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RITUAL FOOD VESSEL (ting)

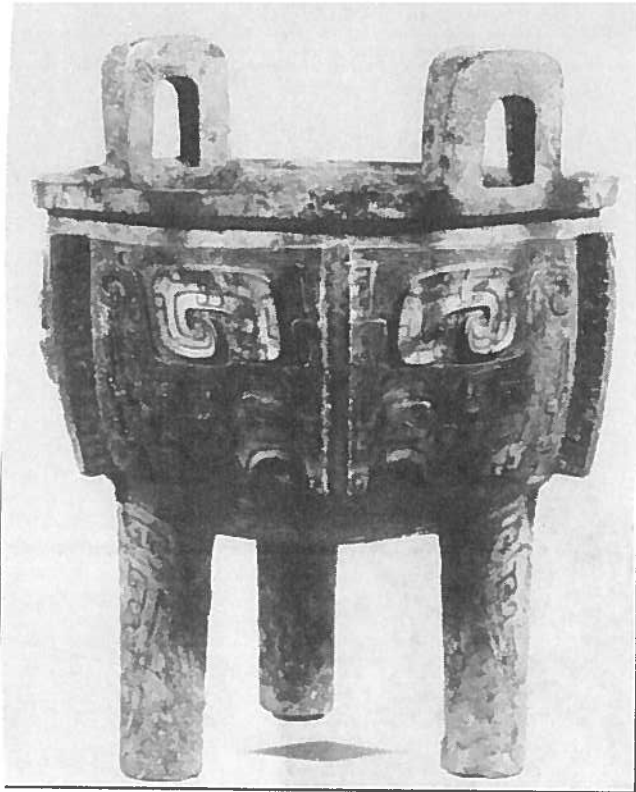
Chinese, Shang dynasty, ca. 1200–1000 B.C.

Bronze: $9\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{4}$ in. (24.1 × 19.7 cm.)

Purchase, 1940 (4838)

4838

Ritual Food Vessel (ding)



NEW CHINESE BRONZE AGE GALLERY

Attention is drawn to a newly-effected presentation of the Academy's holdings of Chinese bronze age material. The small but distinguished collection has been installed in an intimate, entirely new setting adjoining Gallery 18 of the Chinese section. Shadow-box display cases are equipped with humidity and light controls to assure a proper atmosphere for bronze preservation.

Spanning a period from the Shang to Han Dynasties (11th century B.C. to 2nd century A.D.), this group of rare treasures includes objects of jade and marble as well as ritual vessels, weapons and ornaments of bronze, some inlaid with gemstones. An important, recently-acquired 4th century B.C. covered vessel, decorated with a malachite inlay design, is shown for the first time.

CHINESE RITUAL VESSEL OF THE TYPE TING
Shang Dynasty, 11th century B.C., bronze,
10-1/8" x 7-1/2" x 6-1/16"
Purchase in memory of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1967

Among the artworks discussed on the group tour of Chinese art is this ritual food vessel (4838). 2-91



BRONZE

The bronze ritual vessels created in the Shang Dynasty (15th to 11th century B.C.) for use in ceremonies to honor ancestors are among the greatest of China's tomb treasures. It is thought that royal spirits acted as intermediaries between Shang society and a supreme deity they called Shang Di. Not just food and wine but offerings of flesh and blood were required. Humans and animals were offered in large scale sacrifices to ancestral and nature spirits.

Ritual Food Vessel (*ding*)

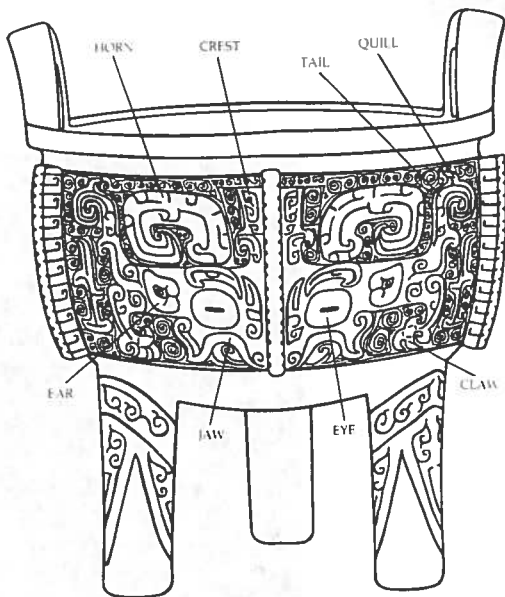
Chinese, Shang Dynasty, ca. 1200-1000 B.C.

Bronze: 9 1/2 x 7 3/4 in.

Purchase, 1940 (4838)

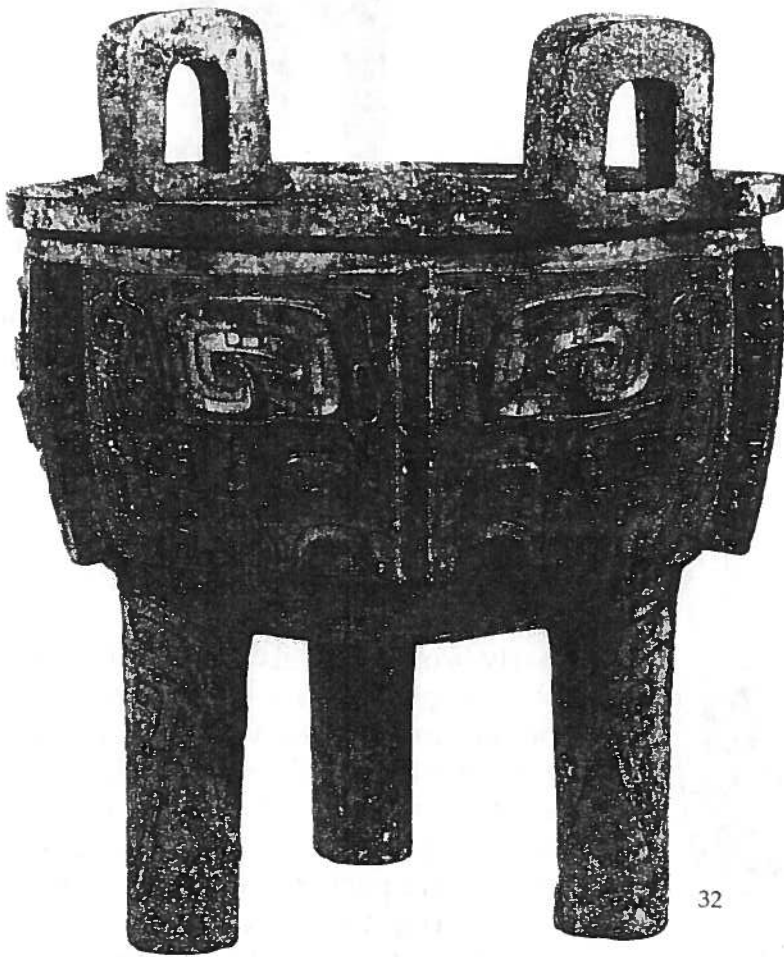


What is most interesting is the design motif called the *taotie* that occurs on almost all Shang bronzes. In this superb tripod from the Academy collection, the motif is seen in a classic example of its fully developed phase. While there are a very few scholars who think the *taotie* is simply a decoration, to most it seems clear that it is a major totem; a symbol of power, ancestors or deities. The beast-like motif was probably a protector and/or a spirit that had to be appeased. The articulated flanges at the juncture of the mold seams in bronzes from this period, serve as a complementary design feature.



Early bronze vessels show that the basic shapes evolved from simple Neolithic pottery prototypes. Vessels were made in a piece mold. 1. The process begins with a solid clay model that looks like the finished product. 2. Mold sections, made of clay, are packed around the model, transferring the form and the surface designs onto the mold. 3. The outer surface of the model is shaved off to form the core. The amount of clay removed determines the thickness of the bronze in the finished vessel.

4. Vent holes for escaping gases and a pouring inlet are cut into the top of the mold and the separate parts of the assembly (core and mold) are fired to the hardness of earthenware. 5. Once fired the mold sections are reassembled around the core. 6. The bronze is poured in and the mold broken off before the bronze is completely cooled. 7. The completed bronze vessel is burnished smooth.



32

32 inscription



Purchase, 1940
Bronze, 9-1/4" high

11th century, B.C.
Gallery 18 A

ARTIST: Not made by a single individual, but by a foundry group.

SUBJECT: A bronze age altar with offerings to the ancestors would have held many such vessels. More than 12,000 have been excavated since 19th century A.D. of which there are 50 known types, the Ting is the most numerous. Vessels were made for cooking, containing and serving food, for pouring and drinking millet wine, for mixing wine with water, in a religious ritual of preparing and offering food for Gods and ancestors.

Occasions for casting a bronze have a very wide range; from successful end of military raid, recording of treaties, deeds of land and gifts or appointments from King or other superior, to be taken on a journey, as a wedding present.

The inscription often ends with request that the vessel be treasured "forever" by descendant of the man who had it cast, but it eventually was buried, either with the owner, or as an heirloom with one of the descendants, accompanying him to the spirit world. All bronzes have come from tombs.

MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUE: Bronze technology was mastered early by the Chinese by 3rd millennium B.C. (3000-2000 B.C.). Bronze is an alloy of 9/10 copper and 1/10 tin, sometimes with lead added. According to recent (1962) theory (see Fairbank, W: piece mold craftsmanship ...) bronze vessels were

cast from "piece molds", made of clay. The mold process: a vessel was made of clay as a model. From model a "piece mold" was made by pressing wet clay to the model. (Vertical flanges mark the joints where the sections of the piece mold fit together.) The casting done with molten metal poured into the hollow area between the outer section of the mold and the interior section. When cool the pieces were gold or honey colored and carefully trimmed. Design may have been pressed into the clay from carved wooden molds or designs may have been carved directly into the model. Details like the meander may have been painted in red. Blue and green patina result of oxidation by the salts in the earth and erosion, from burial in earth.

STYLE: The various vessels were made during certain of the bronze age eras and not during others. Some vessels had limited production, other like the Ting, were continued throughout the Bronze Age and into the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - A.D. 220). Shapes, decorations and motifs also changed. Many different schemes have been proposed by scholars for the style phases. The listing below follows Yett's phases (from Willetts' Chinese Art). First phase (Shang and early Chou) 13-10th century B.C.: geometric ornament, animal forms (i.e. zoomorphic), the "T'ao Tieh" (glutton dragon found in paintings), "Thunder pattern" segmented flanges rather close to body of vessel. Some animals in relief in the round shown somewhat naturalistically (i.e. lids, handles) and other animals disassembled and recombined with parts of other animals. This piece shows the "T'ao tieh" mask motif: a composite animal face with no lower jaw, parts of various animals assembled, often combined with profile body of a "dragon" in a double image. Said to be a warning against gluttony, but this may be erroneous. Possibly a "guardian against evil" intended to give a magic potency in the ritual offerings.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS: The beauty of the patina, the subtle layering of color that could not be purely produced by man alone. Compare this piece with a similar sized one to the right which is square and has 4 legs rather than the round one with 3 legs. Which shape is more pleasing to your eye?

Ritual Vessel Ting (#4838)
Purchase 1940
Bronze, 9-1/4" high

GALT 8a

China
11th c B.C.
Shang Dyn.
Gallery 18a

ARTIST: Unknown

DESCRIPTION: Tripod with solid legs. Surface is relatively clean of corrosion. Excellent Tao Tieh in relief, shaped with horn and ear curves, etc. projecting even further. Graceful outward curve of rim loops. Even, simple flanges.

Decor: Clear, prominent Tao Tieh combined of 2 dragons nose to nose, ram's horns, ox ears, and forehead crest design very clear.

MEDIUM & TECHNIQUE: Cast bronze

USE: For cooking food to offer ancestors in a ritual.

Made - 11th c B.C. to before 3rd c A.D. Shang into Han Dyn.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS: An excellent vessel to show the double image of dragons becoming mask. Show the drawing to compare. Tall students may look inside to see the inscription under the rim.

Ting pronounced "Ding"

This superb tripod, with harmoniously balanced form and crisply articulated *t'ao-t'ieh* motif, perfectly illustrates the salient characteristics of the bronze caster's art at its very best. The style and technique is associated with the later years of the Shang dynasty. The *t'ao-t'ieh*, or ogre mask, seen here is a classic example of the motif in its fully developed phase. No explanation for the meaning of the *t'ao-t'ieh* nor the sources of its form have yet been convincingly offered. The two-character inscription on the inner wall of this vessel has been translated by Robert J. Poir as "[dedicated to] Son i or Clan-sign i." HAL

RITUAL FOOD VESSEL (ting)

Chinese Shang dynasty, ca. 1200-1000 B.C.
Bronze 9 1/4 x 7 1/4 x 7 1/4 (23.8 x 18.8 x 18.8 cm)
Purchase 1940-4838

Ritual food vessel (*ting*)

late Shang dynasty

bronze; h. 9½" (23.5 cm.), diam. 7¾" (19.7 cm.).

Purchase, 1940 (4838)

This fine tripod perfectly illustrates the salient characteristics of the bronze style associated with the later years of the Shang dynasty. Its stout body is harmoniously balanced on three tapered legs, conveying in visual terms the sense of stability that is apparent when one actually handles the vessel. All of the major parts of the *t'ao-t'ieh* motif, which appears unchallenged by any other ornament on the bowl of the tripod, are rendered in relief but with a fine distinction between the degree of projection of the various parts of the composition, which reveals their relative importance in the overall assembly. Thus, the facial features, curving jaw and nostrils, eyes, eyebrows and ears are laid over the supporting shield-like formation, which serves as the "skull," and those other forms in the same plane which function as the parts of the body. Special stress is placed on the horns shaped like a recumbent "C." In them one can find an exciting and essentially sculptural effect evident in the dynamic treatment of the contours, which are sharp and rise from the wall of the vessel to form an enticing peak at the sharp tip of the formation. The style is quintessentially plastic, eliciting memories of modeling forms in clay and that particular pleasure at having made a three dimensional form.

The appeal to our haptic response is enhanced by the contrasting treatment given to the background. There, the finely cast lines of the smaller spirals of the fill ornament provide an almost pictorial contrast to the reflective elements of the motif proper, an effect that is created by the difference in texture between these minuscule lines and the massive features of the *t'ao-t'ieh*.

The emphatic treatment given to the *t'ao-t'ieh* motif on bronzes of this style inevitably elicits questions regarding its symbolic significance and the possibility of identifying some specific creature in nature which may have served as a model for it, whether whole or in part. Despite the ingenuity which has gone into these iconographical studies, no satisfactory explanation for the meaning of the *t'ao-t'ieh* nor for the sources of its forms has yet been developed. In all likelihood, the *t'ao-t'ieh* and the other zoomorphically oriented motifs found on Shang bronzes are best understood as a blending of certain elements drawn from nature in a metaphorically magical configuration. The fact that it is the *t'ao-t'ieh* motif, as manifested in this late phase of Shang art, which usually evokes a sense of content and meaning is largely a question of style, since there is little substantive difference between this form of the

motif and versions of it made in earlier times.

The somewhat timid rendition of the triangular motifs on the legs, conventionally identified as stylized versions of the cicada, is traditional. They are often cast as shallow incised forms which in no way compete with the dominant decor on the body itself. The prominent flanges which fall naturally at the juncture of mold seams or the joints of a pattern are regularly articulated in bronzes of this period and serve as a complementary design feature reinforcing the plastic effect of the entire construction.

There is a crisply cast, two-character inscription on the inner wall of the vessel just under the lip. The second character is the ritual name *i*, drawn as is customary from one of the "ten celestial stems." It is normally interpreted as signifying the day on which the ancestor died or was worshiped. In this instance, it is rather quizzically combined with the character for "son" (which might simply be a clan sign) rather than the more common ancestral association like "father," "mother" or "uncle." Thus, the inscription would translate "(dedicated to) Son *i*" or "Clan-sign *i*."

Published:

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Link, Howard. "Curator's Choice: Honolulu Bronzes." *Oriental Art*, vol. 5, no. 11 (November 1974), p. 31, fig. 4 and pp. 36-37.