

The Qijia Culture Cemetery at Mogou in Lintan, Gansu

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From July to November, 2008, the Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology of Gansu Province collaborated with the Research Center for Cultural Heritage and Archaeology of Northwest University (Xi'an) to conduct salvage excavations at the site of Mogou in Lintan County, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

I. Summary of the Cemetery

The site is located near the border between Lintan County and Minxian County on a terrace above the southwest bank of the Tao River and the west bank of the Mogou stream. The site is 1000m in length from west to east and more than 300m from north to south, covering a total of more than 30 ha. The cemetery is in the northeast section of the site and comprises 8000 sq m. The excavations consisted of a total of 69 units, each 5 x 5m square for a total of 1700 sq m. A total of 351 graves were recovered in the cemetery, the majority of which can be associated with the Qijia Culture.

The structure of the stratigraphy across the excavation area is more or less consistent; four strata were exposed. Stratum 3 is associated with Ming and Qing period remains and the Qijia and Siwa Culture burials all have openings below this level. A total of 16 rows of Qijia burials were excavated,

and these are all oriented towards the northwest and aligned in rows from the northeast to the southwest. The cemetery is rather dense. Most of the burials were pit graves, although a small number of cremations were also present (Figure 1). The pit graves can be divided into two general types: vertical shaft pits and vertical pits with side chambers. The vertical pits with side chambers comprise approximately 70% of the cemetery.

II. Vertical Shaft Pit Tombs

M21: Discovered in the southwest of excavation unit T3815, the opening of this grave was underneath Stratum 3, approximately 0.9m below the ground surface. The grave was rectangular in shape, 2m long, 0.52m wide and 0.66m deep. It was oriented at 325°.

This grave contained the skeletons of two individu-



Figure 1. The Excavation Area and Cemetery Arrangement (NE–SW)



Figure 2. Tomb M21 (SW-NE)



Figure 3. Tomb M208 (Top is Northeast)

als on top of one another (numbered I and II), both of which were extended supine burials heading to the northwest. Other than the skulls, which were in contact with one another, the other parts of the two skeletons were separated by a layer of earthen fill 10–20cm thick. On the left side of the cranium of skeleton I, the excavators discovered one deep bellied jar and one jar with two large handles. In addition, one pottery vessel was found on either side of the cranium of skeleton II. One was a jar with two large handles while the other was a jar with a drum-shaped body. The two sets of potteries were set on different levels, thus suggesting they belong, respectively, to the two different individuals. Furthermore, adjacent to the pelvis of skeleton I, two bone needles were recovered (Figure 2).

III. Shaft Pit tombs with Side Chambers

The majority of tombs with side chambers off of vertical shafts have only a single chamber. A relatively small number have two chambers, and very few have three or more chambers.

1. Single side chamber graves. These can be divided into graves with chambers on the left and those with chambers on the right side. The former are more common. Examples include M208 and M246.

M208: This grave was located in the northern part of excavation unit T3803. The opening of the grave was discovered below Stratum 3, about 1m below the ground surface. The side chamber was located on the left side of the tomb shaft, and additionally the tomb contained a head niche and a foot niche (Figure 3). One animal bone and a stone block were discovered in the head niche. The foot niche contained a shell ornament.

The plan view of this grave was a rectangle with curved corners about 2m long and 0.60–0.68m wide. The shaft was 2.1m deep and the grave was oriented at 315°.

Three pottery vessels were discovered along the southeast side of the grave approximately 20cm below the opening and these lay on top of four stone planks and a single broken pottery.

Two skeletons, both with their heads oriented to the northwest, were found at the bottom of the burial shaft and numbered IV and V for the left and right individuals respectively. Skeleton IV was an adult female buried in flexed on side position. The right femur and pelvis of skeleton V were found beneath the leg of skeleton IV and belonged to an adult male who was buried in an extended prone position. The tibia of this individual was misaligned and the fibula and foot bones were out of place. Skeleton IV had one bone tube near the neck. In the vicinity of the left knee excavators found a pile of

quartzite and the remnants of decayed wood. Near the right arm of skeleton V was a bone object, and clusters of bone ornaments were found near the waist of skeleton IV and the skull of skeleton V.

The base of the side chamber and the burial shaft were approximately level. The mouth of the grave was oval in shape and the base was rectangular with curved corners. The side chamber had an arched ceiling, the center of which had collapsed. The mouth of the grave shaft was 1.56m long, while the side chamber was 2.12m long at its deepest part, 0.78m deep and had a height of 0.4m. There were traces of a wooden plank that would have sealed the side chamber. Inside the chamber were the remains of three skeletons which were numbered I to III from the innermost to the outermost individual. All three were extended supine burials with their heads oriented to the northwest. Skeleton I was an adult male who had a bronze bubble-shaped disc on his chest, and a bronze scraper on his right femur next to a whetstone. Skeleton II was a juvenile female and skeleton III also a juvenile. Near the head of skeleton III was a jar with a flared rim and a bone plaque, and a large number of talc beads were discovered near the neck (Figure 4). A bone tube and a bone awl were found near the legs. Four pottery vessels were found at the foot end of the side chamber (Figure 5).

M246: This grave was discovered in excavation unit T3708 underneath Stratum 3, approximately 0.78m below the surface. The side chamber in this burial was on the left side of the shaft, and a niche was found near the



Figure 4. Grave Goods from M208
Top. Bronze Scraper Bottom. Talc Beads



Figure 5. The Pottery Assemblage of M208



Figure 6. Tomb M246 (Top is Northeast)



Figure 7. The Side Chamber of M246 (SW-NE)



Figure 8. The Pottery Assemblage of M246

head (Figures 6 and 7).

The shape of the shaft was rectangular with curved corners, although somewhat irregular, with a length of 2.3m, a width of 1.08m, a depth between 1.9 and 1.96m, and an orientation of 305°. The fill of this burial contained large numbers of potsherds, three bone artifacts and a stone axe. There were clear indicators that a plank was used to seal off the side chamber in this grave. A stone block was placed on both ends of the left sides of the tomb shaft.

Four skeletons were discovered at the base of the grave shaft. One on the left side was an adult female in an extended prone position heading southeast. Beneath the skull was a disorganized collection of ulna, radius and femur bones. A crashed pottery jar was found to the right of the leg area. The three skeletons on the right side were all lacking their crania and their skeletons were in disarray. A shallow pit was uncovered at the base of the burial shaft within which a child skeleton (Skeleton VI) was discovered in an extended supine position heading northeast.

The skulls of three adults were found in a niche on the head end of the burial in addition to one fragment of a scapula, and one bracelet. These crania may belong to the headless individuals in the burial.

The bottoms of the side chamber and the burial shaft are more or less on the same level, and the ceiling of the side chamber, which was rectangular with curved corners, has collapsed. The opening of the side chamber was 1.9m long, while the chamber interior was 2m long, 0.56m deep, and 0.4m high. One bone awl was found in the fill. A single skel-

eton was discovered in the side chamber (skeleton II) – an adult male with his head to the northwest and the rest of his skeleton in disarray. Seven potteries were discovered on the head end of the chamber (Figure 8). Among the bones are 18 pieces of tooth ornaments, a bone chisel and a stone chisel.

2. Graves with double side chambers: These can be further subdivided into two types: the ones with left and right side chambers and the ones with upper and lower side chambers.

M84: This grave was discovered in the southwest portion of excavation unit T4010 and the northeast part of T3910. The opening of this grave was below Stratum 3, about 70cm below the ground surface. The side chambers were found on the two sides of the grave shaft (Figures 9 and 10).

The grave shaft was rectangular with curved corners, about 2.4m long, 0.6–0.7m wide, 1.96m deep, and oriented 308°. Evidence of grooves that would have been used for planks sealing the side chambers were found on the left side on both the head and foot ends of the grave. The lower part of the groove was below yellow packed earth and above dark brown loose sediment.

On the right side, a groove for a plank to seal the side chamber was discovered on the foot end. The lower part of the groove was level with the bottom of the grave shaft. This grave contains relatively abundant evidence of the use of sealing materials for the side chambers.

The fill in the grave shaft can be separated into three strata. The top stratum was grayish yellow mixed sediment about 1.5m thick and contained potsherds, human bones, three stone implements and one perforated bone piece. At about 1.1m deep in the southeastern corner of this stratum a cluster of quartzite was found. The middle stratum approximately 0.27m thick comprised yellow



Figure 9. The Left and Right Side Chambers and the Human Remains in the Upper Stratum of the M84 Grave Shaft (Top is Southwest)



Figure 10. Human Remains from the Lower Stratum of the Grave Shaft of M84 and the Upper Stratum of the Right Side Chamber (Top is Southwest)

soil with traces of dark silt. The surface of this level was quite flat suggesting that it was laid down deliberately. The bottom stratum was dark brown sediment about 19cm thick. In the middle level near the left chamber was a shallow pit containing a child skeleton (skeleton I) – an individual in flexed on side position and heading northwest. Misaligned bones from two skeletons (X and XI) were found at the base of the burial shaft, both of which were from individuals in flexed on side position heading northwest. Skeleton X came from a young female while XI was from an adult male; the skull of the latter was overlapped on the foot of the

former. A cluster of quartzite rocks were found on top of skeleton XI's pelvis and a bone spoon was discovered beneath his right arm. A set of tools was discovered at the base of the shaft on the head end of the grave.

The bottom of the left side chamber and the stratum of the yellow mixed soil in the grave shaft were approximately on the same level, and both the mouth and base of the chamber were rectangular with curved corners. The ceiling of the chamber was vaulted. The mouth of the opening of the side chamber was 1.5m in length, and the chamber was 1.8m long at its longest point, 0.32m high, and 0.76m deep. Two skeletons were placed within the side chamber, both in extended supine position with their heads oriented to the northwest. The outer individual (II) was a juvenile while the inner (III) was an adult female with a displaced pelvis. The head end of the side chamber contained a single-handle jar and a double-handle jar, and the foot end contained a double handle jar.

The bottom of the right side chamber was approximately level with the base of the grave shaft. The mouth of this side chamber was semi-circular and about 1.94m long and 1.14m high. The mouth ceiling was arched toward the interior, but there was an abrupt change in the direction of the arch about 36cm into the chamber. The fill inside the chamber can be divided into four strata. Stratum 1 was yellow-grey sediment about 0.82m thick. The base of this level was mixed with evenly distributed quartzite. Stratum 2 was pure loess about 16cm thick with a flat surface. This level contained some finger bones and a turquoise bead. Stratum 3, about 4cm

thick, comprised greenish-grey silt, very evenly distributed with a fine consistency. The Stratum 4 was a dark-brown mixed sediment about 12cm thick.

According to the characteristics of the stratigraphy, and the condition of the human remains and the grave goods, the right side chamber can be divided into upper and lower parts with Stratum 2 acting as the division between them. The human bones in the upper part of the side chamber were designated skeleton IV, an adult female who was deposited in flexed on side position. Bones in the middle were designated skeleton VI, an adult male secondary burial that included a cranium, torso bones, and scattered lower limb bones including at least parts of lower limbs and digits. There is evidence of a board on top of these bones and a bone spatula was discovered amongst the bones. Skeleton VII was found on the inside and was a juvenile who was buried in an extended supine, position without a skull. A cranium (numbered V) was placed on top of the potteries at the head end of the grave, and may be the head of skeleton VII. The foot end of the grave contained two skeletons (VIII and IX) of children that were poorly preserved. Also a number of talc beads were found in this area. Six pottery vessels were found at the head end of the side chamber.

Although no complete skeletons have been found in the lower part of the side chamber, nevertheless in the dark brown sediment two leg bones and a small number of toe bones were discovered. It is possible that these bones came from skeleton VI. Five pottery vessels were recovered from the head part of the side chamber, while



Figure 11. Pottery Assemblages from M84

the foot area contained one pottery vessel.

That the bottom of the right side chamber and the groove for the chamber sealing and the base of the grave shaft were all on almost the same level shows that the right side chamber was part of the original construction of this grave. The grooves for the sealing plank of the left side chamber was on the same level with the dark brown mixed soil in the grave shaft, which suggests that this side chamber was constructed after the development of the dark brown mixed soil and would therefore have been later than the right side chamber. The artifacts found in conjunction with both upper and lower portions of the right side chamber contained double handle jars and high-neck jars. The characteristics of the pottery assemblage discovered in the left side chamber, in contrast, are clearly distinct from those from the right side chamber (Figure 11).

3. Multiple side chamber graves. Most of these contain three chambers. Often these graves have chambers on both the right and left sides and then, in addition, have a chamber above another on one side.

M290: This grave was discovered in the northwest of excavation unit T4005 below Stratum 3 and intruding into burial M311, 0.84m below ground surface. On the left side of the grave shaft there are both an upper and lower side chamber. On the right side only a single side chamber was present although there were both upper and lower head niches contained seven and four potteries respectively (Figures 12 and 13).

The grave shaft is rectangular with rounded corners from top to bottom. It is 1.7m long, 0.5–0.56m wide, 2.1m deep and oriented at 304°. The excavators discovered a pig mandible, sheep/goat cranium, quartzite, and a small number of human bones in the fill in addition to a pottery vessel lid and a broken part of a stone axe. The skeleton of an adult male (skeleton I) was dis-

covered at 1.8m below the opening of the grave. The skull was in the center of the grave shaft and the rest of the bones were in the northwestern part of the shaft.

The upper left side chamber is 0.55m above the base of the grave shaft. The mouth of this chamber is semi-circular and it has a rectangular floor with rounded corners and an arched ceiling. The opening of the chamber is 1.1m long and the longest part is 1.38m. The chamber is 0.4m deep and 0.7m tall. Two skeletons (skeletons III and IV) were found inside. Skeleton III, the inner skeleton, was a female child buried in an extended supine position heading northwest. Skeleton IV seems to



Figure 12. Tomb M290: The Left Upper Side Chamber and the Right Side Chamber (Top is Northeast)



Figure 13. Tomb M290: The Left Upper and Lower Side Chambers (SW-NE)



Figure 14. Pottery Assemblage from M290

have been a male child (not certain) buried close to the grave shaft and it seems that part of this side chamber near the head has slumped into the grave shaft. Some of the human remains and the pottery grave goods also slid down. Two double handled jars were found in at the head end in association with skeletons III and IV.

The floor of the lower left side chamber is about 6cm lower than the base of the grave shaft. The opening to this chamber is approximately semi-circular, the base is rectangular with rounded corners whose head end is somewhat wider than the rest, and the ceiling is arched. The entrance to the chamber is 1.42m wide, and the chamber is 1.62m long at its longest point, 0.4m tall, and 0.6m deep. The excavators found evidence of a wooden sealing plank of this chamber. Three skeletons were recovered from this side chamber. These were numbered V, VI, and VII by the inward sequence. Skeleton V was an adult female in flexed on side position heading northwest. The bones of her upper body were in disarray and the small bones of the left leg were moved out of position. The skulls of skeletons VI and VII were found to the left of the pelvis of skeleton V. Skeleton VII was a child with other bones strewn about, among which was found an arm bangle.

The bottom of the right side chamber was higher than the bottom of the shaft by about 0.54m. The opening was roughly semi-circular, while the base was rectangular with curved corners. The length at the opening was 1.4m while the interior of the side chamber was

2.04m at its longest point, 0.45m tall, and 0.57m deep. One skeleton (skeleton II), an adult male in extended supine position with his head oriented to the northwest, was deposited within the side chamber. A group of small bronze tubes was found near his head (Figure 14).

IV. Conclusion

The Mogou site is a Qijia Culture cemetery characterized by graves with side chambers – a type of grave structure that is complicated and heterogeneous. The multiple burials from the site contain two to eight skeletons (usually between three and five), not counting the remains in the fill of the grave shaft, and these include both males and females, young and old. The style of burial is varied. There are large numbers of human bones piled into the graves. The density of these collected bones depends on the size of the space available for burial and the number of individuals placed in a grave. It is clear that the clustering of bones is primarily due to the later interment of bones into graves that already contained skeletons.

It is often that case that there are skeletal elements in the grave shafts of burials with side chambers. The positions of some individuals suggest that they may have been buried alive. Some seem to have been buried with sacrificial animals. These are interred with their heads oriented to the southeast, exactly opposite of the human skeletons in the side chambers. It may be the case that the examples buried in the grave shafts were human

sacrifices. Furthermore, the fill of the grave shafts sometimes contains dog and sheep skeletons, cattle horns and mandibles together with complete or broken pottery vessels, as if these were deposited in sacrificial activities.

In the two excavations a total of 2600 grave goods were discovered, 2000 of which were potteries. Lithic objects include production tools such as axes, chisels, whetstones with perforations, microlithic blades, and mortar and pestles, as well as ritual or ornamental objects such as mace heads, talc beads, and turquoise flakes. Bone objects include tools such as bone handles for knives with stone blades, bone chisels, bone needles, and bone spoons, as well as ornamental objects such as bone armbands, bone tubes, bone plaques and cowries. In addition, there are also examples of gold earrings and compound ornamental objects.

The pottery objects can be divided into two general types: One type includes red fine-ware vessels such as

jars with two large handles, jars with belly handles, jars with narrow necks and flared rims as well as sandy-ware jars, and *dou*-stemmed vessels, all of which bear features of Qijia Culture. The second type comprises grey fine-ware jars with two handles and drum-shaped bodies and brown, sandy-ware jars with two handles. In addition, some of the double handle jars already begin to show the style of saddle-shaped mouths. Generally speaking, any one grave only has vessels from one of these two broad sets. There are few examples where they coexist. One such example is M84, in which the left and right side chambers each have vessels of one of the two types. Graves with these two types occur next to each other in the rows of burials within the same cemetery. This is an important set of data for discussing the relationship between the Qijia Culture and the Siwa Culture.

Postscript: The original report was published in *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology) 2009.7: 10–7, with five line drawings and four photographs. The authors are Xie Yan 谢焱, Qian Yaopeng 钱耀鹏, Mao Ruilin 毛瑞林, Zhou Jing 周静, and Zhu Yunyun 朱芸芸. The present version is prepared by Zhu Yunyun and translated into English by Rowan Flad 傅罗文.