

# Historical Perspectives on the Introduction of the Chariot into China

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

THE first systematic archaeological excavations conducted by Academia Sinica, from 1929 to 1937 in Anyang, revealed a late Shang site with a surprisingly developed material culture. In the archaeological context of that time, several features in the cultural inventory of Anyang appeared as abrupt innovations, prompting suggestions, especially from Western scholars, of Western influence. Subsequent excavations within China have served to demonstrate more gradual developmental sequences, if not necessarily indigenous origins, for most of these artifacts. Despite these archaeological advances, however, the fully developed form of the chariot found at Anyang remains China's earliest evidence of this most important and technologically sophisticated of all Bronze Age artifacts. The combination of this abrupt appearance of the chariot within China and the striking similarity Chinese models

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189

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pp. 189-237

TABLE 1: SHANG ORACLE-BONE INSCRIPTIONS CONTAINING THE WORD *CHE*

## Hunting

1. Crack on *guisi* (day 30), Que divining: "In the ten-day week there will be no harm." The king prognosticated saying: "Then this also has danger as in the omen." On *jiawu* (day 31), the king went out in chase of rhinoceros. The Minor Vassal harmed the chariot and horse, overturning the king's chariot; Prince Yang also fell out. *Jinghua* 1; I.B
2. Crack on .. *hai*, Que divining: "In the ten-day week there will be no harm." The king prognosticated . . . On *dingmao* (day 4), the king's valet (?) Bi drove the chariot and horses . . . standing in the chariot netted horses, also . . . *Yicun* 980; I.B
3. . . . no harm." The king prognosticated saying: "There is danger." . . . Mao drove the chariot . . . chariot netted horses, also there was standing . . . *Qianbian* 7.5.3; I.B
4. . . . chariot . . . there was standing . . . *Yizhu* 290; I.B
5. . . . day *dingmao* (day 4) . . . harmed the chariot and horses . . . *Tieyun* 114.1; I.B
6. Crack on . . . : "If the king chases deer, he will make a catch." Really . . . the king's chariot . . . *Nanfang* 3.71; I.L

## Warfare

7. Chu, ? . . . Gong chariots . . . no harm. *Kufang* 1686; II.B
8. . . . Minor Vassal Qiang allied and attacked, capturing Rou of Wei . . . twenty-four men, 1,570 (men) of Er, the Earl of Fan . . . horses, two chariots, 183 shields, 50 quivers, and . . . arrows. (They used =) sacrificed Earl Du of You to Da Yi, (used =) sacrificed Earl Mao of Shen to . . . Fan to Ancestor Yi, and (used =) sacrificed Rou to Ancestor Ding. Ran Gan Jing(?) awarded . . . *Jingjin* 202; IV-V.WM

## Personal Name

9. . . . chase . . . at Che . . . deer-net; this . . . *Tieyun* 160.3; I.B
10. Divining: "Go out . . . Che will lead . . ." *Jiabian* 1003; I.B
11. Che is not expected to lead PN. *Tieyun* 140.1; I.B
12. . . . at Che(?) dance . . . *Yibian* 8081; I.B
13. Crack on *wuchen* (day 5): Che . . . ? from now this month. *Yibian* 324; I.B

## Miscellaneous

14. . . . palace chariot and horses . . . capital. *Cunzhen* 1.743; I.B
15. . . . chariot . . . not . . . harm . . . *Menzius* 1334; II.C
16. Let it be the right charioteer who will perform ritual to Brother Xin. *Nanbei* 641; III.WM

and four others seem to derive from a single divination (Table 1: 2-5). Moreover, in these sixteen occurrences, there are at least thirteen distinct variations in the way the graph is written (fig. 4). I would suggest that the instability of the graph at this time may be an indication of the recent acquisition of the chariot, just as foreign loanwords in modern languages go through a period of impromptu variation before eventually being standardized.

Most of the inscriptions containing the word *che* are extremely fragmentary and offer little or no context from which to view the use of the chariot, but a few of them are complete enough to enable us to make some comments. These inscriptions fall into two types: those pertaining to the Shang king's personal use of chariotry, and those pertaining to its use by (western) enemies of the Shang state. Of these, the inscriptions indicating the king's personal use (Table 1: 1-6) are chronologically the earliest, all belonging to the standard "Diviner Bin goup" (I.B) inscriptions of late in Wu Ding's reign.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> For a brief introduction to this oracle-bone periodization, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, "Recent Approaches to Oracle-Bone Periodization: A Review," *Early China* 8 (1982-83): 1-13. In this and subsequent studies, I propose to use notations of the form "I.B." to

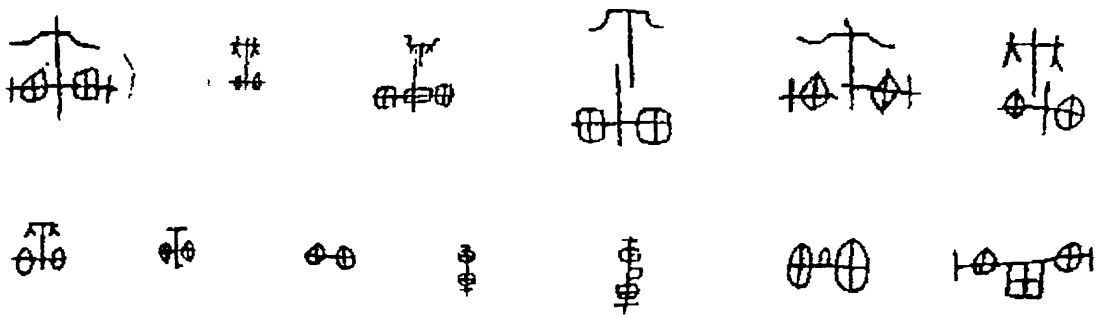


Fig. 4. Variations in the oracle-bone form of the graph *che*. (From Sun Haibo 孫海波, *Jiaguwen bian* 甲骨文編 [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965], pp. 531-532.)

All of these inscriptions pertain to hunting, the quarry being rhinoceros (Table 1:1), horses (Table 1: 2-3) and deer (Table 1: 6). Let us consider in somewhat more detail the first of these inscriptions, which in any case is the only one that is completely intact.

發已卜戲貞：旬亡𠄎。王固曰：乃茲亦出崇若𠄎。甲午王往逐蒙。小臣古車馬殲于王車，子央亦陸。

Crack on *guisi* (day 30), Que divining: "In the ten-day week there will be no harm." The king prognosticated saying: "Then this also has danger as in the omen." On *jiawu* (day 31), the king went out in chase of rhinoceros. The Minor Vassal harmed the chariot and horse, overturning the king's chariot; Prince Yang also fell out.

(*Jinghua* 1; I.B)

Although two words in this inscription remain problematic despite an extensive literature regarding their meaning here,<sup>43</sup> the general sense of the divination is clear. All four features of a complete divination inscription—Preface, Charge, Prognostication and Verification—are present. The divination charge proper is of the simplest type, regarding the fortune of the coming ten-day week. The king's personal prognostication then indicates that he regarded the divination as inauspicious. Finally, his prognostication is proved correct on the very first day of the next ten-day week. In the course of a rhinoceros hunt over rough ground, the king's chariot was overturned, and a royal prince named Yang was thrown out. There is no indication that the king was hurt, but it would seem that Prince Yang was severely injured.<sup>44</sup> It goes without saying that ac-

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characterize the periodization of inscriptions, with Roman numerals I through V corresponding to the regnal periods of Dong Zuobin's 董作賓 five-period periodization (i.e., I: Wu Ding; II: Zu Geng, Zu Jia; III: Lin Xin, Kang Ding; IV: Wu Yi, Wen Ding; V: Di Yi, Di Xin) and capital letters designating the diviner group to which the inscription belongs (i.e., D: Dui; B: Bin; L: Li; C: Chu; He: He; WM: Wuming [No Diviner group]; H: Huang; and also D-B for the Dui-Bin Transitional group and D-L for the Dui-Li Transitional group). This type of dual notation is preferable to either of the single notations now in use, since a single period often included more than one diviner group and a single diviner group often extended over two or more periods.

<sup>43</sup> 𠄎, here translated without great conviction as "omen" and 𠄎, translated as "harm"; see Li Xiaoding 李孝定, *Jiaguwenzi jishi* 甲骨文字集釋 (Nangang: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo zhuankan 50, 1965), pp. 2635ff and 0583ff, respectively.

<sup>44</sup> All of the other inscriptions involving this figure (See Shima, p. 30) feature exorcism rituals intended to cure his injuries, with most of those that contain dates coming just after the *jiawu* (day 31) of this accident. To cite just one example: 貞：來乙巳酒子央御。 . . . Divining: "On the coming *yisi* (day 42), libate Prince Yang and exorcise . . ." (*Xubian* 2.7.9; I.B)