

# The remains of Yangshao Culture at Xiaowu Site in Lingbao City, Henan

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## Abstract

In 2007, Henan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology conducted survey and trial excavation to the Xiaowu Site in Lingbao City. The trial excavation recovered two tombs of early Yangshao Culture. Both of the tombs were rectangular earthen pit tombs of multiple secondary burials. The M1 of them yielded 79 individuals of human skeletons, and M2 yielded 17 individuals. The M1 was one of the large-scale multiple secondary burial tombs of the Yangshao Culture yielding the most individuals of human skeletons found to date. In the Sanmenxia area, the secondary burials of the Yangshao Culture are rare; these two secondary burial tombs found in Xiaowu Site are the first discovery of this type of burials of early Yangshao Culture in this area, and also the second collective discovery of multiple secondary burial tombs of early Yangshao Culture at the joint area of Shaanxi, Shanxi and Henan Provinces in the recent several decades, so they have significant academic values.

**Keywords:** Early Yangshao Culture; secondary burials—Neolithic Age; Xiaowu Site (Lingbao City, Henan)

## General introduction

The Xiaowu Site is situated in the south of Xiaowu Village of Yangdian Town in Lingbao City, Henan Province and occupies an area of about 10ha. In April 2007, through survey on the site we discovered two seriously damaged tombs of the Yangshao Culture at the village, in the south of the site. At once we reported the matter to the relevant department for the preservation of ancient monuments and, with its approval, conducted rescue clearance of the two graves. By using the trial trench method we opened two trenches (TG1 and TG2), which covered an area of about 14.2sq m, where we revealed two tombs (M1 and M2) and an ash pit (H1). Below is a description of these remains.

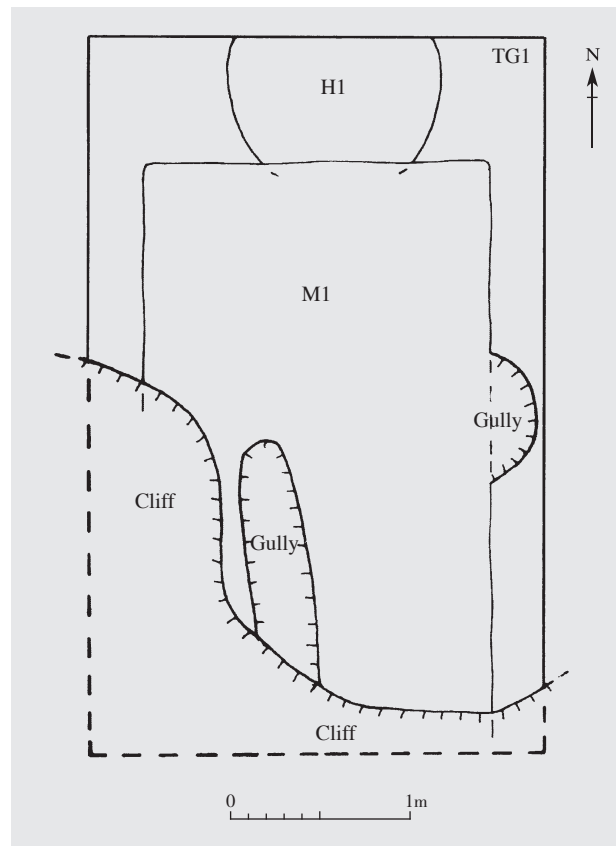
## Stratigraphy

The stratigraphical condition is rather simple. Either of the trial trenches is a rectangle with the major axis exactly in the north-south direction. TG1 containing tomb M1

measures 3.65m in length and 2.5m in width, and TG2 (about 60m west of TG1) related to tomb M2, is 3.2m long and 1.6m wide (Figures 1 and 2).

In TG1, the stratigraphical accumulations fall into two layers. The first layer is formed of surface soil with a thickness of 0–40cm. Beneath it are M1 and H1, both intruding the second layer and primary soil and belonging to the Yangshao Culture. The second layer is a yellowish-brown soil stratum without any artifacts and measures 25–30cm in thickness.

TG2 revealed four layers. The first layer is a surface soil stratum with a thickness of 10–15cm. The second layer is 30–40cm thick yellowish-brown soil and contains a few potsherds. It covers tomb M2 that intruded the third and fourth layers and primary soil. The third layer is formed of dark yellowish-brown soil that measures 3–30cm in thickness and yielded a few potsherds. The fourth layer consists of yellowish-gray soil with a thickness of 0–20cm and contains very few fragmental potsherds. Beneath the fourth layer is grayish-yellow



**Figure 1** The plan of excavation trench TG1.

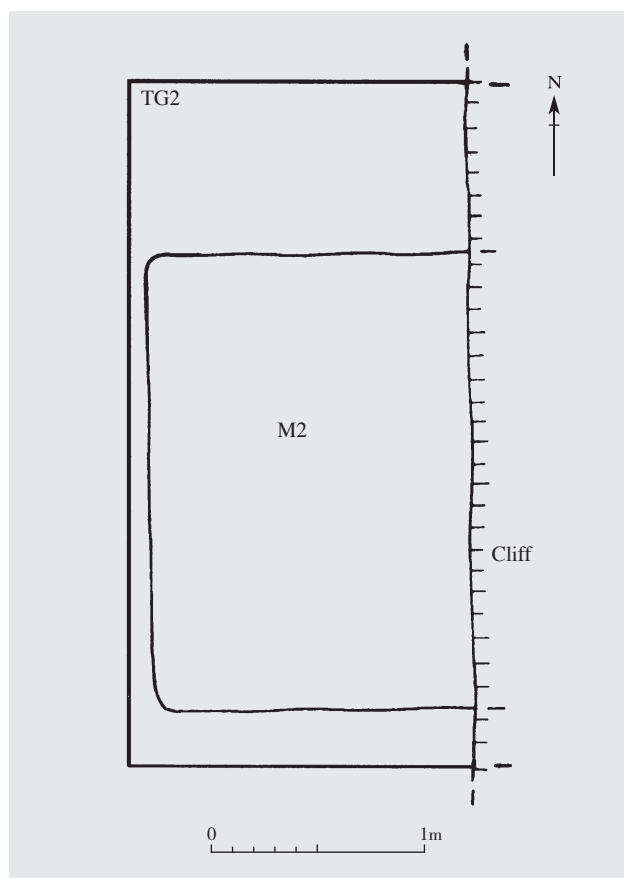


Figure 2 The plan of excavation trench TG2.



Figure 3 The plan and section of tomb M1.

1–79. Human bones (7, 8, 10, 11, 13–15, 18, 21, 31–36, 42, 46, 74, 77 are covered by other bones).

primary soil. The second to fourth layers and tomb M2 belong to the Yangshao Culture.

### Tomb M1

M1 is opened beneath the first layer and intruded into ash pit H1, the second layer and primary soil. The grave is a rectangular earthen shaft with roughly vertical walls and a flat bottom. Its southern part has been damaged, the remaining pit measures 3.1m in length from north to south, 1.89m in width from east to west, and 0.35m in depth. In the pit are grayish-brown earth fillings, which are loose in texture, contain a large amount of granular burnt clay and yielded a number of potsherds.

This is a multiple secondary burial. Through identification the bones of 79 individuals were discerned from the unearthed human remains, which were piled roughly in three west-to-east rows and without distinct layering. The northern pile is thinner, generally in one or two layers, while in the southern part especially southeastern corner, human bones form three layers. The closely gathered bones are skulls, pelvises, limb bones and ribs; other bones occurred rarely. The head points to the east in most cases, with few heading the northeast, northwest and southeast, and the ones heading west, north and south were rarely seen. In face direction, the upward ones come first, followed by the rightward, and the leftward are the rarest. In sex, the males total 27 individuals, the females 41, and 11 indiscernible. In age the dead can be divided into the youth (15–23 years old), more robust (24 to 35), middle-age (36 to 55) and underage (younger than 14) groups; no aged bones (older than 56) were discovered. The males occurred largely in the more robust and middle-aged groups, while the females died in their more robust period and especially in youth (Figures 3–7).

The earth fillings of M1 yielded potsherds, of which most belong to fine clay ware and some to sandy ware. In color the red sherds account for the majority, and the grayish-brown, gray and grayish-black ones occurred rarely. In decoration, most of the finds are plain-surfaced; polished sherds were sometimes seen. Designs were encountered occasionally, including concave bowstring pattern, cord mark, black straight-sided triangular and oblique line patterns. In form there are the basin, *bo*-curved-bellied bowl, wide-rimmed jar, small *bo*, etc.

The basin, two pieces. M1:1 is of red fine clay ware. It has an out-bent rim, a slightly bulging belly and a plain surface. The mouth diameter





Figure 4 Tomb M1 (W-E).



Figure 5 Tomb M1 (SW-NE).



Figure 6 Tomb M1 (NE-SW).



Figure 7 Northeastern corner of tomb M1 (N-S).

measures about 31.6cm (Figure 8:7). M1:2 belongs to yellowish-brown fine clay ware. It has an out-turned rim and a roughly vertical belly, and bears a concave bow-string pattern. The mouth diameter is about 26cm (Figure 8:13).

The *bo*-curved-bellied bowl, eight pieces. All belong to fine clay ware and each has a plain surface. M1:3 is red and has a reddish-brown circle along the rim. The mouth is slightly contracted; the belly curved. The mouth diameter measures 27.8cm (Figure 8:4). M1:4 is also red in body and has a yellowish-brown circle along the rim. The mouth is slightly curved and has a diameter of 31cm (Figure 8:6). M1:5 has a yellowish-brown surface and a gray inside. The mouth is contracted and measures about 30cm (Figure 8:2). M1:6 belongs to gray ware and bears a yellowish-brown belt along the rim. The mouth is slightly contracted and the belly is oblique and curved. The mouth diameter measures about 32cm (Figure 8:1). M1:7 is a yellowish-brown sherd with a yellow belt along the rim. The mouth is roughly vertical and measures about 28 cm in diameter (Figure 8:5). M1:8 has a yellowish-brown body and a roughly vertical mouth, which is about 32cm in diameter (Figure 8:8). M1:9 is of gray ware and has a reddish-brown circle along the rim. The mouth is roughly vertical and measures about 38cm in diameter (Figure

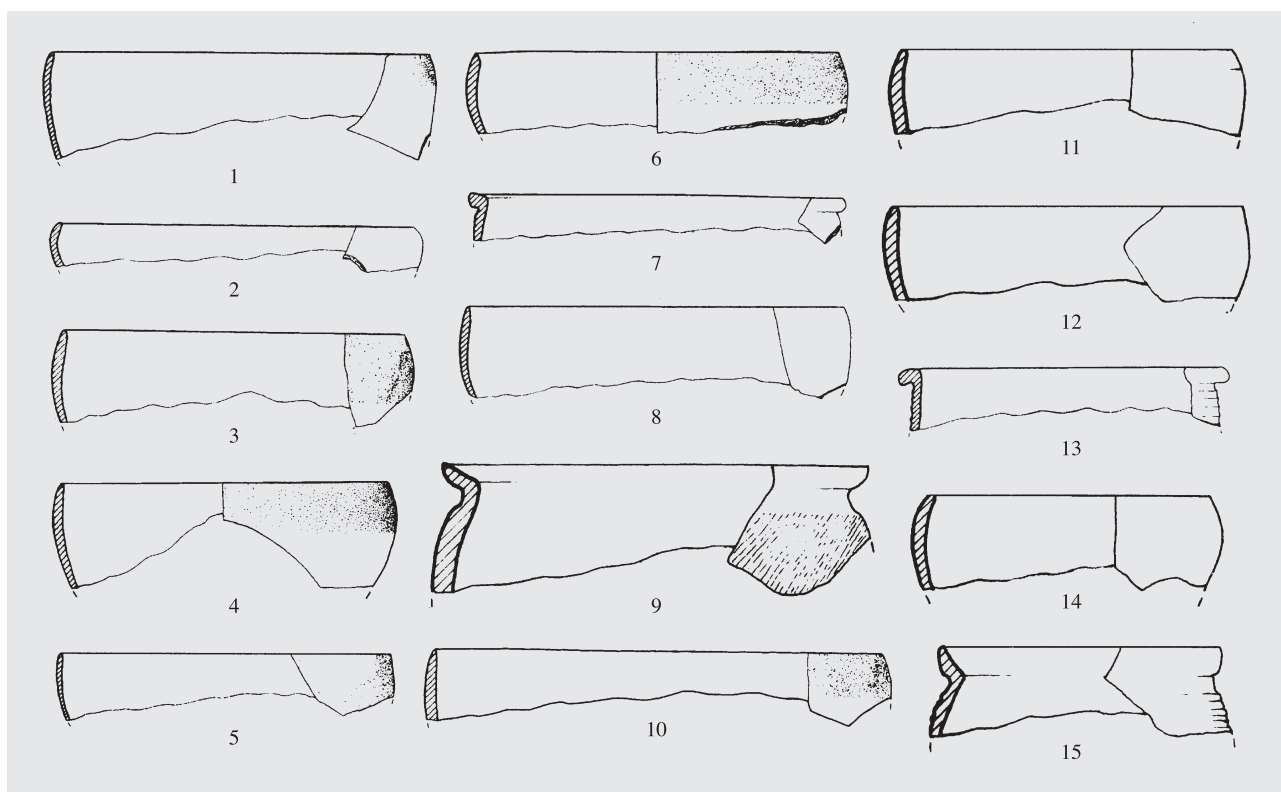
8:10). M1:10 is of gray ware and has a grayish-brown circle along the rim. The mouth is contracted and the belly curved. The mouth diameter measures about 29cm (Figure 8:3).

The small *bo*, three pieces. All belong to fine clay ware; each has a plain surface and a contracted mouth. M1:11 has a yellowish-brown body, a rounded lip and an oblique and curved belly. The mouth diameter is about 12cm (Figure 8:14). M1:12 is yellowish-brown in body and about 14cm in mouth diameter (Figure 8:11). M1:13 is red-bodied and has a slightly contracted mouth with the diameter measuring about 14.8cm (Figure 8:12).

The wide-rimmed jar: two pieces. The rim is out-bent with the upward side slightly concave; and the belly is curved. M1:14 belongs to gray sandy ware and has a rounded rim. The belly is decorated with concave bowstring pattern. The mouth diameter measures about 12cm (Figure 8:15). M1:15 is of grayish-brown sandy ware. It has a pointed rounded lip and a cord mark-decorated belly. The mouth diameter measures about 18cm (Figure 8:9).

In addition, a few round potsherds were yielded from the tomb. They are made of red or yellowish-brown fine clay potsherds.





**Figure 8** Potteries unearthed from tomb M1.

1–6, 8 and 10. *Bo*-curved-bellied bowls (M1:6, M1:5, M1:10, M1:3, M1:7, M1:4, M1:8 and M1:9); 7 and 13. Basins (M1:1 and M1:2); 9 and 15. Wide-rimmed jars (M1:15 and M1:14); 11, 12 and 14. Small *bo* (M1:12, M1:13 and M1:11).

## Tomb M2

Tomb M2 is located a little south of the middle of excavation trench TG2. It is opened beneath the second layer and intruded into the third and fourth layers and primary soil. The grave is a rectangular earthen shaft in east-west orientation with the walls made roughly vertical and the bottom flat. It measures 2.13m in length from the north to the south, 1.65m in remaining width as the eastern part has been damaged, and 0.4m in remaining depth. In the grave are grayish-brown loose earthen fillings, which contain granular burnt clay and ashes, and yielded some potsherds.

M2 is also a multiple secondary burial and contains human remains of 17 individuals according to the results of osteological identification. These bones are put relatively sparsely and only in one layer, where pelvises and limb bones form the most, and skulls and ribs were encountered in a small number. The remaining several skulls are all discovered above long bones. Their rare occurrence may be a result of the damage discovered in the pit's eastern part where most of the skulls were put in. These skulls are heading the southwest, south or northeast while all are facing upward. Among the examined bones eight individuals belong to males, six to females, and

three are unknown in sexual attribution. The dead are largely more robust years old and middle-aged; youth's remains are rare. The males died in their middle-age or more robust period, while the females died mostly in their more robust period and seldom in youth. No grave goods were found in the grave (Figures 9–11).

The earthen fillings yielded only 17 potsherds of fine clay ware, among which nine are reddish-brown, six red and two grayish-black in color. They are plain except for one piece with concave bowstring pattern. In form, there are the basin, *bo*-curved-bellied bowl and bowl.

The basin, one piece (M2:1) is found. It belongs to red fine clay ware. The rim is slightly out-curved; the belly roughly vertical. Below the rim is a damaged perforation. A group of fine dense concave bow-string patterns is made on the belly. The mouth diameter is about 28.5cm (Figure 12:6).

The *bo*, four pieces. They are of red clay ware and without decorations. M2:2 is reddish-brown and gray for the outer and inner sides respectively. It has a contracted mouth, a concave groove on the inner side of the lip, swollen shoulders and a curved belly. The mouth diameter measures about 23cm (Figure 12:5). M2:3 is red in body and has a contracted mouth and a pointed round lip. The mouth diameter is about 22cm (Figure 12:4). M2:4 belongs



to reddish-brown ware. It has a slightly contracted mouth, a rounded lip and bulging shoulder. The mouth diameter measures about 27cm (Figure 12:1). M2:5 is a reddish-brown sherd and has a roughly vertical mouth, which measures about 27.8cm in diameter (Figure 12:2).

The bowl, one piece (M2:6). It belongs to red clay ware. The mouth is widely opened, the belly oblique and the surface plain. The mouth diameter measures about 26cm (Figure 12:3).

### Ash pit H1

This pit is located in the middle of the north of excavation trench TG1, extends northwards beyond the trench, and is opened beneath the first layer. It intruded into the second layer and primary soil and was intruded by tomb M1 in the southern part. Its plan is round, the wall vertical and the bottom flat. The mouth measures 1.12m in diameter and 0.55m in depth. In the pit are grayish loose earth fillings, which contain a small amount of granular burnt clay and yielded relatively rich potsherds.

The potsherds are largely of fine clay ware; sandy ones occurred rarely. They are red in body except for a small number of grayish-brown and gray sherds. The plain-surfaced ones took overwhelming majority; designs were seen seldom, only concave bowstring and cord mark patterns were encountered. In form there are the basin, *bo*, bowl and narrow-rimmed jar types.

The basin: two pieces. Either has a curved rim. H1:1 is of red clay ware. It has a thin rim, a slightly swollen belly with the lower part obliquely

contracted and a flat bottom. The upper belly is decorated with a fine dense concave bow-string pattern. The mouth diameter measures 38.6cm (Figure 13:5). H1:2 belongs to reddish-brown clay ware. The rim is thick, the lip pointed and the belly obliquely curved. The upper belly bears a wide bowstring pattern, and the lower belly is decorated with cord marks, which have been cut by the bowstring pattern. The mouth is about 32cm in diameter (Figure 13:6).

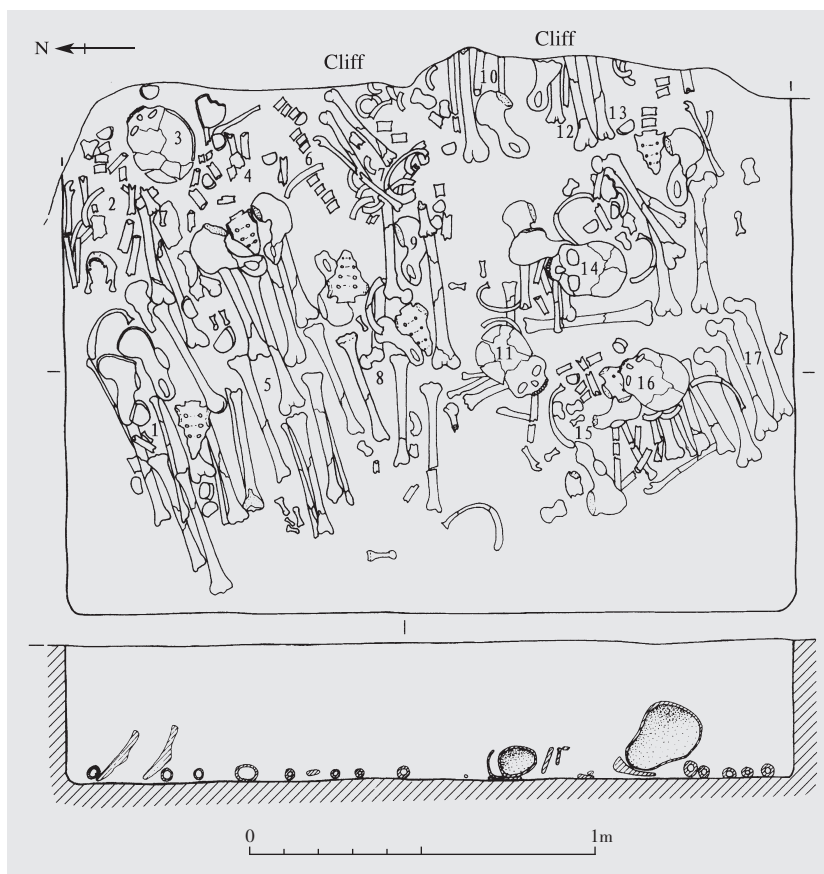


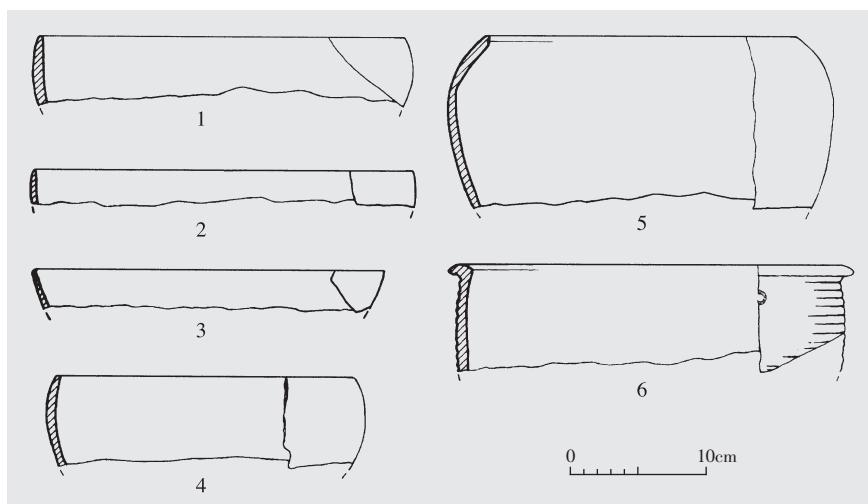
Figure 9 The plan and section of tomb M2.  
1-17. Human bones.



Figure 10 Tomb M2 (W-E).

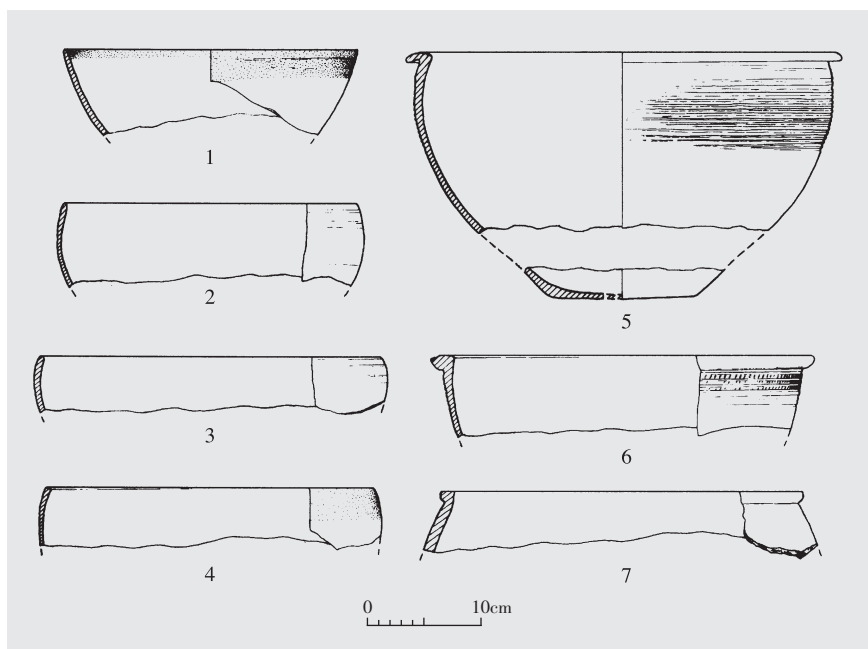


Figure 11 Tomb M2 (N-S).



**Figure 12** Potteries from tomb M2.

1, 2, 4 and 5. *Bo* (M2:4, M2:5, M2:3 and M2:2); 3. Oblique-bellied bowl (M2:1); 6. Basin (M2:1).



**Figure 13** Potteries from ash pit H1.

1. Bowl (H1:4); 2–4. *Bo* (H1:3, H1:5 and H1:6); 5 and 6. Basins (H1:1 and H1:2); 7. Narrow-rimmed jar (H1:7).

The *bo*, three pieces. Each has slightly contracted mouth, a curved belly and a plain surface. H1:3 is of red fine clay ware. It has a pointed round lip; the shoulder bear traces of scraping. The mouth is about 25.7cm in diameter (Figure 13:2). H1:5 belongs also to red fine clay ware. The lip is rounded and the shoulders bear traces of scraping. The mouth is about 30cm in diameter (Figure 13:3). H1:6 has a grayish-brown fine clay body. The rim is squared and bears a reddish-brown circle. The mouth measures about 29cm in diameter (F13:4).

The bowl, one piece (H1:4). It belongs to grayish-

brown fine clay ware and bears a red belt on either side of the rim. The mouth is flaring, the rim rounded and pointed, and the belly curved. The surface is plain. The mouth diameter measures 27.5cm (Figure 13:1).

The narrow-rimmed jar, one piece (H1:7). It is of grayish-brown sandy ware. The rim is flat with a squared round lip; the surface is plain. The mouth diameter measures about 32cm (Figure 13:7).

## Conclusions

The tombs of the Xiaowu Site contain no grave goods. Nevertheless, judged by their stratigraphical position, form and burial custom and the distinctive features of the potsherds from their earth fillings and the cultural layers associated with them, it can be concluded that in cultural nature and date, this batch of remains is roughly identical with the finds of Yangshao Culture Phase I at the Nanjiaokou Site in Sanmenxia, Henan and those of Yangshao Culture Phase II recorded at the Dongguan Site in the Old Yuanqu City, Shanxi. All of them belong to the Dongzhuang Type of early Yangshao Culture in the western Henan and southwestern Shanxi regions and can be attributed to the mid and late stages of this type. Chronologically the two tombs are slightly different from each other with M1 a little earlier than M2.

Through the clearance we gained a basic understanding on the form and burial custom of the two graves. M1 yielded human bones as many as 79 individuals;

as its south part has been damaged, the entombed human bones must have been still more, so it is a large-sized multiple secondary burial and can be rated to be one of the largest secondary burials recorded so far in the Yangshao Culture with the individuals it contains coming first in number. The human bones from the two tombs mainly include skulls, pelvises, limb bones and ribs, which belong to either male and female adults or underage children, but no remains of the aged people were in association with them. As known from the bones identifiable in sex, the females died mostly in their youth or more robust



period, while the males passed away in their more robust or middle age, thus the females died at a younger age than the males did. In M1, the bones are gathered densely; and, except for the destroyed, they were generally entombed with the skull put on pelvises and limb bones. In M2, the human bones are put sparsely, with the limb bones forming the most while the skulls rarely seen. This may be due to the damage of the pit's eastern part where the gathered skulls have been destroyed. Probably it was an embodiment of some difference between the two tombs.

The Xiaowu tombs are the first discovery of this burial type among the early Yangshao Culture remains known so far in the Sanmenxia area of western Henan. Their revelation, as well as the discovery of this sort of burial among the early Yangshao Culture vestiges at the Qiandian Site in Lingbao and other ruins, indicates that the secondary burial must have been one of the basic entombment styles of the Dongzhuang Type in the western Henan and southwestern Shanxi areas. In the 1950s through 1970s, a large number of sites in these areas and the Guanzhong Region were discovered in association with multiple secondary burials of the early Yangshao Culture, which in academic circles was generally taken as

the evidence of the existence and prevalence of this burial custom in the Banpo Type of Yangshao Culture within the Guanzhong Region. The excavation on the Xiaowu Site with this sort of tomb discovered once again in the early Yangshao Culture amended the relevant understanding. Despite their affiliation to the same multiple secondary burial, a lot of tombs in the Banpo Type contain grave goods while those of the Dongzhuang Type yielded no grave goods, which indicates that still certain difference exists between the tombs of these two types. The discovery of multiple secondary burials in the early Yangshao's Dongzhuang Type within the Sanmenxia area of western Henan found more direct source for the mid Yangshao's multiple secondary burial custom recorded on the Nanjiaokou Site in the same area.

### Postscript

The original report published in *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology) 2011. 12: 3–22 with 12 illustrations, two pages of plates, two tables and an appendix was authored by Wei Xingtao 魏兴涛. The abridged version is prepared by the author and translated into English by Mo Runxian 莫润先.