

On the Combination of Bronze Weapons in Yin Tombs at Anyang

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The present paper is a discussion on the combinations of bronze weapons from Yin period tombs at Anyang 安阳 and a study into their relationship with the tomb-owners' status and other related problems.

I. Combination of Bronze Weapons in Yin Tombs at Anyang

In the past over 70 years since the beginning of excavation on the Yin Ruins, 7,000–8,000 tombs of the Yin period have been revealed within this area. From these burials (mainly from those excavated since the 1950s), the author selects 197 unrobbed and undamaged graves with bronze weapons and, based on them, makes a research on the combination of bronze weapons in the four phases of the Yin Ruins culture (see Table 1).

1. Combinations of bronze weapons in Yin tombs at Anyang

Phase I 10 tombs yielded bronze weapons. Of them six belong to the earlier (Sanjiazhuang 三家庄) stage and four to the later one. The weapons are combined in three manners: *yue* (battle axe)-*ge* (dagger-axe)-arrowhead, *ge*-spearhead, and *ge*. They all contain *ge*. Eight tombs yielded only *ge*, accounting for 80% of the total.

Phase II Tombs with bronze weapons total 63. The weapons occur in six combinations: *yue-ge-spearhead-arrowhead*, *yue-ge-arrowhead*, *ge-arrowhead*, *ge-spearhead*, *ge*, and arrowheads. The second, fourth and fifth are the same as their counterparts in Phase I; the newly added are the first, third and sixth. Of the six combinations, five contain *ge*, which were unearthed from 62 tombs, i.e. 98.41% of the graves with bronze weapons. Arrowheads occur in four combinations, sug-

Table 1 Combinations of bronze weapons in Yin tombs at Anyang

No.	Combination	Phase	I	Phase	II	Phase	III	Phase	IV
		Tombs	%	Tombs	%	Tombs	%	Tombs	%
1	<i>Yue-ge-arrowhead</i>	1	10	2	3.17				
2	<i>Yue-ge-arrowhead-spearhead</i> (socket axe)			3	4.77	1	1.52		
3	<i>Yue-ge-arrowhead-spearhead-sabre</i>					1	1.52		
4	<i>Yue-ge-spearhead-sabre</i>					1	1.52	1	1.72
5	<i>Yue-ge-arrowhead-sabre</i>							1	1.73
6	<i>Ge-spearhead-arrowhead</i>					4	6.06	7	12.07
7	<i>Ge-arrowhead</i>			2	3.17	5	7.57	3	5.17
8	Spearhead-arrowhead					2	3.03	1	1.72
9	<i>Ge-spearhead</i>	1	10	2	3.17	11	16.66	9	15.52
10	Spearheads					1	1.52	7	12.07
11	<i>Ge</i>	8	80	53	84.13	38	57.57	15	25.87
12	Arrowheads			1	1.59	2	3.03	14	24.14
Total		10	100	63	100	66	100	58	100

gesting a more important function in comparison with Phase I.

Phase III Altogether 66 tombs yielded bronze weapons, which are combined in 10 ways: *yue-ge*-arrowhead, *yue-ge*-spearhead-arrowhead-sabre, *yue-ge*-spearhead-sabre, *ge*-spearhead-arrowhead, *ge*-arrowhead, spearhead-arrowhead, *ge*-spearhead, spearheads, *ge*, and arrowheads. There emerged five new combinations: the third, fourth, sixth, eighth and tenth. Of the ten combinations seven contain *ge*, which were unearthed from 61 tombs, or 92.42% of the total of the burials with bronze weapons in the whole phase. In part of tombs, spearheads began to be used as funeral objects uncombined with other types of weapons; and tombs containing *ge*-spearhead combinations increased distinctly in number. This suggests that spears became an important type of weapon, second only to *ge*.

Phase IV 58 tombs contain bronze weapons in nine manners of combination: *yue-ge*-spearhead-sabre, *yue-ge*-arrowhead-sabre, *ge*-spearhead-arrowhead, *ge*-arrowhead, spearhead-arrowhead, *ge*-spearhead, spearheads, *ge*, and arrowheads. These are roughly the same as those in the third phase. Of them six contain *ge*, which were yielded from 36 tombs, i.e. 62.07% of all the graves with bronze weapons in this period, a proportion less than that in Phase III. Tombs yielding only arrowheads reach 14, accounting for 24.14% of the graves with bronze weapons in this period and suggesting rather a swift growth of the function of this type of weapon.

2. Views on the combinations of bronze weapons from Yin Ruins tombs

Ge Discovered in a great number and commonly from large-sized, medium-sized and small-sized Yin Tombs of all the phases, they constitute the key objects in the combination of bronze weapons on the Yin Ruins.

Spearheads They emerged in a small quantity in Phase I, slightly increased in Phase II, and prevailed widely from Phase III. This suggests the gradual growth of their importance.

Arrowheads Like spearheads, they were rare in the first and second phases, but increased rapidly in Phase III, and their examples were unearthed in plenty. Evidently archers' role in the later period was greater than that in the earlier period.

Yue Yielded in a small number in the four phases. No examples were encountered as the only type of weapon among the funeral objects.

Sabres (curve-headed) They did not emerge until

the third phase. Their examples were unearthed along with *yue*, in a number smaller than that of the latter. So the two types must have not been ordinary soldiers' weapons.

II. Combination of Bronze Weapons and Tomb-owners' Status

It has well been known that the factors whether bronze vessels are present and how many they (especially *gu-jue* sets) are among the grave goods reflect the height of the tomb-owners' status and the greatness of their power. The ritual bronze vessels in the tombs with bronze weapons can be analyzed as follows:

1. As shown in Table 1, the first to fifth combinations all contain *yue*, and occur in eleven tombs unexceptionally with bronze vessels. Of these graves the Fu Hao 妇好 (Lady Hao) tomb yielded four *yue*, which were in association with 210 vessels, including more than 40 sets of *gu*-cups and *jue*-tripod cups. The tomb-owner Fu Hao was the Yin king Wu Ding 武丁's spouse, who took part in many important battles and held great military power. The Guojiazhuang (郭家庄)-M160 tomb contains three *yue* in association with 41 bronze vessels, including 10 sets of *gu* and *jiao* (covered *jue*). The tomb-owner Ya Zhi 亚址 was a higher-rank aristocrat, and must have been a ranking officer as the tomb yielded 1127 weapons varying in types. Both burials contain large-sized bronze *yue* over 33 cm long. Two tombs yielded two *yue* (more than 20 cm long) each, in either case in association with several dozen weapons of other types and 17 or 20 bronze vessels, including three *gu-jue* sets. The tomb-owners were middle-rank officers from the middle aristocracy. Seven tombs yielded one *yue* (usually small-sized) each, in association with one, two and three *gu-jue* sets in two, four and one burials respectively, and all the bronze vessels are inferior in quality. The tomb-owners belonged to the middle or lower aristocracy. The above findings indicate that the bronze *yue* constituted a mark of the aristocratic position as well as a symbol of military commandship, i.e. a ritual weapon "symbolizing the grade of nobility and the height of status."

2. The sixth, or *ge*-spearhead-arrowhead, combination is seen in eleven tombs. 10 of them yielded groups of bronze vessels, mostly including 1–2 *gu-jue* sets; only one grave has no bronze vessels. But this is furnished with a larger chamber, has a human victim and contains a number of pottery vessels. So it can be

inferred that the tombs with *ge*-spearhead-arrowhead combinations were the burials of middle or lower rank officers from the aristocratic stratum with certain power.

3. The seventh, *ge*-arrowhead combination comes from 10 tombs, of which 8 burials yielded groups of bronze vessels, with *gu* and *jue* largely in one set, and two graves contain groups of pottery vessels in association with bronze tools or cheek-pieces. A rather peculiar burial is M18 to the north of Xiaotun 小屯, which contains 24 bronze vessels, including five *gu-jue* sets. It yielded nine *ge* and ten arrowheads, the greatest number in this type of combination. The inscriptions on bronzes indicate that the tomb-owner was a member of higher aristocracy or the royal family. The absence of *yue* in the pit must have been for the reason that the tomb-owner did not hold any important military posts before his death although he took part in some battles.

4. The eighth, spearhead-arrowhead combination is unearthed from three tombs. Of these two yielded bronze vessels in six and 12 pieces respectively, each including two *gu-jue* sets; one contains no bronze vessels but some pottery ones.

5. The ninth, *ge*-spearhead combination is encountered in 23 tombs. Among these 16 contain bronze vessels, largely a *gu-jue* set, and 2–11 *ge* and spearheads. The other seven graves have no bronze vessels but 2–5 *ge* and spearheads.

6. The tenth, eleventh and twelfth combinations are formed of *ge*, spearheads and arrowheads alone respectively. The spearheads are seen in eight tombs, in one or two pieces, with no bronze vessels in seven tombs; the exceptional burial contains those poor in quality, which must have been made exclusively for funeral use. The arrowheads come from 17 tombs, in 1–5, 8 and 9 pieces respectively. Of these graves 15 have no bronze vessels but pottery ones; and two contain lead or bronze vessels specially made for funeral use. The *ge* was encountered in 114 tombs, the greatest number among the three categories. Each grave yielded 1–9 or 13 pieces. They are in association with bronze vessels in 38 burials. Among these tombs the variety of bronzes shows the tendency on the whole that where more and better *ge* are, there occur more vessels (including *gu-jue* sets). In Phase II, for example, Tomb Sikong (司空)-M27 yielded eight fine *ge* and five vessels, including two *gu-jue* sets. Tomb Xuejiazhuang (薛家庄)-M3 contains 13 *ge*, largely rather good in quality, and three vessels, including one *gu-jue* set. Tomb Sikong-M14 have two *ge* and one *gu-jue* set, both groups being

inferior in quality in comparison with the bronzes of the above two graves. In the vesselless *ge*-furnished tombs, *ge* occur generally in one or two pieces, or, in very a few cases, comprise four or more pieces, all made poor in quality and belonging to objects exclusively for funeral use.

In the tomb groups with the above-described tenth–twelfth combinations, the graves with 1–2 *ge* or spearheads and those with bronze arrowheads or lead *ge* alone are usually pits in an area of some 2 square meters. They are furnished with coffins but no chambers; and their vessels are pottery articles in a small number, without bronzes in association. These burials account for an overwhelming majority. Their owners must have been ordinary members of the clan, belonging to the common people.

To sum up the described, the weapon-containing tombs of the late Shang period on the Yin Ruins vary from each other in the status of their owners before death, which is reflected in the clear diversity of their weapons in type, quantity and quality. The commands and higher officers possessed bronze *yue*, *ge* and arrows, bronze *yue*, *ge*, spears and arrows, or bronze *yue*, sabres, *ge*, spears and arrows. In number these ranged from dozens to hundreds and even to some thousand. The *yue* and sabre were distinct indicators of commandship. The middle and lower officers could have bronze *ge*, spears and arrows (with small-sized *yue* in some cases), *ge* and arrows, spears and arrows, or *ge* and spears, usually only in several pieces. As for ordinary soldiers, they were armed with bronze *ge*, spears or arrows alone, each person using one or two pieces in case of either of the former two.

III. Other Discussions

In addition to the knowledge of the arms equipment of Yin period officers and soldiers, two other conclusions can be drawn as follows in the light of the association of bronze weapons with bronze vessels in Shang tombs on the Yin Ruins.

1. The relativity of officials' duties in the Yin period

There were several classes of officials, who were in charge of politics, sacrifice, military affairs, divination, agriculture, *etc.* respectively. Their duties, however, were not so fixed and exclusive, on which some scholars have discussed. Here I would like to bring additional evidence on this problem.

On the official “qin 寗,” most of the researchers

believe that they were in charge of palaces. Among the Yin Ruins tombs with bronze weapons, Sikong-M539, -M29 and -M25 and Western-Area-M1713 all yielded bronze vessels bearing the inscription “qin 冏.” For example, Tomb Sikong-M539 has 14 bronze vessels, including five inscribed, of which two bear the characters “qin chu 冏出,” and one bears “qin 冏.” The bronze weapons are in the *yue-ge*-spearhead-arrowhead combination, numbering 65 pieces. Tomb Western-Area-M1713 contains 17 bronze vessels, largely made exclusively for funeral use, two exquisitely-made pieces bearing the inscription “qin yu 冏鱼.” Its bronze weapons are in the *yue-ge*-spearhead-sabre combination, numbering 64 pieces. These data suggest that the tomb-owners assumed before their death the office of “qin,” who acted also as officers commanding troops in battles.

On the official “zuo ce 作册,” the previous researchers generally took them to have been history recorders. In the tomb of Guojiazhuang-M50, some bronze vessels bear the inscription “zuo ce,” and the bronze weapons are in the *ge*-spearhead-arrowhead combination, totaling 14 pieces. Perhaps the tomb-owner would also lead troops into campaigns when he held the post of “zuo ce.”

2. The hereditary character of Yin official positions

As known from oracle bone inscriptions, the chiefs or supreme leaders of mighty clans could hold official posts generation after generation, especially the positions of military officers.

Among the Yin Ruins tombs with both bronze vessels and bronze weapons, some graves belonging to different phases have vessels that share the same inscriptions. The inscription “ya zhi 亚址,” for example, occurs in Tombs Guojiazhuang-M160 and -M53. The former yielded more than 1,000 *yue*, *ge*, spearheads, arrowheads and other weapons, and belongs to Phase III of the Yin Ruins culture; the latter contains 16 *ge*, spearheads and arrowheads, and goes back to late Phase IV of the same culture. The inscription “𠄎” is seen in the tombs Western-Area-M271 and -M1125. The former has three *ge* and a spearhead

and comes from Yin Ruins Phase III, while the latter contains a *ge*, a spearhead and three arrowheads and belongs to Yin Ruins Phase IV. The inscription “yi bei 邑贝” is recorded in Tombs Western-Area-M613 and -M355. The former yielded 10 *ge* and a spearhead, and dates from Yin Ruins Phase II; the latter, two *ge* and three spearheads, and from Phase III of the Yin Ruins culture.

The owners of the above-mentioned tombs all acted as military officers before their death. The owner of M160 was a higher-rank officer; that of M53, a middle- or lower-rank officer; and those of the other four tombs must have been lower officers.

As these groups of inscriptions occur on major bronze vessels of the tombs, I believe them to have been the marks of the clans that the tomb-owners belonged to. In other words, the chiefs or important figures of the Zhi, 𠄎, and Yibei clans acted as military officers of different periods. This conclusion can be verified with corresponding records in oracle bone inscriptions.

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