https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202403/1308997.shtml

Published: Mar 17, 2024 10:26 PM

**Earliest known double-axle cart in E.Asia unearthed in home of Terracotta Warriors**

Archaeologists in Northwest China's Shaanxi Province, home to the world-famous Terracotta Warriors, have unearthed the oldest extant double-axle cart in East Asia. The discovery, dating back to the Shang Dynasty (c.1600BC-1046BC), sheds light on the development and structure of carts, state broadcaster CCTV reported, citing the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology.    
  
The find was made at the Zhaigou site in Qingjian county during a renewed effort in June 2022 to deepen the study of settlements and societies of the late Shang Dynasty in the Loess Plateau region of the province.  
  
According to reports from CCTV, the excavation revealed noble tombs at the site filled with burial carts, some adorned with exquisite bronze fittings.   
  
Among them, one cart stood out with a unique design that is unparalleled among current archaeological findings from the Shang and Western Zhou (1046BC-771BC) dynasties. It is believed to be the oldest of its kind found in China and East Asia.  
  
It features parallel double straight axles, with a bow-shaped yoke placed horizontally at the front, connected to an elliptical rear, with a single axle passing through two wheels.   
  
The axles measure approximately four meters long, with a wheelbase of about 1.8 meters. The cart's wooden structure is adorned with bronze fittings at the ends, while parts such as the axles and shafts are coated with lacquer.  
  
Based on the features of this cart, archaeologists speculate that it could possibly be the type of ox-drawn or large carts mentioned in oracle bone inscriptions and various texts.   
  
Sun Zhanwei, head of the Zhaigou site project, said that the two parallel axles positioned beneath the cart are extremely rare. According to Sun, double-axle carts were not common until the Qin (221BC-206BC) and Han (206BC-220AD) dynasties. As the earliest physical evidence of a double-axle cart, it provides invaluable materials for studying the development and design of carts.  
  
Furthermore, the discovery suggests that the northern Shaanxi region may have served as a crucial node for the southward transmission of carts and horses from the Eurasian steppe to the Central Plains, Sun noted.  
  
"Carts were only discovered in the Yinxu [the 3,300-year-old capital site of the late Shang located in Central China's Henan Province], and no carts have been found from before the Yinxu period. So we generally believe that the transmission of carts from West Asia to the Central Plains possibly occurred through this region," explained Sun.  
  
In addition to the carts, archaeologists also uncovered the largest known Shang Dynasty settlement in the Loess Plateau of northern Shaanxi, as well as the largest number of tombs with a shape similar to the Chinese character "jia" (甲) outside the Yin-Shang cultural sphere.  
  
Situated in the heartland of the northern Shaanxi Loess Plateau, the Zhaigou site has been considered as an important discovery in recent years as it revealed a large area of rammed-earth structures, large-scale tombs, small burial grounds, pottery kilns, and other diverse remains, scattered across 11 neighboring hills.  
  
Previously, the site has yielded a large number of bronze chariots and horses, weaponry, jade artifacts, bone tools, lacquerware, and oracle bones, reflecting the economic and cultural progress of the loess hill region during the Shang Dynasty, as well as the impact of the Shang Dynasty on the area.