



壶 Hu Cat. 12

Period I-II of Late Shang Period, H. 36.8 cm, W. at rim 19.2 cm
Inscription: one lineage emblem 卣

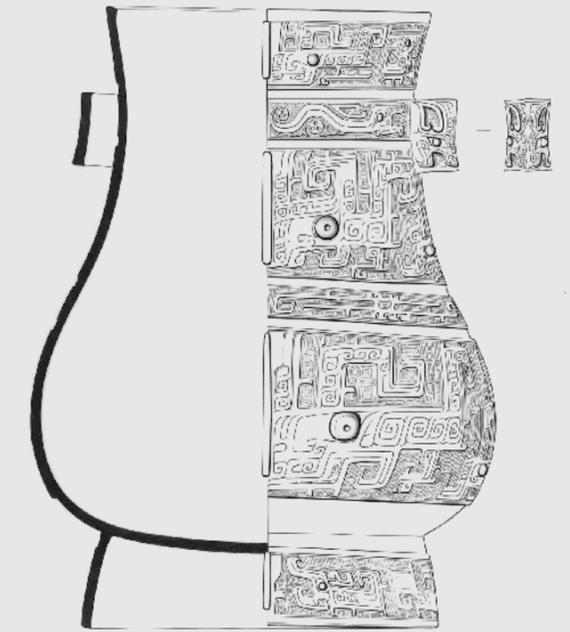
The most conspicuous feature of this *hu* is its flattened ellipse cross section, making its decoration almost fully visible from a single frontal vantage point.¹ Set on a conical foot, the body has a pear-shaped profile. At the neck, the silhouette is interrupted by a pair of vertical lugs curved to repeat the profile of the vessel. The lugs, which are V-shaped in cross section, lie on mold lines, one of which has an irregular opening near the foot.

This vessel is homogeneously covered from mouth to foot with patterns in flat relief set against a meander background. The only protruding elements are the hemispherical eyes of various animals that appear in five of the six registers of decoration. Two *taotie* on the central flanges are flanked by four dragons on the foot register and the two main body registers (fig. 1), while the mouth register has two *taotie* flanked by four birds (fig. 2). On the foot register, the dragons are centered on the central flanges, while the *taotie* are centered on the vertical line through the lugs. On the narrow mouth and foot registers, the dragon bodies are

elongated and horizontal, whereas on the main body registers, the dragon bodies are more vertical. On the neck register are four dragons that flank the two lugs. The dragons have leaf-shaped ears and long sinuous bodies with whirls at the bends of their torsos (fig. 3). These whirls are likely visual manifestations of *qi* energy, the intrinsic energy that permeates the entire universe, and signify the animation and movement of the dragon through water. The middle narrow register is formed of four asymmetrical units, each unit consisting of a broad, hooked-ribbon set with a single

eye (fig. 4). Each of the animals in the six decorative registers is arranged horizontally in opposition to the adjacent register. In other words, the mouth register is centered on the flange, while the neck register is centered on the lugs, and so on down the body of the vessel. Each of the lugs is decorated with an animal head with huge horns. The complexity of each element, as well as the overall decorative scheme, cannot be overemphasized.

On the interior of the mouth is a pictographic inscription, usually called a lineage emblem. This particular graph has been found on four other vessels and has been transcribed as 卣,² but this transcription is still considered very



¹ This piece was previously in the H. G. Oeder Collection and Bella and P.P. Chiu Collection, and published in: Hentze 1941, pl. XLIV, no. 92; Rawson 1988: no. 5; Sotheby's 1984.6.19: 8; Liu & Wang 2007: 326.
² Zhang Yachu 2001: p. 370, no. 583.

tentative. On one vessel this graph stands alone, just like the MacLean Collection piece (app., cat. 12, 1:1).³ On the second, this graph is followed by *Fu Xin*, or Father Xin (app., cat. 12, 1:2).⁴ On the third, it is combined with two pictographs of books and followed by *Fu Yi*, or Father Yi (app., cat. 12, 1:3).⁵ On the fourth, this emblem is combined with two pictographs of books and followed by a long inscription (app., cat. 12, 1:4).⁶

Pottery antecedents of this type of bronze *hu* can be traced back to the Erlitou culture, and even to Neolithic cultures.⁷ Those pottery *hu* have two vertical lugs and a conical foot, but the cross sections of their bodies are circular. It is worth mentioning that the Chinese character *hu* 壺

was derived from the pictograph showing this type of vessel.⁸ Comparing Late Shang period bronze examples and their pottery antecedents with flaring mouths, rounded bodies and high footings, we can conclude that the MacLean *hu* should be dated to the earlier periods of the Late Shang. This speculation is confirmed by archaeological finds. One of the two examples from Fuhao's tomb is very similar to the MacLean piece, with a round lower body and a flaring mouth (app., cat. 12, 2).⁹ Many similar examples are found in various museums.¹⁰

³ *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*: 16.10494.

⁴ *Beijing kaogu jicheng* vol. 11: 97, 99. For the vessel, see 1998.50 fig. 1: 3.

⁵ *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*: 6.3303.

⁶ *Yin Zhou jinwen jicheng*: 11.5951, Chen Peifen 2005.3: 148–49. Like the *ya* 亞 shape on the *ya bi* 亞卣 inscription of MacLean *ding* (cat. 3), the book graph signifies the official title of scribe. The addition of the book graph indicates that members of this lineage served as scribes in the Shang court. Zhang Maorong 2000: 46–51.

⁷ *Sishui Yinjiacheng*: 115, fig. 80: 14.

⁸ Zou Heng 1980: 142.

⁹ *Yinxu Fuhao mu*: 16.

¹⁰ *Gugong qingtongqi*: no. 19. Lefebvre d'Argencé 1977: pl. XIV, center. Chen Fangmei 1995: no. 61. *Henan chutu Shang Zhou qingtongqi* vol. 1: pl. 335. All these examples have very similar silhouettes and six-register decorations.

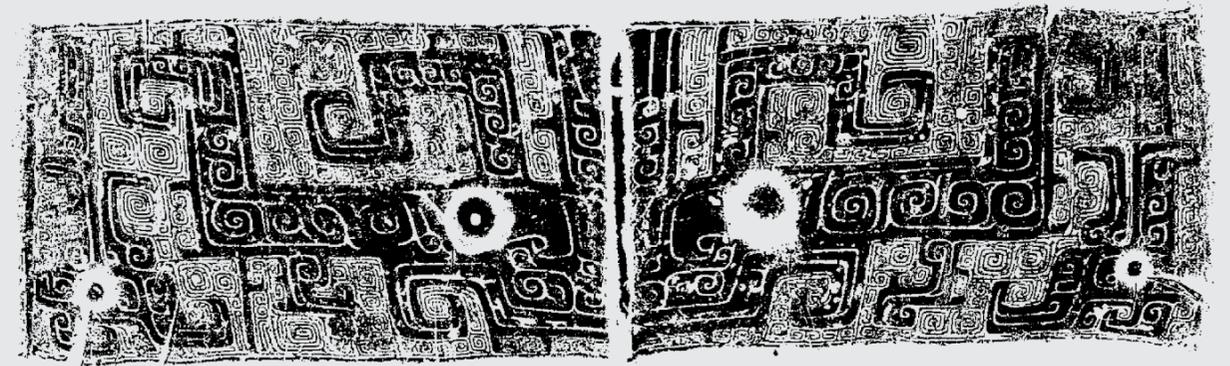


fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4