



Wine Ewer (*Gong*), circa 1200-1050 BCE
Shang Dynasty, Anyang Period
Cast bronze
7 ¼ x 8 x 4 13/16 in. (18.4 x 20.3 x 12.2 cm)
Gift of R. H. Norton, 52.7a-b

TAKE A LOOK

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A CLOSER LOOK

CHINESE COLLECTION

Ritual Wine Vessels

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ABOUT



The Artwork

The *gong* (pronounced go-oh-ng) is a brilliant example of a bronze vessel from the later part of China's Shang dynasty dating from circa 1200–1050 BCE. This wine-pouring vessel is ornately decorated and illustrates both real and imaginary natural images. The lid of the *gong* has been molded into the face of a smiling bottle-horned dragon positioned at the front of the lid. Its legs are draped down both sides of the vessel's spout ending with claw-like talons near the base. At the back of the lid, the face of the tiger with raised ears and an attentive, curious expression peers over the handle of the container. The handle of the *gong* is also composed of a combination of animals, including a small bear dangling underneath the handle which is topped with a head of an antelope. The bands that articulate different levels of the vessel also feature serpents and elephants at the base. Dark, coiled patterns among the animals represent *leiwen*, or lightning and thundercloud motifs. Archaeologists believe these animal and natural images had meaning for the ancient people of China, perhaps to ward off evil. No one knows for sure.

It is believed that Shang dynasty aristocrats used *gongs* for pouring wine during ceremonies to communicate with spirits of their ancestors. While commonly used in rituals, the *gongs* that survive were found in Chinese tombs and were placed there to serve the dead in the afterlife.

The Artist

The names of the artists who created this vessel are lost to us, as is the case with most ancient cultures. However, the artists who cast bronze objects like this *gong* are considered among the most sophisticated artists of the Bronze Age. The Bronze Age began in the Near East and South Asia around 3300 BCE; the technology of casting bronze is thought to have arrived in China around 2000 BCE. The artists who made this object worked in teams near present day Anyang, which was the site of a Shang dynasty capital city, Yin. This vessel was created using a ceramic piece mold made up of several parts. The pieces decorated with complex multifaceted designs were assembled around an interior clay core. Molten bronze was then poured between the external pieces of the mold and the clay core. After the bronze had cooled and hardened, the ceramic molds were broken to reveal the vessels.

You can learn more about bronze casting techniques on our website at norton.org/educators

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SEE



THINK

Observe & Describe

Have students take a quiet moment to look carefully at the Ritual Wine-Pouring Vessel (*Gong*). If possible, hide the title until students guess the use.

As they get a closer look at the image, first ask students: What do you see? Have students notice as many details as possible before moving on to the next question. Ask them to describe the lines, color, shape, and texture. Encourage even closer looking by asking the following questions:

- What else do you see?
- What animals can you find in the artwork?
- What material do you think was used to make the *gong*?
- What makes you think that?

Start a Conversation

- How do you think it was made? Why?
- How do you think this object was used?
- Can you name a similar object we use today?
- Why would the artist make an everyday object so ornate?
- Why did the artist choose to depict animals on the *gong*?

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Let's Compare

Tripod Wine Vessel (*Jia*)

Made around 1200 BCE during the Shang dynasty, *jia* vessels were commonly included in sets of bronze vessels in the tombs of the Shang dynasty elite. The *jia* was used to warm wine, while the *gong* was used to pour wine during ritual ceremonies. Like the *gong*, the *jia* was made using the piece-mold casting process.

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Ask students the Observe and Describe questions that also are significant to the *jia* tripod wine jar. Then, have students discuss the following:

- This *jia* was also used in ceremonies around the same time as the *gong*. How are these artworks similar?
- What are the differences?
- How do you think this object was made?
- Can you think of uses for the *jia*? How could the *jia* and *gong* be used together?
- If you could pick one of these objects to have in your home, which one would you choose? Why?

Tripod Wine Vessel (*Jia*) with Cover, circa 1200 BCE
Shang Dynasty, Anyang Period
Bronze
13 x 7 3/4 x 8 1/8 in. (33 x 19.7 x 20.6 cm)
Gift of R. H. Norton, 52.4a-b



WONDER

Classroom Activity

Have students experience the artist's process, piece-mold casting, in the classroom! Have them view the Bronze Casting video at norton.org/educators. Then, students can experiment with clay, such as Model Magic, by putting the clay inside shapes with an open back such as plastic eggs.

Even LEGO bricks and toys work!

Ask the students the following questions:

- *When you take the clay out, what does the clay look like?*
- *Why might an artist use the piece-mold casting method instead of another type of art making?*

Make Personal Connections

Ask your students if there is anything else they wonder about the *gong*. Allow time for answers and discussion. Then, have your students work in pairs to answer the following questions. Ask them to share something they learned from their partner.

For Younger Students

- *The gong was used in rituals in ancient China. What does it mean to have a ritual?*
- *Do you have any rituals or traditions in your family? What are they?*
- *Why are these rituals/traditions special to you?*
- *Are there any special objects that your family uses during these traditions/rituals (e.g. special plate on your birthday, special Thanksgiving decorations, special religious objects)?*

For Older Students

- *Why do you think the gong was so important to the people living in the Shang dynasty?*
- *Is there an everyday object that is special to you? Why?*
- *If you could communicate with your ancestors through a work of art, what symbols would you add to tell them about you?*

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