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“An Excavation at Suifu”

by

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AN EXCAVATION AT SUIFU^[1]

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In March 1936 I was at Suifu expecting soon to leave for Chengtu. A Chinese friend told me that in enlarging the local parade ground, in preparation for an inter-school "track-meet," a deep grave had been opened, and suggested that I go and take a look at it. I soon recognized it as an old Chinese tomb, probably of the Han dynasty and of much scientific interest.

Nobody in Suifu recognized the importance of the grave, and it was quite certain that everything it contained would be destroyed by the workmen or carried away into private homes, so that in the future the objects would be of little or no scientific value. I therefore called upon the local magistrate, Leng Chuan Yüan (冷專員), informed him of the approximate age and value of the grave, and suggested that care be taken to preserve its contents. The magistrate was somewhat sceptical, but he gave his consent to my being on hand so as to help preserve anything of importance.

I had with me no tools for excavating, and the workers were opium smokers whom the government had imprisoned in order to force them to break off the opium habit. At first I had no authority to compel or power to persuade them to use better methods, so that some valuable articles were smashed and others were carried away.

A reporter of the Suifu daily newspaper visited the grave and published an article telling its approximate age and the value of its contents. The local magistrate then turned over to the Suifu Board of Education and to the Municipal Museum full authority, and the leaders of those organizations invited me to take part in the excavation with considerable authority as to the methods used, hired special coolies to do the work, and appointed responsible men to help look after the tomb and take care of the materials excavated. After that there was a gradual improvement in the methods and the results. Some of the men in charge spent a great deal of time on the work, and showed a most commendable spirit.

There were two ancient tombs side by side, each about forty-three feet long inside, and pointing almost directly east and west (*See Fig. 1*). They were constructed originally on

[1]. Research article and publication of the West China Union University Harvard-Yenching Institute.

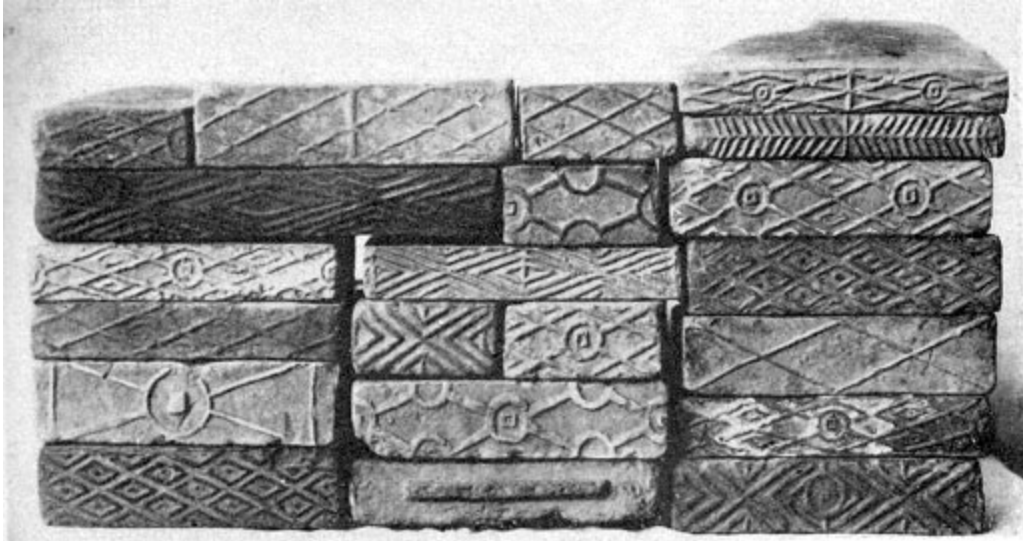
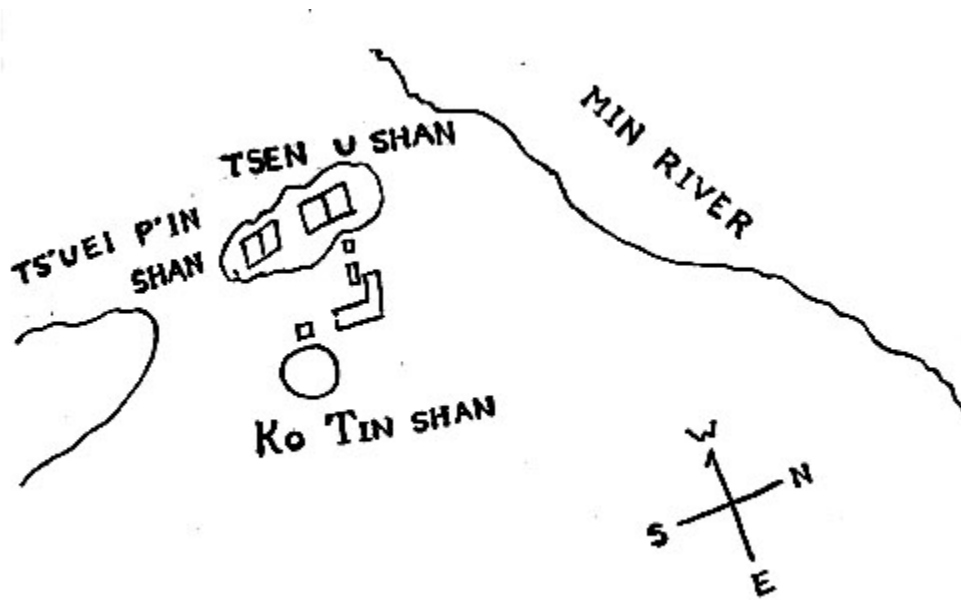


PLATE 1. Ornamental bricks, from the Suifu graves, which are now in the West China Union University Museum of Archaeology. Note the frequency of the Chinese coin design.



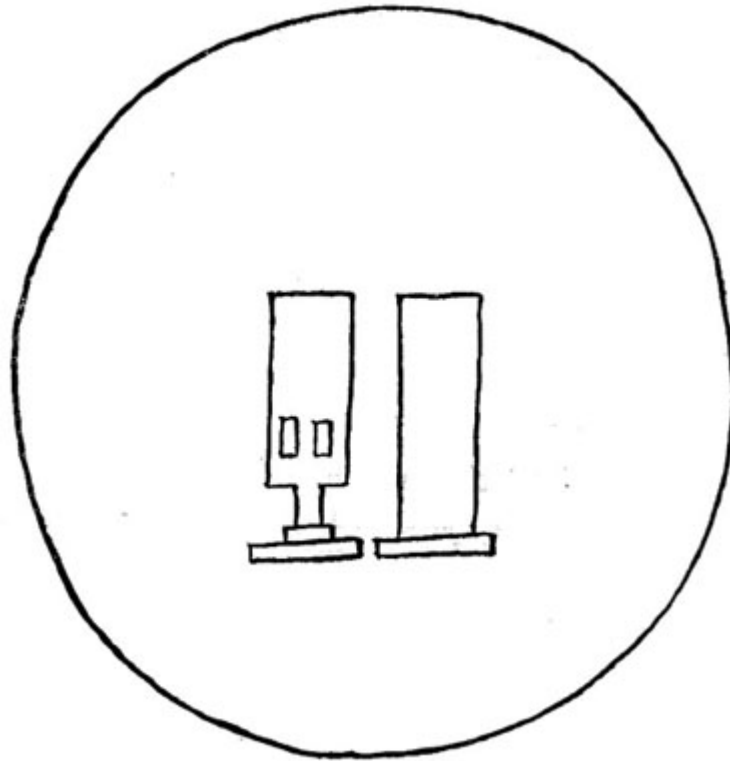


FIG. 1. Rough map showing the site of the graves at Suifu.

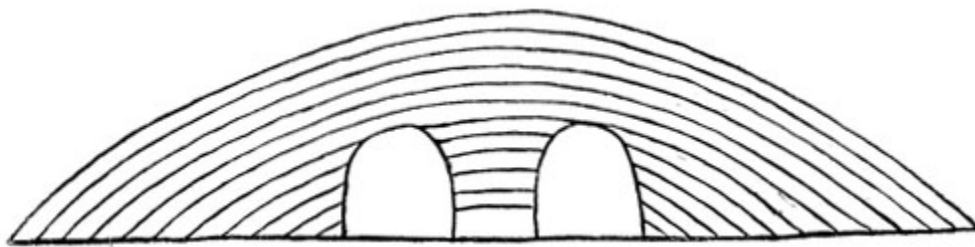


FIG. 2. Sketch of the artificial mound enclosing two ancient graves made of ornamental bricks. Excavated at Suifu, Szechwan, China, in April, 1936. The layers in the mound were quite distinct because of the broken pieces of stone that collected at the top or bottom of each load. Diameter 85-90 feet; height 10 feet 6 inches.

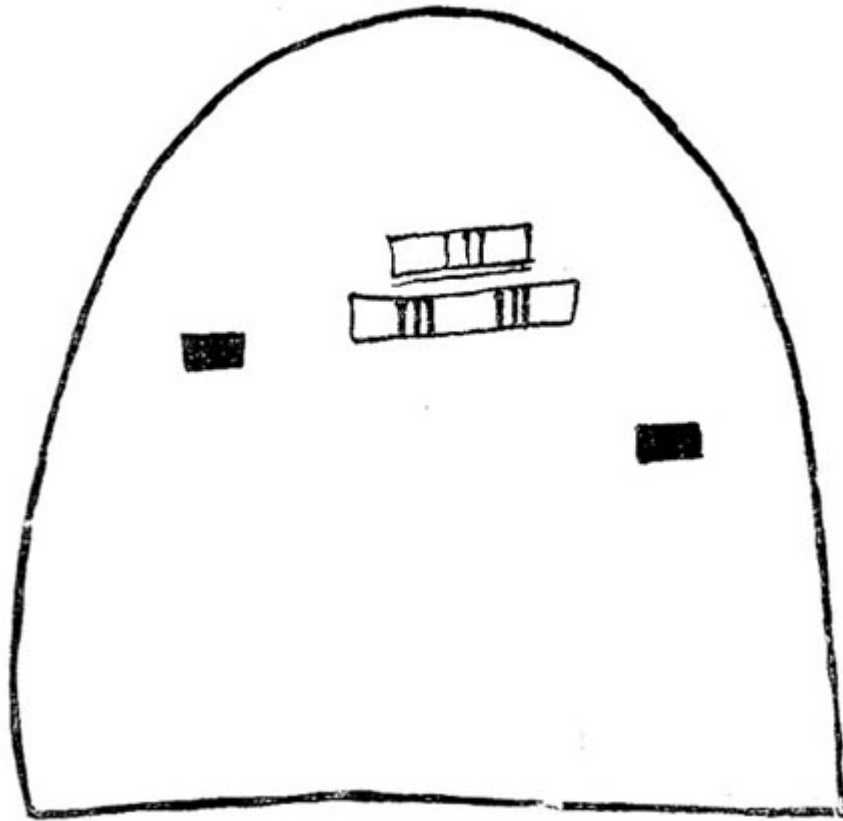


FIG. 3. The rear end of the north grave at Suifu. Five shelves were made by depressions in the wall, each shelf being separated from its neighbor by two bricks. Two other shelves were made by protruding bricks. The south grave had five shelves made by depressions in the wall, but it did not have the shelves made by protruding bricks.

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level ground, with stone foundations and with stone floors covered with bricks. Above the stone foundations the tombs were made of grey bricks which were ornamented on the two ends. A very few bricks in the floor of the north tomb were ornamented not on the ends, but only on one side. The bricks at the bottom were flat, but from the height of about two and a half feet bricks were used which

were smaller on one end than on the other, like the keystone of an arch. The result of the use of these bricks was a tomb that rounded towards the top like a true arch. The inside and the outside surfaces of the tombs were very beautiful because of the many patterns on the ends of the ornamented bricks. I counted twenty-seven different patterns, and others may have been overlooked or destroyed (*See Figs. 4-10*).

The upper surface of the south tomb was covered by a layer of unornamented bricks made concave on the lower surface and convex on the upper surface so that the upper surfaces of the ornamented bricks were protected.

After the brick tombs had been constructed, dirt was carried and a mound was erected over the graves. The mound was about ninety feet in diameter and about twenty feet high. The dirt was piled up in layers nearly two feet thick. Bits of stone in the dirt tended to go to the bottom or to the top of each load, so that the successive layers in the hill could easily be seen. Probably the hope and aim of the persons who originally constructed the mound was to make it look like a natural hill so that nobody would suspect the existence of graves inside (*See Fig. 2*).

Over fifteen hundred years ago the graves were looted. The thieves dug down through the tops of the graves. They made two holes through the top of the south grave and one through the top of the grave on the north. They opened the door of the north grave and apparently carried out the coffins, and threw many bowls, earthenware men, and other objects just outside the door, where they were later covered up with dirt. The thieves smashed one of the earthenware coffins and most of the earthenware bowls and images. Not one unbroken bowl was found, although three were later reconstructed.

Through the holes in the roofs tons of dirt fell into the graves, covering all the

contents from two and a half to seven feet deep. Near the end of the Ming and during the Manchu dynasties the ground above was again disturbed. The Chinese had taken possession of Suifu, this spot was used as a burial ground, and dirt mixed with lime and broken pieces of porcelain fell into the graves. This layer could easily be distinguished.

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One of the main difficulties during the excavation was due to the fact that crowds of people, sometimes numbering several thousands, wanted to see what was going on. They stood on the mound above the tombs or crowded around and even in front of those who were doing the excavation so that sometimes work was almost impossible. Some of the local officials and scholars cooperated in a very commendable way, and during the last part of the excavation the spectators were better controlled.

The majority of the earthenware objects were grey in color, but one in the north grave and several in the south grave were made of a fine clay which after baking was a standard orange-yellow color which might popularly be called a golden yellow. Evidently this clay was purposely chosen for its beauty. There are some such objects from Han dynasty cave-tombs in the West China Union University Museum of Archaeology, but those at Suifu are more beautiful and more artistically made.

A few of the bowls from the Suifu tombs were colored black on the outside, and a few others were a bright red inside, but most of the earthenware objects were uncolored. There were no glazed objects among those originally in the graves or in the lower and earlier strata of dirt. The tombs and their contents represent a pre-glaze culture.

I took pictures of most of the objects excavated, but some of the films were

spoiled and others were not well exposed. As a result I have had to depend much on the drawings which I made in the field note book. I was able to purchase pictures of some of the objects from a Suifu photographer, but these were unsatisfactory because of the use of a poor background.

Aside from what had filtered in through the top during the last four centuries there was no lime or mortar in the graves. Fine river sand had been placed between the stone and the brick, and between the layers of brick, but the persons who built the tombs apparently knew nothing about lime or mortar.

All the coins, of which there were about four hundred, were round bronze Chinese coins., with square holes in the middle. They were probably all made during the Han dynasty, although some of them might be dated in the Six dynasties, about 280 A.D.

In most of the Han dynasty Chinese graves of Szechwan one can look in vain for Chinese characters or inscriptions, excepting on Chinese coins. Inscriptions on bricks or on stone walls and pillars have been found in a few of them. In the Suifu tombs some of the coins were marked Wu Chu (五銖), and two bricks were found on which there were Chinese characters. On one of them was the number seven hundred and



PLATE II. One of the graves at Suifu soon after it was discovered.



PLATE III. The south grave, showing the stone coffin, and some of the Suifu people who took part in the excavation.

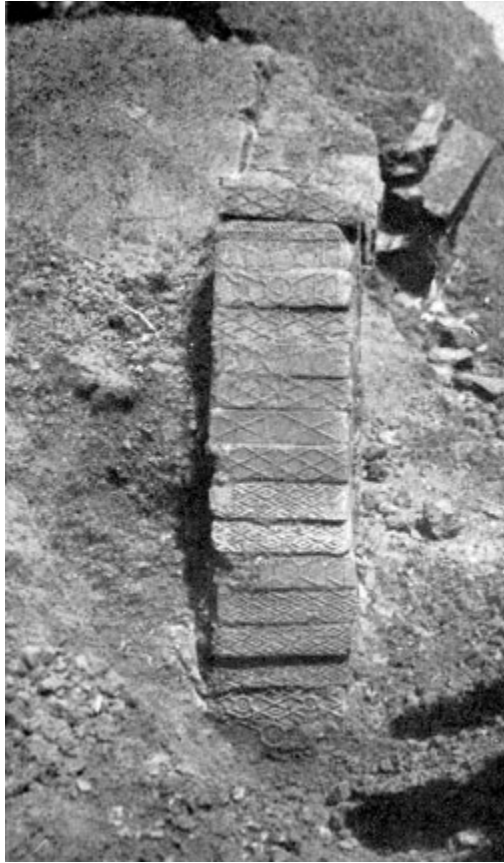


PLATE V. Ornamented bricks *in situ*. Part of the south grave. Unornamented bricks can be seen covering the top of the grave.



PLATE IV. A Suifu official, holding in his hand the earthenware image of a comedian making a wry face.

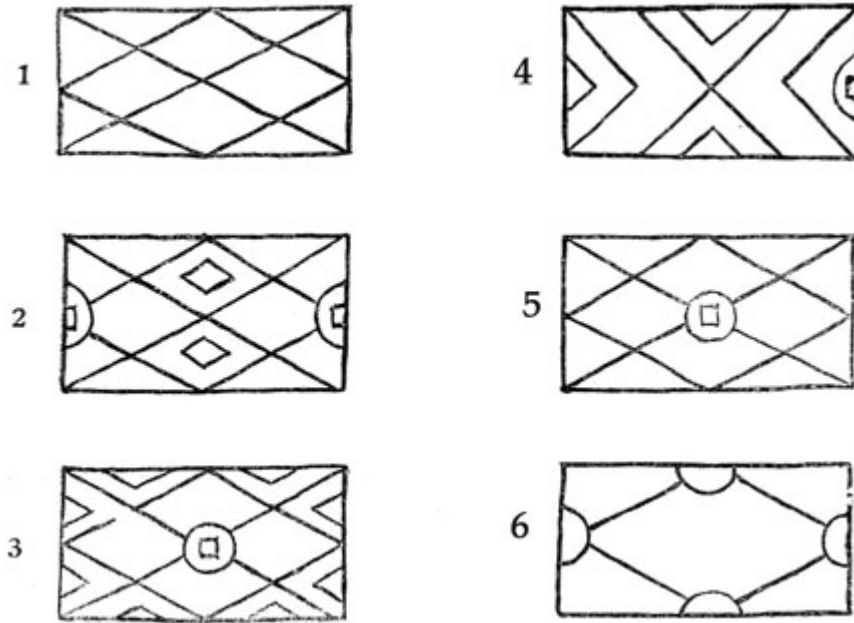


FIG. 4. Small ornamented bricks from the Suifu tombs. 1 and 2 are opposite ends of the same brick; 3 is the opposite end of 6; 5 is sometimes found as the opposite end of 6; in the case of 4 the design was the same at both ends. Length from 15.25 to 16 inches; width 4.75 to 5.25 inches.

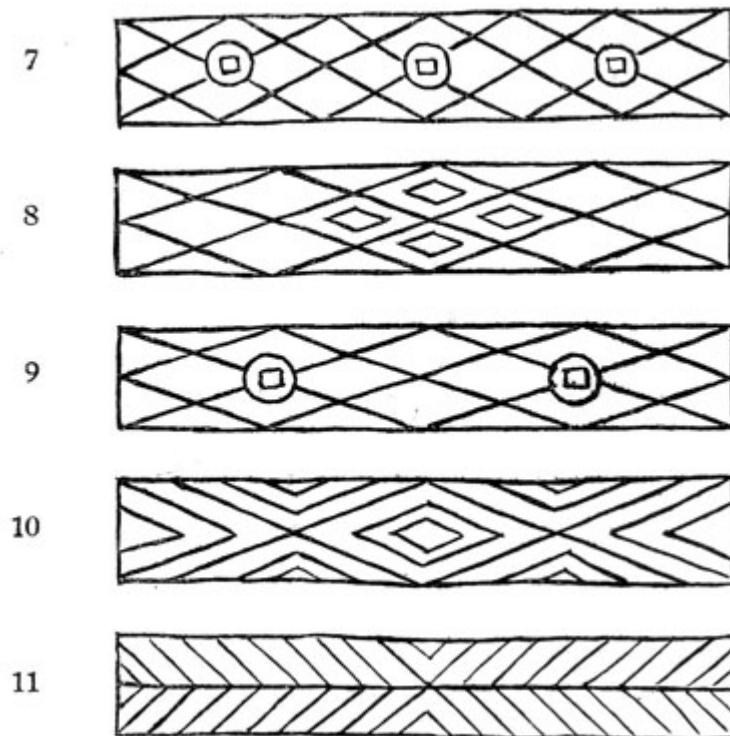


FIG. 5. Designs on the smaller ends of keystone-shaped bricks. 8 is the smaller end of 20, and 9 of 22. Thickness 1.5 to 2 inches.

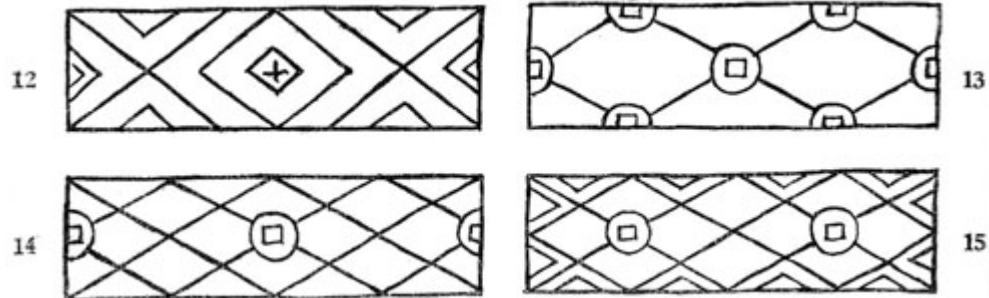


FIG. 6. Large ends of ornamental bricks. Width about ten inches; thickness about two inches.

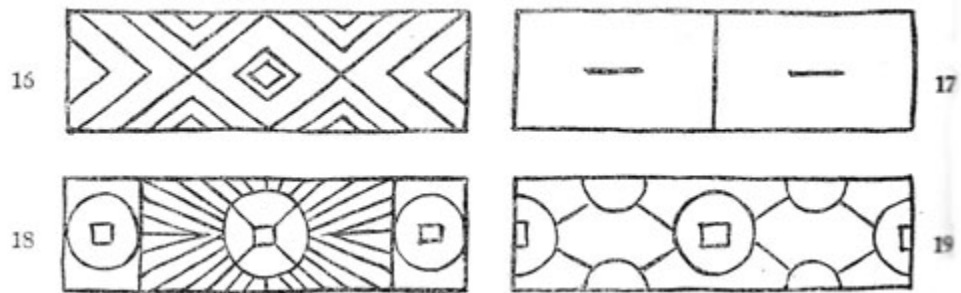


FIG. 7. Large ends of ornamental bricks. The frequency of the Chinese coin designs is noteworthy.

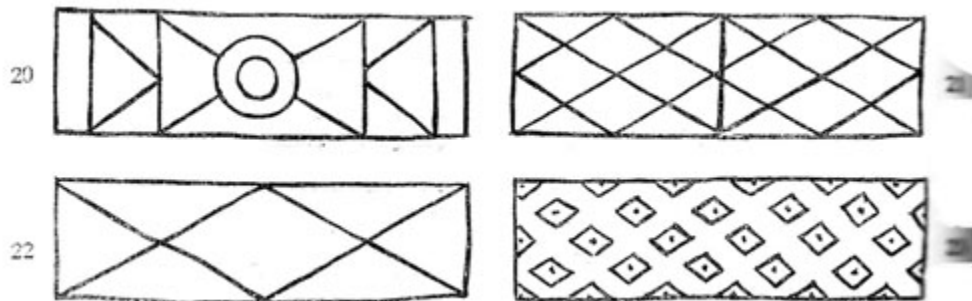


FIG. 8 Large ends of ornamented bricks. 20 is the larger end of 8; 22 of 9; 23 is the same design on both ends.

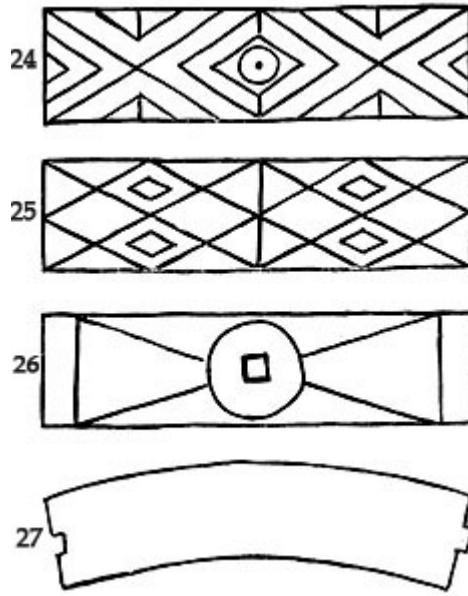


FIG. 9. Three large ends of ornamented bricks; and (27) one curved unornamented brick as was used to cover the top of the south grave. 25 is the opposite end of 19.



FIG. 10. A design found on one side only of some bricks on the floor of the north grave. Length 14.5 inches; width 9.5 inches; thickness 2.25 inches.

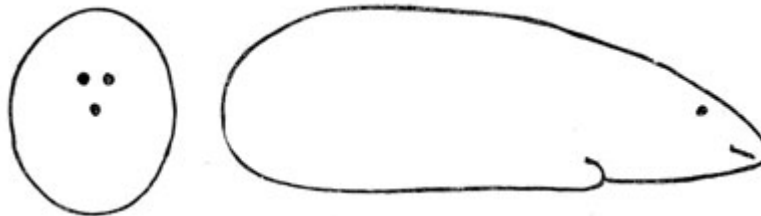


FIG. 11. A White stone so carved that it looks like a pig. It may have been a plumb bob.

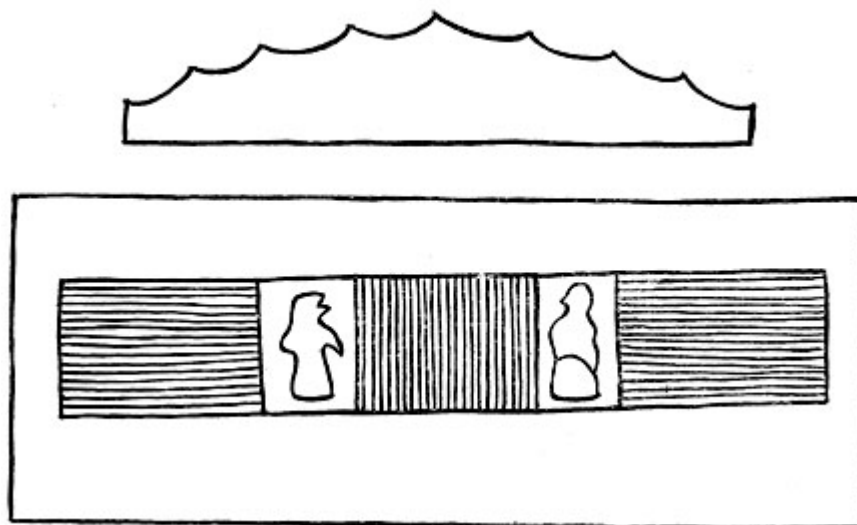


FIG. 12. Drawings of the top and one side of the stone coffin found in the south grave.

forty and on another the number one hundred and forty. The characters on these bricks were written in an ancient Chinese style.

Practically all the objects in the Suifu tombs closely resemble those that have been found in other parts of Szechwan in Han dynasty Chinese graves. It therefore seems safe tentatively to date Suifu tombs in the latter part of the Han dynasty, or at the latest during the Three Kingdoms or the Six Dynasties.

The north grave was erected first and the south grave a short time afterwards. This is evident from the fact that a drainage ditch leading from the mouth of the north grave was covered by the stone foundation of the south grave.

The graves were those of people of high culture, wealth, and social standing. This is indicated by the size of the graves and the value and artistic quality of the materials. Some gold-plated fragments of bronze were found, but it should be born in mind that what we secured was what the looters considered to be of little

value. Probably the graves originally contained fine objects of bronze, jade, silver, and gold.

The following is a list of the objects secured in the Suifu tombs, practically all of which are now in the Suifu Municipal Museum.

Four hundred and nineteen whole bricks, all but a few of which are ornamented on both ends.

Four hundred and seventy-three broken bricks, each having the ornamentation originally on one end of a brick.

Two bricks on which Chinese characters, the numbers 740 and 140, have been incised.

Bones of three or four human skeletons from both tombs.

One stone coffin on which were carved the images of two men, and with a well-carved cover. The lid is intact, but the coffin broke into pieces (*See Plate III and Fig. 12*).

One broken earthenware coffin.

Hundreds of sherds, some of which were ornamented. A few were cord-marked (*See Fig. 13*).

Numerous broken bronze ornaments, including pieces of a bronze armor or garment, and ornamental bronze leaves and flowers. A few of the bronze fragments were gilded (*See Fig. 14*).

Two bronze chisels. They may have been lost by the stone masons, or by the persons who opened the tombs in order to rob them. The entire absence of iron objects is remarkable.

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Two earthenware miniature fish ponds. One of them contains a boat, a bridge, a salamander, three snails and three fish (*See Plate VI*). The other was badly broken by the looters.

Fragments of clay houses with flat-tiled roofs.

Parts of five "stone mountains" or vases. The tops of these resemble the tops of large vases or bottles, but the sides resemble ornamental stone mountains with terraces, such as are sometimes seen in Chinese gardens. On the terraces were small clay images of human beings. One suggestion is that they may have contained large candles, and another, is that they may have contained flowers.

Fragments of many large and small earthenware bowls. Many were unornamented. A few are cord-marked, and a few others are ornamented by a flower design (*See Figs. 16 and 17*). The color of most of them is grey, but one is made of the "golden-yellow" material. A few have been colored black, probably by means of soot or charcoal, and a smaller number have been colored red by means of a red substance that washes off easily.

One small earthenware lamp and fragments of five or six larger lamps.

Two large earthenware ducks and eight smaller ducks, probably their ducklings.

Two clay images of hens and chicks, and fragments of others.

Two earthenware images of snakes, one of which is neatly coiled.

Two large heads of dogs with pug or bull-dog-like noses, and fragments of two or more such smaller ones. There is one headless image of a large dog sitting down.

Two heads of tigers with mouths wide open.

Four small white stone images so carved that they resemble pigs. They have small holes in the rear into which strings could be inserted and tied, so that they might be plumb bobs (*See Fig. 11*).

A strange animal head slightly resembling the head of a horse or a donkey. No mouth or eye can be seen, and there is only one large ear(?) protruding upwards from the middle of the forehead. The "ear" is concave in front and convex behind, not round like a horn, so that one can not assert with confidence that it is an unicorn or a *kirin* (*See Plate VIII*).

Six earthenware heads of pretty women. The bodies had been destroyed.

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One image of a cook, possibly a woman preparing a fish. The hand of the cook rests on the fish.

A fragment of a hand playing a lute. There is also a well-made earthenware lute which was broken but has been repaired (*See Plate IX*).

A broken image of a servant with a broom and a dustpan. It is thirty-three and a half inches long. Similar images of all sizes have been found in the Han dynasty Chinese cave-tombs.

A fragment of a hand holding a shield.

A fragment of a hand holding what is probably a whip.

A head of a comedian making a wry face. Similar comedians have been found in the cave-tombs of Kiating (*See Plate IV*).

Poorly-made images of six people which are about eight inches high.

About thirty images of men and women which are about four inches high. Most of them were found on or near the "stone mountains."

A broken earthenware image of a man lying on his chest.

Three images of human heads with tongues hanging down over the chins. The Chinese call them *tiao-ching-kuei* (吊頸鬼) or demons of people who hanged themselves. I have secured such images in the cave-tombs of Kiating.

A large head of a human-like creature with its tongue hanging down over the chin on to the chest, face and forehead wrinkled, tusks, and two deer-like horns which branch. There is a large knob on top of the head, and a smaller one in the middle of the forehead. This is also called a *diao-ching-kuei* by the Chinese, and it is probably a more elaborate and better example of the *tiao-ching-kuei* mentioned above. It is by far the best head of this kind that I have seen. The length not including the horns is fourteen inches, the length of the horns is five inches, and the width from the tips of the ears is thirteen inches (*See Plate VIII*).

There is one complete image and a broken image of a man turning a somersault

(*See Plate X*). They resemble the Wu Ts'ang P'usa used by the *tuan kung* or priest of the Wu Chiao (巫教), but when placed in the graves they may have been meant to be merely acrobats.

I had previously seen and heard of only three Han dynasty Chinese graves constructed, like those at Suifu, on the flat surface of the ground out of ornamented bricks. One was about ten // outside the North Gate of Chengtu, and was des-

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troyed in 1934 when the motor road was built to Sintu (新都) It was evidently a Han dynasty Chinese tomb, but the contents were lost, and the bricks were used to build the walls of a farmer's house, excepting those which were broken up and used in making the road. The bricks were recovered from the walls of the house by General Ch'en of the Twenty-Eighth Army, and presented to the museum of the West China Union University. There is another such grave near Kiangkow (江口), where there are also hundreds of Han dynasty cave-tombs. When I saw this grave in 1933 the contents had long ago been carried away, the grave was exposed to the elements, and the ornamented bricks were rapidly disintegrating. I saw another grave of this kind on the compound of the Standard Oil Company near Wanhsien (萬縣) in 1932, where it had accidentally been opened. It contained typical Han dynasty Chinese coins and unglazed pottery, and was lined by ornamented bricks. Some of the bricks were given to the West China Union University Museum of Archaeology, but the coins and the pottery are probably now in a foreign country. Aside from a few bricks (*See Plate I*), coins, and unglazed images of which there were duplicates, which were given to the West China Union University Museum of Archaeology, nearly all the contents of the two Suifu graves are carefully preserved and are being displayed in the Suifu Municipal Museum.

The materials excavated at Suifu closely resemble those found in the Han dynasty Chinese cave-tombs, and are evidently all Chinese. Evidently they were graves of Chinese, or, a thing which is possible but not very probable, the graves of aboriginal chieftains who used only Chinese cultural objects in the tombs.

The dating of the graves must be done tentatively with the expectation that further light will be thrown on such problems by future excavations. It is my opinion that the graves are probably those of Chinese people who were buried near the end of the Han dynasty, or between A.D.29 and A.D.220, but that it is not impossible that the burials were during the Three Kingdoms or even as late as the beginning of the Six Dynasties (六朝), or about 300 A.D.

Since the contents of the Suifu graves closely resemble those of the Han dynasty cave-tombs, popularly called "Mantzū Tung" and believed by some to be aboriginal dwellings, the Suifu graves and their contents furnish important additional evidence that the "Mantzu Tung" were not dwellings of aborigines, but Chinese tombs.

Archaeologists and others who pass through Suifu will find it worth while to visit the Suifu Municipal Museum and carefully look over this collection.

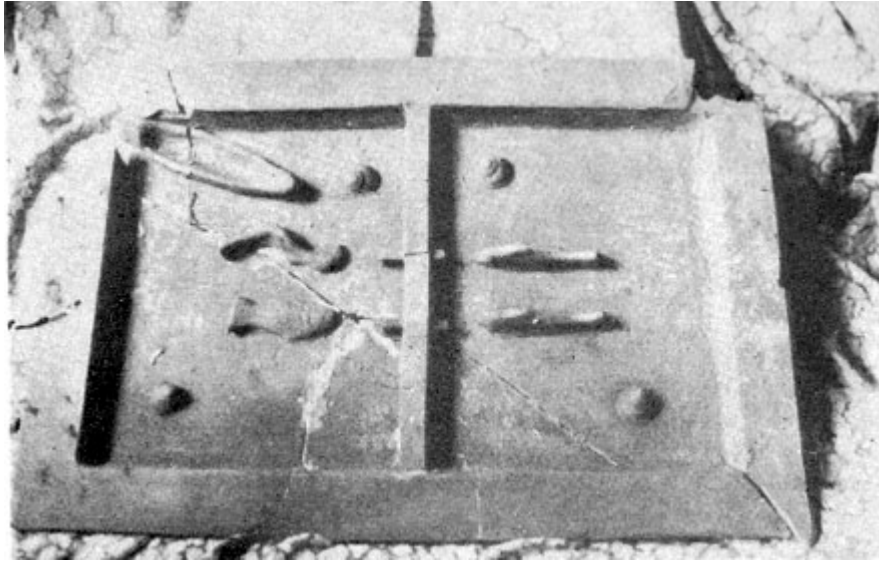


PLATE VI. An artificial fish-pond. The clay is a standard orange-yellow in colour. In the pond are a boat, a bridge, three fish, four snails and salamander. Similar ponds have been found in Chinese cave-tombs near Chengtu.



PLATE VII. Four stone images from the Suifu graves. Note the eyes with their Mongolian slant, and the hands folded in the sleeves. These are the oldest stone images of men yet found in Szechwan. Height 9.25 to 11.5 inches. The largest image found is almost three feet high.

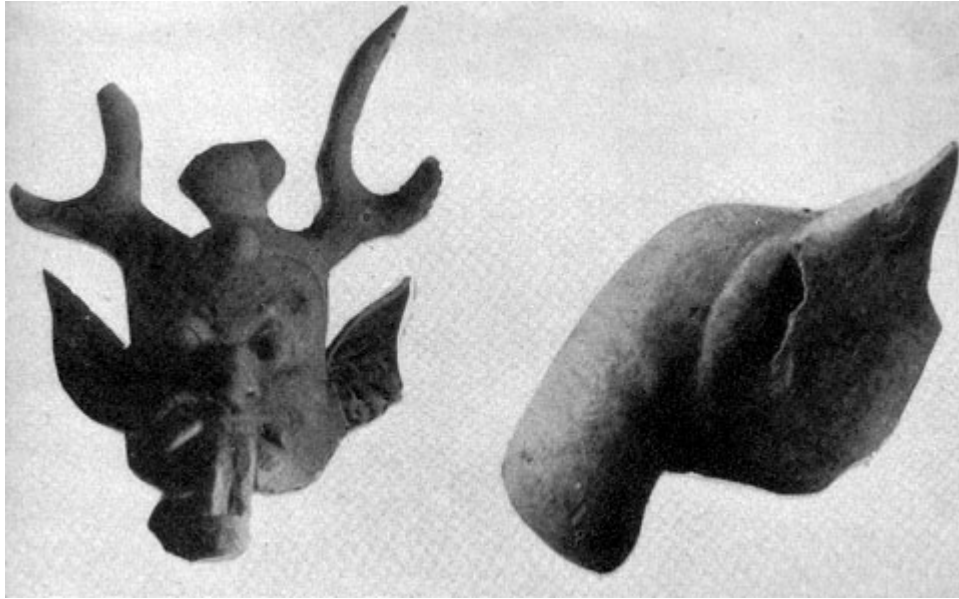


PLATE VIII. (left) A grey earthenware image of a head with the tongue hanging down on to the chest, a large knob on top of the head, large ears and two deer-like horns. Length, without horns, 14 inches; length of horns 7 inches; width from the tips of the ears 13 inches.

(right) The head of an animal with mouth indistinct and no eyes visible but with one large ear on the top of its head. This "ear" is concave in front, not round like a horn. Could it be an unicorn or a *kirin*? It is made of orange-yellow clay. Length 11.5 inches; width 5.75 inches; thickness 2.5 inches.

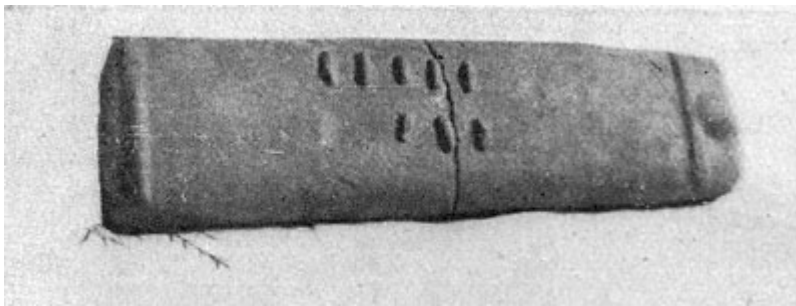


PLATE IX. A small clay image of a lute from the Suifu graves.



PLATE X. An acrobat, with his tongue protruding, standing on his hands. From the Suifu graves. Height 14.25 inches.

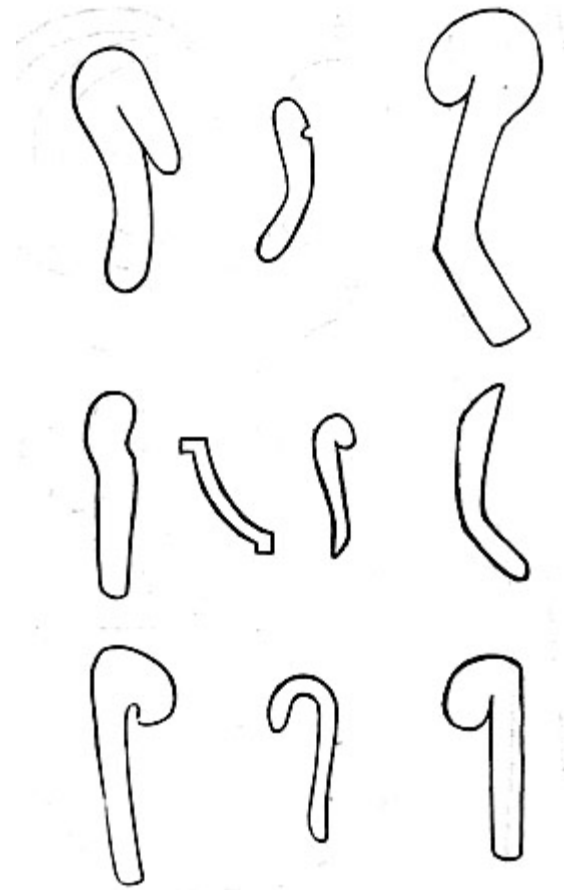


FIG. 13 Rim sherds from Suifu. About half the original size.

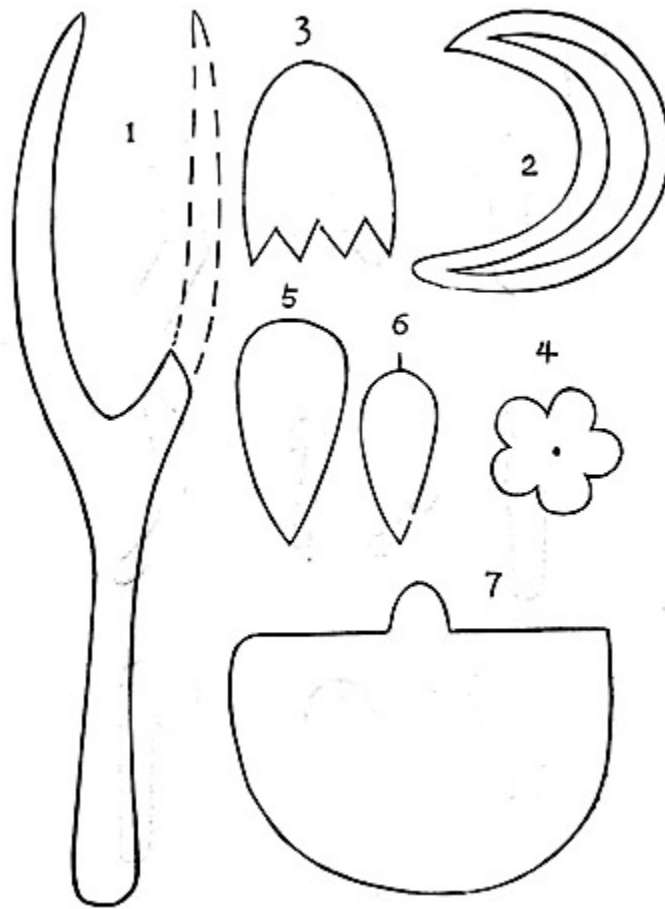


FIG. 14. Bronze objects, approximate size, found in the Suifu graves. 3 may be a back-scratcher; 4 is a flower; 5 and 6 are tree leaves used as ornaments.

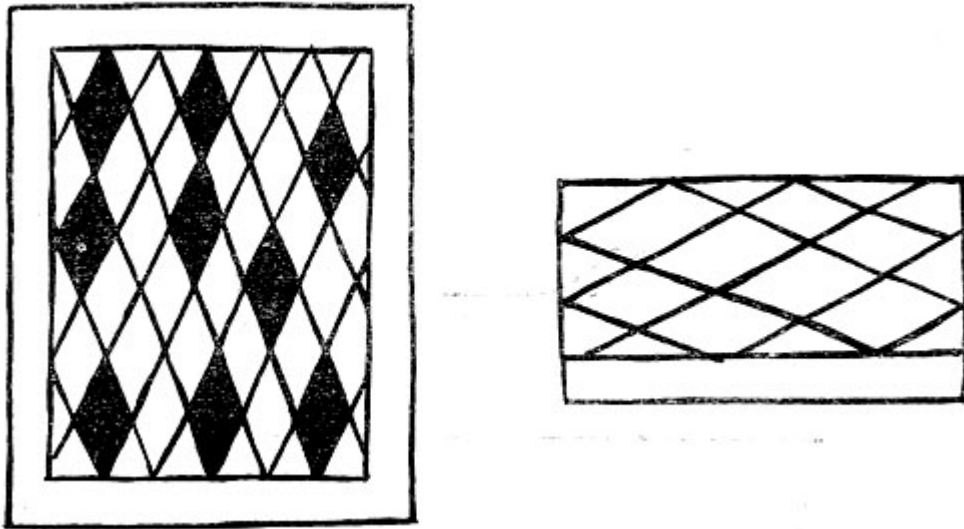


FIG. 15. Sketches of two lattice windows from earthenware houses found in the Suifu graves.

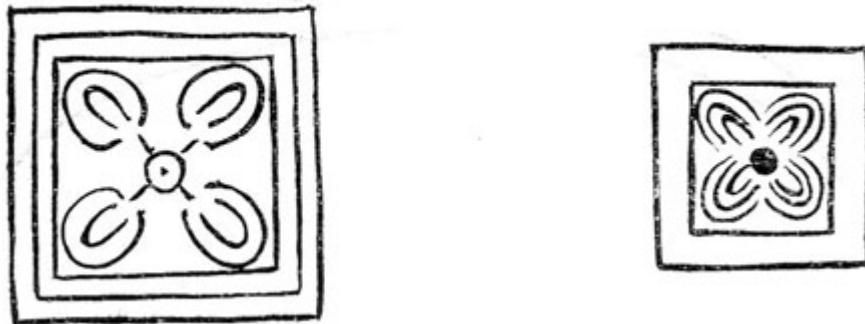


FIG. 16 Ornamentals stamped on the bottoms of earthenware bowls found in the Suifu graves.
Bowls with similar ornaments have been found in the cave-tombs of Kiating.

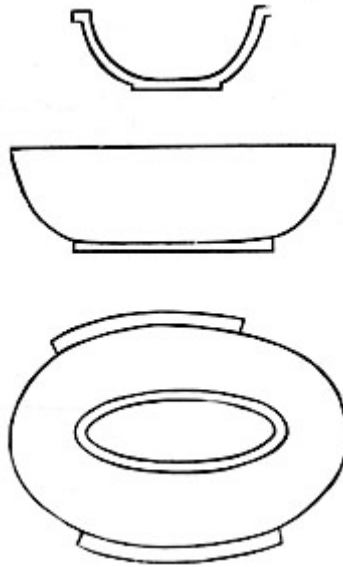


FIG. 17. End and side views and view from the top of a small well-made bowl from the Suifu graves. Several such bowls were found, all of them broken. This type of bowl is common in the Han dynasty cave-tombs.

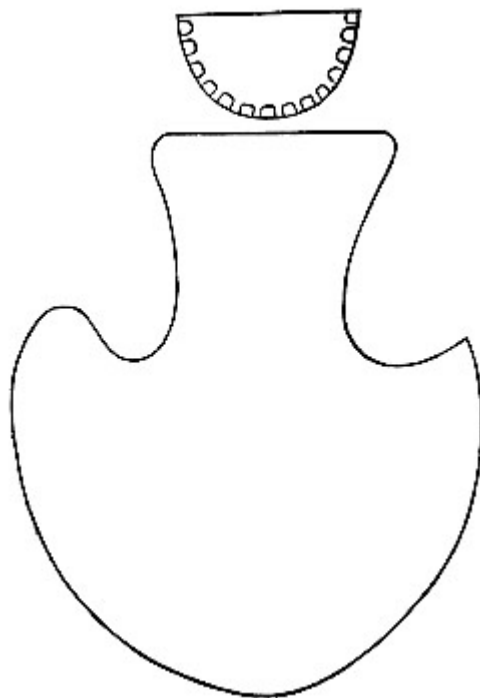


FIG. 18. The small drawing above represents a typical stone implement such as is found frequently among the paleolithic and neolithic artifacts of West China. Below is an earthenware replica of a bronze or iron descendant of this type of implement, found in the Suifu graves. Iron

tools that are apparently derived from prehistoric implements are now in use in Szechwan province.