

# Tomb No.1 of Chu State from Mayishun Lane in Changsha City

Changsha Municipal Institute of Culture Relics and Archaeology

**Keywords:** Changsha    Mayishun Lane    Chu tomb    middle Warring States period

Mayishun Lane 马益顺巷, folk name called as “Lane of Ants” by local residents, is at the south side of the old town in Changsha 长沙. Its north side of the lane joins West Lake Road 西湖路 just outside the City’s south gate; its east end intersects with Huangxing Road 黄兴路 South. Its west side is close to the Xiang River 湘江 over Shuyuan Road 书院路, while the south side faces a hill named Miaogaofeng 妙高峰. At 70 m above sea level, this area is where a tomb of Chu State was recovered.

The tomb was excavated in December 1991 as a

recurring effect from city development construction. The code number for the tomb is 92Chang.Nan.MaM1.

## I. Tomb Structure

The tomb is of a rectangular shaped earthen-pit with a ramp and furnishing with wooden-coffins, whose earth mound is no long preserved (Figs. 1 and 2). Currently the remaining burial top displays one-step ledge, which is slightly bigger than the bottom. The top burial pit is about 4.76 m long by 3.95 m wide, while the bottom is about 4.68

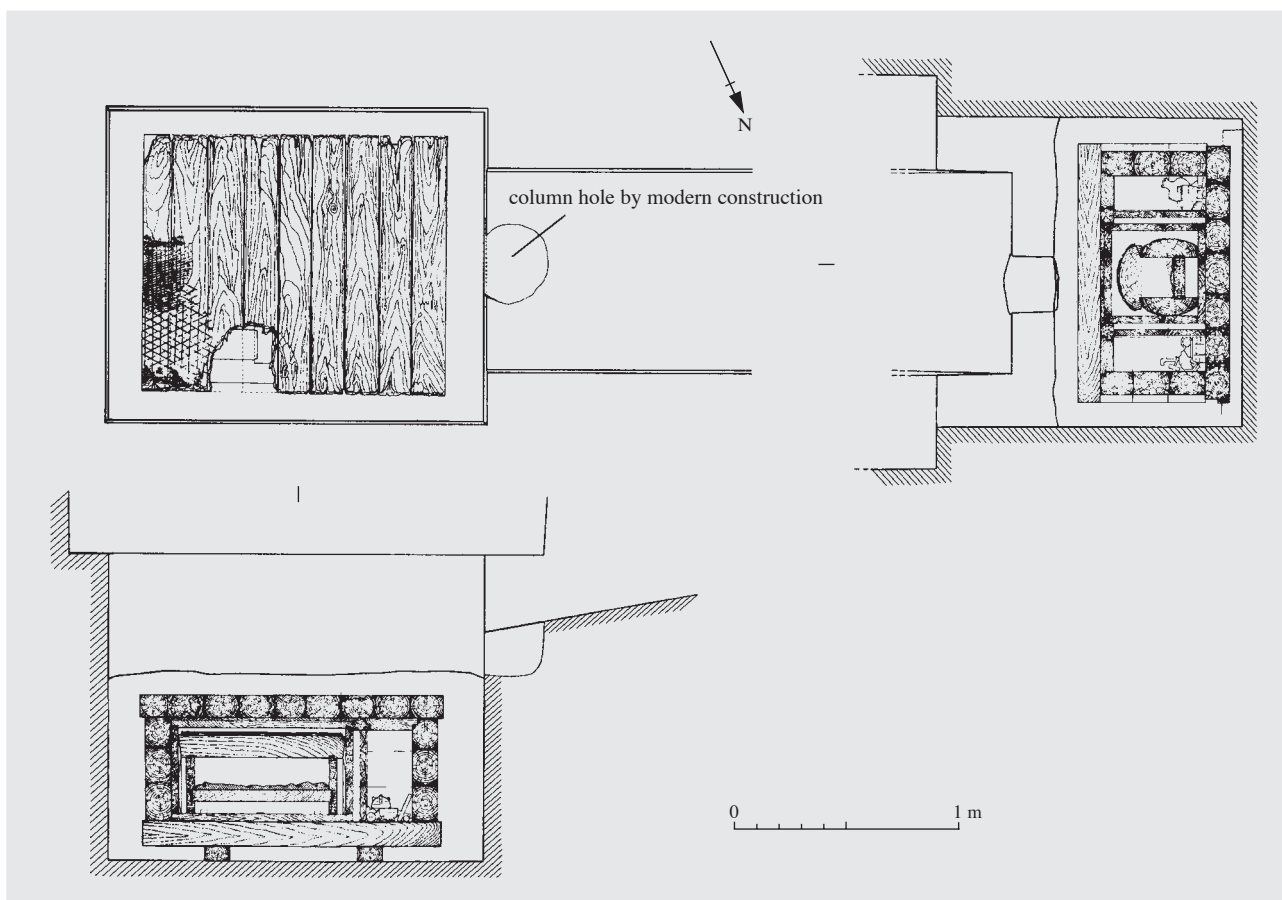


Fig. 1 Plan and cross-section of Tomb No.1



Fig. 2 Condition before the top planks of outer coffin recovered (photo from west to east)

m long by 3.84 m wide. The depth of the burial is 3.82 m. The ramp is at center of west wall. Its top width is 2.5 m and bottom width is 2.44 m. The ramp is about 2.85 m from the bottom of burial, and the slope of ramp is 10 degrees, and the orientation is 290 degrees.

The backfill is a mix of red-web patterned clay and white clay. Especially the surrounding of coffins and top coffins are covered with very compact white clay.

Burial furniture is well preserved, consisting of one outer coffin and two inner coffins. The outer coffin has cover top, side lumber, enforced wooden slabs, bottom woods, sleeper, and girder.

The outer coffin is 3.78 m long by 3.22 m wide, and 1.89 m high. At each east and west sides of the bottom lay one wooden sleeper lumber, respectively. The cover and bottom slabs runs over-hanging the side and enforced wooden slabs. On the top cover lay three layers of mats, although preserved poorly. The mat at the lowest layer displays V-shape pattern. The other mats have diamond-shape pattern.

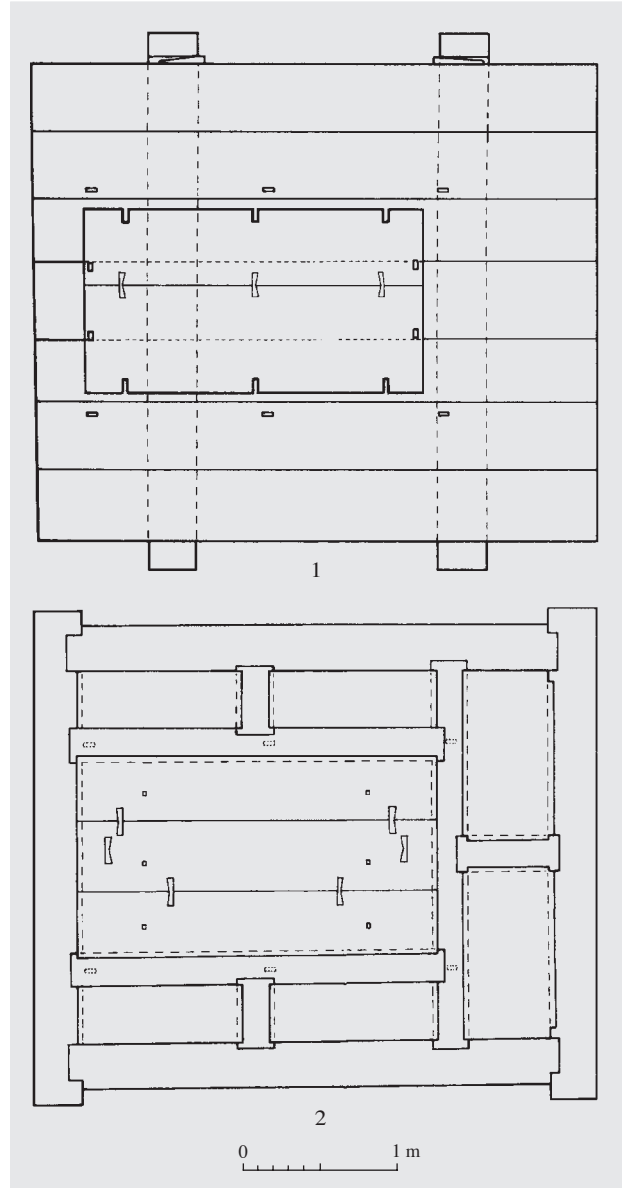


Fig. 3 Structure of the chamber of outer coffin  
1. plan of the bottom planks 2. plan of wooden girders, poles, and side lumbers

Within the coffin, compartments were separated with wooden girders, poles, and side lumber. Three burial compartments were identified around the outer coffin, the head compartment, left-side compartment, and right-side compartment. Three girders were found on the top of compartment, each interlocked with one short girder (Fig. 3).

Six square-shape poles stand around four corners of the outer coffin, 1.25 m long, with tenon at both ends inserting into holes of the short girder at the top and of the lumber of bottom slabs (Fig. 4). Between poles are wooden slabs separating the compartments and the coffin, while the side way of head compartment is open to side

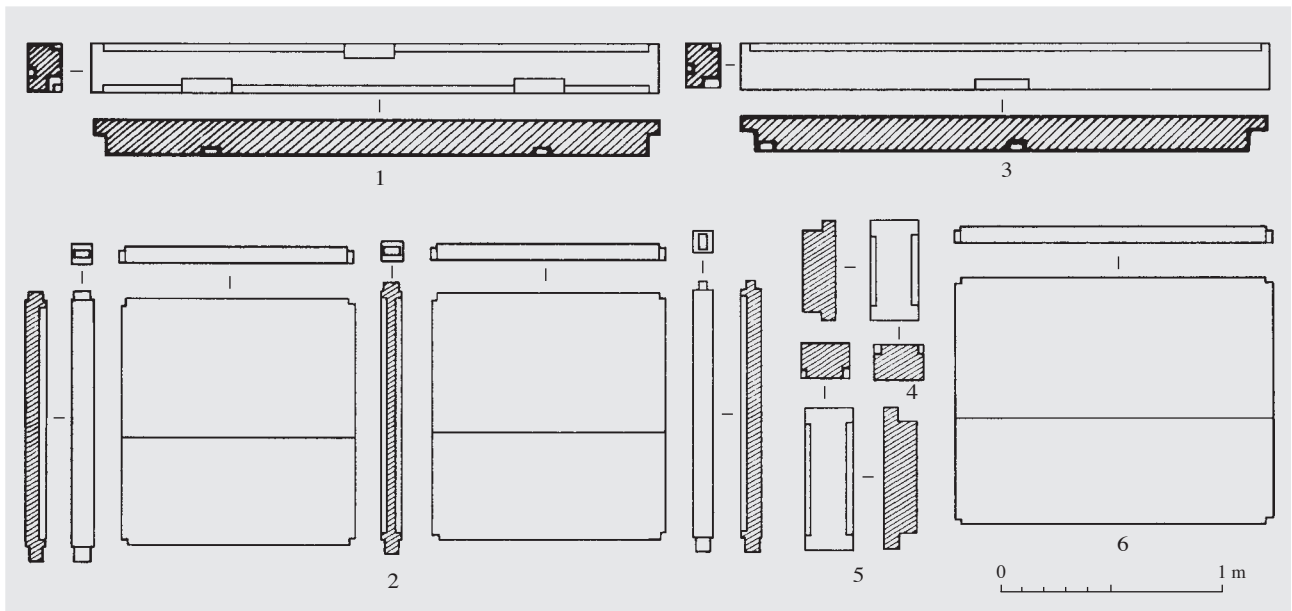


Fig. 4 Structures of wooden girders, poles, and side lumbers

1. long girder of the head compartment
2. girder and pole of two side compartments
3. long girder of the side compartment
4. short girder of the side compartment
5. short girder of the head compartment
6. slab of the head compartment



Fig. 5 Chamber and outer coffin (photo from west to east)

compartment.

The cover slabs of all head compartment, side compartments, and coffin are connected with girders and outer coffins side slabs in mortise-and-tenon technique, precise and smooth (see Fig. 3:2).

Inner coffins consisted of two sets, situated in the east side within the outer coffin (Fig. 5). The large inner coffin is 2.42 m long by 1.25 m wide, and 1.25 m high, painted black outside and red inside. The coffin cover is snap on the body frame, while slabs of side walls and bottom are connected with mortise-and-tenon technique.

The small inner coffin is 1.98 m long by 0.96 m wide, and 0.96 m high, painted black outside and red inside. Two sides of the cover and sides of the body display three incisions each for rope wrapping. Two ends of the cover

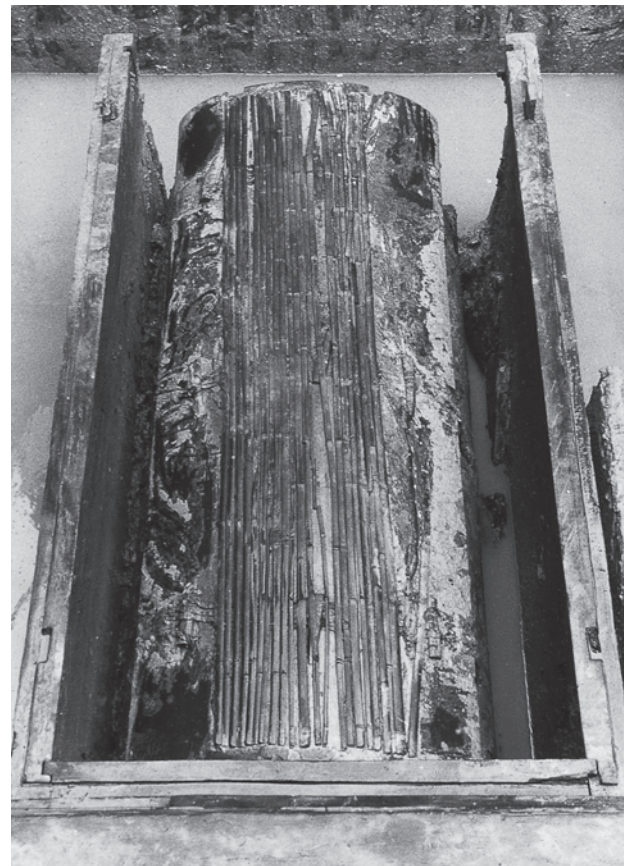


Fig. 6 Bamboo mat on the top of the coffin

also display traces of two incisions for roping, but not traces of rope. Four strands rope used to tie up the coffin, about 1 cm in diameter, were found at the bottom of the

coffin. On the top of the coffin found traces of bamboo mat (Fig. 6).

Inside the coffin remained only fragments of bamboo mat. Human remains were completely decayed, thus the burial orientation is not known.

## II. Burial Goods

All burial goods were stored in the head compartment and the two side compartments, numbering 80 pieces (sets) (Fig. 7). By raw material categories, burial goods are consisted of earthenware, bronzes, lacquers, jades, glass, bamboo, and wood. Because the tomb was greatly disturbed before excavation, actual placements of burial goods are no long known.

1. Earthenware. 19 pieces comprise of 24% of total burial goods. Most of pottery wares were bronze-imitat-

ing ritual vessels. The wares were made of fine grey clay, with a layer of black coating. Methods of decoration consist of line-incision, color painting, and molding. Color-painting motifs are mainly clouds with dots, diamonds, and circles background. The motif is usually separated from line-incisions by a yellow band. Colored band usually is shown on the rim of colored band that, for example, usually is found on the rim of *yi*-spoon and *shao*-spoon. The types of earthenware include *ding*-tripod, *yufou*-vessel, *zunfou*-vessel, *he*-vessel, *fu*-vessel, *dui*-vessel, *hu*-pot, *guan*-jarlets, *yi*, and *shao*.

*Ding*-tripods have five. The four *ding*-tripods have covers, whose handles are in shaped of deformed animal and whose rims are snap-on types. Those *dings* are featured with round-base and slender hoofed legs, and decorated with line bands and cloud patterns (Figs. 8:1;

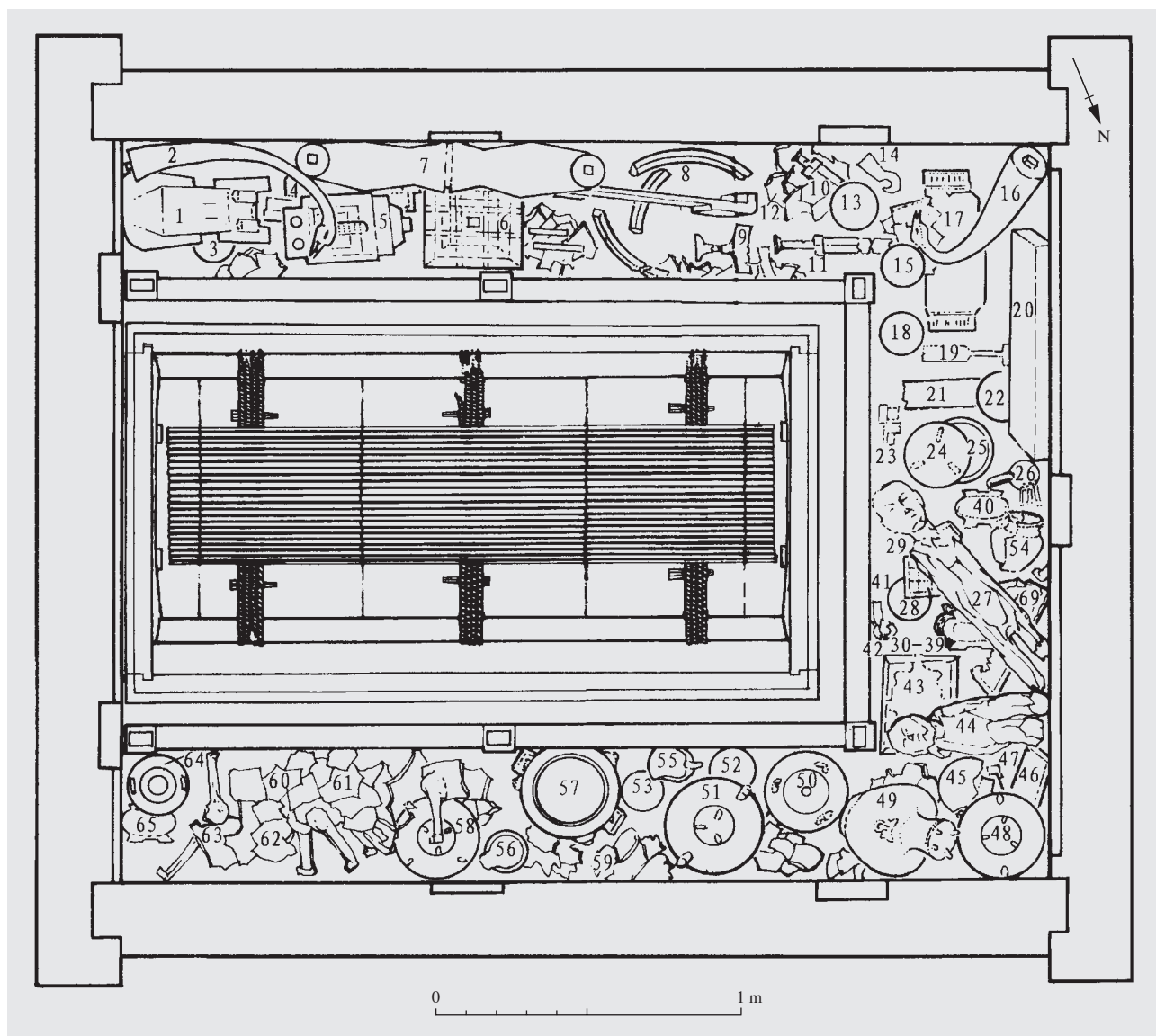


Fig. 7 Funeral objects in Tomb No.1

9 and 10). M1:57 is featured with sloping rim, slightly restrained neck, deep body, round base, rectangular bent handles, and broad hoofed legs. A yellow band appears on the rim as well as the middle of body. The neck was decorated with yellow-colored cloud-and-thunder pattern. One raised line and one incised line appear in between neck and the middle of body. The legs have flanges. The mouth diameter is 37.5 cm (Fig. 11).

*Zunfou*-vessel has a flat cover, whose edge has four small rings evenly distributed. The cover's rim is snap-on type. Other features include slightly restrained neck, deep drum-shaped body, and short ring foot. Four ring handles are on the shoulder. The cover is decorated with yellow-colored cloud pattern, while the neck is decorated with two sets of S pattern in yellow paint. Yellow clouds are also shown on the shoulder and the upper body. The middle of body has a yellow band. Incised lines appear on the neck, the shoulder, and the body. A sample of this type, M1:48, has overall height at 36.4 cm (Figs. 8:2; 12).

2. Bronzes have 11 pieces, accounting for 14% of total burial goods. Ritual objects dominate the bronzes, all are incomplete. Some of the objects were found with red painting on the surface. The types of bronzes identifiable include *ding*, *dun*, *fu*, *pan*, *shao*, mirror, and chariot-fittings.

*Ding* has two pieces. M1:24 has a carved cover with a ring handle surrounded with three deformed animal-shaped secondary handles at edge, featured with snapped rim, flat base, and hoofed legs with hollowed core. There are two rectangular handles, hollowed inside. Decoration on the cover has two parallel raised lines, while cloud-pattern motifs on the handles. Two raised lines are also found around the body, and human-faced motifs found on the upper portion of the legs. The mouth diameter is 22 cm (Fig. 8:3). Sample M1:25 is similar to the above, but featured with lying oxen-shaped handle on the cover associated with ring secondary handles. The body was painted entirely with red paint in cloud pattern (Fig. 8:4).

The mirror is square in shape, a type rarely seen in tombs of Chu State. It has a small cross-shaped handle on the back. The mirror is thin and light, and the front surface is slightly curved. The back of the mirror seem to have been painted in red decorated with square patterns, each square enclosing circles. The edge is 8 cm long.

3. Objects of lacquer, wood, and bamboo, 38 pieces, accounting for 47% of total burial goods. The object types include daily utensils (eared cups, *dou*-stemmed plate, *he*-box, *an*-table, *ji*-table, combs), funeral objects

(tomb guardian, human figurines), weapons (sword, cross-bow), and music instruments (*se*-musical instrument, dram base, flutes). All lacquers have wooden cores painted with black cover-coated with red-painting and decorated with motifs of deformed dragon, stroke lines, maze-shape, sun-mimics, waves, deformed birds, and deformed cloud patterns, etc. The techniques of lacquer wares include carving, engraving, chiselling, and drilling. The small objects were made on one single wood. Most of these organic objects were made delicately and painted colourfully.

The most special objects are of funeral goods and music instruments. Object M1:5 and M1:6 are tomb guardians, whose body and base were carved on one complete wood. The heads of tomb guardians are connected each other on the back, combined with single neck and body, and stood on square base. Two square holes on the top of head, holding deer antlers, which were not recovered from the tomb. The animal face is featured with robust eyebrows, big round eyes, large square nose, and open mouth with long tongue. Two hands are upwards to touch the chin. The whole body is painted with black color, with outlines of eyes, eye-brows, nose, mouth, and tongue painted red, filled with circles and cloud pattern, which are supplemented with yellow-color dots. Neck and arms were painted with red-and-yellow intervals in patterns of clouds and others. The base is trapezoid, painted with red color in patterns of diamond and variants of clouds, filled with yellow color dots in between gaps. The overall height is 53 cm (Figs. 13 and 14).

A phoenix drum holder with tiger base (M1:1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 16). The drum holder was carved into two birds standing on the back of two tigers. The birds are featured with slender neck and long beak. The bird body is painted with black, supplemented with red and yellow paints on different parts to depict wings and feet, and motifs of oval, cloud, and dots. The surface of drum was not well preserved. Two tigers, crouching, were carved on single wood, respectively, featured with big round eyes, slightly open mouth, slightly dropping tongue, and upward tail. Three holes on the back are to connect with bird feet. The body was black painted with outlines of eyes, tongue, ears, moustache in red and yellow painted. The red-and-yellow painting depicts different features of tigers. The overall height of the object is 93.4 cm, and 161 cm long (Fig. 15).

A twenty-six stringed plucked music instrument (M1: 46, 27) is rectangular in shape, consisting of upfront, back, and wall slabs with a hollow core. The parts were

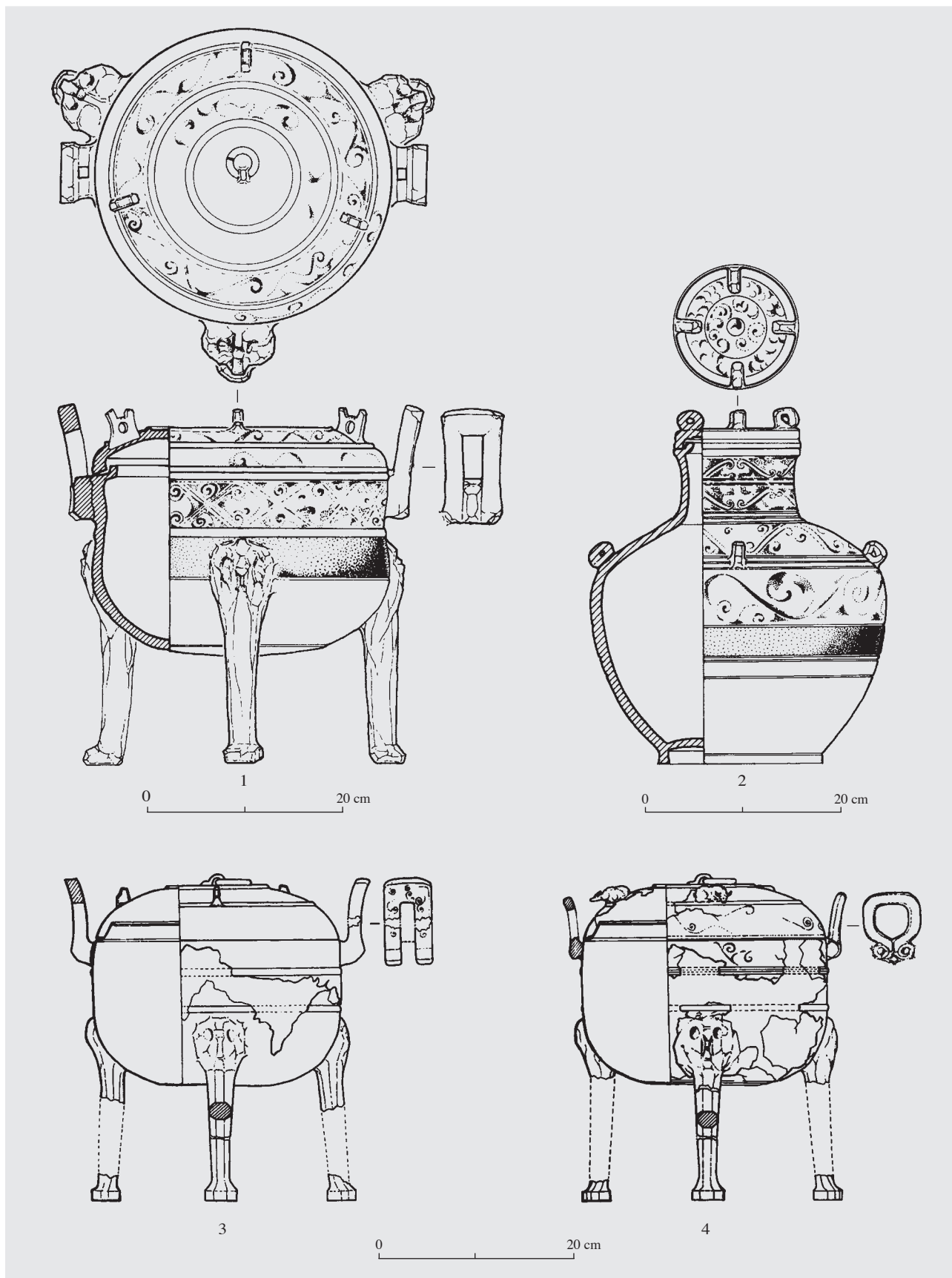


Fig. 8 Funeral objects from Tomb No.1

1. ceramic type B *ding*-tripod (M1:60) 2. ceramic *zunfou*-vessel (M1:48) 3, 4. bronze *ding*-tripods (M1:24 and 25)



Fig. 9 Ceramic type B *ding*-tripod (M1:60)



Fig. 10 Ceramic type C *ding*-tripod (M1:50)



Fig. 11 Type A ceramic *ding*-tripod (M1:57)



Fig. 12 Ceramic *zunfou*-vessel (M1:48)

nailed together with slender bamboo sticks. Upfront displays a curved surface, made by three wooden slabs stick together by two layers. The upper layer slabs join with the end wall outer-slabs by snapped on, while the lower layer slabs were carved together with the end wall inner slabs from a single wood. The instrument has a nut with four pegs at the heading end, while at the end there is a bridge made on one single wood. Between the nut and the bridge lying 26 strings, separated into three groups:

nine strings up-hand, eight strings middle-hand, and nine strings lower-hand. The instrument is 89 cm long (Fig. 16).

4. Objects of jades, glass, and agate, 12 pieces, accounting for 15% of total burial goods. All are of ornaments.

Jades include two rings and one pendent. The pendent is grey dragon shape, in oval, about 6 cm long. Carving techniques include shallow relief and openwork.

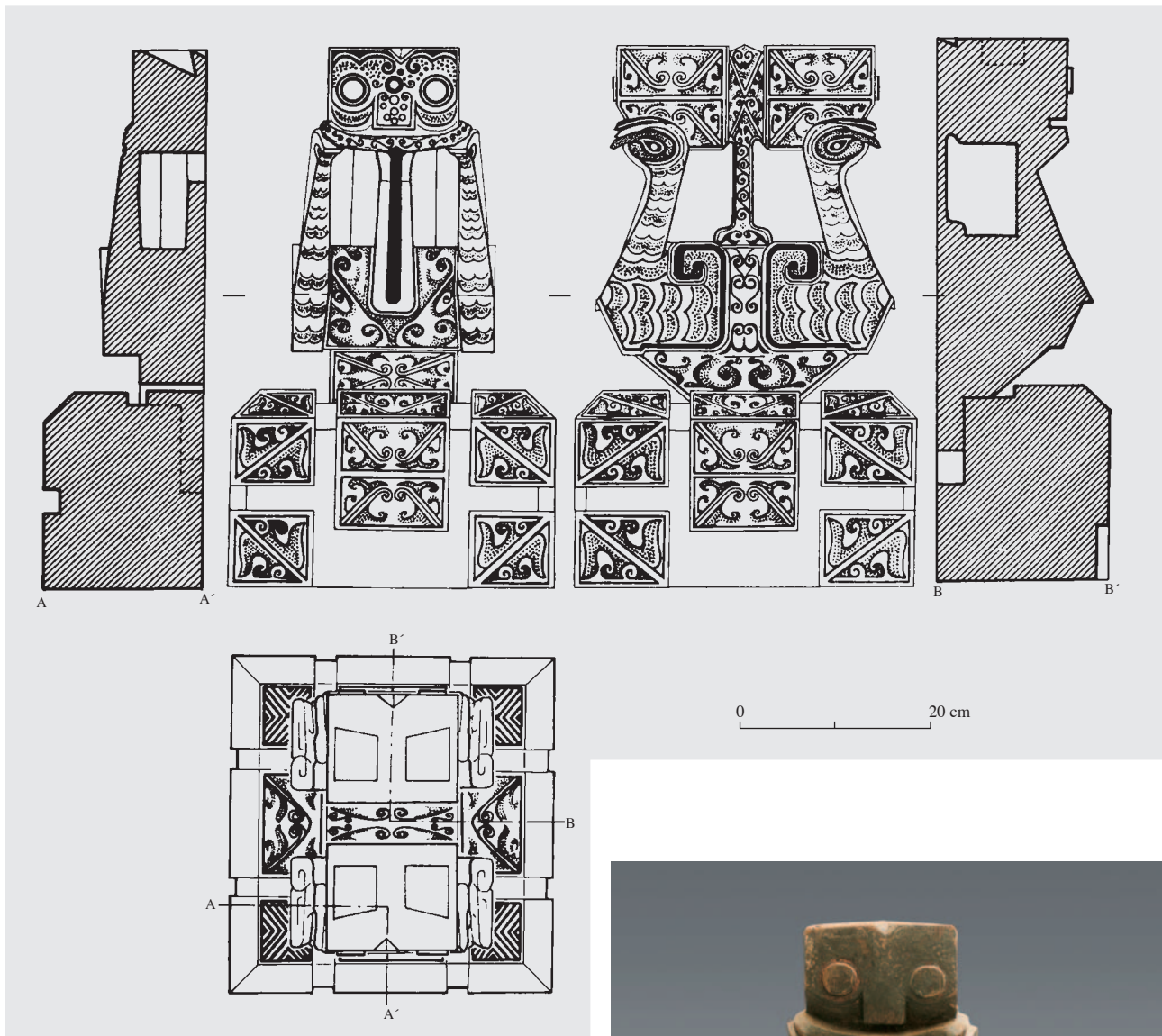


Fig. 13 Lacquer tomb guardian (M1:5, 6)

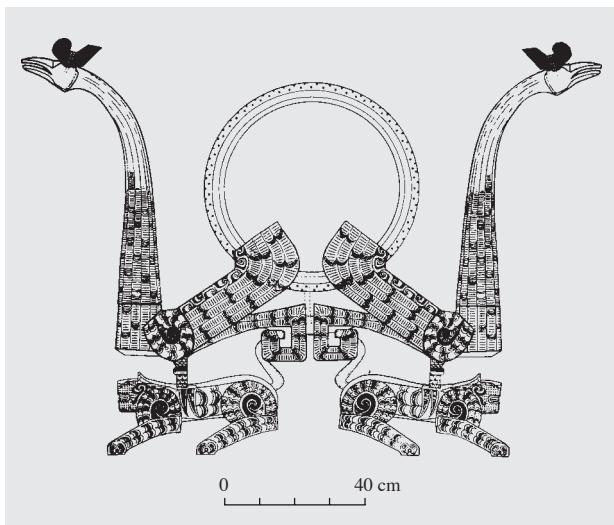


Fig. 15 Lacquer phoenix drum holder (M1:2, 7)



Fig. 14 Lacquer tomb guardian (M1:5, 6)



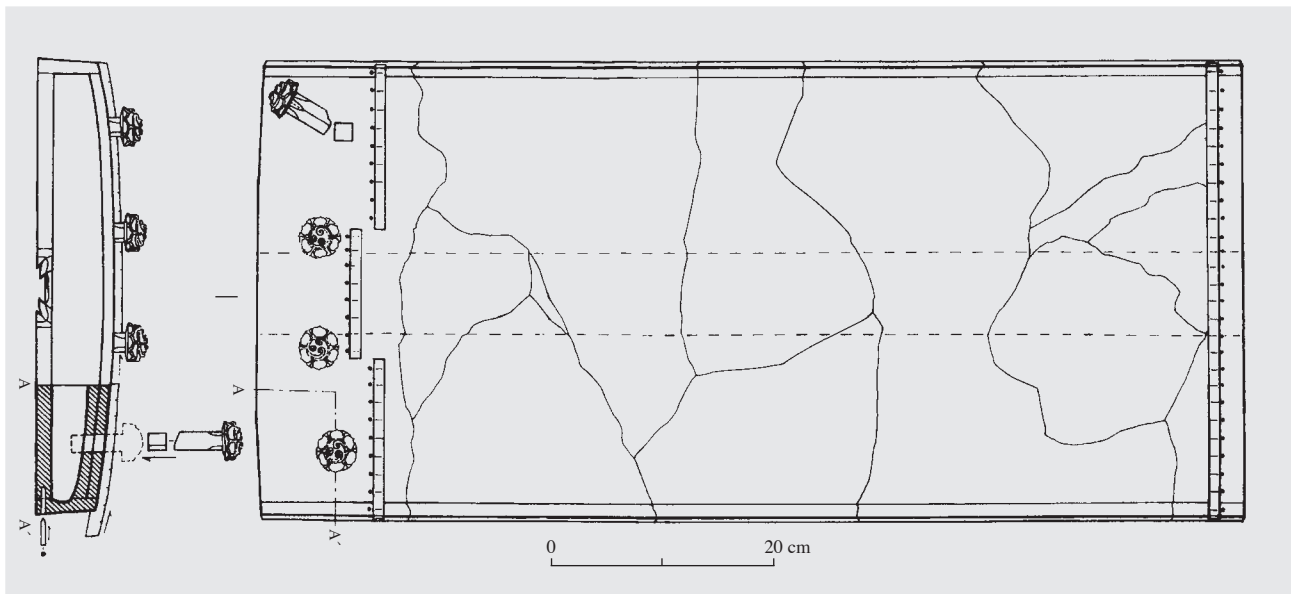


Fig. 16 Lacquer music instrument (M1:46, 27)

Glass objects include 2 beads and 4 tubes, all blue in colors. The beads are about 0.7–1.2 cm in diameter.

Agate objects have 3 rings, similar in size and semi-transparent, about 4–7.8 cm in diameter.

### III. Conclusion

In terms of the tomb size and furnishing scale, the owner of this Chu State tomb found in Mayishun Lane in Changsha City should belong to an upper class noble-member. The basic structure is similar to those of Chu State tombs found in Yutaishan 雨台山, Jiudian 九店, Wangshan 望山, Tengdian 滕店 of Hubei 湖北 Province, thus its relative date should be around the middle of Warring States period.

However, changes in tomb construction were made to this particular unit, as compared to those in Hubei Province. For examples, the construction of wooden chamber applied the mortise-and-tenon technique to join the bottom and wall stabs. In addition, heading and side compartments are separated from burial chamber by additional slabs. These features are considered to be a later timing-mark.

This tomb is furnished two sets (A and B) of earthen ritual objects, and one set of bronze ritual objects. The combination of pottery rituals presents a set including *ding*, *fu*, and *zunfou*, and B set including *ding*, *dun*, and

*fu*, while the bronze set includes *ding*, *dun*, *fu*, *pan*, *yi*, and *shao*. The A and B sets of pottery ritual combination are common in Chu State tombs dated to the early to middle Warring States period in Hubei. In other words, the pottery ritual object settings are rarely seen in the tombs before the Warring States period or after the middle Warring States.

The twenty-six stringed plucked instrument was unique to this tomb, never seen in any other tombs of Chu State of this period. Usually, the similar music instruments were recovered with commonly 18 stringed, 19 stringed, 21 stringed, 23 stringed, 24 stringed, and 25 stringed, among which, the 25 stringed plucked instrument is the most common type.

Based on the detail study of burial goods, some scholars characterized the main features of burial furnishing setting for *dai fu* 大夫 noble class of Chu State as following: 1. Use of combination of bronze and earthen ritual settings; 2. Use of chariots or horse fittings; 3. Usually buried with wooden human figurine, not live human sacrifices; 4. Bamboo strips not common seen in the burial; 5. Types of lacquers and wooden wares and weapons appear but in low number. According to this, we believe the owner of this tomb should be a *dai fu* noble in the State of Chu during the middle Warring States.

Note: The original report, published in *Kaogu* 考古 2003.4: 50–73, with 30 illustrations, 3 pages of plate, is written by He Jia 何佳 and Song Shaohua 宋少华. The summary is prepared by the first author and English-translated by Shen Chen 沈辰.