

# 2003–2004 Excavation of Shang Tombs at Xiaomintun in Anyang City, Henan

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During the 2003–2004 excavation at the Xiaomintun Locus in the Anyang precinct, over 1200 tombs were exposed. Over 1,000 of them are of the Anyang Era of the Shang period. 200 tombs are located in the northern excavation area and 800 are located in six zones in the southern excavation area. As a regular pattern, two or three tombs occur together in parallel without intruding each other, and their head orientations and artifact assemblage are rather similar. One may suspect that they belong to one clan or branches of one clan, like the tombs located in the Western Zone to the south. The eastern and south-eastern clusters of tombs are particularly notable, as they are all oriented south, mostly furnished with one sooty *li*-tripod, and sometimes with bronze knives and clay tuyères that are related to metalworking. The occupants of these tombs are probably related to the bronze workshops. Only a few are of the Late Phase of the First Period and they are all urn burials. Tombs of the Second Period are likewise modest in number, totaling about 10. The majority are of the Third and Fourth Periods.

## General Description of Tombs

Most tombs are rectangular earthen pits without passageway. The largest one (M17, detailed below) is probably accompanied with a chariot-horse pit. The others measure 2–4m<sup>2</sup> in dimension. Most tombs are simply furnished with one coffin, but larger ones with one chamber in addition. Some tomb occupants are merely wrapped with mats or nothing, and grave goods rarely occur to them. Skeletons that are buried in trash pits or wells might have been low in social status and even died of abnormal reasons. We also discovered some features that had never been noticed before: 2–12 postholes on the bottoms of tombs, mostly lined along the walls. The post holes are mostly rounded, 2–3cm in diameter, and 5–20cm deep. Placed in pair, they would have been re-

lated to the building of the walls of the wooden chambers. Traces of textiles were found on some coffins or chambers or the skeletons, the patterns of which are black on white or red ground, and consist primarily of the *Taotie* designs that prevail throughout the Anyang Era.

These tombs are usually single burials; the tomb occupants are laid mostly supine (some prone) and stretched. Their head orientations fall within the range of 0–20 degrees; those closer to each other in space are also closer to each other in head orientation. Human victim is rare. Some tombs are furnished with dog sacrifice or limbs of cattle or lambs in the fill or on the tiers or in the waist pits. Some tombs are even furnished with whole fish.

Grave goods are generally modest in quantity, and most of them are pottery *gu*-goblets and *jue*-cups. Still, they are impressively varied by material, including pottery, bronze, lead, lacquer, wood, jade, bone, and shell artifacts.

For the sake of illustrating these tombs we select Tomb M17, which is an undisturbed tomb and a cache of treasures.

## Tomb M17

M17 is located in the southern excavation zone. It was discovered 55cm below the present-day ground level. Oriented 14 degrees, it is 2.8m long and 1.4m wide – its mouth slightly larger than its bottom – and 1.9m deep. The pit is filled with rammed earth, and on the bottom it contains a chamber and a coffin, both of which have decayed. The wooden chamber, 2.52m long, 1.16m wide, and 0.45m high, is coated with white and red lacquer. The cover is made up of square logs of 3cm thick, whereas the bottom of nine round logs of 6–7cm in diameter. The wooden coffin is 2.15m long and 0.88m wide; its height is undeterminable. It is lacquered mainly in red but with some black, white, and yellow colors.

The thickness of the coffin is untellable either. A waist pit of 76cm long, 38cm wide and 24cm deep sits beneath the coffin, but dog sacrifice is not seen (Figures 1 & 2).

A cattle leg, originally placed atop the chamber, is found in the fill in the north-east corner. A dog is likewise found in the fill above the chamber. Its skeleton is nearly rotten, and we can only tell that it is oriented north. So is the body of the occupant. Traces of textile, presumably clothing, are visible upon the bones.

Tomb M17 yields 7 pottery wares, 18 bronzes and 40 pieces of jade/stone artifacts. Bronze wares are mostly wrapped with dark red lacquer and placed between the chambers and coffins. Most pottery artifacts, especially pig figurines and *he*-pitcher, are painted with bright cinnabar. Jade and stone artifacts such as *zhang*-scepters, *qi*-axes, and handle-shaped plaques are placed inside the coffins.

Pottery artifacts from Tomb M17 are all made of washed clay and grey in color (Figure 3). One is a *gu*-goblet (M17:53) of 11.5cm across at mouth, and another *jue*-cup (M17:16) of 8.7cm across at mouth. The third is a *gui*-tureen (M17:21) of 23.1cm across at mouth. The fourth is a *he*-pitcher (M17:9) of 6.2cm high and equipped with a lid. Two are wind musical instruments *xun* (M17:35 is 7.1cm high and M17:15, 4.7cm) in the shape of egg with a flat bottom; they have one hole on the top, three on one side and two more on the other.

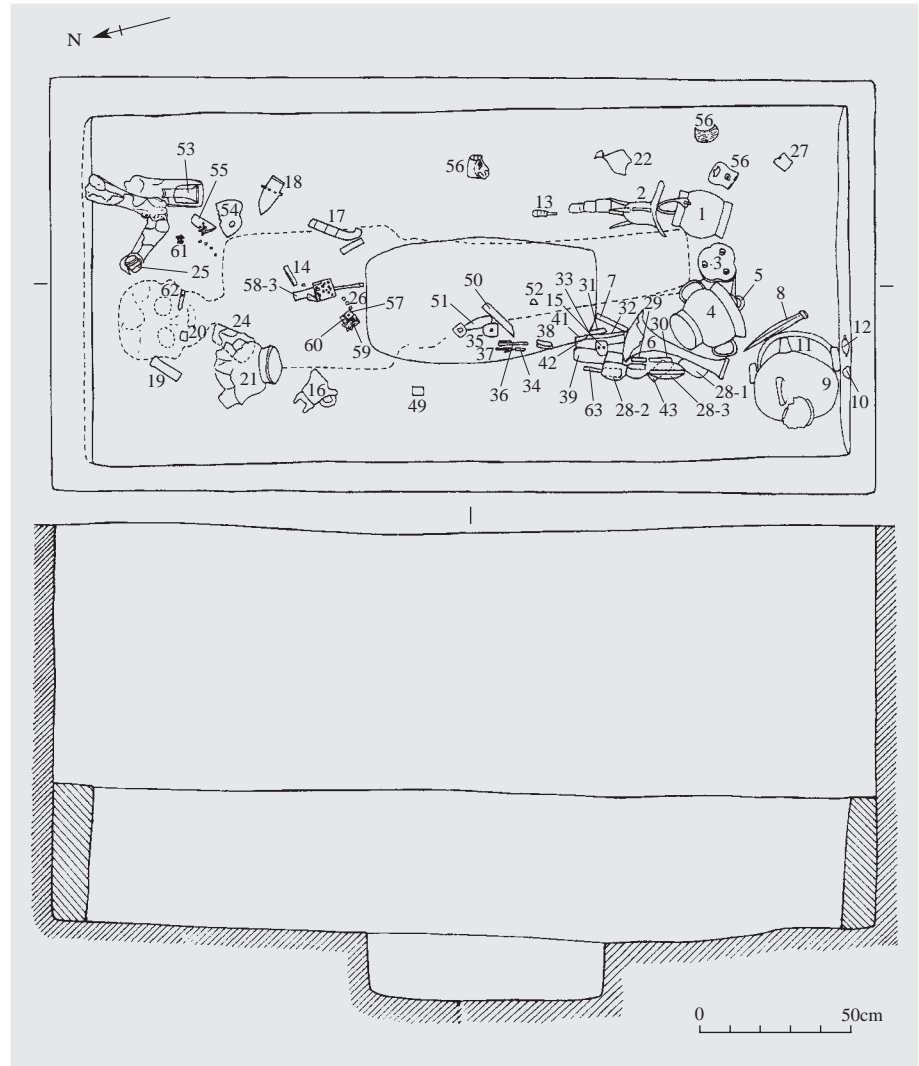


Figure 1. Plan and sectional view of Tomb M17

1. Bronze you-container 2 and 5. bronze *jue*-cup 3. bronze *ding*-tripod 4. bronze *gui*-tureen 6. bronze *gu*-goblet 8 and 12. bronze spear 9. pottery *he*-pitcher 10 and 25. bronze bells 11. bronze *ding*-tripod 15 and 35. pottery *xun* 16. pottery *jue*-cup 17 and 18. bronze *ge*-dagger-axes 19. bronze adze 20. jade tube 21, pottery *gui*-tureen 25 and 26. pottery pig figurine (1 item) 23, 40 and 41. fragmentary stone *ge*-dagger axes 24, 28, 39, 43, 44, 46, 47, 49, 50 and 51. stone *zhang*-scepter 26. jade ornament 27. perforated stone spade 29. stone hairpin 30. stone rod 31, 32 and 63. stone handle-shaped plaques 33. stone plaque 34. bronze knife 36. bronze carving knives (2 items) 37. bronze arrowhead 38. stone bridge-like ornament 42. stone knife 45. stone hairpins (2 items) 48. stone disc 52. jade ornament 53. pottery *gu*-goblet 54. stone *qi*-axe 55. jade *zhang*-scepter 57. jade plaque 58. jade hairpin, stone hairpin tip and jade handle-like artifact 59. jade ornament 60. perforated arc 61. turquoise 62. jade *ge*-dagger ax (items 23, 44–48 are invisible because they are underneath other artifacts)

The remaining one is a pig figurine (M17:56) of 10.4cm (Figure 4).

Bronze artifacts from Tomb M17 consist of 7 ritual vessels and 11 weapons and tools. The seven vessels are comprised of one round-*ding*-tripod (M17:11, 17.6cm



Figure 2. Tomb M17 (E-W)

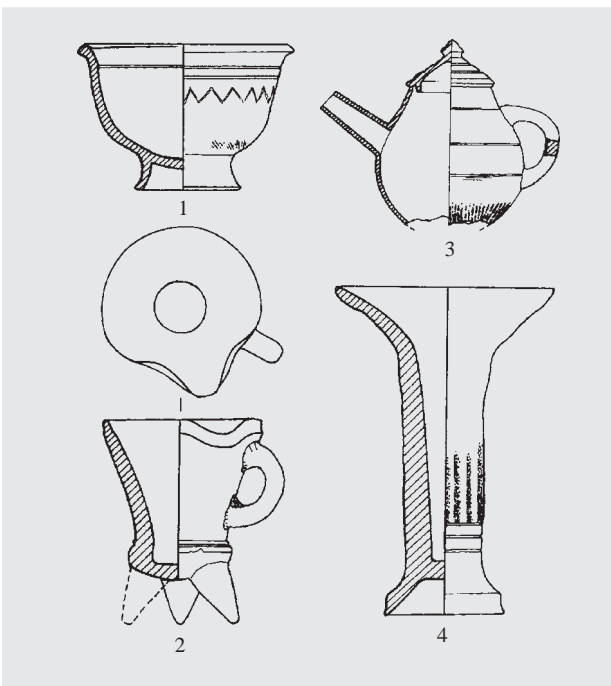


Figure 3. Pottery wares from Tomb M17  
 1. Gui-tureen (M17:21) 2. jue-cup (M17:16) 3. you-container (M17:9) 4. gu-goblet (M17:53) (Scale: 1 and 3. 1/8 2 and 4. 1/4)

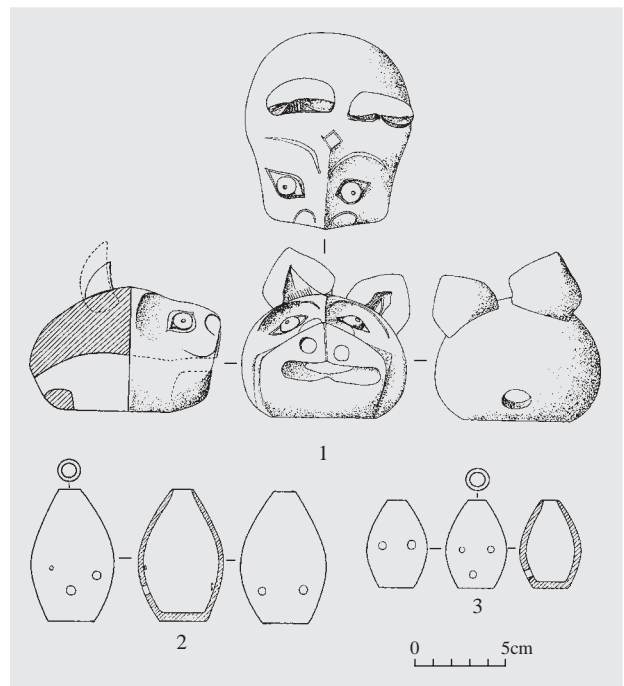


Figure 4. Pottery artifacts from Tomb M17  
 1. Pig figurine (M17:56) 2 and 3. Xun (M17:15 and 35)

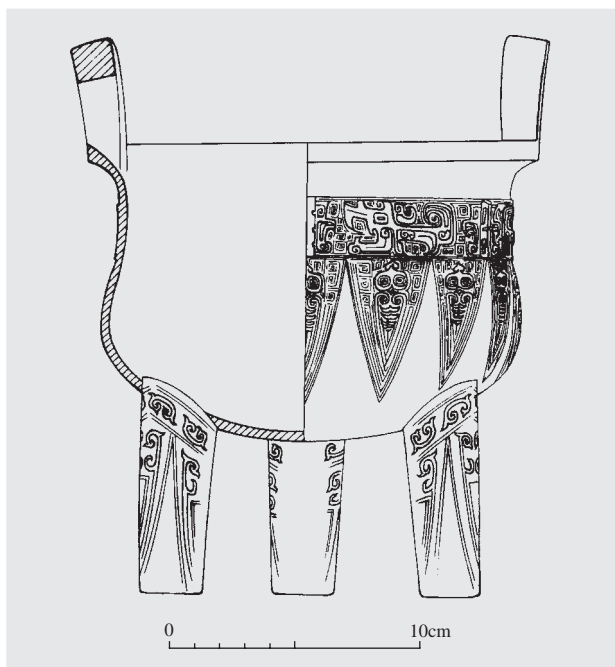


Figure 5. Bronze Ding-tripod (M17:11)

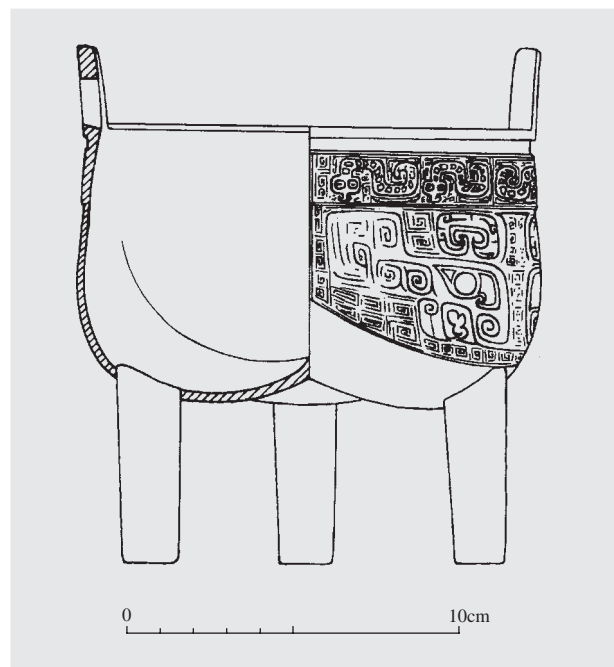


Figure 8. Bronze Ding-tripod (M17:3)



Figure 6. Bronze Ding-tripod (M17:11)



Figure 9. Bronze Ding-tripod (M17:3)



Figure 7. Inscription in Bronze Ding-tripod (M17:11)



Figure 10. Bronze You-container (M17:1)

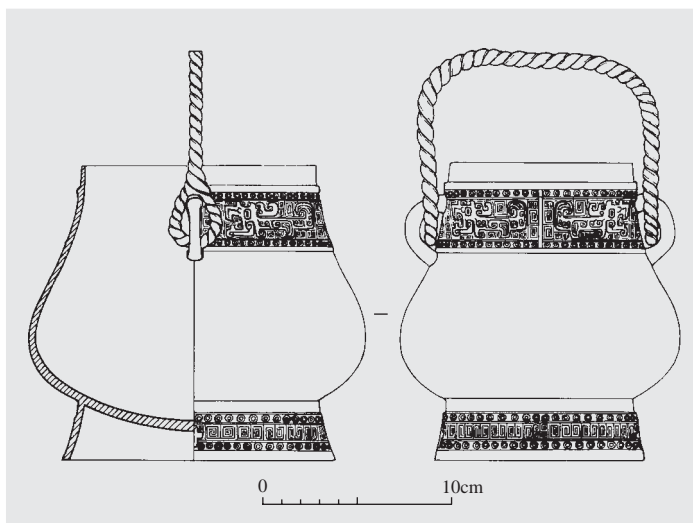


Figure 11. Bronze You-container (M17:1)

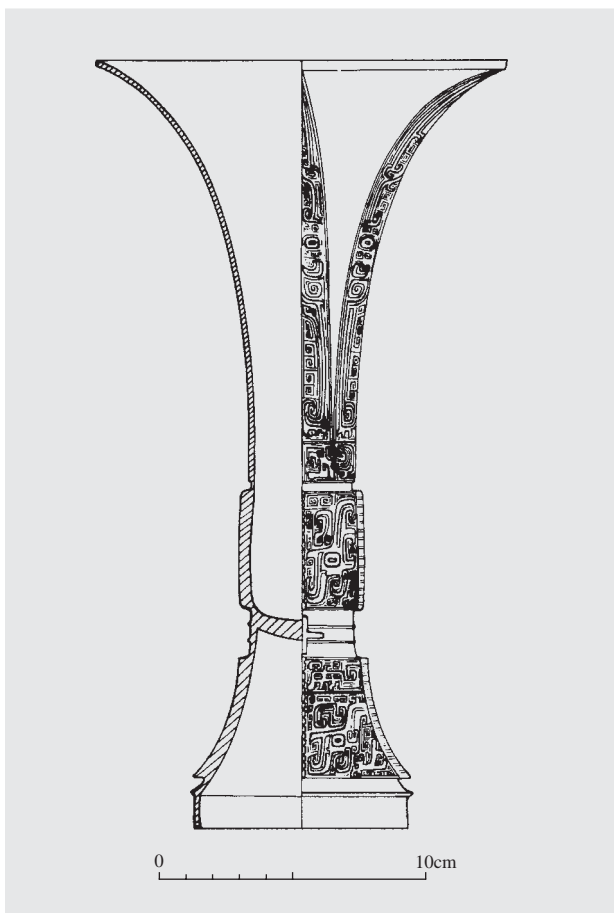


Figure 12. Bronze Gu-goblet (M17:6)



Figure 13. Bronze Gu-goblet (M17:6)

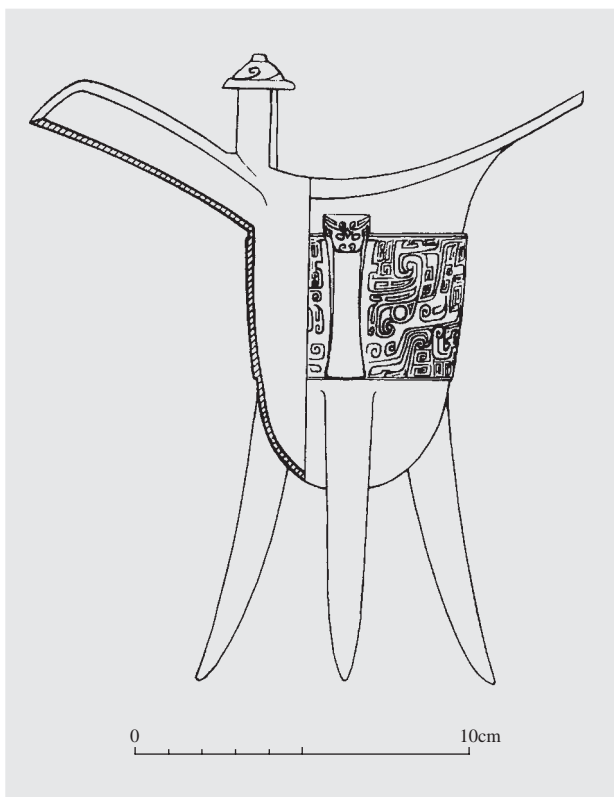


Figure 14. Bronze Jue-cup (M17:2)



Figure 15. Bronze Jue-cup (M17:2)

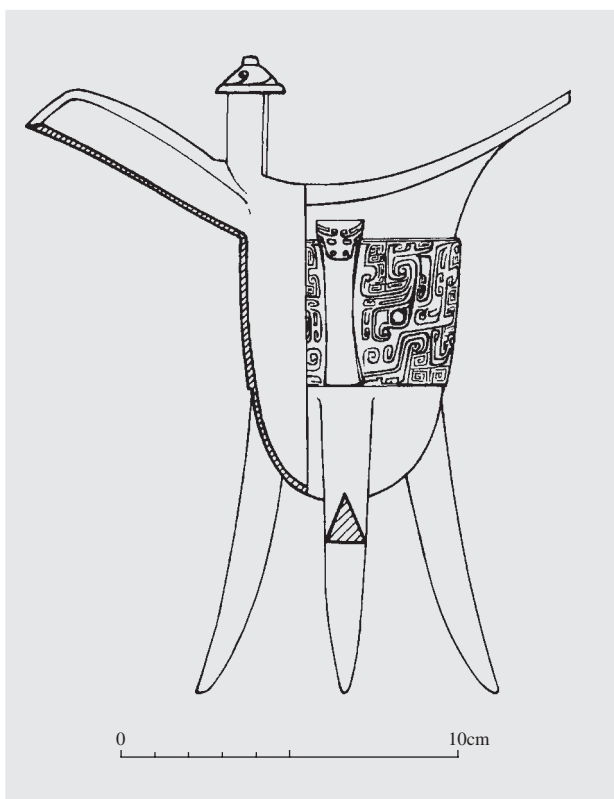


Figure 16. Bronze Jue-cup (M17:5)



Figure .17 Bronze Jue-cup (M17:5)

across at mouth, Figures 5–7), one *li*-like *ding* (M17:3, 17.6cm across at mouth, Figures 8 & 9), one *you*-container without lid (M17:1, 15.6cm high, Figures 10 & 11), one *gu*-goblet (M17:6, 28.6cm high, Figures 12 & 13), two *jue*-cups (M17:2, 18.9cm high, Figures 14 & 15; M17:5, 18.6cm high, Figures 16–18), one *gui*-tureen (M17:4, 17.7cm across at mouth, Figures 19 & 20). The round *ding*-tripod, *gu*-goblet, and one *jue*-cup

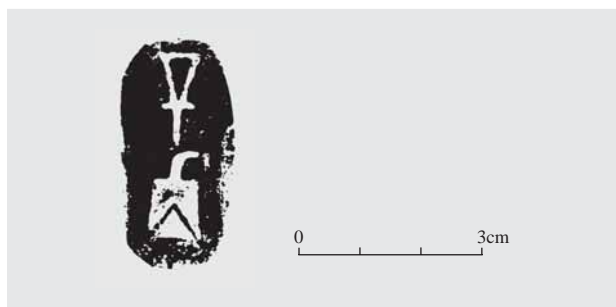


Figure 18. Inscription under the handle of Bronze *Jue*-cup (M17:5)

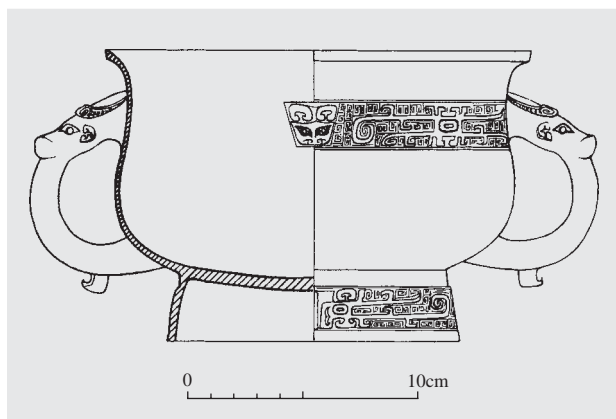


Figure 19. Bronze *Gui*-tureen (M17:4)



Figure 20. Bronze *Gui*-tureen (M17:4)

(M17:2) bear the pictograph of “𠄎”; the other *jue*-cup (M17:5) bears the pictograph of “辛 𠄎”.

The other bronze artifacts are weapons and tools. They include two *ge*-dagger axes (M17:18, 23.3cm long; M17:17, broken; see Figure 21), two spears (M17:12, 25cm long and M17:8, 26.3cm), one knife (M17:7, only the central part is preserved, 14.1cm long. It has one rectangular hole on the back), two bells (M17:10, 4.2cm high), one adze (M17:19, 10.4cm long), one arrowhead (M17:37, 6.6cm), and two carving knives (M17:36, incomplete; M17:64, triangular in section, pointed, 4.3cm long).

Jade and stone artifacts are fairly abundant in quantity but poorly preserved. The *zhang*-scepter, disc, *qi*-ax, and *ge*-dagger ax made of sandstone are severely weathered. Other stone artifacts include handle-shaped plaques, rods, hairpins, and perforated spades. There are also some handle-shaped plaques made of agate (Figure 22).

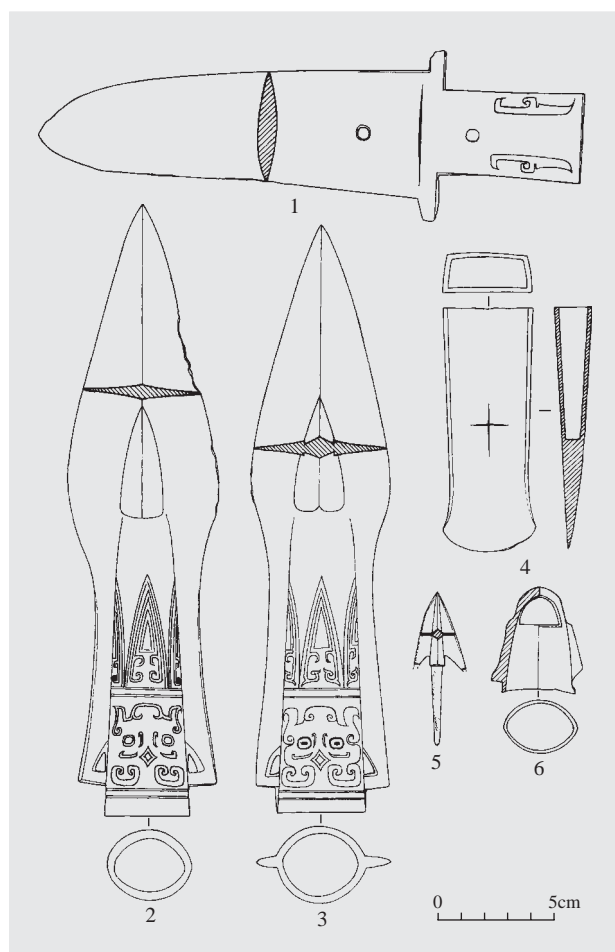


Figure 21. Bronze artifacts from Tomb M17

1. *Ge*-dagger-ax (M17:18) 2 and 3. spear (M17:8 and 12) 4. adze (M17:19) 5. arrowhead (M17:37) 6. bell (M17:10)

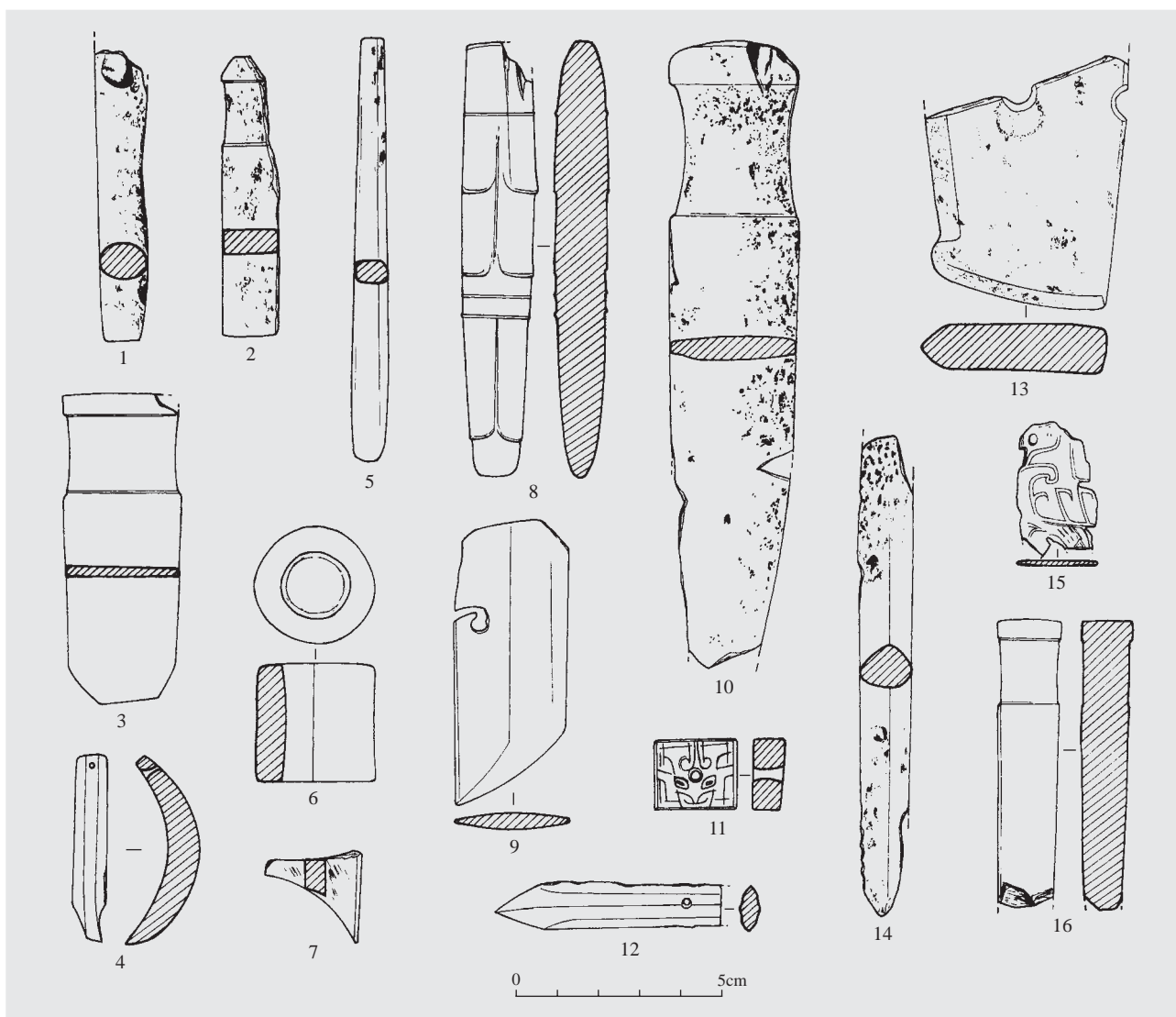




Figure 22. Other artifacts from Tomb M17

1. Stone rod (M17:30) 2 and 10. Stone handle-shaped Objects (M17:31 and 32) 3 and 8. Jade handle-shaped plaques (M17:58, M17:13) 4. jade perforated arc (M17:60) 5. jade hairpin (M17:58) 6. jade tube (M17:20) 7. jade (M17:52) 9. jade zhang-scepter (M17:29) 11. jade plaque (M17:57) 12. jade ge-dagger ax (M17:62) 13. perforated spade (M17:27) 14. stone hairpin (M17:29) 15. jade ornament (M17:59) 16. agate handle-shaped artifact (M17:14)

## Observations

The pottery *gu*-goblet, *jue*-cup, and *gui*-tureen are of the third phase of the Anyang Era. The pictograph of “” that appear on four bronze vessels also occur to bronzes found previously in the neighboring area in the Anyang precinct. The one on the *ding*-tripod (M2065:1) from Tomb M2065, located at the Xiaomintun North Locus, has been deciphered as “京” by some paleographers, although other paleographers disagree. The combination of “辛” and “” on a *jue*-cup is rare. The sources of these bronzes deserve our attention: they might have been

awards, gifts or dowry.

The postholes in tombs are a new discovery. They occur in two-hole set, which is located at the head side or foot side or center of the tomb, or four-hole set, which is located at the midpoint of the four sides of the tomb. Tombs equipped with postholes are usually equipped with wooden chambers, indicating some connection between them. The wooden chambers are mostly built of logs in their entirety or in halves. Rectangular planks are only seldom used in the upper parts of chamber walls. One may suppose that the postholes are originally used to fixate the round logs.



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