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Photograph by Langdon Warner

THE BRICK RED HORSE

Detail of one of the horses of T'ang T'ai Tsung.
Sian-fu Museum.

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PROVINCIAL MUSEUMS OF NORTH CHINA

BY LAURENCE SICKMAN

THE provincial museum is an old institution in China. If by the term museum, we understand a place where objects of interest or historical value are exhibited and made accessible, then the present-day museums of China may lay claim to a very ancient heritage. It has long been the custom to gather stele of importance in the local yamen for preservation. In large cities, the Confucian temples have served as the repository for stone inscriptions of merit. The famous Pei Lin in Hsi An-fu is, indeed, an excellent example of this type of local museum. There, among the magnificent stele gathered in the Confucian temple, are not only stones cut especially for the temple, but also stele brought from the neighboring regions. In this way, the Confucian temple has come to house a number of highly important Buddhist stones. The modern provincial museums have greatly enlarged upon these simpler institutions concerned only with preservation and display. But the provincial museums are not new institutions and it would be a mistake to consider them as a Western importation.

The opening of the Ku Wu Ch'ên Lieh So just twenty years ago and the Palace Museum ten years later, marked a new epoch in Chinese cultural activity. The great treasures of the former Ch'ing dynasty were for the first time available to the public, and scholars were offered a field of research without parallel. This stimulus to public and scholarly interests was immediately followed by the rapid organization of a number of learned societies and research institutions. In 1928, the National Research Institute was organized, to be followed by the Peiping Institute, the Chinese Architectural Society, and a number of similar institutions engaged in the study and publication of Chinese antiquities. Under changing conditions, the publication of Chinese antiquities under changing conditions, the

provincial institutions have readily adapted themselves and become active organizations engaged in excavation, research and public enlightenment. The organization of the National Research Institute (also known as the Academia Sinica), the Peking Research Institute and similar scholarly organizations naturally brought with them a great enlargement of scope to the provincial museums. Thus all work of excavation is carried on through the coöperation of one of these central organizations and the local provincial authorities. For example, the excavations at An Yang are jointly under the auspices of the National Research Institute and the Honan provincial government. The results of their discoveries are divided between the two institutions. Likewise, the work in Shantung is a matter of coöperation with the Shantung authorities and a proportion of the material is left in Chi Nan-fu and exhibited in the local museum.

We may pause here to consider briefly the organization of the National Research Institute whose activities are so important in the development of the provincial museums. The National Research Institute or the Academia Sinica¹ was first organized in Canton by Fu Ssü-nien, Yang Chen-sheng, and Ku Chieh-kang in the year 1928. At that time the program of the institution was arranged under eight different heads, namely: History, Chinese spoken language, Critical examination of texts, Popular customs, Archaeology, Chinese written language, Anthropology, and Study of the Tun Huang material. In 1929, the Institute was moved to Peking and the original eight proposals were condensed to three, which are: History and Critical examination of texts, the Spoken language and popular crafts, and third, Archaeology and Anthropology.²

We are here concerned only with the Academy's last branch of research. In this field the most important work has been carried on at An Yang in northern Honan, and at Lung Shan south of Chi Nan-fu in Shantung. The work at An Yang, which has brought to light so much important material relating to the Yin site and Shang culture,³ has been carried on with the coöperation of the Honan provincial government, and a large amount of the material unearthed has gone to the province of Honan to be exhibited in the museum of K'ai Feng.

¹ Kuo Li Chung Yang Yen Chiu Yuan Li Shih Yü Yen Yen Chiu So.

² See: Pei P'ing Hsüeh Shu Chi Kuan Chih Nan, by Li Wen-ch'i, p. 75.

³ H. G. Creel, "The Re-Discovery of Pre-Confucian China," *Open Court*, xlix, pp. 177 ff.

K'ai Feng on the Lunghai railway line is situated in the north-eastern part of Honan just south of the Yellow River. Famous as the great capital of the Northern Sung dynasty, K'ai Feng has many important monuments of history and art. The most striking is, perhaps, the great T'ieh T'a, or Iron Pagoda, built in Sung times and later completely encased in polychrome glaze tile of the early Ming period. The provincial museum is not far from this magnificent architectural achievement. The museum is housed in a number of connected, rambling buildings given over to a variety of exhibitions. Like all the provincial museums, the one in K'ai Feng serves a number of diverse purposes. It includes collections of natural history, geology, ethnology, art, and archaeology. The greatest treasures of the museum are the inscribed bones from An Yang, the Hsin Chêng bronzes and the large collection of funerary epitaphs engraved on stone.

The Hsin Chêng bronzes, now on display in the K'ai Feng museum, are an important and impressive series which were found at Hsin Chêng Hsien, Honan in 1923. These bronzes were first published by Carl W. Bishop in a paper of the Smithsonian Institute.⁴ Mr. Bishop chanced to be in the locality at the time of the discovery of the bronzes and was able to give a brief description of the tomb and the pieces as they appeared shortly after their excavation. Later the bronzes were cleaned, restored, and are now handsomely published by the Museum in the *Honan Record of Bronzes and Stones*. This great find comprises about one hundred pieces, a number of which were very large and spectacular. They were all found in one grave which, according to Mr. Bishop, had been the scene of a typical bronze-age burial, including a bronze-fitted chariot with its horse. There was no inscription which might definitely date the bronzes, although Mr. Bishop mentions the existence of a dedicatory inscription of a not unusual type. Although there is considerable divergence of opinion as to the exact dating of this most interesting series, still from the style of ornament and shape of the pieces, it is possible that they may date from the end of the Chou period, perhaps the fourth or the fifth century B.C. Of greatest interest among the lot are a number of large bells, one almost four feet high and beau-

⁴ Smithsonian Report 1926, pp. 457-468.

tifully ornamented with a low design of intertwined dragons. By far the most fantastic are a series of two pairs of large vessels of the type known as *hu*. These great vessels with full swelling bodies and



END OF AN ENGRAVED STONE COFFIN

Northern Wei Period from the Lo Yang Region. Scene represents the snake and tortoise of the North combined with a human figure.

K'ai Feng-fu Museum. Reverse print of rubbing.

long square necks rest on animal feet in the form of crouching tigers. They are also equipped with similar beasts in full relief as handles. One pair has on the lid, which is decorated with flaring petal-like pieces, quite naturalistically rendered cranes with wings spread as though poised for flight.

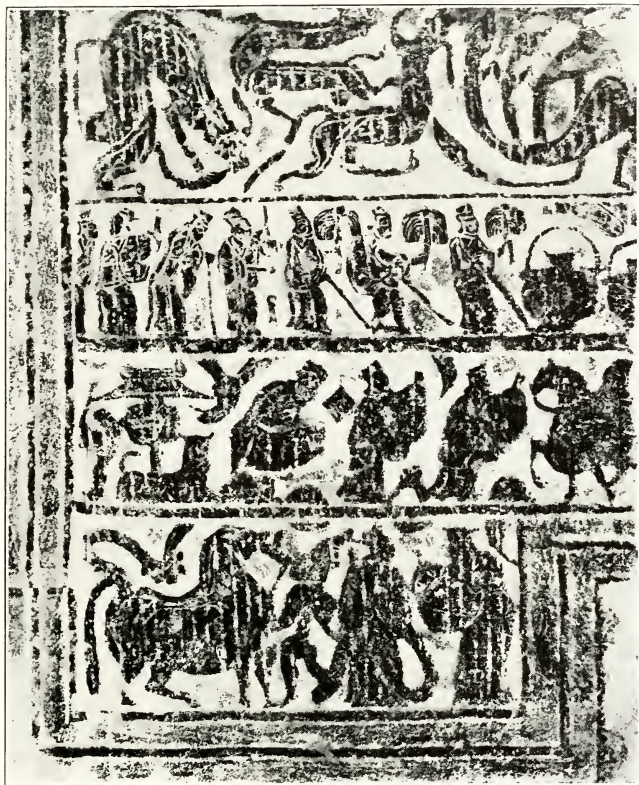
The K'ai Feng museum possesses a wealth of material from the excavations at An Yang. The greater part of this material now on exhibition comprises the inscribed oracle bones, but there are also valuable examples of ivory, bronze, bone, and stone implements. The museum has much material from An Yang and from other smaller excavations which has not yet been thoroughly studied. As this material is gone over, analyzed and published, it will gradually be made accessible to students and to the general public. Among the pieces now on exhibition, one of the most interesting, from the point of view of the art student, is a very large scapula bone, perhaps ten inches long and eight inches wide at the broader end. It is covered with powerful carving in an all-over pattern of T'ao T'ieh masks, and single-horned dragons against an intricate background of *lei wen* or thunder pattern. So far as my experience extends, this is the most complete and elaborate example of carved bone from the Shang site that I know. Such material is of the greatest value for comparative study. These carved bones taken together with the fragments of pottery bronze molds from An Yang, also in the Museum, all excavated under scientific conditions, give a sure and clear criteria for patterns appearing on bronze vessels attributed to the Shang dynasty. A number of the most important, inscribed oracle bones in the Museum have also been published in the large edition of *Honan Record of Bronzes and Stones*.

The funerary epitaphs, or *mu chih*, or *mu chih ming*, are eulogies of the deceased cut on stone slabs and placed in the graves. They vary in size from about one foot square to about three feet square, while the largest stones are sometimes as much as ten inches thick. The inscription is engraved on the upper surface, and sometimes the sides of the stones carry handsome designs of conventional floral patterns. Often there is also a lid. This is a large stone of the same dimensions as the epitaph with the upper edges bevelled so that the square of the top is somewhat smaller under the epitaph proper. This lid is usually ornamented with a central square carrying four, six, or eight large seal characters from which comes their Chinese name, *chüan tsü kai*. About this central square are delicately engraved designs of demons, dragons, or more usually, the four animals of the quadrant often mounted by human riders. Unfortunately, such highly ornamented lids are rare. The inscriptions on these epitaphs generally begin with a list of the titles of the dead,

his genealogy and noble rank. Then there follows an elaborate eulogy often expressed in passages of high literary merit. This is followed by an account of the death and details of the burial, giving precise dates and the location of the tomb. Not infrequently the material is summarized by a poem at the end. The importance of these epitaphs cannot be overestimated. They often contain historical material of great importance. They give the biographies of distinguished people and add an invaluable commentary to the dynastic histories.

Although the use of such epitaphs has continued to the present day, the large majority of those excavated date from the Wei, Sui, and T'ang periods. These epitaphs from the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries are of considerable importance to students of art history. The calligraphy is often of the highest order being characterized by a strong and powerful style as opposed to the more elegant and less forceful writing of later periods. They present many interesting problems to the student of epigraphy through their use of many unusual forms. As dated material, they comprise the most important body of evidence for comparative examination of undated stones. As examples of art and craftsmanship, the best funerary epitaphs of the Six Dynasties are unrivaled and comprise the main part of non-Buddhist material from that time.

The K'ai Feng Museum possesses what is probably the largest collection of early funerary epitaphs in the world. Many hundreds are on display while large numbers are still in storage through lack of exhibition space. The majority of these stones come from the Lo Yang region for, since Lo Yang was the capital through the Wei and Sui periods, the region is rich in graves of princes and dignitaries of the sixth and seventh centuries. Rubbings of all the epitaphs on exhibition may be purchased at the Museum. The most important have been selected and reproduced by lithograph in the *Honan Record of Bronzes and Stones*. In this publication, sold by the Museum, are reproduced eighty-nine epitaphs of the Wei period, two from Eastern Wei, four from Sui, four from T'ang, and one Sung dynasty piece. Among the other stones in the Museum, one should not fail to mention a large full-sized stone coffin of the Wei dynasty with engraved designs of an especially high quality (page 68).



HAN FUNERARY STONE

From the T'êng Hsien site. Chi Nan-fu Museum. Rubbing.

The Shensi museum in Hsi An-fu, is, like all the other provincial museums in North China, a subsidiary department of the provincial library. Their greatest treasures are, perhaps, four of the famous bas-reliefs representing the horses of T'ang T'ai Tsung which were shot in battle. A set of copies of these stones was made in 1089 by

order of the governor. The museum does not state whether they believe the horses on exhibition to be of the original T'ang set or from the Sung copies. However this may be, they are sculptures of the highest order, and their association with one of China's greatest heroes renders them national treasures of significance (frontispiece).

The Shensi museum possesses some of the most important Buddhist stones of any of the provincial museums. In addition to a number of good Wei stele, there is a series of magnificent large standing figures, several of which have been reproduced by Sirén.⁵

This museum is at present less active, perhaps, than that of K'ai Feng or Chi Nan. But a series of excavations south of Shi An-fu, which are now in progress, are recovering a number of important objects of the Ch'in period. Doubtless, they will be published and exhibited in the near future.

The Shansi Provincial Museum in T'ai Yuan-fu is located in a large temple compound which also houses the library. The main temple buildings have been converted into reading rooms, while the side halls have been reconstructed to house the collections of bronzes, stones, pottery, and other objects for display. Shansi is one of the richest provinces in Buddhist treasures, and with wise providence, the museum in T'ai Yuan-fu has gathered many of the images from ruined temples. The number of Six Dynasty stones is surprisingly small, considering the fact that Shansi produced so many monuments in that period. However, the Northern Wei dynasty is represented by a few small stele. The majority of the Buddhist figures date from the Yuan and Ming periods. An interesting indication of former Buddhist monuments of great scale is given by a huge hand of a Buddhist figure done in black bronze and fully four feet high. Another great fragment of drapery, probably from the same figure, is in the museum courtyard. If the figure had been broken up for the value of the bronze, these figures would scarcely have remained. It may be that these two fragments are all that are left of a colossal figure broken in the great Shansi earthquake early in the fourteenth century which destroyed so many of the province's famous temples with their early wall paintings.

During recent years, the Shansi museum, partially in coöperation with the Freer Gallery of Washington, has been conducting a series

⁵ Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture*.

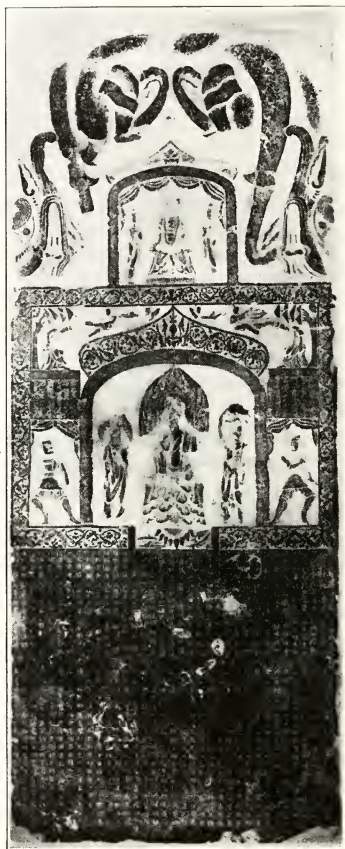
of excavations at a neolithic site south of T'ai Yuan-fu. In addition to a number of stone implements, the excavations have brought to light large quantities of neolithic pottery of the Yang Hsiao type found by Professor Andersson in northern Honan. Great quantities of this pottery, almost all in fragmentary condition, are now on exhibition in the museum. When this material is properly assorted and published it will form a most important addition to our knowledge of neolithic China.

The Shantung Provincial Museum in Chi Nan-fu is one of the best situated and best arranged in North China. It is located in connection with the library in an old garden of great beauty, and faces on a lake formed by the famous Chi Nan springs. The library was founded in 1909 by Lo Hsün-hsün, at that time Provincial Inspector of Education. In connection with the library, he founded a department for the collection and preservation of bronzes and stones. He began the collection of stones, which were from time to time excavated in the province, and the ancient vessels already in other collections. Although, since the founding of the department twenty years ago, there have been many changes of government and considerable political difficulty in Chi Nan itself, nevertheless the museum has steadily progressed and been able to add to its collection.⁶ In 1930, Mr. Wang Hsien-t'ang became director, and under his able guidance, the museum is rapidly becoming one of the best arranged and most efficient in China.

Shantung has long been known to Western students of art and archaeology through the famous Han stones of Hsiao T'ang Shan and Wu Liang Ssü. These stones, engraved in low relief, with scenes of ancient emperors and sages, auspicious spirits and strange beasts, and scenes of daily life, were used to line the stone houses of sacrifice before the grave or often employed within the grave itself. The Chi Nan museum has on exhibition more than fifty such Han funerary stones, representing a variety of techniques from very low relief, incised figures in staccato, to relatively high reliefs where the background is cut completely away and the outline of the figure slightly modeled. There is a miniature tomb door in the collection with an extremely handsome lintel ornamented by three great ram heads in high relief. A very recent acquisition is an exceptionally

⁶ See: Shan Tung Sheng T'u Shu Kuan Chi K'an, p. 53.

large lintel of this type. It is about eight feet long and in addition to the ram-head decoration of the other lintel, it carries elaborate borders of geometric pattern, together with representations of birds,



THE PRIEST CHIH etc. STELE A.D. 530.
Historical Museum, Peiping. Rubbing.

intertwined dragons and similar beasts. An extremely interesting series of stones, which were discovered in 1929 and 1930, and which, to my knowledge, have not as yet been published, are eighteen stones from T'eng Hsien. Among the eighteen stones, there is sufficient variety of technique to prove that they cannot be from the same grave, but in style they seem to be of one period. The probable richness of the Shantung field is well illustrated by the really casual way in which these stones were discovered. Nine of them were found when a certain Mr. Hung was digging the foundation for a house at T'eng Hsien; in the same district Mr. Huang discovered three more while plowing in the field; Mr. Wang Hsien-t'ang, director of the museum, himself discovered two outside the north gate of the city; and two more were found in excavating an old grave, and the remaining two were bought (page 71).

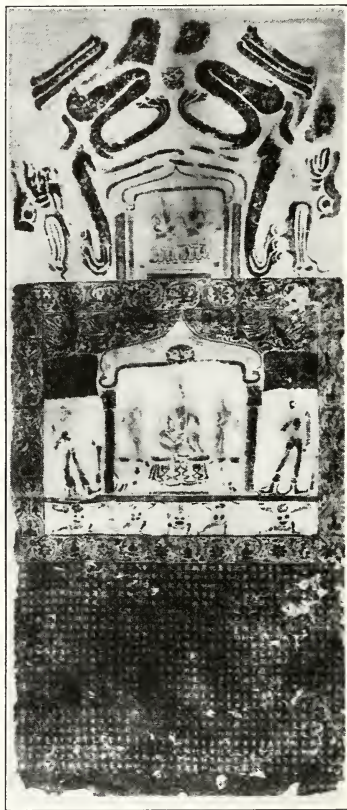
In addition to the Han stones which are all exhibited in one room, there is another stone gallery where funerary epitaphs, inscriptions, and Buddhist sculpture are exhibited. There are a number of Buddhist stones from the Northern Ch'i period and an exceptionally good stele of Northern Wei.

The most important activity of the museum at present is the excavation work being carried on at Lung Shan, south of Chi Nan. There the museum in coöperation with the National Research Institute has uncovered a culture layer very closely related to the Shang dynasty finds at An Yang. Below this Shang level they have discovered a neolithic site of the highest importance. In addition to typical neolithic stone implements, the excavations have yielded some types of neolithic pottery heretofore unknown in China. There are rather coarse types of red ware and a somewhat finer white pottery, but the most remarkable are fragmentary vessels of an extremely thin black pottery with a high gloss, probably produced by some process of polishing.

Peiping remains today the cultural capitol of China. Mr. Li Wen-ch'i in his "Guide to the Organization of Peiping Institutions of Learning"⁷ lists eight research institutes, thirty-three different libraries and seven museums. Of these seven museums the most important are, of course, the two Palace Museums. However, since

⁷ Pei P'ing Hsueh Shu Chi Kuan Chih Nan, Peiping National Library, 1933.

these collections are static, at least no provision is made for adding to the number of objects, we shall not consider them here but rather review briefly the organization and collections of another institution,



THE CHU SHIH-KUAN STELE, A.D. 540
Historical Museum, Peiping. Rubbing.

the Historical Museum. This museum, unlike the others described, is not a provincial organization but is under the control of the national government. The Historical Museum was first organized in 1911 under the Peiping Department of Education but the exhibitions were not open to the public until 1926. Two years later, the control of the museum was transferred to the National Department of Education and in the same year it was combined with the National Research Institute.

The objects taken over from the old Imperial Academy of Learning formed the nucleus of the collection which has since that time been steadily increased by excavation and donation until at present the collection numbers over two hundred thousand objects of historical value. The museum is happily situated in the main hall and two great side galleries of the Wu Men or front gate of the Imperial Palace with a splendid view over the yellow roofs of the Palace Museum. The great number of Sung porcelains recovered from Chü Lu Hsien in southern Hopei is of special interest. The city of Chü Lu Hsien was flooded and destroyed in the Sung Ta Kuan period (1107-1110) and so the remains from there are definitely datable to that period. A great variety of Sung dynasty wares are represented in the museum collection and all from this one site. There are the so-called Northern Celadons, Honan Chien yao, fen ting, as well as the splendid thick white ware, often with black or brown over-decoration, which was manufactured at the place and has come to bear its name. In view of the scarcity of datable Sung ceramics, this collection is of the greatest value to students.

One of the best departments of the Historical Museum is the collection of stones. In addition to over fifty funerary epitaphs of the T'ang dynasty, the museum possesses two early Buddhist stele of the highest quality. Both of these stele come from P'ing Yang in Shansi and, though the dates are ten years apart, the two are identical in style. The one known as the Priest Chih Stele (page 74) bears the date third year of Yung An (A.D. 530) while on the back it bears a curious second dedicatory inscription dated the second year of Jen Shou of Sui (A.D. 602). The back and sides are covered with the names of donors. The second large stele, almost a mate to the one just mentioned, is known as the Chien I Commander-in-Chief, etc., Chu Shih-kuan stele and bears the date sixth year of Ta T'ung of Western Wei (A.D. 540). The back and sides are also covered with the many names of pious donors (page 76).

In principle, the Chinese museums present a double system: there are the national museums (one is planned for Nanking) which, through such organizations as the National Research Institute, collect material from the provinces to a single center where artifacts from all regions may be studied in relation; and a second system of provincial museums, locally supported, where objects particular to the province may be preserved. Already one may see this system at work in the sphere of recent publications. Thus, the Provincial Museum of Honan has published the important funerary epitaphs in their collection, while at the same time the National Library in Peking, a national institution, has under preparation a much larger work, drawing its material from several provinces but employing a farther selection. Without local coöperation such a general work would be an almost hopeless task. But the real importance of the provincial museum lies in the fact that it forms a local center of cultural study. The enormous task of preserving, assorting and interpreting China's antiquities, and making them accessible to the public must in the end rest largely with these local centers.