since there are many different species of pheasant in China,, it is not surprising that a great variety of bird forms should appear in the art as well. Perhaps the most distinctive is the type which has a large crest and a long tail, but it must be said that many of the birds in Shang art are

43. Waterbury, *op. cit.*,  
p. 122.



Plate 30 on page 102  
Plate 31 on page 103

so stylized that they do not resemble any specific species. Because of this uncertainty, authors have called these birds everything from cockatoos to peacocks, although there is little evidence that either of these species was at all common in Shang China. No doubt the truth is that while many of the designs on the bronzes represent the pheasant, others are merely depictions of birds in a general sense without any attempt to portray a particular species.

Here again, as with the owl, the earliest depictions of birds with large crests resembling that of a pheasant occur in Neolithic art.<sup>44</sup> In Shang art this crested bird type becomes very common, especially among jade carvings where pheasants are frequently portrayed in a clearly recognizable form. A very beautiful and characteristic example is the carving in the collection of the British Museum. All the features associated with this kind of bird, which appear over and over again in Shang jades, are present in this figure: the large crest, the prominent eye, the curved beak, the wing with spiral designs, and the long tail. Although the elements are all very exaggerated, the basic form suggests a stylized pheasant.

In the bronze art of the period, there are countless representations of such birds among the Shang vessels. Some of them can be recognized as pheasants, others are too

44. Kwang-Chih Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 130.



30. Jade Bird  
Shang Period  
British Museum, London



31. Bronze Tsun  
Shang Period  
Royal Ontario Museum  
Toronto

generalized to be identified with any bird and still others are composite designs in which elements taken from the pheasant are combined with features from a wide variety of other animals. In some cases these avian forms appear as the main decorative motif, as in the cover of a bronze pot in the Musée Guimet in Paris where a pheasant with a large crest and long tail is rendered in sculptural form,<sup>45</sup> but this is very rare. Far more common are the bronze vessels like the splendid Freer Gallery tsun in which pheasants are one of the ornaments on the surface of the vessel. As in this example, the pheasant is often seen with the dragon, a conjunction which may have had a specific symbolic meaning. In other bronzes, only a part of a bird may be employed. For example, in some cases there is only an eye with feathers, or there are bird wings attached to other animals or forming part of a T'ao-t'ieh mask.

The most likely meaning of this bird motif is that it represented the sun and light in contrast to darkness and night. There is a good deal of visual evidence connecting the pheasant with the sun. In several Shang inscriptions the bird is shown with sun rays radiating from its head<sup>46</sup> or with the ancient character for the sun drawn on its body.<sup>47</sup> Other evidence is provided by a group of bone hairpins excavated at Hou-chia-chuang which have bird finials that can be recog-

45. Munsterberg, *op. cit.*, plate 60.

46. Carl Hentze, *Die Sakralbronzen und Ihre Bedeutung in den Frühchinesischen Kulturen* (Antwerp: 1941), p. 103, fig. 136.

47. *Catalogue of the Chinese Exhibition* (London, 1936), pl. 1.



32. Bone Pins with  
Bird Designs  
Shang Period  
Royal Ontario Museum  
Toronto

nized as pheasants by their crests and long tails and also by the fact that they have circular solar emblems in the center of their bodies.<sup>48</sup> In other instances the solar disk is portrayed as feathered, or a bird's eye resembling the ancient Chinese pictogram for sun is surrounded with feathers. In both cases, the idea no doubt is that the sun flies through the sky like a bird, a concept which can be found in many early civilizations.

In later Chinese art and folklore, the connection between the bird and the sun is well documented and very common. During Han and later periods, the sun is represented as being inhabited by a raven or crow just as the moon is shown with a toad or frog. Why these black birds were substituted for the original pheasant type is not clear, but substitutions of one animal for another are not at all uncommon in Chinese animal symbolism. Another context in which the pheasant is connected with the solar forces is in the representation of the four directions. Here a bird, called by most Western writers a phoenix, represents the southerly direction where the sun is in contrast to the North and darkness symbolized by the tortoise and the snake. This symbolic motif of the four directions occurs very frequently—not just in painting but on mirrors, in textiles, on lacquers and in sculptural forms beginning with the Han period. This ancient tradition lives on in the modern

48. *Li Chi*, *op. cit.*, p. 216, fig. 38.



33. Detail of Funeral Banner  
Han Period  
Changsha, China

period: as Tun Li-ch'en reports in his book on the customs and festival of Peking, the Chinese make small sun cakes on the first day of the second month which are decorated with the image of a chicken. These cakes are offered to the sun since it is believed that a rooster lives in the sun.<sup>49</sup> The fact that it is now said to be a rooster rather than pheasant or a phoenix is not too surprising since in China, as in many other countries, it is said that the rooster greets the rising of the sun with his loud crows.

In addition to the association of the pheasant with the sun, there is also some evidence that it is connected with the wind. In Shang inscriptions, the character *feng* or bird, is virtually the same as that for wind, suggesting that the two concepts are related.<sup>50</sup> That a wind deity was worshipped by the Shang people is indicated by several inscriptions found on oracle bones.<sup>51</sup> Here again, the idea that the flight of a bird through the sky resembles the wind occurs in other civilizations as well. In Shang script, the pictograph *feng*, or, when referring to both male and female birds, *feng-huang*, shows a bird with a very large crest and long tail in contrast to the ordinary pheasant in which these two features were less pronounced. It has been suggested that the so-called phoenix, a purely Western concept which has no relevance to China, is nothing but an Argus pheasant or a pea-

49. Tun Li-ch'en: *Annual Customs and Festivals in Peking*, translated by D. Bodde (Hong Kong, 1965), p. 25.

50. Tsung-Tung Chang, *op. cit.*, pp. 86 and 307.

51. Herrlee Glessner Creel, *The Birth of China* (New York, 1937), p. 181.



cock.<sup>52</sup> It is possible that the Shang Chinese made a distinction between these two birds, one of which was associated with the sun and the other with the wind. This is suggested by the fact that they used two different characters, one showing a typical pheasant of a type frequently seen all over China, the other depicting a much rarer and more fanciful bird which resembles the character for the wind deity. In any case, whatever the naturalistic source of these images and pictographs, there can be no doubt that for the people of the Shang period all these birds were magical symbols rather than decorative designs.

52. Williams, *op. cit.*,  
p. 323.



4

*The Bull  
and the  
Ram*





THE ONLY TWO ANIMALS which are found in both Shang art and among the remains of the sacrifices in tombs are the bull and the ram. We know from the inscriptions on the oracle bones that on special occasions as many as one hundred head of cattle were sacrificed to the spirits of the ancestors and the deities of nature. Thus, there can be no doubt that these animals were essential to the religious life of the Shang people. However, it should be pointed out that the bulls and rams represented in the jades and on the bronze vessels of the Shang period are not domestic animals but water buffalo and wild mountain sheep.<sup>53</sup> To judge from the inscriptions, the term *niu* is used to describe cattle in general and can refer to oxen, bulls, cows or water buffalo; it is the latter which are most commonly shown in the art of the period.

As with the dragon, the tiger, the owl and the pheasant, the origin of the motif of the horned animal can be traced back to prehistoric times. At least one sculptural

53. Alfred Salmony, *Archaic Chinese Jades* (Chicago, 1952), p. 15.

representation of a water buffalo as well as a jade ram can be dated to the Neolithic period.<sup>54</sup> More common are the horn shaped painted ornaments depicted on Neolithic pottery jars. That the horns stand for the horned animal itself is very likely for in the Shang script the pictograph for cattle or sheep emphasizes the prominent horns of the animals and reduces the body to a schematized abstraction.<sup>55</sup> This same emphasis on the horns is also found on the jars from Hsin-tien in Kansu where double horns resembling those of water buffaloes are seen along with solar disks and the symbol standing for lightning.<sup>56</sup> In a very interesting discussion of these double spirals, Carl Hentze describes this motif as “comme de bovide,” which he believes is “symbole lunaire parce qu’elle repelle un croissant.”<sup>57</sup> Clearly recognizable ram horns are also seen on the pottery vessels from Pan-p’o in Shensi and a ram’s head in sculptural form is found on a pottery tripod excavated at Hsiao-t’un.<sup>58</sup>

In the art of the Shang period both the water buffalo and the bull portrayed in a rather naturalistic manner are a common motif. The water buffalo is also found among the stone carvings excavated at the Fu Hao tomb at Anyang in 1975. A very similar carving of a crouching water buffalo is in the British Museum. A powerful piece of sculpture decorated with spiral designs and abstract cowry shells, it certainly suggests

54. Alfred Salmony, *Chinese Jade* (New York, 1963), plate 11.

55. Tsung-Tung Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

56. Anderson, *op. cit.*, plate 128.

57. Carl Hentze, *Mythes et Symboles lunaire* (Anvers, 1932), p. 96.

58. Carl Hentze, *Funde in Alt China* (Göttingen, 1967), plate XI.



34. Limestone Buffalo  
Shang Period  
British Museum, London

that, like the marble tiger and owl from Anyang, the carving must have represented animals which were of great significance to the Shang people.

Plate 35 on page 117  
Plate 36 on page 118  
Plate 37 on page 119

Even more striking as well as being amazingly naturalistic is the bronze vessel in the shape of a water buffalo in the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge. Here again the emphasis is on the curved horns which are decorated with spiral designs. The handle of the cover of the vessel is in the form of a dragon with phallic horns, a curious detail which hardly suggests that this is a naturalistic animal sculpture such as a nineteenth century European artist might have made.

There are also numerous representations of bulls and water buffaloes among the jade carvings of the Shang period, some of them quite realistic, while others are very stylized.<sup>59</sup> A good example is the small jade from the Winthrop collection in Fogg Museum which again has prominent crescent shaped horns with spiral designs.

Although the bull and the water buffalo are rarely seen as the main decorative motif of Shang bronze vessels, parts of these creatures, notably their horns, are frequently found among the ornamental designs on bronzes. They occur so often in connection with the T'ao-t'ieh masks that at least one scholar has suggested that the T'ao-t'ieh should be considered a bovine creature. The most spectacular of all the

59. Waterbury, *op. cit.*, plates 17-19; Salmony, *op. cit.*, plate 56.





35. Bronze Tsun  
Early Chou Period  
Nezu Museum, Tokyo



36. Bronze Tsun  
Shang Period  
Fogg Museum of Art  
Cambridge



37. Jade Buffalo Head  
Shang Period  
Fogg Museum of Art  
Cambridge

Shang bronzes using this motif is a chiu shaped food bowl in the Freer Gallery. It is decorated with no less than twenty-four bulls' heads along with nipples, dragons and pheasants. The four handles of the bowl have three bulls' heads, each facing the four directions, and there are twelve other bull designs. Since the number twelve corresponds to the number of months of the lunar year, it seems very likely that the purpose is the annual twelve month cycle, just as the ten days of the Chinese week were represented by ten sun birds in Han art. That such a complex iconographical scheme should have been a purely formal design seems quite impossible, especially if one considers that nipples are associated with nurturing and fecundity, the dragon with fertility and rain, and the pheasant with the sun. Add to this the crescent shaped horns of the bull and the entire cosmology of the ancient Chinese is represented.

The importance of the bull is also indicated by the literature of the time as well as the traditional festivals associated with the animal. In one of the earliest Chinese texts, the *Shih Ching*, or *Book of Poetry*, which is believed to date from the early Chou period and to reflect even older traditions, mention is made of the sacred bull being sacrificed. One line reads: "Raise the drinking cup of buffalo horn: Hurray for our lord; may he live forever!"<sup>60</sup> There is also a very old

Plate 38 on page 121

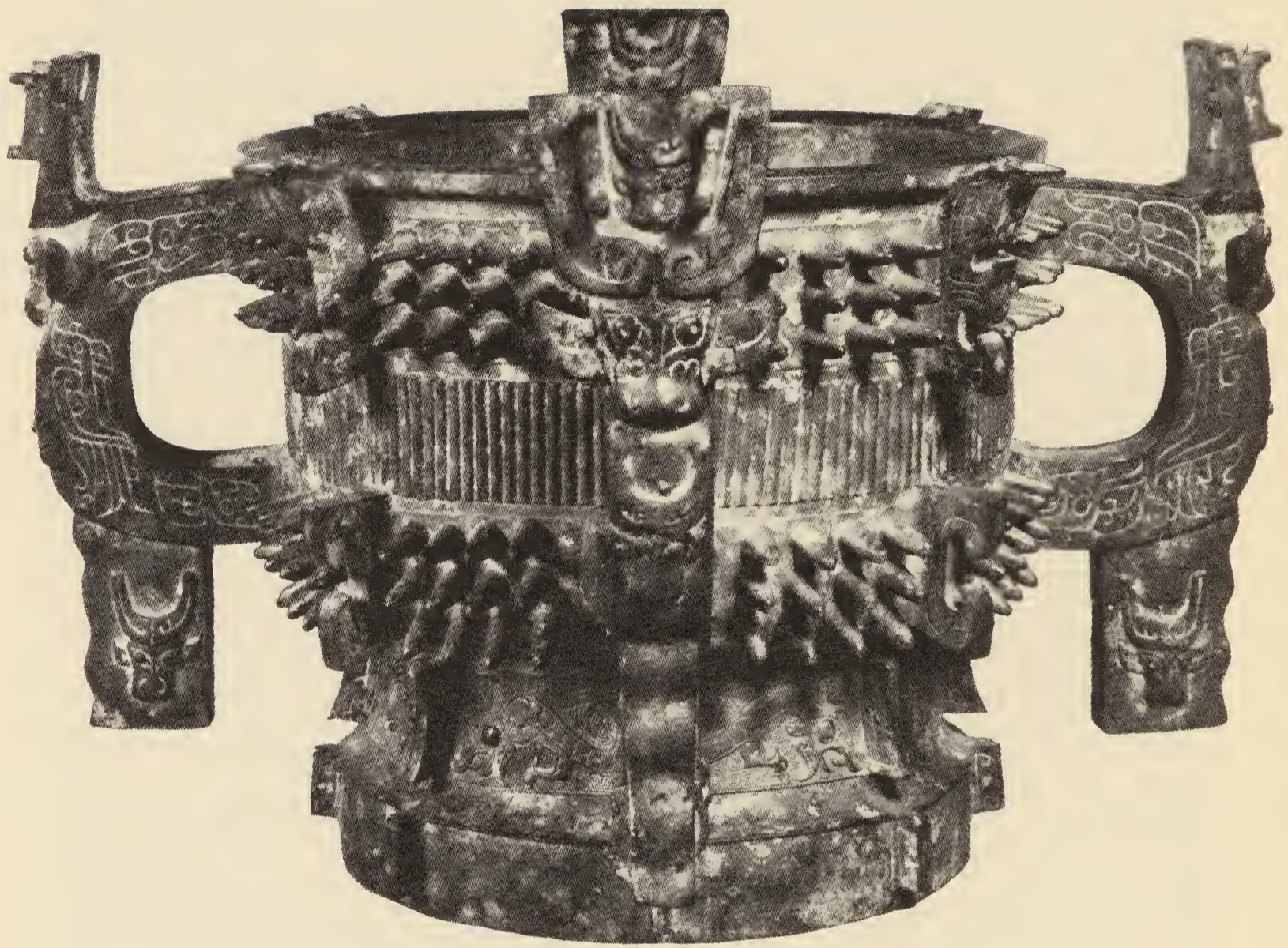
Plate 39 on page 122

Plate 40 on page 123

60. Arthur Waley: *The Book of Songs* (London, 1937), p. 167.



38. Bronze Lei  
Shang Period  
Palace Museum, Peking



39. Bronze Chiu  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



40. Cover of Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

custom in Chinese villages in which clay oxen were made in order to hasten the coming of spring and to insure the fertility of the fields. C. A. S. Williams describes the modern custom as he observed it. He says "the so-called Spring Ox is made of clay and is beaten with sticks to stimulate the revival of spring. The details of colour both of ox and driver are carefully worked out every year according to astrological and geomantic omens."<sup>61</sup>

In light of the evidence presented here and in view of the fact that the ancient pictogram for moon in Shang writing was a crescent shape resembling the horns of a bull or water buffalo, it would seem likely that already in prehistoric times, and certainly during the Shang period, the bovine horns were connected with lunar forces which in turn controlled the fertility of the fields and the coming of rain. Where the horns of the bull are shown as capped uprights resembling phallic emblems (a motif which is quite common on the bronzes), the horns were probably looked upon as symbols for the fecundity of the race. In either case, there can be little doubt that the Shang people regarded these animals with special veneration.

Like the bull and the water buffalo, the ram and the sheep are recognized in the early writing and earliest art by their prominent horns. However, while those of the

61. C. A. S. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 303.





41. Bronze Tsun  
Shang Period  
British Museum, London

bovine animals are crescent shaped and curve gently upward, the horns of the rams are shown bending sharply downward. This tendency can already be seen in Neolithic art, but it is even more marked in the art of the Shang period, both in the jades and the bronzes. A particularly impressive example of the ram as the dominant motif is a tsun shaped bronze vessel in the Eumorfopoulos collection of the British Museum which shows two adorned rams with a T'ao-t'ieh mask between them. Even more spectacular in its use of the ram motif is a large square tsun now in the Historical Museum in Peking.<sup>62</sup> It is, so far as we know, unique in having no less than four rams. The four animals, each facing a different direction, are represented quite naturalistically with not only the characteristic horns of the sheep family but other typical features as well. Much of the surface of the bronze is covered with spirals. A whorl design decorates the front of the ram muzzles and a low relief pheasant ornament is seen on the flanks.

Far more numerous than these works in which a realistic ram forms the main design are the bronzes on which parts of the ram, usually the horns, appear in conjunction with the other animal parts. In these fantastic creatures, the body of a tiger or bird is usually combined with ram horns, or the horns are attached to a T'ao-t'ieh mask.

62. *The Great Bronze Age of China*, *op. cit.*, No. 20, p. 146-149.



42. Bronze P'ou  
Shang Period  
Private Collection  
New York

That these horns must have had some special magic significance is also suggested by the fact that they are attached to a human figure, probably that of a deity, in two very interesting works of early Chinese art. One is the celebrated Shang drum in the Sumitomo collection in Kyoto, in which the deity appears with huge ram's horns.<sup>63</sup> The other is a small jade finial in the Winthrop collection of the Fogg Museum in which a man-like figure has two stylized pheasants projecting like wings from his shoulders and a horned ram head on his chest.<sup>64</sup>

There are two main sources which may provide a clue to the meaning of this animal motif. One is the early writing, and the other the literature and traditional folklore of China. In the inscriptions on the oracle bones there is a pictograph which is composed of the characters for mountain and the character for sheep, no doubt meaning mountain of the sheep. This sacred mountain was known as Yüeh and was venerated by the Shang people. We do not know which mountain this referred to, but that it had an important role in Shang life cannot be doubted, for it was a center of pilgrimage and sacrifice and its deity is referred to in Shang inscriptions. One such oracle bone reads "Is it the mountain god Yüeh who through his curse prevents rain from coming?" and another inscription asks "Has the mountain god Yüeh placed a curse on the

63. Hentze, *Sakralbronzen*, *op. cit.*, plate 141.

64. Hugo Munsterberg, *The Art of the Chinese Sculptor* (Rutland, Vt., 1960), plate 2.



43. Bronze Yu  
Chou Period  
Collection Stangler  
New York

harvest?"<sup>65</sup> It would seem that the wild sheep were connected with the mountain in which the god dwelled and with fertility and rain.

Of the literary references the most interesting is in the *Book of Poetry* in which it is said:

With the Thing Purified, the  
Thing Bright,  
With the bullocks for sacrifice,  
and our sheep  
We come to honour the Earth  
Spirit,  
To honour the quarters.

This association of bulls and rams with the deities of the earth and the four directions certainly indicates that these animals had some special sacred meaning. There is also an old legend in Canton, which is at times referred to as the city of the rams, that tells of: "Five venerable magicians, clothed in garments of five different colors, and riding on rams of five colors met at Canton, each of the rams bore in his mouth a stalk of grain having six ears, and presented them to the people of the district, to whom the magicians said 'May famine and death never visit your markets.' Having said these words they immediately disappeared, and the rams were changed into stone."<sup>66</sup> While this story is much later than any of the bronzes dis-

65. Tsung-Tung Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 184-185.

66. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

cussed, it may very well reflect ancient traditions and in any case shows that rams were still associated with harvests and abundance in the nineteenth century.





5

---

*The  
Cicada*



ONE OF THE MOST COMMON motifs in Shang art is the cicada, an insect which at the end of summer is heard all over China and is very popular with the Chinese people. The sound made by the male cicada in order to attract the female is likened to music. S. Wells Williams, in his book on the Middle Kingdom, says, "The cicada, or broad locust, is abundant about Canton in summer, and its stridulous sound is heard from tree and groves with deafening loudness. Boys often capture the male, tie a straw around the abdomen, so as to irritate the sounding apparatus, and carry it through the streets in this predicament, to the great annoyance of everyone."<sup>67</sup> This insect is unique in several ways. It is not surprising that the Chinese should have singled it out for special attention. Its outstanding characteristics are a broad head with protruding eyes, wings which are held roof-like over the body and short legs, the front ones are usually armed with spines. The cicadas insert their eggs in the branches

67. S. Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom* (London: 1883), Vol. I, p. 237.

of broad leaved trees or in weeds and grasses. Upon hatching, they crawl or fall to the ground, burrow into it and begin feeding on the roots of trees or plants. They remain underground for at least four years, but some stay much longer—such as the so-called seventeen year locust, which is also a kind of cicada. The mature nymph leaves the soil by night in the late spring or summer and climbs a tree trunk where the insect sheds its nymphal skin and emerges as a fully developed adult.<sup>68</sup> It is especially the last stage of the cicada's life cycle in which it emerges out of the ground and turns into a mature insect, which Chinese farmers no doubt had observed since prehistoric times, that struck the Shang people as being magical.

The earliest cicada motifs in Chinese art are seen on prehistoric pottery fragments found at Hou-Kang,<sup>69</sup> although it would appear from the surviving evidence that this design was rare in Neolithic art. In Shang times, on the other hand, the cicada often appears among the decorations of the bronze vessels. Its popularity as a motif is another indication that it is untenable to hold that animals represented on the bronzes are those which were offered to the spirits during the sacrifices, because no cicadas were ever used as offerings.

The insect is shown at various stages, from larva to the adult, but at times it is so

68. Ralph B. Swain, *The Insect Guide* (New York, 1948), p. 50–51.

69. Kwang-Chih Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China* (New Haven: 1977), plate 67.

Plate 44 on page 138  
Plate 45 on page 139

stylized that it is difficult to recognize. That a cicada is intended in most of the cases is quite clear, for the ornamental design closely resembles the pictograph for cicada in ancient Chinese writing and the only other insects depicted in Shang art, the silkworm and the praying mantis, are clearly different.

The cicada is never the main motif on any of the bronze vessels, but it appears very frequently in conjunction with the tiger, the dragon, the owl or the pheasant, and it is also used as part of a larger design. Sometimes there is just one insect, especially when it is seen on the tongue or body of another animal, but often rows of insects form a band decorating the surface of the vessel as in the li shaped food container in the collection of the Freer Gallery. Hentze, who has written a book devoted largely to a discussion of the cicada motif in ancient Chinese art, has brought together a great deal of material relating to this subject and has demonstrated how often this insect is found in Shang art.<sup>70</sup> Although most of the depictions are clearly recognizable, he points out that it may resemble a triangular design or a palmette as in the bronze ku in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, and numerous other bronze vessels.

70. Carl Hentze, *Frühchinesische Bronzen and Kultdarstellungen* (Antwerp, 1937).

In addition to the bronze ornaments, there are also many representations of the cicada in jade sculpture and as decorative



44. Bronze Li  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



45. Bronze Yu  
Shang Period  
Musee Cernuschi, Paris

motifs in bone carvings and white ceramic ware. The jade carvings in cicada shape are often quite naturalistic, showing the insect in different stages of its development and bringing out its distinctive features. A good example of such a jade is the early Chou one in the Winthrop collection of the Fogg Art Museum which originally must have served as some kind of amulet for it has holes drilled through its body, which would suggest that the cicada had some magic, protective function.

That such a seemingly small and insignificant creature as the cicada should have had a prominent position in Shang art, equalled only by the tiger, the dragon and the birds, has puzzled both Chinese and Western scholars. Eleanor von Erdberg Consten in her discussion of this phenomenon has this to say: "Sung scholars, always bent upon making a moral point, found it difficult to explain the frequent occurrence of the cicada on the ritual vessels. The Po'ku T'u-lu says: "the cicada is a small animal with a big voice, this means: 'One should not act wickedly, since this will soon become known.' " Or the cicadas are praised, because they are on high, clean and clear places."<sup>71</sup> Obviously much later moralistic interpretations of the possible meaning of the cicada are far off the mark and show little understanding of Shang culture.

The oldest document which may shed

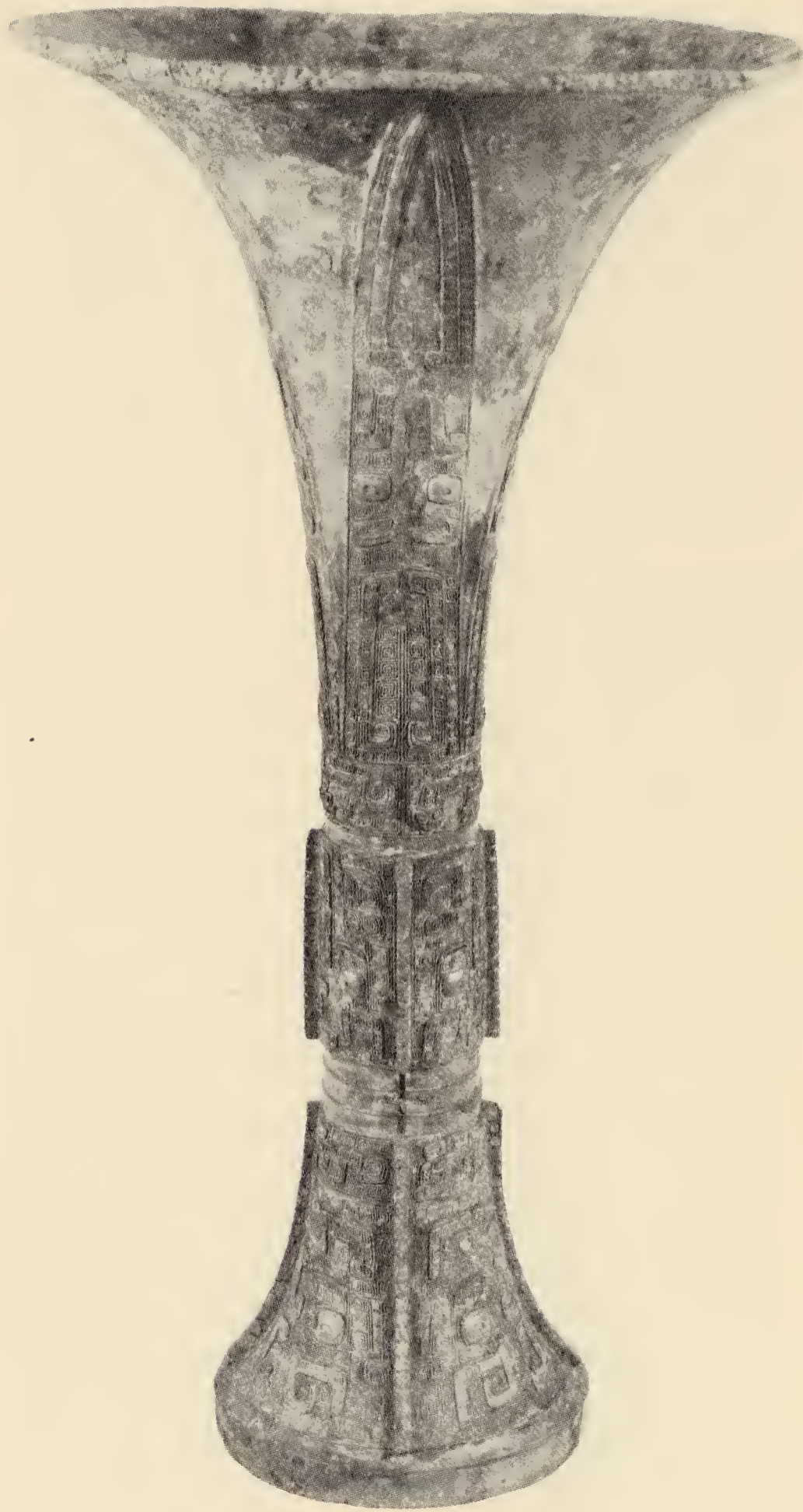
Plate 46 on page 141  
Plate 47 on page 142  
Plate 48 on page 143

71. Eleanor von Erdberg Consten, *op. cit.*, p. 264.





46. Bronze Ku  
Shang Period  
Asian Art Museum  
of San Francisco



47. Bronze Ku  
Shang Period  
Ex-Collection C. T. Loo  
New York



48. Bronze Chia  
Shang Period  
Minneapolis Institute  
of Arts

some light on the symbolism of the insect in ancient China is the *Shih Ching*, or *Book of Poetry*, which dates from the early Chou period. The insect referred to in the poetry is called a locust, but the ancient Chinese made no clear distinction between the cicada and the locust, nor the frog and the toad, or the raven and the crow. (In fact even in the Western world certain kinds of cicadas are called locusts.) The poem mentioning the locusts reads as follows:

Your herdsman dreams,  
 Dreams of locusts and fish,  
 Of banners and flags.  
 A wise man explains the dreams:  
 Locusts and fishes  
 Mean fat years.  
 Flags and banners  
 Mean a teeming house and  
 home.<sup>72</sup>

This passage suggests that in early China the locust or cicada like the fish was regarded as a symbol of abundance and prosperity. In discussing the meaning of the cicada motif on ancient Chinese bronzes, Creel comes to much the same conclusion when he says: "The noise made by this insect is heard continually during the summer in north China, making it a very apt symbol of the time when the crops are maturing."<sup>73</sup> This association between the

72. Waley, *op. cit.*, p. 168.73. Creel, *op. cit.*, p. 117.



49. Jade Cicada  
Chou Period  
Fogg Museum of Art  
Cambridge

cicada and the harvest also occurs in Europe where the cicada is often called the harvest fly. The second reference to the locust or cicada in the *Book of Poetry* does not refer to the fertility of the fields and rich harvests but to the fecundity of the race and the desirability of numerous offspring, for it likens the multiplication of the insects to many sons and grandsons. The text of the poem reads:

The locusts' wings say "throng,  
throng";  
Well may your sons and grand-  
sons  
Be a host innumerable

The locusts' wings say "bind,  
bind";  
Well may your sons and grand-  
sons  
Continue in an endless line.

The locusts' wings say "join,  
join";  
Well may your sons and grand-  
sons  
Be forever at one.<sup>74</sup>

While these early explanations seem to point to the cicada as an emblem of abundant harvests on the one hand and the fertility of the race on the other hand, there is a very different interpretation of the cicada motif

74. Waley, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

which has some currency among both Chinese and Western scholars. Berthold Laufer, who was primarily responsible for disseminating this idea, summarizes it as follows: "The cicada plays an eminent role in the folklore of the Chinese who were deeply impressed by the long and complicated life history of this interesting insect. In the same manner as the larva creeps into the ground and rises again in the state of a pupa till finally the cicada emerges, so the soul of the dead was believed to fly out of the old body and awaken to new life."<sup>75</sup>

The chief evidence for the cicada as an emblem of resurrection and new life is found in Chou and Han texts. A jade tongue amulet is mentioned in the *Chou Li*, a text dealing with the rituals and ceremonies in late Chou China. Numerous jades in the form of cicadas have also been found in Han tombs. Laufer says: "Among the personal amulets worn by the corpse, those to be placed on the tongue are most important and frequently spoken of in ancient texts. As all these amulets are imitative of bodily forms, those for the tongue are shaped in the outline of this organ."<sup>76</sup> Hentze points to several examples of such cicada emblems on the tongues of T'ao-t'ieh masks and tigers in Shang and Chou art, and concludes that the cicada as a symbol of resurrection already occurs in the Shang period.<sup>77</sup> However, since the evidence is very scanty and it is just as

75. Berthold Laufer, *Archaic Chinese Jades* (New York, 1927), p. 44.

76. Berthold Laufer, *Jade* (Chicago, 1912), p. 299.

77. Hentze, *op. cit.*, p. 16 and figures 47-53.

plausible to argue that the cicada in the mouth of the T'ao-t'ieh or the tiger earth deity is a symbol of prosperity, this explanation is not convincing. This is not to say that Laufer's interpretation does not apply to later period when the texts and the archaeological evidence substantiate his claims. Jades in form of a cicada have indeed been found in tombs where they had no doubt been placed on the tongues of the dead in order to protect them and to insure that their souls would be reborn out of the depth of the earth, just as the larva of the cicada emerges out of the ground. However, this more rational and sophisticated idea is a late one and probably does not apply to the Shang and prehistoric periods. During these earlier times, it seems far more likely that the cicada, as the *Shih Ching* poems suggest, were thought of primarily as emblems of fertility and fecundity.









6

---

*The Fish,  
the  
Tortoise  
and  
the Toad*



AMONG THE EARLIEST of the symbolic animals in Chinese art are the fish, the tortoise and the toad, which are found in the ornamental designs on Neolithic ceramics. Indeed the oldest Chinese prehistoric village at Pan-p'o in Shensi province,<sup>78</sup> which dates from the fifth millenium B.C., and the somewhat later sites at Miao-ti-kou in Honan and Ma-chia-yao in Kansu, produced pottery with this type of design.<sup>79</sup> That the farmers of these villages should have portrayed these particular animals on their utensils can hardly have been pure chance. These animals are all connected with moisture and water which is essential for the welfare of rural populations. Such depictions were unquestionably related to what the anthropologists call "sympathetic magic," which is based on the belief that what you represent in paintings or rituals will also

78. Kwang-Chih Chang, *op. cit.*, plate 55.

79. *Ibid.*, plates 61 and 56.

occur in nature. The choice of these animals, especially the fish, must have had religious and magic purposes. Among the ornamental designs on some of the Pan-p'o bowls are human faces with fish headdresses and fish on both sides of their faces which probably represent a priest or shaman of an ancient Chinese fertility cult.<sup>80</sup> All three of these animals are still prominent in the folklore of modern China, showing again the extraordinary persistence of ancient Chinese traditions.

In discussing the beliefs and ceremonial rites of the peoples of Neolithic China, K. C. Chang says: "There is also some evidence that the Yang-shao farmers may have performed in their villages some kind of fertility rites for the sake of crop harvests and fishing and hunting gains. This is implied by their burial of deer, the frequent occurrence of female symbols among the ceramic decorative designs, and a painted bowl discovered at Pan-p'o-ts'un depicting on the inner surface a tattooed face, possibly that of a priest, wearing a fish shaped headdress."<sup>81</sup> Numerous other fish designs are found among the decorative motifs painted on prehistoric pottery, for there is no doubt that fishing was one of the major sources of livelihood for the inhabitants of these villages. In light of this, the representation of fish on the ceramic vessels must have been intended to insure a plentiful supply of fish for the villagers.

80. *Ibid.*, plate 48.81. *Ibid.*, p. 110.



50. Bronze P'an  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

All three of these animals also appear in the art of the Shang period, and there are pictographs for them in Shang writing. They are represented both in the form of sculptures and as decorative designs ornamenting bronze vessels. Since they are usually shown as one of several animal motifs, it is clear that they were not as important as the tiger or dragon. The fish is particularly favored for p'an shaped water basins like the one in the Freer Gallery but they also occur as part of composite designs, such as in the Mayer kuang in which the horns of the animal head are made up of two fish. Fish shaped sculptures are found among even the earliest Chinese carvings and are particularly popular among the jades of the Shang period.<sup>82</sup> Two marble tortoises came to light during the excavations at Anyang<sup>83</sup> and several tortoises exist, a particularly charming one being in the Winthrop Collection of the Fogg Art Museum.

The tortoise is less common among the bronzes, although there is a very prominent one on a p'an shaped water basin in the British Museum which forms the main decorative motif.<sup>84</sup> It is also found in clay form at the early Shang site of Cheng-chou.<sup>85</sup> Among the representations of the toad or frog in the Shang period, the earliest, and one of the most striking aesthetically, is the very abstract marble sculpture in the Bull collection in Philadelphia which resembles

Plate 51 on page 157  
Plate 52 on page 158

82. Max Loehr: *Ancient Chinese Jades* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1975), pp. 117-120.

83. K. C. Chang, *op. cit.*, plate 124.

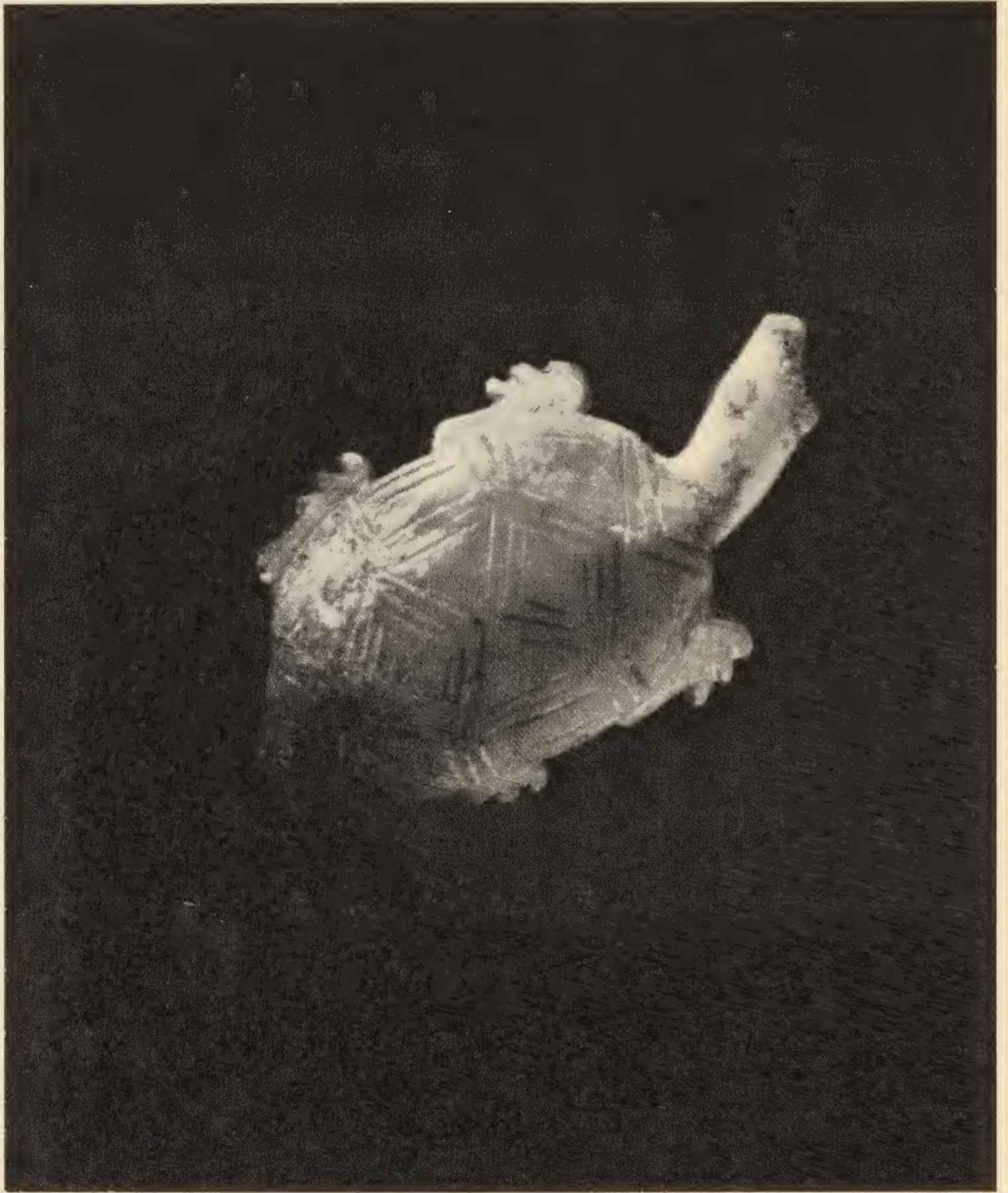
84. Jessica Rawson, *Ancient China* (London: 1980), figs. 47 and 51.

85. K. C. Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 236.





51. Cover of Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



52. Jade Turtle  
Chou Period  
Fogg Museum of Art  
Cambridge

nothing so much as a Brancusi sculpture.<sup>86</sup> An excellent jade example, dating probably from the very late Shang or early Chou periods is in the collection of the Buffalo Museum of Science. In the designs of the Shang bronzes, the toad is very rare. It does not become popular until the Han period, when it was thought of as living in the moon.

That the fish should be so important in ancient Chinese art is not surprising, for the early Chinese peasants depended on fish for much of their food supply. The *Book of Poetry* employs the image of abundant fish as a sign of prosperity and well being, and its absence to symbolize hunger and poverty. In discussing the significance of the fish motif in Chinese art, C. A. S. Williams says: "The fish is symbolically employed as the emblem of wealth or abundance on account of the similarity in the pronunciation of the word *yü*, fish, and *yü*, superfluity, and also because fish are extremely plentiful in Chinese waters. Owing to its reproductive powers it is a symbol of regeneration, and as it is happy in its own element or sphere, so it has come to be the emblem of harmony and connubial bliss; a brace of fish is presented amongst other articles as a betrothal gift to the family of the bride elect on account of its auspicious significance; as fish are reputed to swim in pairs, so a pair of fish is emblematic of the joys of union, especially of a sexual nature; it is also one of

86. Fong Chow, *Animals in Chinese Art* (New York, 1967), plate 1.



53. Jade Toad  
Chou Period  
Buffalo Museum of Science  
New York

the charms to avert evil, and is included among the auspicious signs on the footprints of the Buddha."<sup>87</sup> While it is true, of course, that Williams collected this information in the nineteenth century so that some of these beliefs and traditions may be fairly recent, others may date from the Shang and even the prehistoric period. Certainly the idea that the fish is connected with prosperity and good fortune and is a magic, auspicious emblem goes back to the very beginning of Chinese civilization.

The tortoise, too, was used as food, but it also had a sacred purpose, for in addition to animal bones, the shell of the tortoise was used for divination. The shells were cleaned and then held over a fire until their surfaces cracked. It was from these cracks that the priest or shaman read the future. The predictions were often inscribed on the shells, and archives of such Shang oracle inscriptions have been excavated at Anyang.<sup>88</sup> In light of all this, it is clear that the tortoise must have been revered by the ancient Chinese and looked upon as a very auspicious animal.

In Han China the tortoise as well as the snake was a symbol of one of the four directions. It is often referred to in legend and art. It stood for darkness, moisture and the North, and it is often called the Dark Warrior.<sup>89</sup> The reason these two animals are paired is that the ancient Chinese believed

87. C. A. S. Williams, *Chinese Symbolism and Its Motives* (Shanghai, 1941), p. 185.

88. K. C. Chang, *Shang Civilization*, *op. cit.*, plate 5 and pp. 32–35.

89. Munsterberg, "Symbolism of the Four Directions" *op. cit.*, p. 40.

that the tortoise was female and that the snake was its male partner. In modern Chinese folk religion, the Supreme Emperor of the Dark Heaven, Hsüan-Hien Shang-ti, is shown on the back of a tortoise encircled by a snake and floating on the waters, indicating that the old idea of the tortoise being associated with water, moisture and the North still prevails in modern times.<sup>90</sup>

That the toad or frog (the Chinese made no clear distinction between them) was also associated with water and moisture is evident from the fact that it is shown together with the tortoise on a Han brick in the Musée Guimet and as a substitute for the tortoise in representing the northerly direction in a model of a funeral chamber.<sup>91</sup> Just as westerners once believed that there was a man in the moon, so the Chinese claimed to see a frog in the moon which was responsible for assuring a plentiful supply of rain to produce good harvests. All three of these animals, the fish, the tortoise and the toad, also appear in the famous Han reliefs from Wu liang-tzu in which fish draw a cart of water deities who are surrounded by tortoises and toads.<sup>92</sup> None of these representations go back to Shang times and there are no Shang texts which spell out the meaning of these animals; nevertheless, the abundance of visual material showing the prominent place they occupied in art and folklore

90. J. Hackin and others, *Asiatic Mythology* (London, 1932), p. 341.

91. H. d'Ardenne de Tizac, *L'Art Chinois Classique* (Paris: 1926), pl. 93.

92. Edouard Chavannes, *Mission archeologique dans la Chine septentrionale* (Paris: 1909), Vol. 1, plate LXVI, no. 130.

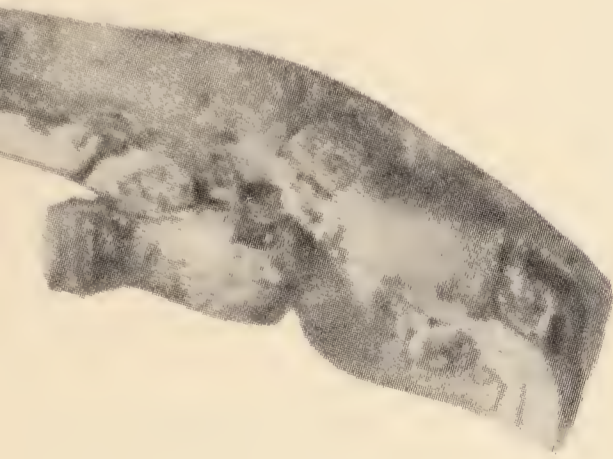
for a period of over five thousand years clearly suggests that they were not just decorative motifs but magic and sacred emblems.





7

*The  
Snake*





CLOSELY RELATED to the fish, tortoise and toad on the one hand and the dragon on the other is the serpent or snake. Some authors have even suggested that the snake and dragon are interchangeable,<sup>93</sup> and Creel points out that the two are closely associated in ancient Chinese literature.<sup>94</sup> While this may be true in later times when, after the introduction of Buddhism, the Indian naga serpent became confused with the Chinese lung dragon, the Chinese of Shang times saw them as two distinct creatures whose names were written in very different characters. The dragon was envisioned as an inhabitant of the sky and had wings and feet whereas the snake was an animal of the earth and waters and, like real snakes, was legless and wingless.

The idea of the snake as a special and often sacred animal occurs in almost all early civilizations. In China the motif is already present in Neolithic pottery where it is used in a context which suggests that it must have had some magic meaning. The most

93. Marcel Granet, *Danses et Legendes de la Chine Ancienne* (Paris: 1926), p. 554.

94. H. G. Creel, *Studies in Early Chinese Culture* (Baltimore: 1937), p. 238.

famous such snake design in prehistoric Chinese art is the cover of a clay pot from Pan chan in Kansu, now in the Museum of Far Eastern Art in Stockholm; it shows a snake on the back of a human head resting on a star shaped base which has additional snake designs.<sup>95</sup> Another Neolithic jar, now in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, depicts a human figure flanked by two snakes.<sup>96</sup> All this indicates that the snake not only had a prominent role long before the dragon became common but that it also must have had some kind of sacred meaning.

In Shang art, the snake occurs frequently among the ornamental designs on the bronzes, bone carvings and white pottery, but not among the sculptures and jades. The most striking snake designs are on the inside of the p'an shaped water basins in which the snake is usually the dominant motif. An excellent example is in the collection of the Freer Gallery. The snake, which occupies the center of the basin, is characterized by a long, coiled-up body ending in a pointed tail. Its head is huge, with ears, phallic horns and big staring eyes. In contrast to the dragon, it has no claws or wings and its body is covered with a diamond pattern like that often seen on snakes in nature. Since this type of vessel was used for water and the snake is believed to inhabit rivers and lakes, it is only fitting that

95. Andersson, *op. cit.*, plate 187.

96. Hsio-Yen Shih, *Chinese Art in the Royal Ontario Museum* (Toronto: 1972), p. 17, No. 2.

it should have been represented on the bottom of a p'an. Around the inner rim of the basin are tigers, birds and fish which probably represent earth, heaven and water, the basic components of the natural world.

The snake was also used as a part of a larger composition, as in the owl shaped tsun in the Cleveland Museum of Art in which snakes form the wings of the bird,<sup>97</sup> or the li-ting tripod in a private Swedish collection where snakes are shown winding around the rim of the vessel.<sup>98</sup> The most beautiful snake design occurs on a wine bucket in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco where the elongated arch of a two-headed snake serves as the handle of the vessel. This snake also has large eyes and phallic horns. It is associated with T'ao-t'ieh masks, dragon designs and a sculptured pheasant forming the finial of the cover, all of which suggests a magical and auspicious symbolism. Another prominent snake design occurs on a square ting in the Musée Cernuschi, Paris.

The snake motif is also very common among the bone carvings of the Shang period. Good examples are found in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Bishop White, who formed this collection, calls the snakes seen in these works lizard-like creatures,<sup>99</sup> but there is little doubt that they were intended to rep-

97. Waterbury, *op. cit.*, plate 54.

98. *Ibid.*, plate 36.

99. W. E. White, *Bone Culture in Ancient China* (Toronto: 1945), plates XV-XVII.



54. Bronze Yu  
Shang Period  
Asian Art Museum  
of San Francisco

resent snakes or serpents. The most interesting of these bone carvings in Toronto is the fragment of a spatula which is decorated with a composite creature that has a snake body, a partly human and partly animal head, and ram horns. The snake body is covered with circular whorl designs and is flanked by a zig-zag pattern, and the face has big staring eyes and a diamond shaped tongue. While the exact meaning of this design will probably never be known, it seems likely that what we have here is a serpent deity of a type still found in modern Chinese folk belief and folk art where a snake with a human face is held to inhabit lakes and rivers. Although there are no Shang inscriptions interpreting the snake deity, it is noteworthy that E. T. C. Werner, in his book on Chinese mythology, describes the serpent god as having a man's head and a snake's body.<sup>100</sup> He also says that the "celestial King of the Serpents is represented in several forms. Commonly, he is shown as a real serpent. This is seen in a temple dedicated to him as the Marshall Serpent at Su-cha Fu (Soochow), Kiangsu, where the boatmen and common people make offerings to him of frogs, special services with incense, etc., being performed in his honor on the twelfth day of the fourth moon."<sup>101</sup> These beliefs and customs are, of course, very much later than the Shang period, but the close association between

100. E. T. C. Werner, *A Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* (Shanghai: 1932), p. 448.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 416.



55. Bronze Fang-Ting  
Shang Period  
Musee Cernuschi, Paris



the snake, the frog and the tortoise as well as the dragon would suggest that in ancient times it was a symbol of water and fertility. To this day, there are Chinese peasants who believe that snakes and dragons inhabit oceans, lakes, rivers and wells, and offerings are made to them by travellers to insure that they will not be drowned. The idea that the snake had some magical power over water must be very ancient, for the snake is usually the dominant figure in the p'an water basins and a snake spirit is mentioned in the oracle bone inscriptions.<sup>102</sup>

Since the explanations of the snake images come from periods separated by many hundreds of years from the Shang age, they may very well owe more to the Indian nagas than to the indigenous snake deities of ancient China. However, this cannot be said of the human figures with the snake body on the Shang kuang in the Freer Gallery or of the human figures with the snake designs on their feet in the famous bronze tiger vessels in the Sumitomo and the Cernuschi collections.<sup>103</sup> The iconography of these Shang works is very similar to that found on the Wu Liang-tzu reliefs which show the divine ancestors, Nü Kua and Fu Hsi, as half human and half snake.<sup>104</sup> It is true that this legend can only be traced back to Han texts,<sup>105</sup> but the idea of connecting ancestors with some sacred totem is a very ancient concept and still occurs among primi-

102. Creel, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

103. Elisseeff, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-126.

104. Otto Fischer, *op. cit.*, plate 318.

105. Bernard Karlgren, *Legends and Cults in Ancient China* (BMFEA, Vol. 18), p. 229.



56. Bone Spatula  
Shang Period  
Royal Ontario Museum  
Toronto

tive peoples of the modern period. There are also many old Chinese legends which tell of women impregnated by serpents, a clear indication that snakes and serpents were not only associated with the fertility of fields and waters but also the fecundity of the race. Thus it would seem that these much older native traditions were in later periods mixed up with the naga kings derived from India, a confusion of traditions which often occurred in popular Chinese religion.



57. Leg of Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



8

*The  
T'ao-  
T'ieh*





OF ALL THE DECORATIVE MOTIFS in Shang art, the most mysterious and most controversial is the T'ao-t'ieh. More contradictory theories have been advanced about its meaning than about any other decorative motif in Shang art. About the only thing on which virtually all scholars agree is that the term T'ao-t'ieh is misleading and was only applied to the ornament long after it evolved. The characters for T'ao-t'ieh, meaning glutton, occur very rarely in Chinese texts and are never encountered in Shang inscriptions. According to Watson, the term is first mentioned in the *Tso Chuan*, a third century B.C. commentary on the *Ch'un Ch'iu*, where it is used as an epithet for a legendary evil person who is denounced for his covetousness.<sup>106</sup> Another reference is found in the *Ch'un Ch'iu* itself where it is described as a creature with a big head and no body.<sup>107</sup>

106. William Watson, *Ancient Chinese Bronzes* (London, 1962), p. 41.

107. Li Zueqin, *The Wonder of Chinese Bronzes* (Peking, 1980), p. 57.

In keeping with such interpretations dating from the late Chou period, Chinese scholars have identified the animal masks

appearing on the Shang bronzes as T'ao-t'ieh masks, explaining that they were placed there to warn people using these vessels against overindulging in food or drink. This moralistic explanation is quite in keeping with Confucian ideas but has nothing to do with the original meaning of the symbol. Chances are that the term T'ao-t'ieh was wholly unknown to the Shang people and was only popularized by Sung dynasty antiquarians who no longer had any understanding of the iconography and world view of the Shang period.

While the term T'ao-t'ieh probably does not apply to the animal masks on the ancient bronzes, it is used here because it has become the standard term employed for this type of ornament. Of all the many definitions of the T'ao-t'ieh, the one by Consten is probably the best: "The term t'ao-t'ieh denotes mask-like animal faces in frontal view, which lie flat on the surface of the vessel. Except for inconspicuous variations in the linear pattern fillings, the two halves of the face are symmetrical on both sides of the line, either imaginary or stressed by flanges or ridges that run down the forehead to the nose. Legs, tails and the intimation of the body may be added to the sides of the face; they are subject to the same law of symmetry. In most cases they are too small in proportion to the face."<sup>108</sup>

The actual components of the T'ao-t'ieh

108. Consten, *op. cit.*, p. 300.





58. Bronze Li  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

on the ancient bronzes vary greatly. Some early examples show two large eyes almost to the exclusion of all other elements, while later works, such as the bronze mask in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, depict a clearly recognizable tiger mask. However, while the fangs of the tiger occur in almost all T'ao-t'ieh masks, the other elements are extremely diverse. In a Freer Gallery li tripod, for example, the fangs, eyes and snout are those of a tiger, the horns come from the bull, the ears and the design on the forehead are derived from birds, and each half of the T'ao-t'ieh, viewed separately, may be read as a dragon. In short, far from being a naturalistic representation of a specific animal, the T'ao-t'ieh is usually a composite design which is made up of a great variety of different elements.

The lack of consistency of the individual components is illustrated by a tsun shaped vessel in the Freer Gallery; in it there is hardly a trace of the tiger mask, for the dominant elements are inspired by bird forms, with the eyes, ears and nose recalling the pheasants seen on bird shaped bronzes. In some cases the T'ao-t'ieh mask resembles a human face, although certain abstract animal forms are also used as in the chih shaped bronze in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum. In most cases, however, the T'ao-t'ieh mask is a composite design which is made up of animal and bird ele-

Plate 59 on page 183  
Plate 60 on page 184



59. Bronze Tsun  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



60. Bronze Chih  
Shang Period  
Royal Ontario Museum  
Toronto

ments forming a creation that is *sui generis* and cannot be identified with any creature found in the natural world. A typical example of an arbitrary and totally unnaturalistic T'ao-t'ieh used as the dominant feature on a Shang bronze vessel is the ting in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in which large eyes, recalling the character for sun, are combined with ears resembling the horns of a bull, eyebrows that look like bird wings, the fangs of a tiger, and a nose composed of two addorsed birds with pronounced beaks and crests. Above the mask there is a band design consisting of dragons and there are stylized cicadas on the legs of the vessel, all of which adds up to a diverse and fantastic configuration.

It had long been assumed that the T'ao-t'ieh mask was a unique creation of the artists of the Shang period, but excavations of recent decades have brought to light a wealth of new material which suggests that the T'ao-t'ieh had its origins in the Neolithic period. Chinese scholars have interpreted the incised decoration of a Neolithic clay cup excavated at Shih-chia-ho in Hopei as a forerunner of the T'ao-t'ieh of later times,<sup>109</sup> Jessica Rawson reproduces a Neolithic jade ring from southern China which has a face design, and a Neolithic stone adze, from Liang-cheng in Shantung, with ornaments that resemble the T'ao-t'ieh.<sup>110</sup> Li Zuequin

109. Akiyama, *Arts of China*, *op. cit.*, p. 34, fig. 36.

110. Rawson, *op. cit.*, p. 8 and fig. 26 and 27.



61. Bronze Ting  
Shang Period  
Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York

says that this adze “proves that the t’ao-t’ieh motif had already emerged in the Neolithic age,” and concludes that “there must certainly have been many more kinds of motifs, such as those often encountered on painted earthenware vessels and wooden artifacts.”<sup>111</sup>

An even more primitive form of the T’ao-t’ieh appears among the prehistoric pottery urns of the Yang-shao type where abstract face designs decorate the surface of the vessels. Such a design on a pot from Tien-shui in Kansu which shows two large eyes surrounded by curved shapes not unlike those found in the Shang T’ao-t’ieh, although they are arranged in a more systematic manner.<sup>112</sup> That the clay T’ao-t’ieh mask may have predated the bronze form is also suggested by the finds at Erh-li-t’ou which date from the very beginning of Shang civilization.<sup>113</sup>

For many years, Western scholars have tried to identify the animal from which the T’ao-t’ieh was derived and have come up with some peculiar explanations. The two most far-fetched were those offered by Friedrich Hirth and Michael Rostovzeff: the former suggests that the T’ao-t’ieh is derived from the great mastiff of Tibet<sup>114</sup> while the latter has “not the slightest doubt that what is meant is a horned lion-griffin, the most popular animal in Persian art.”<sup>115</sup> Creel thinks that “the t’ao-t’ieh is perhaps intended to

111. Li Zueqin, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

112. *Historical Relics Unearthed in New China* (Peking, 1972), p. 24.

113. K. C. Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

114. Friedrich Hirth, *Ancient History of China* (New York: 1911), p. 84.

115. Michael Rostovzeff, *The Animal Style in South Russia and China* (Princeton: 1929), p. 70.

represent an ox, for cattle were important food animals and were used to sacrifice to the gods.”<sup>116</sup> C. P. Fitzgerald has this to say: “One of the principal animal motifs of the early bronze art is the t’ao-t’ieh, an ogre like head with massive muzzle (the lower jaw is usually missing) and vast staring eyes. The frequency with which this monster is represented on bronze vessels and other antique objects is clear evidence of the important part which it played in the mythology of the early Chinese. It is difficult, in the absence of really ancient literary evidence, to say what the t’ao-t’ieh was intended to represent. Opinions on this question are many but the view which sees the t’ao-t’ieh as the dragon regarded under its destructive aspect seems the most satisfactory.”<sup>117</sup>

The two Western scholars who have studied the iconography of ancient Chinese art most thoroughly, Florance Waterbury and Carl Hentze, have come up with still different ideas. Miss Waterbury, after a detailed examination of the subject, concluded that the T’ao-t’ieh head in the vast majority of cases “is quite clearly and definitely the symbolic tiger.”<sup>118</sup> In his last book, Hentze, who discussed the problem in many books and articles, concluded that the T’ao-t’ieh is a devourer (*Verschlinger*) who represents the gate of death and darkness and yet at the same time is also the liberator who brings new life and light.<sup>119</sup>

Plate 62 on page 189

Plate 63 on page 190

116. Creel, *Birth of China*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

117. C. P. Fitzgerald, *China*, fourth edition (London: 1954), pp. 111–112.

118. Waterbury, *op. cit.*

119. Hentze, *Funde in Alt-China* (Göttingen: 1967), p. 181.





62. Bronze Yu  
Shang Period  
Museum of Fine Arts  
Boston



63. Bronze Tsun  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

Plate 64 on page 192  
Plate 65 on page 193

While there can be no doubt that the concept of the T'ao-t'ieh was of major importance in the magical world of the Shang people, there is no particular reason why it should have been based upon some specific animal. The imagination of early man everywhere, and China is certainly no exception, has created many supernatural creatures which have no equivalent in nature. The dragon and the phoenix, or feng, may be ultimately derived from a real animal but in their Shang form, they certainly cannot be identified with a particular species. The concept of eyes which have supernatural power is common in many primitive arts and this, too, was not necessarily connected with a definite animal or deity.

In light of all this, it seems most likely that the T'ao-t'ieh mask does not represent any specific animal but is a more universal emblem which can take different forms but is always auspicious and protective in nature. Yuzo Sugimura in his discussion of the T'ao-t'ieh probably puts it best when he says that he believes this motif serves magical and religious purposes and that it is "a representation of an animal face that was apparently intended to drive away evil spirits."<sup>120</sup> The true function of the T'ao-t'ieh mask was no doubt that of a guardian who protected the living during religious ceremonies and the dead in their tombs.

120. Yuzo Sugimura,  
*Chinese Sculpture, Bronze  
and Jades in Japanese  
Collections* (Honolulu: 1966),  
p. 38.



64. Bronze P'ou  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington D.C.



65. Bronze Chia  
Shang Period  
Asian Art Museum  
of San Francisco



9

*The  
Human  
Figure in  
Shang Art*







**A**LTHOUGH THE GREAT MAJORITY of ornamental designs decorating Shang bronzes consist of animal figures, human motifs also occur occasionally. Some consist of entire figures, wholly or partially human, and others have only a human head. They appear on bronze vessels, weapons and tools, ceramics (notably the white pottery), and among jades and bone carvings. But they occur only rarely among stone sculptures. In some the representation is quite realistic, depicting a clearly recognizable Mongolian type of man, but at other times the figure is rendered in such a stylized, abstract manner that it is impossible to identify the race of the person.

Here again, one should note that human figures appear on the Neolithic jars of the Yang-shao culture and in a somewhat more abstract form on the pottery of the Ma

Chang civilization. Andersson found several ceramic vessels decorated with such designs at Pan Shan in Kansu, vessels which are now in the collection of the Stockholm Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities.<sup>121</sup> Even better examples of this type, excavated in recent years, are now in the Shanghai Museum.<sup>122</sup> They seem to represent a sky deity; the figures have solar disks at their sides, a spiral cloud design above them and the flowing water design beneath them.

A similar form, consisting of a standing human figure with outstretched limbs, occurs in oracle bone inscriptions where it is read as Ti and identified as the supreme deity who presided over the heavens and brought thunder, rain and drought. It is to this god that the ancient Chinese appealed for advice in conducting their affairs and for good fortune. Even the ancestral spirits and the deities of nature were subordinate to Ti, for they were looked upon as mere intermediaries between the supreme god and the Shang people.<sup>123</sup> In describing his position in the Shang religion, David Keightley says: "Ti had dominion over rain, wind, other atmospheric phenomena, harvests, the fate of urban settlements, warfare, sickness and the king's person. He shared some of these jurisdictions with the ancestors and nature powers, but he was the supreme religious deity."<sup>124</sup>

Sometimes this god is called Shang Ti,

121. Andersson, *op. cit.*, plates 188–192.

122. Jan Fontain and Rose Hempel, *China, Korea, Japan* (Berlin, 1968), color plate 1.

123. Tsung-tung Chang, *op. cit.*, pp. 211–235.

124. David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History* (Berkeley: 1978), p. 33.

with the character Shang signifying upper or superior, suggesting that he was the ruler above or the god on high. In Chou times, he was identified with T'ien, or Heaven, but it is believed that these two deities were originally separate beings for T'ien does not appear in Shang inscriptions. Probably not until the Chou conquest were the two deities merged. (Interestingly enough, the Jesuits used the name Shang Ti when they wished to translate the word "God.") Whatever the case, there can be no doubt that the Shang people worshipped a supreme deity whom they represented as a man with outstretched arms and legs.

The most striking Shang image of this type is found on a large bronze drum in the Sumitomo collection in Kyoto.<sup>125</sup> It represents a figure with an unmistakably human face, huge ram horns, ears like bird wings, arms ending in tiger's claws, and legs which are spread apart with feet like the larva of a cicada which are bordered by fish and snake designs. On both sides of this fantastic creature are birds with huge eyes. Additional bird designs appear above the figure and the top of the drum is decorated with two addorsed birds rendered in three dimensions. In light of the fact that this deity, which is represented on one of the largest Shang bronzes, must not only be a figure of great importance but one who was connected with heaven, it would seem likely

125. Osvald Siren, *Histoire Des Arts Anciens De La Chine*, Vol. 1 (Paris and Brussels, 1929), plate 50B.



66. Jade Finial  
Chou Period  
Fogg Museum of Art  
Cambridge

that we are confronted with the supreme god, Shang Ti, who was believed to preside over heaven, rain, the harvests and fertility.

A similar figure appears on a Shang marble vessel from Anyang.<sup>126</sup> Here the body and legs resemble those of a human being while the face looks something like a bird. Again the arms are outstretched and end in tiger claws, while the legs are spread apart. The crowning feature is an elaborate headdress consisting of bird's feathers and stylized bull's horns. Although the details in the two deities are not identical, the general concept of a human figure with animal and bird elements is the same.

These are the only two Shang works on which the entire figure of the god is represented, but on several smaller objects the same deity is shown in a somewhat abbreviated form. The best known is a small jade finial in the Winthrop collection of the Fogg Museum. The human head is quite naturalistic with huge pierced ears, a broad nose and deep set incised eyes. A hole was drilled in the top of the head which suggests that it may once have had some kind of headdress. The arms consist of birds with long necks and curved beaks. At the throat, there is a rectangular form pierced by a circular hole which resembles the ancient Chinese pictograph for the sun, and beneath it is the head of a ram with curved horns. The back of the figure has a circular pi

126. Oskar Karlbeck, *Anyang Marble Sculptures* (BMFEA, No. 7), plate IV, p. 64.



67. Bronze Ho  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

design, usually interpreted as a sky or sun symbol.<sup>127</sup>

A very similar iconography is also found on a white pottery jar excavated at Anyang.<sup>128</sup> The face in this example is close to that of the figure on the marble vessel, also discovered at Anyang, for it has large bird eyes and a broad mouth, in this case with prominent teeth. The headdress also suggests bird feathers and ram horns, the outstretched arms end in bird claws, and the body is triangular like that of the figure on the Sumitomo drum. Lei-wen spiral patterns cover and flank the figure, and it is surrounded with stylized dragons. In light of all these similarities, it seems likely that the figure on the Anyang white pottery jar is also a representation of Shang Ti.

The most singular example in Shang art of a part human, part animal creature is the human headed and snake bodied one on the celebrated ho shaped vessel in the Freer Gallery. The iconography of this fascinating bronze was discussed by me in an article in *Oriental Art* magazine,<sup>129</sup> but the work is so interesting and so significant in the context of Shang symbolism that the salient points bear repeating. The cover of the vessel consists of a naturalistic human face with phallic horns that are decorated with spiral and zig-zag designs. The face itself, although striking, is not exceptional, for similar faces appear among jade carvings, but

127. Hugo Munsterberg, "An Anthropomorphic Deity from Ancient China," *Oriental Art*, 1951, p. 152, fig. 7.

128. *Arts of China, Recent Discoveries*, *op. cit.*, p. 23, color plate 7.

129. Munsterberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-152.



68. Bronze Ho  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



what is unique is that it is combined with a snake body which winds itself around the exterior of the vessel and with tiger arms and claws. The body of the snake is covered with an all-over diamond pattern, and it is surrounded by bird, bull, dragon and spiral designs. There is also a boldly projecting spout. Such complex iconography could not have been used simply for formal purposes. One is tempted to interpret this as a representation of the supreme ancestor who, as we have noted in the discussion of the Mayer kuang in the Freer Gallery, was envisioned as having a human head and a snake body.

Other deities often mentioned in the Shang oracle inscriptions are the gods of the four directions, who are sometimes invoked individually and at other times as a group. These gods seem to be represented on a bronze cover from the early Chou period in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Phyllis Ackerman, who was the first to realize the importance of this piece, rightly viewed it as a representation of the gods of the four directions.<sup>130</sup> That such symbolism is intended is seen by the fact that the base of the cover is square like the earth, the ring surrounding the figures round like the sky and the handle a snake covered with spirals which may well be thought of as a rainbow. However, the most striking feature of the cover is the four heads facing the four directions, each with a square on top of its head.

130. Ackerman, *Ritual Bronzes of Ancient China* (New York: 1945), p. 91.



69. Bronze Ho  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



70. Bronze Ho  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

The bodies of the figures have been omitted but their legs and feet appear on the lid and are decorated with spiral lei-wen cloud patterns.<sup>131</sup>

This object may well be related to what is probably the most spectacular bronze find of recent years, namely, the square ting decorated with four face masks excavated at Ning-hsiang in Hunan in 1952. This remarkable piece created a sensation when it came to light. The most noteworthy feature is the four faces looking out in the four directions which resemble the face masks of the Indians of the American Northwest. Although the faces themselves are rather naturalistic, they are combined with tiny horns in the shape of snakes and arms with tiger claws. On the legs of the vessel there are T'ao-t'ieh masks and on the handles dragons. Although it has been suggested that these are human victims offered to the deities,<sup>132</sup> such a naturalistic explanation is wholly unconvincing for the heads must surely represent deities and those of the four directions seem the most likely.

Unfortunately none of these works have inscriptions to elucidate the meaning of the images. However, since Shang Ti, as the god on high and the supreme ancestor, was rendered in human form as late as the nineteenth century (he is represented in the popular folk art of the time), there can be little doubt that he was thought of as being

131. Munsterberg, "Symbols," *op. cit.*, p. 38.

132. Mary Tregear, *Chinese Art* (London: 1980), p. 28.

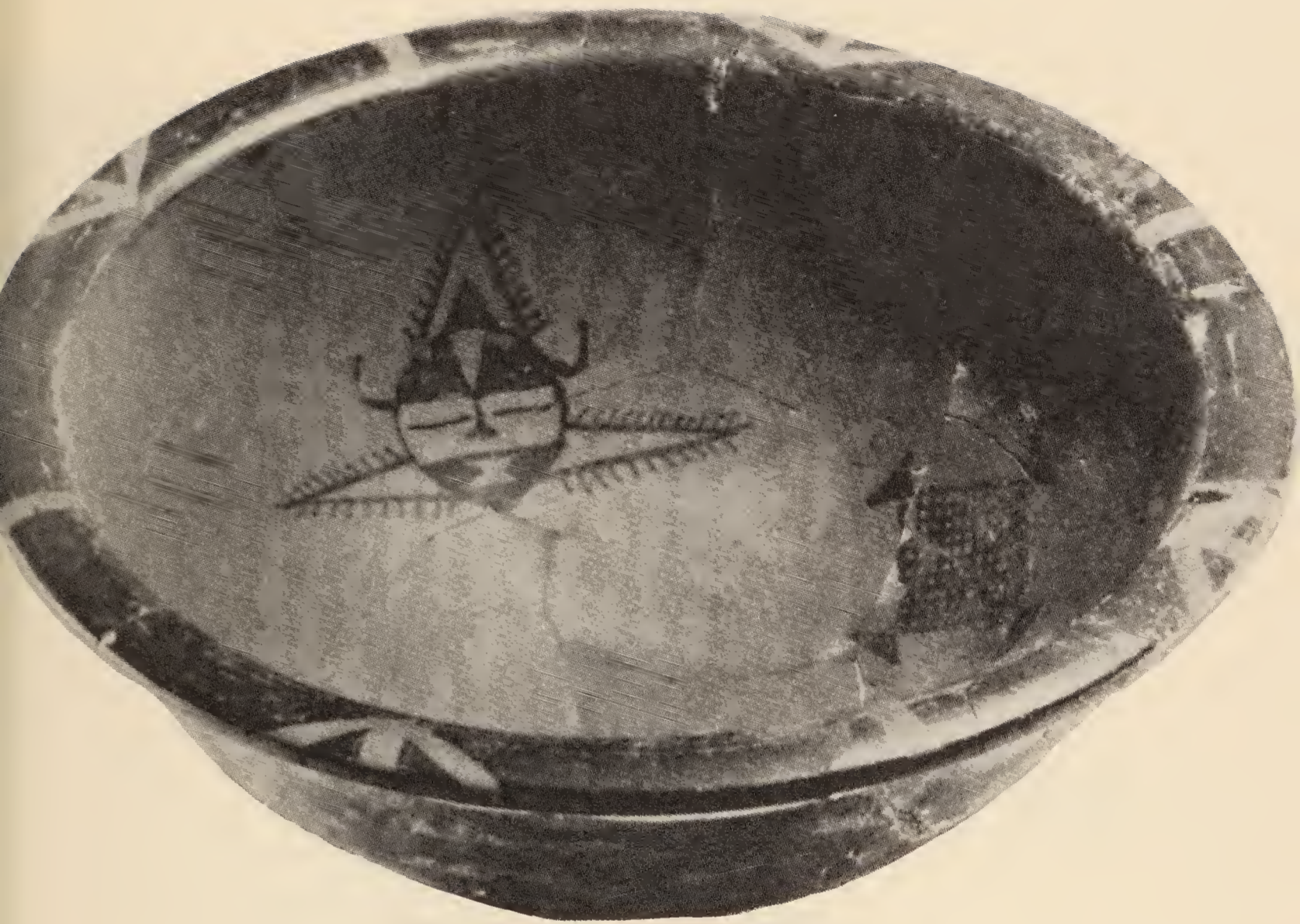


71. Cover of Bronze Ho  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

a man. In view of all this evidence, namely, that the term Shang Ti or Ti appears frequently in Shang inscriptions; that a human figure is represented in a prominent position as the main decorative motif on prehistoric jars as well as Shang bronzes and jades; and that this figure is usually surrounded by symbolic animals, it seems reasonable to conclude that he is not some ordinary mortal but Shang Ti himself.



72. Bronze Square Ting  
Shang Period  
People's Republic of China



73. Ceramic Basin  
with Fan Design  
Neolithic Period  
Pan-p'o Museum  
People's Republic of China







*10*

*Sexual  
Symbolism  
in  
Ancient  
Chinese  
Art*



**B**ERNARD KARLGREN, the noted Swedish Sinologist, first drew attention to the sexual component in ancient Chinese art in his *Some Fecundity Symbols in Ancient China*.<sup>133</sup> Although some of his conclusions have been questioned by other scholars, his general thesis that fecundity and fertility cults played an important role in ancient China is now well established. Central to this idea is the pictographic and archaeological evidence for phallic shaped symbols which stand for the earth deity, She, who was thought of as male, and which closely resemble the character for *tsu*, or ancestor.<sup>134</sup> As Karlgren says: "The worship of some deity or deities of the Earth is among

133. Bernard Karlgren, *Some Fecundity Symbols in Ancient China* (BMFEA, Vol. 2, 1930).

134. *Ibid.*, plate 1; T. T. Chang, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

the oldest rites which we have evidence of in China, and this cult has been much studied by Western Sinologists. The first great monograph on this subject was produced by Edouard Chavannes. . . . He there discusses thoroughly the god or gods which from remote antiquity down to modern times have been worshipped under the name She, the god of the soil."<sup>135</sup>

Phallic shaped objects made of clay are found at prehistoric sites, such as Ch'üan-hu-ts'un, Hu-hsien, in Shensi province. They are believed to date from the third millenium.<sup>136</sup> Other such emblems were no doubt made of wood and have long since vanished. A marble phallus dating from the Shang period is in the collection of the Stockholm Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities<sup>137</sup> and a clay emblem of this type, dating from the Shang age, was found at So-chin-ts'un near Nanking.<sup>138</sup> However, far more important for the interpretation of this image in Shang art are the numerous horns in the shape of phallic emblems which occur on the bronzes, jades and bone carvings of the Shang period. Some scholars call them capped hull horns, and Hentze believed that they represented miniature ancestral temples. However, when looked at in relation to the fecundity and fertility cults prevalent in China at that time, there cannot be any doubt about their purpose and meaning.

A good example of the phallic horn may

135. Karlgren, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

136. Ping-to Ho, *The Cradle of the East* (Hong Kong: 1975), p. 282.

137. Karlgren, *op. cit.*, plate II.

138. Ho, *op. cit.*, p. 282.



74. Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

be seen on a tiger face in a kuang shaped bronze in the Freer Gallery. These horns are decorated with spiral designs signifying clouds and the zig-zag pattern standing for water. The horns on the face-shaped cover of the Freer ho are decorated with the same zig-zags and spirals.<sup>139</sup> It is, in fact a quite common motif, one found not only in the bronze art but in jade and bone carvings, and it must certainly have had some definite symbolic meaning.

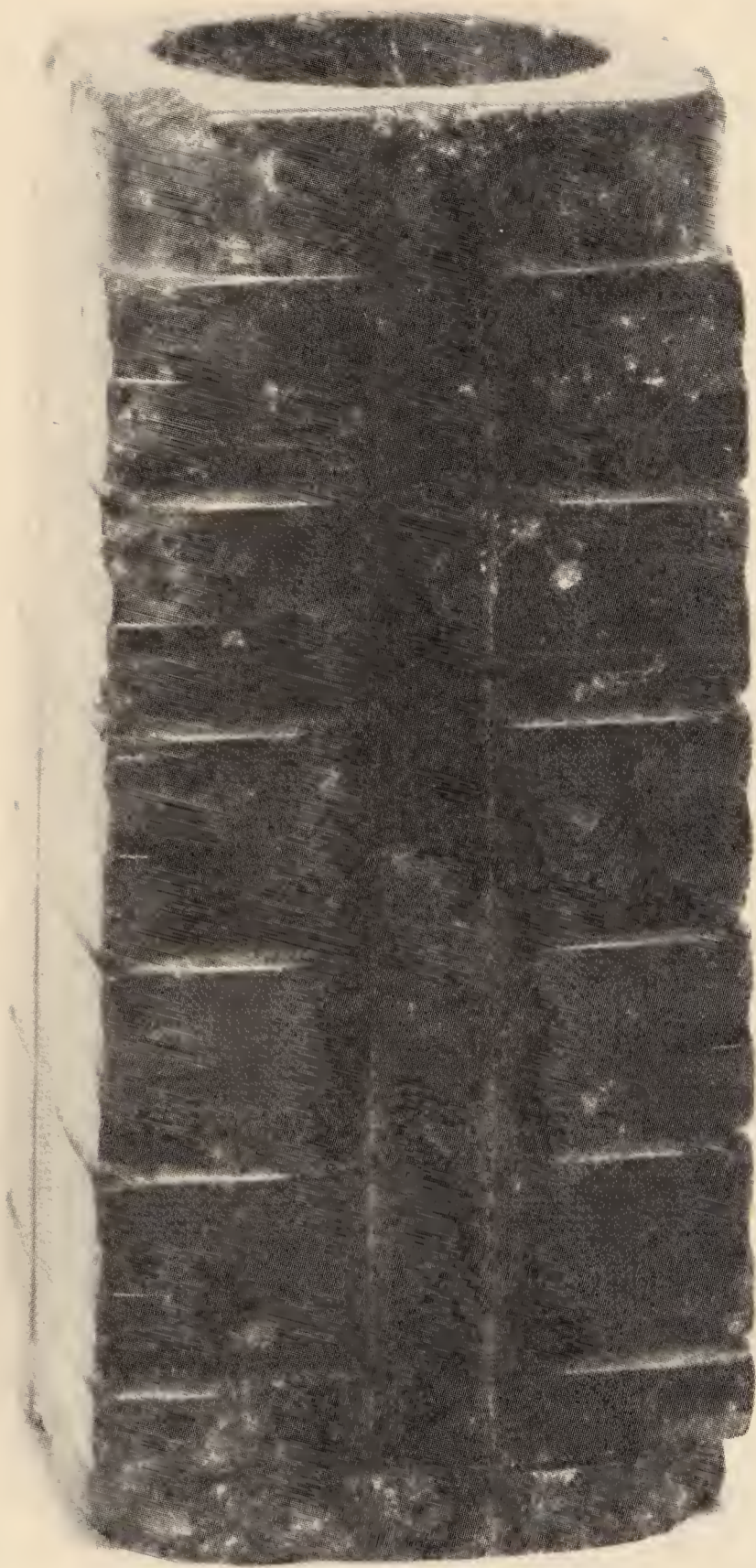
Some of these ancient fertility cults have lived on into modern times. Creel reports that even today small earth mounds are found in many villages which are worshipped as symbols of the local agricultural deity. The character for this mound is made of the pictographs for earth and spirit.<sup>140</sup> More recently, V. R. Burkhardt reports seeing a rock shrine facing the sea in Stanley near Hongkong which had a pointed stone on a flat base on the altar. He was told by the local people that this was the emblem of the soil deity, the source of all fertility, both animal and vegetable.<sup>141</sup> Such primitive cults, which may preserve remnants that go back thousands of years, might well shed some light on the meaning of the sculptural forms and ornamental designs appearing in ancient Chinese art.

Another sculptural shape often occurring in the jade carvings of the Shang and Chou periods is the ts'ung, a hollow tube

139. Munsterberg, *An Anthropomorphic Deity*, *op. cit.*, p. 148, fig. 1.

140. Creel, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-181.

141. V. R. Burkhardt, *Chinese Creeds and Customs* (Hong Kong: 1955), Vol. II, p. 38.



75. Jade Ts'ung  
Chou Period  
Fogg Museum of Art  
Cambridge

surrounded by a square container. It already occurs in Chinese Neolithic art<sup>142</sup> and is found frequently among the grave offerings of the Shang and Chou periods. A good example of such an object is in the Winthrop jade collection in the Fogg Museum. Laufer first popularized the view that this emblem should be seen as representing the earth deity.<sup>143</sup> This idea which is based on a late Chou text, the *Chou Li*, and a Han commentary on the *Chou Li* in which it is said that the pi (a circular disk) placed under the corpse represented heaven, while the ts'ung which was put on its abdomen stood for earth, and that the combination of the two symbolized heaven and earth.<sup>144</sup> However, this explanation is very late and may no longer express the meaning that these motifs had in Shang times. Among the many interpretations of the meaning and function of the ts'ung is the prosaic one that it represents the hub of a wheel<sup>145</sup> and the more esoteric Jungian one that it symbolizes the cavity of mother earth.

Karlgren, who has treated this subject at length, has suggested a novel and most interesting explanation which seems plausible enough although it has not been accepted in all circles. He believes that the ts'ung originally was the cover of a phallic shaped emblem representing the earth deity. The original object was probably made of stone and consisted of several sections which were tied

142. Rawson, *op. cit.*, p. 37, fig. 23.

143. Laufer, *Early Chinese Jades*, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

144. Karlgren, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

145. William Willetts, *Chinese Art* (London: 1958), Vol. I, p. 105.



together with strings. This would explain the grooves on the surface, which are also clearly indicated in the Shang pictograph for the character ts'ung. The jade version of the ts'ung, like the jade replicas of the various symbols of power, weapons and tools, is merely a more precious form of the same object made for interment in the royal tombs. It was only later when the original meaning of the emblem was no longer properly understood that the ts'ung was referred to as a symbol of the earth deity; what it originally represented was the cover which protected the phallic shaped She earth symbol.<sup>146</sup>

The female equivalent for the phallic shape symbolizing the male was the female breast. The ancient Chinese pictograph for mother shows a woman who is characterized by two large breasts with prominent nipples. This symbol may be seen in prehistoric art. Li tripods supported by breast shaped legs with clearly recognizable nipples are already found among the Neolithic pots of the Ma Chang culture and are quite common among the late Neolithic pottery discovered at Hsin Tien and Ssu Wa Shan in Kansu. In commenting upon this phenomenon, Andersson says: "Another general remark concerns the apparent likeness of nearly all the tripod legs to a woman's breast. This likeness can hardly be unintentional. In this connection it is interesting to note how the painted decor of the Hsin Tien urns includes

146. Karlgren, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.



76. Ceramic Jar  
Neolithic Period  
Collection Michael Weisbrod  
New York

some symbols of an agricultural fertility cult. According to the ways of imitative magic, symbols of woman's fecundity are often used to enhance the effect of symbols pertaining to the fertility of the fields or, *mutatis mutandis*, to the welfare of the dead."<sup>147</sup>

The idea of employing the female breast as a propitious emblem associated with human and agricultural fertility is also clearly seen in Shang art. A good example of breasts serving as legs in the bronze art of the Shang period is the tripod in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum. The same device is also found in the ceramic ware of the Black Pottery culture as well as the early Shang period, as may be seen in the clay pots excavated at the Erh Li Kang sites at Cheng-chou.<sup>148</sup> Modern commentators, motivated, perhaps, by a kind of prudery, have called these breasts cow's udders and have denied that any such primitive fertility cult existed in ancient China, but the combination of the pictographs and the evidence of the ceramic and bronze pots leaves no doubt that the female breast was the exact equivalent of the penis in the fertility symbolism of the Shang period.

Another clearly recognizable female sexual symbol which occurs on bronze vessels are nipples. The most dramatic use of this motif in Chinese bronze art is in the large food vessel in the Freer Gallery, already dis-

147. Andersson, *op. cit.*, p. 235 and pls. 171-179.

148. William Watson, *Archaeology in China* (London, 1960), pl. 34.



77. Bronze Li  
Shang Period  
Royal Ontario Museum  
Toronto

cussed in connection with bull symbolism, which has two bands thickly studded with numerous projecting nipples. Many other examples of nipples used as ornamental motifs are found in Shang art, although they are usually much less prominent. Good examples are the kuei vessels in the Royal Ontario Museum and the Musée Cernuschi which has a wide band of nipples, each set at the center of a diamond shape. A very similar type of design is also found on a bronze in the Moore collection of the Yale Art museum.<sup>149</sup> These nipples usually appear with diamond or square shapes just as they do in the Shang pictograph for mother, a combination which leaves little doubt that they were sexual symbols denoting fecundity.

The other ancient symbol which was undoubtedly associated with female fertility and abundance is the cowry shell. It is a motif often encountered in Shang art and is already found in the art of the prehistoric period. As Andersson says: "We shall see how extensive is the use of cowries, real or imitation, as burial ware in China from the Yang-shao age until at least as late as the beginning of the Christian era."<sup>150</sup> How popular the cowry was and what a significant role it had in Shang culture is best illustrated by the fact that no less than seven thousand cowry shells were found with four hundred fifty bronzes, five hundred ninety jades and sixty bone carvings at the Fu Hao

149. Ackerman, *op. cit.*, plate 30.

150. J. G. Andersson, *Children of the Yellow Earth* (New York: 1934), p. 297.



78. Bronze Ting  
Shang Period  
People's Republic of China

Tomb near Hsiao-t'un in Honan in 1975.<sup>151</sup> Another indication of its importance are the oracle bone inscriptions which tell of offerings in the form of cowry shells. There are also pictographs which clearly show a man holding strings of cowry shells.

We know that these shells were used as money in ancient China and that metal replicas of such shells were found in Shang tombs, but it seems likely that this original meaning was associated more with fecundity than with material wealth, although the two were, of course, closely related in the eyes of primitive man. Andersson, in writing about the prehistoric grave finds in the Pan Shan hills, has this to say about the decorative designs on one of the jars: "In this case it is possible that the double-contoured figures depict not the cowrie but rather the origin of this group of ideas: the woman's vulva."<sup>152</sup> Be this as it may, there can be no doubt that the cowry motif which appears so frequently on the bronze vessels of the Shang period represents prosperity in all its senses and was viewed as an auspicious emblem which was believed to bring good fortune. It may occur in conjunction with other motifs, often covering the body of one of the symbolic animals, as in the famous Freer Gallery ho where cowry designs appear on both the bird and the tiger limbs, or it may be used as one of the chief ornaments, as on the tsun with T'ao-t'ieh and cowry

151. K. C. Chang, *Shang Civilization, op. cit.*, p. 88.

152. Andersson, *Researches, op. cit.*, p. 131.



79. Bronze Yu  
Shang Period  
Royal Ontario Museum  
Toronto



decorations, a vessel which is also in the Freer Gallery. Whether it is a subordinate or prominent design, it is clear that it is used as a symbolic motif rather than as a mere decoration.

There is one more type of Shang vessel which has an explicit or implied sexual connotation, namely, a li-ho shaped container for wine. It was made both in clay and bronze, and it has also been found among prehistoric remains. The oldest such objects were discovered at Lung-shan sites in Shantung province.<sup>153</sup> They are bulbous-shaped clay pouring vessels with mammary legs and a spout which resembles a bird's beak. The fully developed form occurs among the bronzes of the Shang period, such as the one in the Avery Brundage collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. It combines in a very striking way both male and female sexual forms and seems to anticipate the famous Yang-Ying male-female duality which, during late Chou times, became one of the most important and widespread concepts in Chinese thought. The male symbol takes the form of a projecting spout shaped like an erected penis from which the sacred liquid was poured. The female elements are the breast shaped legs of the tripod, the cover which resembles buttocks, and the triangular incision beneath the spout which no doubt indicates the pubic region of the female. D'Argencé sug-

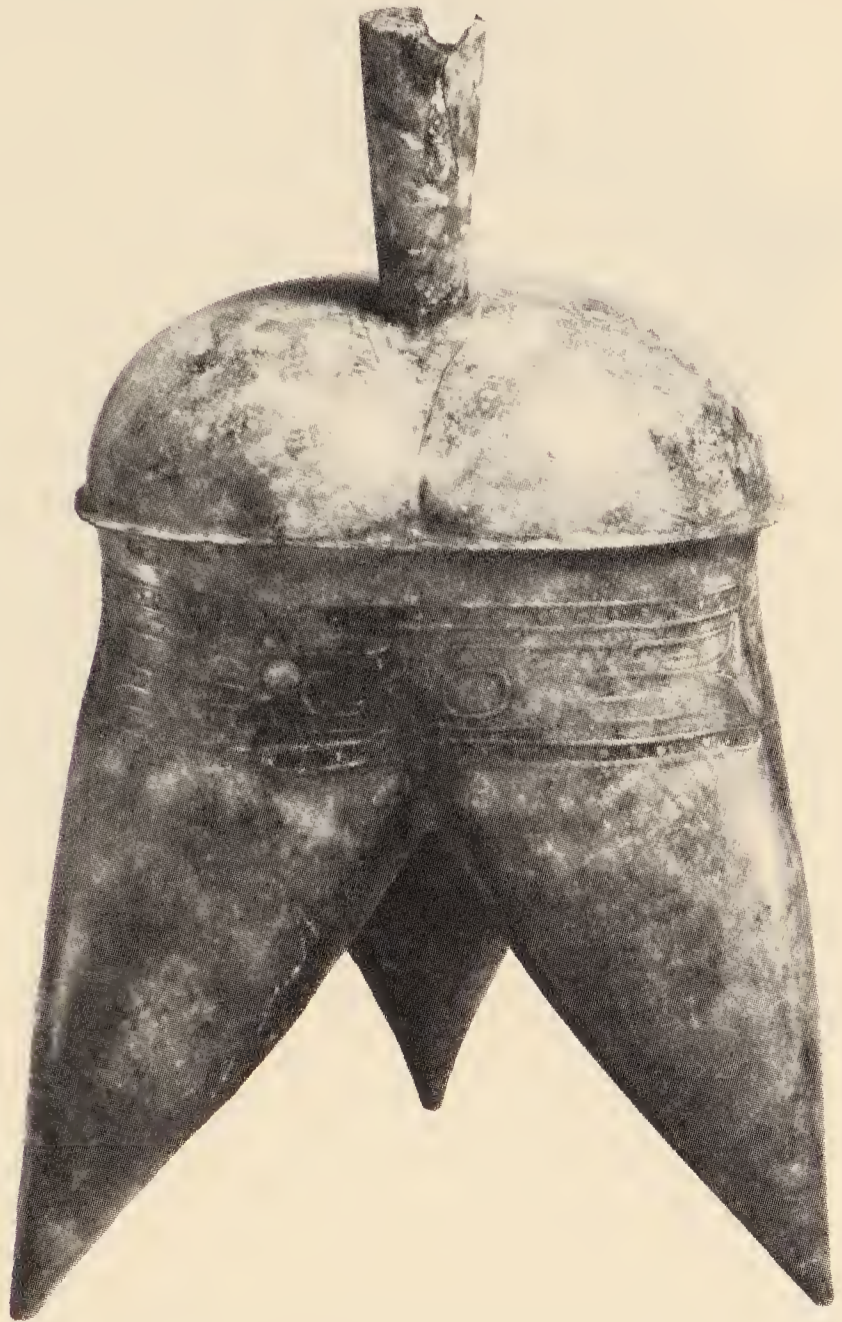
153. Watson, *The Genius of China*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59, pls. 56-57.



80. Bronze Tsun  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.

gests that the top resembles a “human mask with bulging eyes; the spout and a wide aperture serve as nose and mouth.”<sup>154</sup> Although this is a possible reading, the phallic spout is far more prominent than any nose and what D’Argencé sees as eyes and cheeks can be more readily interpreted as buttocks or even as breasts with nipples. It would also be difficult to explain the triangular indentation if this is a face, while the male-female sexual symbolism fits in with everything we know about early Chinese culture.

154. Rene-Yvon Lefebvre  
d’Argencé, *Chinese  
Treasures from the Avery  
Brundage Collection, op. cit.*,  
p. 12.



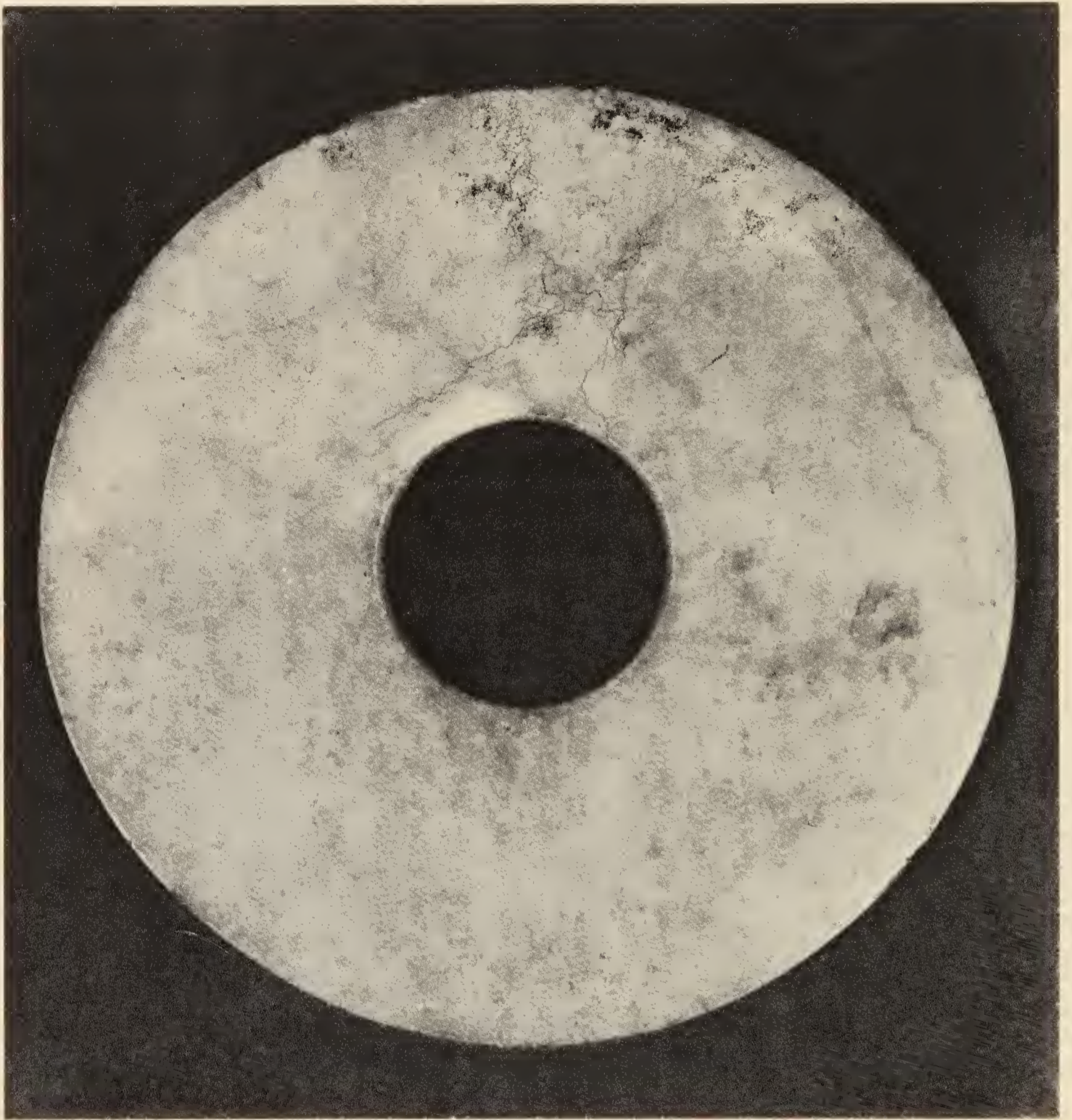
81. Bronze Li-Ho  
Shang Period  
Asian Art Museum  
of San Francisco



*11*

*Celestial  
Symbolism*





82. Jade Pi  
Chou Period  
Fogg Museum, Cambridge

Plate 82 on page 234  
Plate 83 on page 236

ONE OF THE MOST COMMON jade forms in ancient China, called a pi in Chinese literature, is the circular disk with a round perforation at the center. A good example is in the Winthrop collection of the Fogg Art Museum. The texts of the late Chou period say that the pi is a symbol of heaven, in contrast to the ts'ung which is referred to as an emblem of earth. It was looked upon as very yang and was often placed in the mouth of the dead to insure their vitality and to prevent their bodies from decaying.<sup>155</sup> This explanation of the function of the pi has been used by Chinese scholars for centuries and is also found in the works of Laufer and various other Western writers. However, like many of these very late explanations of the nature and function of Shang emblems, it does not hold up under close analysis. The concept of heaven, or t'ien, is one which only emerged in the Chou period; it did not exist among the Shang people who worshipped Shang Ti as the ruler of heaven. Furthermore, the pictograph for t'ien is that of a

155. Karlgren, *op. cit.*,  
p. 39.



83. Jade Pi  
Chou Period  
British Museum, London



large man rather than a circular pi shape. The character resembling the pi, on the other hand, means jih, or sun, and it has been suggested both by Chinese and Western scholars that the pi was a solar symbol long before it became associated with heaven. There can be no doubt that the Shang people worshipped both the sun and the moon, for these deities are mentioned in the oracle bone inscriptions. We are told that during the Shang period, sacrifices were brought to the sun deity both in the morning when the sun rose and in the evening when the sun set,<sup>156</sup> and it seems likely that the pi shaped jade was connected with this cult.

That the solar cult was already prominent during the Neolithic period is indicated by the fact that in the prehistoric jars of Hsin-tien, the circular solar design, sometimes with sun rays, is depicted.<sup>157</sup> The pi jade is also found at prehistoric sites where it obviously could not have represented t'ien, or heaven, since this concept did not exist at the time. The earliest reference to the pi being connected with heaven is found in the fourth century B.C. *Chou Li*, and the earliest text saying that it represents heaven comes from the late Han period and dates from the second century A.D.<sup>158</sup> In light of this, it would seem that originally the pi was a solar emblem and was worshipped as such during the prehistoric and

156. Werner Eichhorn, "Zur Religion im Ältesten China," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd und Ostasiens*, Band II, 1958, p. 37.

157. Andersson, *op. cit.*, pl. 128.

158. Willetts, *op. cit.*, p. 93.



84. Bronze Chia  
Shang Period  
British Museum, London

Shang periods, and that it was only interpreted much later as a symbol for t'ien, or the deity heaven.

Closely related to the solar emblem is the so-called whorl-circle which often decorates Shang bronzes, a disk-shaped motif with a circle at the center surrounded by several curlicues. Typical whorl-circles appear on a li tripod in the British Museum. Here they form the dominant design, but they are often used as subsidiary ornaments, as in the li-ting in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Various explanations for this emblem have been suggested. For example, it has been said that it symbolizes the change of seasons or the movement of the moon or the flux of nature. The correct interpretation is no doubt that offered by Ma Chengyuan, who says that the so-called whorls are actually pictoralizations of the graph meaning brightness and fire. He also points out that when spoken rapidly, this character and the one standing for the fire spirit sound the same.<sup>159</sup> Circular in shape and standing for the bright yang powers, it is no doubt also connected with the sun.

The lunar forces, which in the archaic script are represented by a crescent moon, also play a role in Shang times although it would appear that they were less important than the solar ones. In Neolithic art, small crescent shaped forms appear as decorative

159. *Great Bronze Age, op. cit.*, p. 8.



85. Bronze Li-Ting  
Shang Period  
Asian Art Museum  
of San Francisco

Plate 86 on page 242  
Plate 87 on page 243

motifs on Pan Shan jars. Hentze believes that they represent the phases of the moon.<sup>160</sup> They occur only rarely among the huge number of ceramics which have been excavated. In Shang writing, there is a human figure with a crescent shaped head which Hentze took to be a moon deity,<sup>161</sup> but this is a unique pictograph. The paucity of such crescent shaped designs may be due to the fact that the crescent shaped horns of the bull and the water buffalo stood for the lunar forces rather than that the moon was not worshipped widely by the Shang people. A very interesting artifact which bears this out is in the collection of the king of Sweden in Stockholm. It is a bronze rattle, dating from the early Chou period, which shows the solar disk decorated with a cutout pattern resembling the archaic character for bright. In its lower section, there are two water buffaloes with crescent shaped horns similar to the pictograph for moon. Karlgren, who discusses this object at some length, points out that the combination of the solar emblem and the horned animal already occurs in Neolithic pottery and he draws attention to a Babylonian parallel in which the worship of sun and moon deities is clearly represented.<sup>162</sup> It seems likely that in Shang art the lunar forces are not symbolized by crescent shaped objects but rather by the horns of bovine animals.

160. Carl Hentze, *Mythes Et Symbols Lunaires* (Antwerp: 1932), p. 64.

161. Carl Hentze, *Göttergestalten in der Ältesten Chinesischen Schrift* (Antwerp: 1943), plate V, 2.

162. Karlgren, *op. cit.*, plate VI, fig. 2 and p. 50.

Another type of celestial symbol con-



86. Yang-Shao Pottery Jar  
Neolithic Period  
Museum of Far Eastern Art  
Stockholm



87. Yang-Shao Pottery Jar  
Neolithic Period  
People's Republic of China

sists of spirals, double spirals, undulating lines and zig-zags which already occur on the prehistoric vessels and are frequently encountered among the ornaments on the Shang bronzes. The spiral or meander, which the Chinese call the lei-wen or thunder pattern, is one of the most common of all ornamental motifs in Shang art. It is often the dominant decoration on Neolithic jars, a decoration which has been interpreted as a symbol of clouds, rain and fertility. The ancient Chinese pictograph for cloud resembles a spiral and as Creel pointed out many years ago: "Two ancient forms of the character lei 'thunder' quoted by Shuo Wen include exact replicas of the square spiral which is the thunder pattern of Shang design. And even on the Shang oracle bones we find a symbol which has great resemblance to the so-called cloud pattern used unmistakably in connection with rain, possibly a pictograph of a cloud."<sup>163</sup> That such an emblem would have a central role in this art seems self evident, for the Chinese were an agricultural people living in an area in which droughts often occur; clouds and rain would be of vital importance. And like many early people, the ancient Chinese no doubt believed that through sympathetic magic, the phenomena symbolized in the art would occur in nature. The double spiral is less common. A motif which already occurs on some of the jars of the Yang-shao culture,<sup>164</sup>

163. Creel, *Studies in Early Chinese Culture*, op. cit., p. 237.

164. K. C. Chang, *Archaeology of Ancient China*, op. cit., pl. 61 and 130.





88. Yang-Shao Pottery Jar  
Neolithic Period  
Shanghai Museum

it resembles the ancient pictograph for lightning and may therefore be a symbol for it.<sup>165</sup>

If this is so, it, too, like the lei-wen, would be an auspicious emblem connected with storm, rain and fertility.

Other symbols which are often depicted in the art of both the prehistoric and the Shang period are undulating and zig-zag lines. Since they are very similar to the archaic pictographs for water and the flowing river, there can be little doubt about their meaning. Next to the spiral, the undulating line is the most common ornament on Neolithic jars where it presumably stands for flowing water and, along with the spiral cloud pattern, was doubtless believed to insure rain, moisture and a good harvest. In Shang art, especially on the bronzes, these linear designs are often found as decorative motifs on the tongue, the mouth or the horns of an animal. An example of these various ornaments is the splendid kuang in the Freer Gallery in which the body of the composite creature, which combines elements of the ram, the owl and the fish, is covered with the lei-wen thunder pattern. Spirals and undulating lines appear on the phallic horns and the fish-headed ram horns, while the teeth of this grotesque creature are represented by a zig-zag line. Similar iconographic designs are seen on another bronze vessel in the Freer Gallery on which parallel lines emanating from the mouth of

Plate 89 on page 247  
Plate 90 on page 248

165. T. T. Chang, *Der Kult der Shang Dynastie*, op. cit., p. 237.



89. Cover of Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



90. Cover of Bronze Vessel  
Chou Period  
Cleveland Museum of Art

the ram resemble the ancient character for rain.<sup>166</sup> There can be little doubt that in all these cases the lines stand for water and rain which, as the oracle bone inscriptions also show, was the central concern of the early Chinese people.

166. A. G. Wenley,  
*Chinese Bronzes, Freer  
Gallery of Art* (Washington,  
D.C.: 1946), plate 8, p. 27.



91. Bronze Kuang  
Shang Period  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C.



---

# 12

## *Conclusion*

**T**HE EVIDENCE presented here for the symbolic meaning of the ancient Chinese art motifs should be convincing to all but the most confirmed sceptic who will give no credence to any interpretation of the decorative motifs in Shang art unless he is presented with explanatory texts which were written in the Shang period. Such evidence is unlikely to turn up, for as Hermann Köster says in his essay on religion in ancient China: "Naturally it is not to be expected that these early people talked about their worldview in words or long texts. They did so much more through significant symbols. What they made of life and what they thought of the world, that they expressed pithily through figures and images."<sup>167</sup> Florance Waterbury's attempt to find vestiges of ancient beliefs in Chinese literature was doomed to fail, for all the texts we have come from the Chou and Han periods when the meaning of the old symbols and even the proper function of many of the objects was no longer understood. This

167. Hermann Köster, "Zur Religion in der Chinesischen Vorgeschichte," *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. XIV, 1949-55, p. 196.

development is clearly reflected in the art of the Chou period in which the once powerful and expressive images were either more and more reduced to purely formal designs which can barely be traced to their dragon and bird origins or, in the very late Chou period, were replaced by realistic animals rendered in a very naturalistic style.

In Shang art, all the motifs employed were no doubt meaningful symbols that operated within a definite iconographic scheme which for the people of the time was not obscure and mysterious but embodied the very essence of their way of looking at the world. It is a unified system of images dominated by animals—some taken from nature, others purely imaginary and most of them composite in character. The choice of animals must have been clearly prescribed. No doubt they were chosen for their religious and magic meaning, for many animals which were prominent in daily life, such as the pig, the dog or the chicken, never appear in Shang art, while others, such as the horse, are rarely portrayed. In contrast to animals, human figures are seldom encountered and when they do occur, they often have some features taken from animals. This suggests that they are not ordinary people but supernatural beings of some kind, probably deities or divine ancestors. Plants and floral designs appear in prehistoric pottery, especially that of the Yang-



shao phase of Neolithic art, but they are completely absent in Shang art; they are not even depicted among the purely ornamental motifs. Shang abstract decorative designs are usually geometric in character, although a careful analysis often reveals that they are not completely abstract but have some relation to nature or are derived from prehistoric designs based on natural forms. In applying these ornamental images to the bronzes and other artifacts, Shang craftsmen favored a symmetrical design in which an identical pattern is repeated on both sides of the central axis, sometimes splitting the body of the animal to achieve this effect.

The most striking thing about the decorative motifs in Shang art is that every one of them, without exception, appears in the art of the Neolithic period. Some go back to the very beginnings of Chinese art at least three thousand years earlier than the beginning of the Bronze Age. The second interesting phenomenon is that all of these symbols can also be found in the pictographs of the earliest Chinese script, often drawn in much the same way that they occur in the bronze ornaments. The third remarkable fact is that all these decorative motifs and symbols can also be found in later Chinese art or folklore. In fact, many of them still have some magic or religious meaning in modern China, three thousand years after the end of the Shang period.

In Chinese popular religion the dragon still plays an important role, the dragon king is venerated and the dragon deity is still believed to inhabit the sky just as dragons are said to live in the seas, the lakes and the rivers. The crow or raven is still thought to be resident in the sun and the frog or toad in the moon, while the tiger is looked upon as a symbol of strength and courage and serves as an auspicious protector. In light of all this, it seems most unlikely that animals which occupied such an essential place in Shang art and continued to do so for some five thousand years were simply ornamental in character as some scholars have suggested. This idea that they are purely formal designs is also contradicted by the fact that all these animals not only occur as motifs on the bronze vessels: they are also depicted in jade and stone sculptures. (No doubt they were also carved in wood and portrayed in large scale paintings on the walls of the palaces and temples.) That the large marble sculptures found at Anyang and the jade carvings which required so much labor were created for purely formal reasons seems most improbable in light of the fact that in such early societies, all art was connected with magic.

Finally, there are those who argue that while the original meaning of these animal motifs was symbolic, we will never be able to interpret them correctly. A good example

of such scepticism is found in the writings of Vadime Elisseeff who says: "It is difficult to assign precise functions to each motif; they are no doubt auspicious. Perhaps each of these motifs had originally a precise meaning; certainly on each occasion they were used preferentially for this or that ornament. It will be necessary to compare attentively these motifs with their circumstances, indicated in the inscriptions."<sup>168</sup> Yet even if we should never know the exact significance of each of the motifs during Shang times, it is still useful to speculate on their meaning, using as evidence the art itself, the archaic script and the traditional folklore of China. No doubt scholars will question some of the interpretations offered in this book. Indeed, they may offer different, perhaps more valid, explanations. But there can be no doubt about the general thesis of this study, namely, that the forms used in this art are magical symbols which were connected with the fertility of the fields and the fecundity of the race, the two things most important for the Shang people.

168. Elisseeff, *op. cit.*, p. XVI.



# Bibliography

- Ackerman, Phyllis. *Ritual Bronzes of Ancient China*, New York 1945.
- Akiyama, Terukazu, and others. *Arts of China, Recent Discoveries*. Tokyo and Palo Alto 1968.
- Andersson, J. G. *Children of the Yellow Earth*, New York 1934.
- Andersson, J. G. *Researches Into the Pre-history of the Chinese*, Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities 1943.
- Chang, Kwang-chih. *The Archaeology of Ancient China*, New Haven 1977.
- Chang, Kwang-chih. *Shang Civilization*, New Haven 1980.
- Chang, Tsung-tung. *Der Kult der Shang Dynastie im Spiegel der Orakelschriften*, Wiesbaden 1970.
- Cheng, Te-k'un. *Shang China*, Cambridge 1960.
- Consten, Eleanor von Erdberg. "A Terminology of Chinese Bronze Decoration." *Monumenta Serica* 1959.
- Creel, Herrlee Glessner. *The Birth of China*, New York 1937.
- Creel, Herrlee Glessner. *Studies in Early Chinese Culture*, Baltimore 1937.
- Dennys, Nicholas B. *The Folklore of China*, Hong Kong 1876.

- De Visser, M. W. *The Dragon in China and Japan*, Amsterdam 1913.
- Eichhorn, Werner. "Zur Religion im ältesten China." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd und Ostasiens* 1958.
- Elisseeff, Vadime. *Bronze Archaiques Chinois au Musee Cernuschi*, Paris 1977.
- Fong, Wen. *The Great Bronze Age of China*, New York 1980.
- Granet, Marcel. *Chinese Civilization*, London 1930.
- Granet, Marcel. *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China*, New York 1932.
- Hentze, Carl. *Frühchinesische Bronzen und Kultdarstellungen*, Antwerp 1937.
- Hentze, Carl. *Funde in Alt-China*, Göttingen 1967.
- Hentze, Carl. *Göttergestalten in der Ältesten Chinesischen Schrift*, Antwerp 1943.
- Hentze, Carl. *Mythes et Symboles Lunaire* Anvers 1932.
- Hentze, Carl. *Die Sakralbronzen und Ihre Bedeutung in den Frühchinesischen Kulturen*, Antwerp 1941.
- Hodous, Lewis. *Folkways in China*, London 1929.
- Karlgren, Bernard. *Some Fecundity Symbols in Ancient China*, Bulletin of Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities 1930.

- Karlgren, Bernard. *Yin and Chou in Chinese Bronzes*, Bulletin of Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities 1937.
- Köster, Herman. "Zur Religion in der Chinesischen Vorgeschichte." *Monumenta Serica* 1955.
- Legge, James, translator. *Li Ki*, Oxford 1885.
- Li, Chi. *Anyang*, Seattle 1977.
- Li, Xueqin. *The Wonder of Chinese Bronzes*, Beijing 1980.
- Loehr, Max. *Ancient Chinese Jades*, Cambridge, Mass. 1975.
- Loehr, Max. *Ritual Vessels of Ancient China*, New York 1968.
- Munsterberg, Hugo. "An Anthropomorphic Deity from Ancient China." *Oriental Art* 1951.
- Munsterberg, Hugo. *The Art of the Chinese Sculptor*, Tokyo and Rutland, Vt. 1960.
- Munsterberg, Hugo. *Dragons in Chinese Art*, New York 1972.
- Munsterberg, Hugo. "Symbolism of the Four Directions in Chinese Art." *Art Quarterly* 1951.
- Rawson, Jessica. *Ancient China*, 1980.
- Salmony, Alfred. *Archaic Chinese Jades*, Chicago 1952.
- Salmony, Alfred. *Chinese Jade*, New York 1963.
- Treistman, Judith. *The Prehistory of China*, New York 1972.
- Waley, Arthur. *The Book of Songs*, London 1937.

- Waterbury, Florance. *Early Chinese Symbols and Literature*, New York 1952.
- Watson, William. *Ancient Chinese Bronzes*, London 1962.
- Watson, William. *The Genius of China*, London 1973.
- Werner, E. T. C. *A Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*, Shanghai 1932.
- White, W. E. *Bone Culture in Ancient China*, Toronto 1945.
- Willetts, William. *Chinese Art*, London 1958.
- Williams, C. A. S. *Outlines of Chinese Symbols and Art Motives*, Shanghai 1941.



---

# Index

## A

- Ackerman, Phyllis, 23, 205  
Andersson, J. G., 31, 68, 198, 221, 223,  
225, 227  
Anyang, 19–20, 47, 69–70, 81, 92, 114, 156,  
161, 203

## B

- Begley, Robert W., 24  
bird, 32, 91–109  
*Book of Poetry*. see *Shih Ching*  
Bossert, Helmuth, 26  
bull, 113–131  
Burkherdt, V. R., 218

## C

- Canton, 130, 135  
celestial symbolism, 235ff.  
Chang, K.C., 154  
Changsha province, 98  
Chaucer, Geoffrey, 98  
Cheng-chou, 156, 223  
Ch'ing period, 46  
Chou period, 24, 27, 30, 49, 68, 75, 120,  
144, 147, 159, 179, 199, 205, 218–219,  
235  
*Chou Li*, 147, 220, 237  
Ch'un Ch'iu, 179

- cicada, 135–148  
Confucius, 44, 180  
Consten, Eleanor von Erdberg, 39–40,  
140, 180  
Creel, Herrlee Glessner, 20, 28, 144,  
187–188, 244

## D

- D'Argencé, 229, 231  
DeGroot, J. J. M., 33–34  
death, owl as symbol of, 95–100  
Dennys, Nicholas, 45  
directions, see four directions  
dragon, 21, 28–29, 33, 39–56, 167

## E

- Egypt, 98  
Eliade, Mircea, 25–26  
Elisseeff, Vadime, 32, 79, 255  
England, medieval, 98  
Erh-li-t'ou, 187  
Erligang period, 24, 223

## F

- fish, 31–32, 153–163  
Fitzgerald, C. P., 188  
folklore, 32–33, 40, 45, 171, 173, 253 see  
also religion

four directions, 68, 106, 130, 161, 205  
frog, 32

## G

geometric motifs, 32  
Granet, Marcel, 41–42

## H

Han period, 24, 42, 46, 68, 83, 98, 106,  
120, 147, 159, 161–162, 173, 237  
Hentze, Carl, 22–23, 31, 114, 147, 188, 216  
Hirth, Friedrich, 187  
Hodous, Lewis, 44  
Honan province, 153, 208  
Hopei province, 185  
Hou-Kang, 136  
Hsia period, 41–42  
Hsiao-t'un, 114  
Hsin Tien, 114, 221  
Hunan province, 208

## I

*I Ching*, 44  
India, 167, 173, 175

## J

Jung, Carl, 41

## K

Kan-ku, 41  
Kansu province, 41, 114, 153, 168, 187,  
198, 221  
*Kaogongji*, 29  
Karlgrén, Bernard, 46, 215, 220–221, 241  
Kiangsu province, 171  
Kwang-chih Chang, 21  
Keightley, David, 198  
Köster, Hermann, 251

## L

Laufer, Berthold, 147–148, 220, 235  
Lee, Sherman, 26–27  
Li Chi (person), 20, 31–32  
*Li Chi* (text), 68, 75  
Li Zuequin, 185–186  
Liang-cheng, 185  
Lilith, 98  
Loehr, Max, 24  
Lung-shan period, 91, 229

## M

Ma Chang period, 197–198, 221  
Ma Chengyuan, 28–29, 239  
Ma Wang-tui, 98  
Ma-chia-yao, 153  
magic. *see* folklore, religion  
Manchuria, 69  
Miao-ti-Kou, 153  
Mesopotamia, 41, 98  
Ming period, 46

## N

Neolithic period, 31–32, 69, 91, 101, 114,  
136, 153–154, 167–168, 185, 187, 197,  
220, 221, 239, 241, 246, 253  
Ning-hsiang, 208

## O

owl, 91–109

## P

Pan chan, 168, 198, 241  
Pan-p'o, 114, 153–154  
pheasant, 91–109  
phoenix, 28–29, 106–108  
pictographs, 128, 137, 201, 215, 235, 237,  
246, 253

## R

- ram, 113–131  
Rawson, Jessica, 185  
religion, 31, 33–34, 95, 108, 113, 128,  
153–154, 161–162, 168, 237, 253 *see also*  
folklore  
Rostovzeff, Michael, 187

## S

- sacrifice, animal, 113  
serpent. *see snake, dragon*  
Shang art  
interpretations of 24ff., 251ff.  
finds of, 19–20, 23  
inscriptions 30–31  
abstract motifs in, 32, 253  
animals in, 39–40. *See also* names of  
animals  
sexual symbolism in, 215ff.  
human figures in, 197ff.  
celestial symbolism in, 235ff.  
*See also* names of animals  
Shang Ti, 34, 198–199, 201, 203, 208, 210  
Shantung province, 185, 229  
Shensi province, 92, 114, 153, 216  
*Shih Ching*, 120, 130, 144, 146, 148, 159  
Shih-chia-ho, 185  
*Shu Ching*, 19  
snake, 21, 83, 167–175  
Ssu Wa Shan, 221

- Su-cha Fu, 171  
Sugimura, Yuzo, 191

## T

- Taiwan, 46  
T'ao-t'ieh, 24–25, 53, 71, 104, 116, 126,  
147–148, 169, 179–191  
Te-k'un Cheng, 21  
Ti, 198  
Tien-shui, 187  
tiger, 21, 33, 67–86, 188  
toad, 153–163  
tortoise, 153–163  
Tso Chuan, 179  
Tsung-tung Chang, 30–31  
Tun Li-ch'en, 108

## W

- Waterbury, Florance, 23, 40, 71, 100, 188,  
251  
Watson, William, 20, 26–27, 179  
Werner, E. T. C., 171  
White, Bishop, 169  
Williams, C. A. S., 124, 159  
Williams, S. Wells, 135  
Wu liang-tzu, 162, 173

## Y

- Yang and Yin, 100, 229  
Yang-shao period, 31, 69, 91, 154, 197, 244









