

# Northern Qi Catacomb Tomb in the Southwest Suburb of Taiyuan

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**Key words:** Taiyuan Northern Qi catacomb

In late November, 2002, the bureau of cultural relics from the province, city and district formed a joint archaeological team. In anticipation of the highway construction along the northwest boundary of the Taiyuan 太原 city, the team excavated a series of ancient tombs dating from the Han and later periods. One of them (TM62) is a catacomb tomb. The tomb layout is still intact,<sup>2</sup> and the tomb furnishings are well-preserved.

## I. Conditions of the Tomb

The catacomb tomb is situated on the front slope of a hill north of Kaihua 开化 Village, Luo Cheng 罗城 Town, Jinyuan 晋源 District in the southwest outskirts of Taiyuan. With its back to the north, it faces south at 170 degrees. The entrance of the tomb ramp is buried under the present earthen ground cover (approximately one meter below). Between the passage tunnel in the tomb ramp and the dugout earthen chamber is a vertical shaft for the skylight, and a stone stele was recovered from the entrance to the shaft.

The tomb ramp is 6.5 m long, 1.4 m wide. The lateral walls have straight sides, and there is a remaining base made of unevenly rammed earth. The entrance to the tomb chamber is 4.8 m below the present ground level. The passage tunnel has a vaulted ceiling and is situated in the middle of the tomb ramp, thus continuing the downward slope of the ramp. It is 1.6 m deep, 1.4 m high. The adjacent vertical shaft of the skylight is 1.7 m long, 0.5 m wide. The short entrance to the tomb

chamber, tightly sealed with river rocks, is 0.42 m deep, 1.6 m high. Due to flooding of the tomb chamber the ceiling has collapsed, and the resulting blockage had to be cleared from the top down. The floor plan of the tomb chamber is shaped like a ladder with rounded corners, 2.6 m long, 2.7 m wide at the south end, 1.9 m wide at the north end. The four corners at the top of the tomb chamber is filled in, suggesting that the ceiling either had four sloping sides or that it was domed; the height is unknown (Fig. 1).

Originally the coffin was placed in the middle of the tomb floor, but only traces of crumbled wood are left. Two skeletons are placed side by side, each head pointing to the south. The male, lying on his back with straightened limbs, is at the center of the tomb floor, the female, lying on her side, is to the left west side; this must have been the joint burial of a married couple.

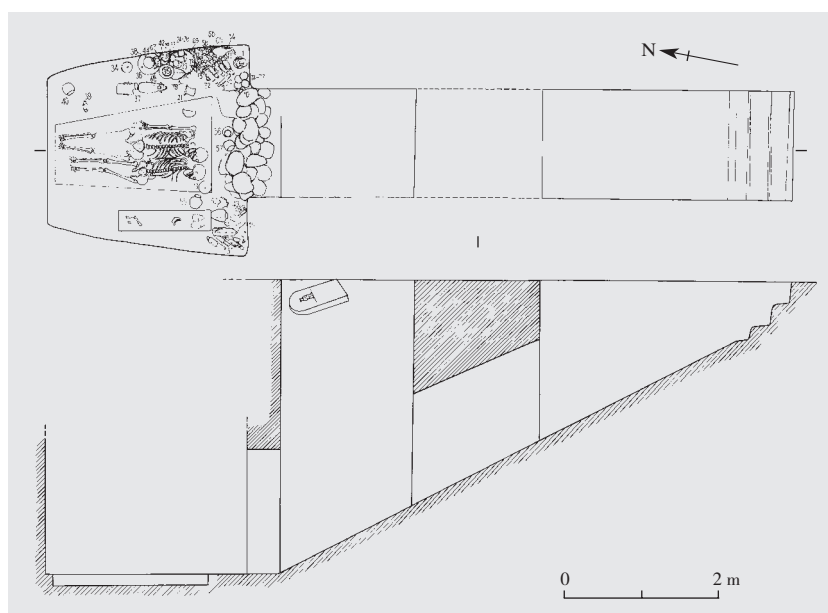


Fig. 1 Plan and cross-section of tomb TM62



Fig. 2 Chamber of TM62



Fig. 3 Position of funeral objects to the east side of chamber

Traces of the wooden coffin fit precisely inside the ladder-shaped dugout pit that is 2 m long, 0.76–1.22 m wide, 0.14 m deep. Along the four sides of the tomb floor is a two-stepped ledge made of rammed earth. The west side of the tomb chamber contains traces of a wooden frame 1.16 m long, 0.25 m wide; a few crushed animal bones have been recovered from the spot (Fig. 2).

## II. Tomb Furnishings

Most of the 79 recovered objects were placed on the east side of the tomb chamber, a few were placed on the southwest end (Fig. 3). Inside the coffin, the male is holding a coin in his right hand, and next to the skull of the female is a bronze mirror (there are also traces of what seems to be the remains of a lacquer cosmetic box).

1. Ceramic figurine: 39 items. They are all grey earthenware, molded, coated with white slip, and red and yellow pigments are painted over the white slip in select areas.

Tomb guardian warrior: 2 items. They are placed on either side of the tomb chamber entrance. TM62:1 wears a round helmet, leather armor with bright shining plates covering the chest and back, belt tied around the waist; he also wears long tube-like pants and round-toed boots. The right hand is held close to the body, making a fist as if holding an object, and the left arm is bent forward with the hand resting on top of a long shield with a lion head ornament on the front surface. The figurine is 41 cm tall (Figs. 4 and 5).

Small ceramic figurine: 37 items. There are four different types.

Warrior with cape: 12 items. TM62:3 wears a round helmet, an inner garment of a long vest, an outer cape, long pants, round-toed shoes. The left hand is clasping the leather belt tied around the waist, while the right hand is hidden inside the sleeve. The figurine is 21.5 cm tall (Figs. 6:1; 7:1).

Warrior with shield: 8 items. TM62:15 wears a hood over the head, jacket with lapels overlapping in front, belt, long pants,

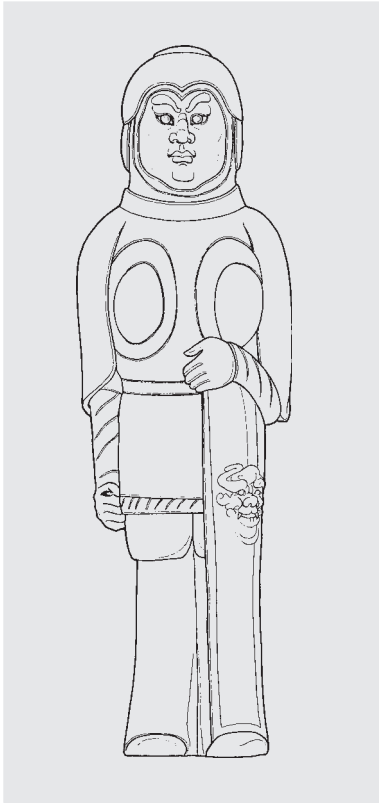


Fig. 4 Tomb guardian warrior (TM62:1)  
(scale: 1/4)



Fig. 5 Tomb guardian warrior (TM62:1)

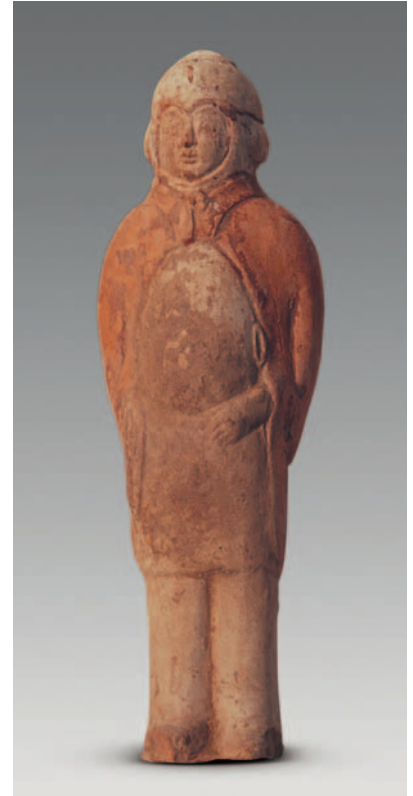


Fig. 6 Ceramic warrior with cape (TM62:3)

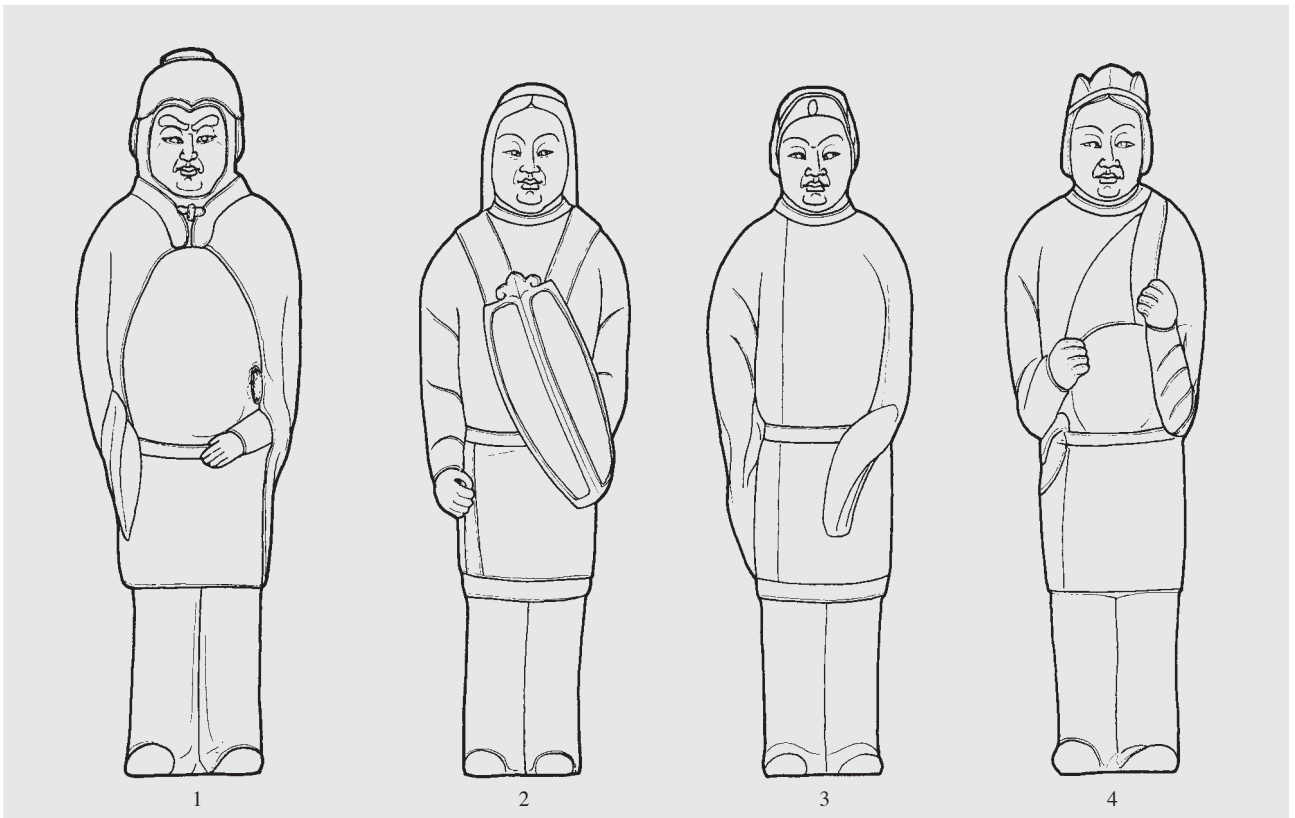


Fig. 7 Ceramic tomb figurines (scale: 2/5)

1. warrior with cape (TM62:3) 2. warrior with shield (TM62:15) 3. male attendant (TM62:20) 4. male attendant (TM62:39)



Fig. 8 Ceramic warrior with shield (TM62:15)



Fig. 9 Ceramic male attendant (TM62:20)

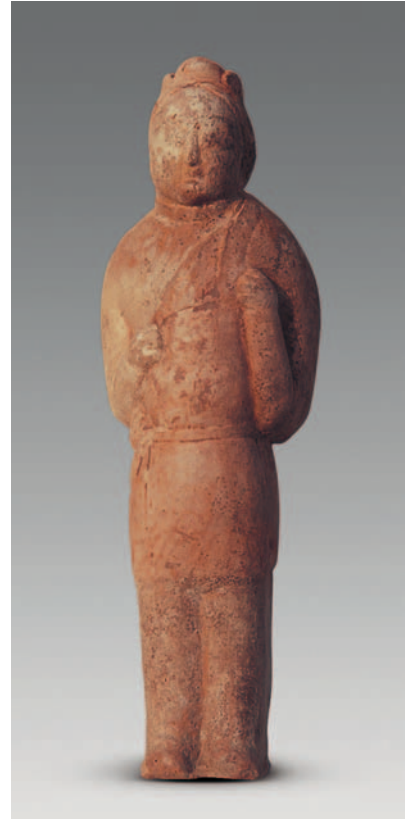


Fig. 10 Ceramic male attendant (TM62:39)



Fig. 11 Tomb guardian animal (TM62:45)

and round-toed shoes. The left hand wields the shield in front of the chest while the right hand is bent forward as if carrying an object. It is 20.5 cm tall (Figs. 7:2; 8).

Male attendant wearing garment with downward draping sleeves: 7 items. TM62:20 wears a soft hat with folded brim, round collar jacket, belt, long pants, round-toed shoes. The left hand is hidden inside the sleeve and raised in front at waist level while the right hand is lowered. It is 20.5 cm tall (Figs. 7:3; 9).

Male attendant carrying object: 10 items. TM62:39 wears a soft hat with two side flaps. His right shoulder is bare with the sleeve of the outer jacket tucked into the belt around the waist, and he wears long pants and round-toed shoes. The left arm is bent at the elbow and the hand is making a fist, while the right hand is raised in front of the chest as if carrying an object. It is 21 cm tall (Figs. 7:4; 10).

2. Tomb guardian animal, one item (TM62:45). It was recovered from the southwest corner of the tomb chamber. It has a human face and animal body, with a horn on top of its head. It has hooved feet and is sitting on its hind legs. There are feathered wings at its shoulders, and along the spine are three tufts of hair with tips curled upward. It is 34.5 cm tall (Fig. 11).

3. Ox cart, one item (TM62:37). It was recovered from the west side of the coffin on top of the two-stepped ledge. The single bull is ornamented with a tassel and fitted with a yoke. Raising its head, it stands upright. The reins are painted on its humped back into which a hole is drilled. Behind the ox is a two-wheeled cart with a curved roof. Vertical bars of the cart are painted on the front and back sides, and the eaves of the cart's roof are drilled with three holes that could hold real feather standards. The ox is 23.5 cm high, 28 cm long, and the cart is 30 cm high, 25 cm long (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12 Ceramic ox cart (TM62:37)

4. Camel, one item (TM62:11). It was excavated from the southeast corner of the tomb chamber. Standing upright, it is raising its head and rearing its neck, with mouth slightly ajar. On its back is a full load of sagging bags. It is 32 cm tall (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13 Ceramic camel (TM62:11)

In addition, next to the camel are found over ten small earthen discs forming a set. Each disc is made of clay and shaped by hand into the form of a round cake with a hole in the center. It is 2 cm in diameter, 0.5 cm thick.

5. *Mingqi* 明器 as imitation utensils in daily life. The clay body is of two kinds: grey and red, and in most cases, they are completely coated with white slip. There is one large platter holding several small bowls and small boxes, and next to it is a lamp, an earthenware urn, a chicken ewer, etc. A rice huller, well, latrine, etc. are also found on the east side of the tomb chamber. On the southwest corner of the tomb chamber is placed a jar, stove, etc. Two urns are placed at the entrance of the tomb chamber inside the pile of stones sealing the entrance.

Basin, one item (TM62:23). The mouth is flared, the base is flat, and the basin is shallow. Its diameter is 36 cm, and it is 4 cm in height.

Bowl, 11 items. They are all of similar shape but different in size. They all have a wide mouth, deep cavity, and concave solid foot. The mouth of TM62:25 has a diameter of 11.5 cm (Fig. 14:1).

Box, 5 items. They are of the same shape. The lids are absent, and they are the bottom halves of interlocking rims sets. The cavity is shallow with straight sides and flat bottom.

Lamp, one item (TM62:34). The base of the stand is in the shape of an inverted lotus that is hollow at the center. The lamp itself is shaped like a bowl and at the center of the round bottom is a protruding socket that fits over the stand. It is 35 cm in height (Figs. 15:5; 16).

Jar, 10 items. They are of the same shape but different in size. The rim of the mouth is curved outward,

and the urn has a narrow neck, drum-like belly and flat bottom. At the shoulder is an incised bowstring decoration. TM62:67 is 13.8 cm in height (Fig. 15:1).

Chicken-head ewer, one item (TM62:36). The mouth is shaped like a basin, and it has a tall and slender neck. The shoulder is round, with a chicken head ornament in front and a row of bridge-like loops on either side. In the back is a dragon handle with its jaws biting into the mouth. The lower belly is slanted inward and the base is small and flat. It is 42.6 cm tall (Figs. 15:4; 17).

Latrine, one item (TM62:38). It is square in shape

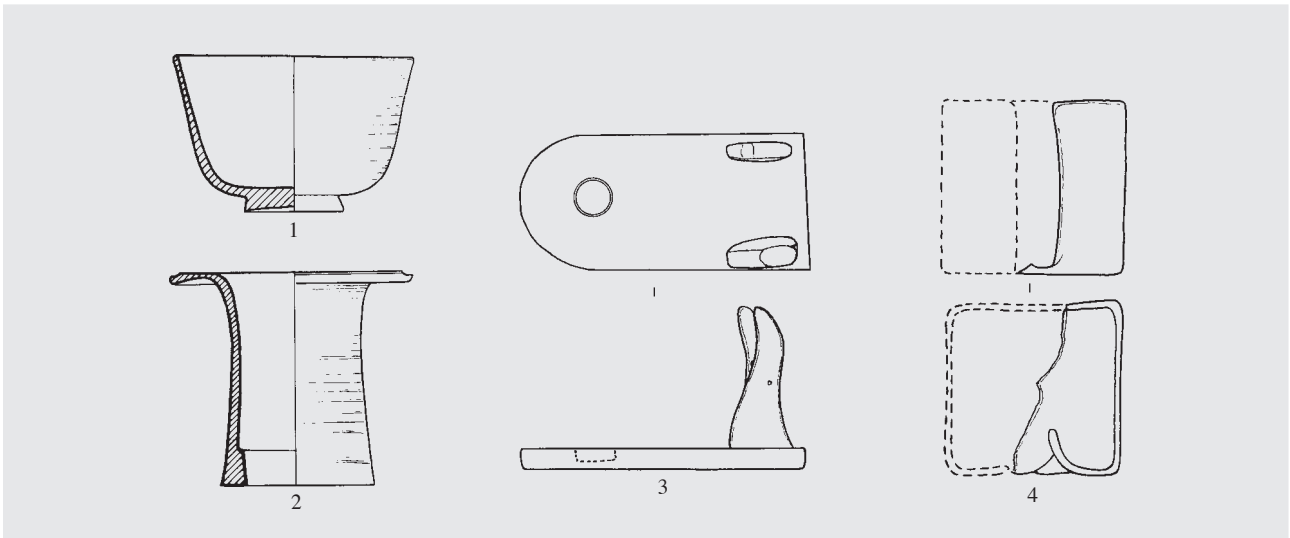


Fig. 14 Burial ceramic objects

1. bowl (TM62:25) 2. well (TM62:21) 3. rice huller (TM62:42) 4. latrine (TM62:38) (scales: 2. 1/2; the rest 1/4)

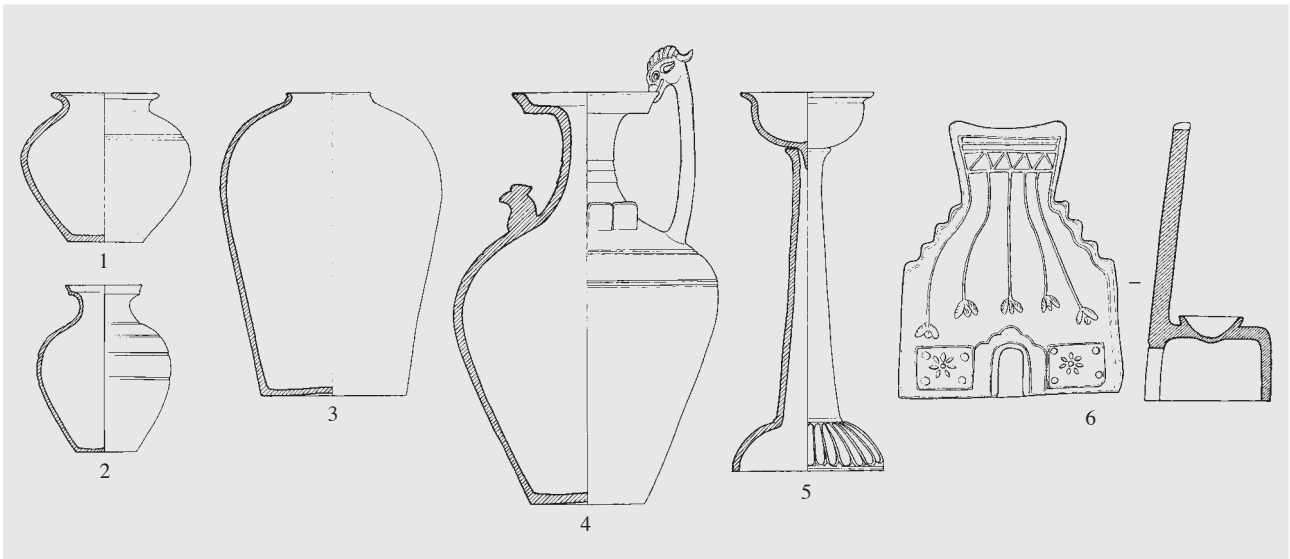


Fig. 15 Burial ceramic objects

1. jar (TM62:67) 2. narrow-neck jar (TM62:53) 3. jar (TM62:55) 4. chicken-head ewer (TM62:36) 5. lamp (TM62:34) 6. stove (TM62:52) (scales: 1, 4. 1/5; the rest 2/5)

with a flat base. Half of it is missing. The pen is fitted with an entrance, and on the outer surface is a painting in red pigments of a seated person waving his arms. It is 8.2 cm tall (Fig. 14:4).

Stove, one item (TM62:52). The firewall is shaped like a tall ladder. The stove opening has an arch shape, and the surface of the firewall has designs impressed from a mold. One cooking pot is placed on top of the stove. It is 13 cm in height (Figs. 15:6; 18).

Narrow-necked jar, one item (TM62:53). The mouth is shaped like a basin, the neck is narrow, the belly is

round, and the base is flat. It is 15.6 cm tall (Fig. 15:2).

Wide-shouldered jar, one item (TM62:55). It has a small mouth, deep cavity, slightly concave flat bottom. It is 14 cm tall (Fig. 15:3).

There is also a rice huller and a cylindrical well (Figs. 14:3 and 2).

6. Bronze coin and bronze mirror, one of each.

Bronze coin (TM62:41). It has a seal script inscription “*chang ping wu zhu* 常平五铢”. It is 2.4 cm in diameter.

Bronze mirror, one item (TM62:73). It has a hemi-



Fig. 16 Ceramic lamp (TM62:34)



Fig. 17 Ceramic chicken-head ewer (TM62:36)

spherical knob with a round base decorated with a pearl roundel. The innermost section has three nipples each supported on a base, and three repeated patterns of a dragon's head with a pearl in its wide open mouth facing a large tortoise that is raising its head and rearing its neck. The outer band has two rings of pearl roundels, between the two rings is a band with a saw-tooth pattern, and outside this is another band with a wave pattern. The outermost rim has a plain design of triangles. The diameter is 13.5 cm.

7. Stone stele. It is made from sandstone. The top is semi-circular in shape, and the lower part of the stele body is made from conglomerate rock. In the middle of the front side of the stele is a portrait carved in high relief. Standing in frontal position, this person's hair is tied into double chignons on top of the head. The person wears a long jacket with lapels



Fig. 18 Ceramic stove (TM62:52) (left: obverse; right: reverse)

overlapping from the right, hands hidden inside the sleeves and clasped together in front of the chest, long pants and round-toed shoes. On the reverse is an inscription that has deteriorated. It is 76 cm high, 39 cm wide, 15 cm thick (Fig. 19).



Fig. 19 Stone tomb stele (scale: 1/8)

### III. Concluding Remarks

This type of tomb structure and floor plan with passage tunnel and skylight situated along the ramp has been found in Han tombs in the suburbs of Xi'an 西安. In

Note: The original report, published in *Wenwu* 文物 2004.6: 35–46, with 31 illustrations in which 24 are photographs, is written by Shang Tongliu 商彤流, Zhou Jian 周建, and Li Aiguo 李爱国. This summary is prepared by Shang Tongliu and English-translated by Judy Chungwa Ho.

the Taiyuan area, this type is found in tombs from the Western Jin and Northern Qi periods. The excavated coin with the inscription “*chang ping wu zhu*” is a relic from the Northern Qi. In the *Beiqi Shu* 北齐书·文宣帝纪, it is recorded that during the Northern Qi “On the 4th year of the Tianbao 天宝 era” (553), the Northern Wei “*yong an wu zhu* 永安五铢” coin was discontinued and the “*chang ping wu zhu*” bronze coin was cast to replace it.” The assemblage of *mingqi* with ox cart in the tomb is a continuation of the funerary tradition since Wei-Jin times. The large quantity of warrior ceramic figurines reflects the institution of armed retainers during periods of frequent warfare and chaos.

The recovered engraved inscription bears the date “Tian bao 6th year” that pinpoints the burial date of the catacomb tomb, and it must have been the original marker above ground in front of the tomb mound, “to record the title and position.” “To record the title and position” is a practice that is not found in Northern Dynasties records, but in the Chapter “Ceremonies and Rituals” of the *Suishu* 隋书·礼仪志 it is said that during the Southern Liang Dynasty, 6th year of Tianjian 天监 era, the emperor passed an edict: “Funerary rites are thus regulated... only permitting a stone pillar to record the title and position.” If this text is not erroneous, the occupant of this tomb must have been a mid-ranking official of the Northern Qi court with the compound name “Hou mo chen 侯莫陈”. Using a stone stele with a carved human portrait to “watch over the tomb” is a rare example not commonly found in tombs of the same type from this region. The engraved epitaph says “funerary rites west of Bingzhou 并州 city”; this provides the link between the tomb and the ruins of Jinyang 晋阳 city and its vicinity.