

Kuang Yu Chen · Zhenhao Song ·
Yuan Liu · Matthew Anderson

Reading of Shāng Inscriptions

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Foreword

The discovery of inscribed oracle bones and shells in 1899 and subsequent identification of Yīnxū, the ruins of the last Shāng Capital located near Ānyáng, Hénán, proved to be a watershed for Early China studies, as these inscriptions represent the most archaic form of Chinese writing (more precisely *hànzì*) and the earliest documentary source in China. Almost all of these documents belong to the royal house of late Shāng Dynasty (~1300 to 1100 BCE). These documents survived for so long because they were engraved on animal bones (mostly bovine scapula) and turtle shells (plastron or carapace), hence the name ‘oracle bone inscriptions’ (OBI) or, in Chinese, *Jiǎgǔwén*, literally ‘shell bone writing’. The inscriptions engraved on hundreds of thousands of bones and shells provide the most precious source for studying early Chinese history. It was based on OBI that Wáng Guówéi, one of the most eminent Chinese scholars of the early 20th century, was able to identify names of Shāng kings and ascertain the historicity of the figures previously thought to be legendary. By doing so, Wáng confirmed the authenticity of the Shāng history as written by Sīmǎ Qiān (145—86 BCE) in the *Shǐjì*, (*The Records of Grand Historian*).

Oracle bone inscription (OBI), the earliest form of Chinese, together with Egyptian, Mayan, and Sumerian constitute the four writing systems independently invented in human history. All four primary writings are logographic in nature. Among them, only Chinese writing system survives and remains logographic. The study of OBI not only plays a pivotal role in connecting the archeological data to the transmitted textual tradition in China, it is also of great import to the comparative study of origin of writing systems and civilizations. Despite this, OBI has not garnered the attention and popularity in the western world that Egyptian hieroglyphs, Sumerian cuneiform, and Mayan glyph have long enjoyed. In fact, there are only a very few scholarly books in English that focus on OBI (e.g. *Sources of Shāng History*, 1978, 1985; *The Ancestral Landscape*, 2000; *Working for His Majesty*, 2012; written by David Keightley, University of California, Berkeley, and *Studies of Fascicle Three of Inscriptions from the Yin Ruins*, 2010, by Ken-ichi Takashima, University of British Columbia) and there are virtually no books for the general public in the West to learn about OBI. This can be contrasted with the tens or even hundreds of books on Mayan and Egyptian hieroglyphs and civilizations found on online book selling sites such as Amazon.com.

The author has had the fortune to learn OBI in college and in graduate school from several leading Shāng scholars, including the late Professors Jīn Xiánghéng (National Taiwan University), Chang Kwang-chi (Zhāng Guāngzhí, Yale University) and Professor JaoTsung-I (Ráo Zōngyí, Yale University). The author has offered a course on OBI (Chinese 165:424, Origin and Development

of Chinese Writing) in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at Rutgers University, New Jersey for many years. The course material forms the basis of this book. The main body of this book is a collection of 120 pieces of rubbings (*tàběn*), mainly from the corpus of *Jiǎgǔwén Héjí* 甲骨文合集 (*Collections of Oracle Bones*) that contain inscriptions covering a wide array of topics including weather, astronomy, kingship, sacrificial ceremonies, rituals, agriculture, hunting, military campaigns and politics. Each rubbing is accompanied by a clear tracing (*móběn*), which will be helpful in case the graphs on rubbing are not clearly legible. The direct graph-to-graph transcription in digital OBI font will help the reader to become familiar with the sequence and direction of reading OBI on the rubbings. Transliteration from OBI graph to English is also provided; so that, by comparing this transliteration with the English translation the reader can appreciate the grammar and sentence structure of archaic Chinese. Finally, annotations are provided

The book is intended to benefit both scholars and lay public who are interested in East Asian civilizations in general and Early China in particular. Readers can use this book to get acquainted with the writing of OBI graphs, just like students learn Mayan or Egyptian hieroglyphs from reading original scripts. In light of the lack of books in English for the study of OBI, it is hoped that this book will fill the need for an accessible introduction to the subject. During the preparation of this book, I have greatly benefited by discussions with Professors Lín Yún, Jílín University, and Sòng Zhènháo, Institute of History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. I am grateful to Dr. Liú Yuán, who has read the Chinese portion of the manuscript, and to Professor Dietrich Tschanz, Rutgers University, who has read and commented on the English part of the manuscript. Both Sòng Zhènháo and Liú Yuán have participated the project from its inception. Dr. Matthew Anderson, a student in my 2006 OBI class, helped with the transcription (OBI font, Chinese and English) and did most of the English translation of the inscriptions. Dr. Zhì Xiǎonà, a student of Professor Sòng, did the tracing work. Without their help, the book could not have been accomplished. It goes without saying that I am solely responsible for any remaining mistakes, big or small. Finally I wish to thank my wife, Alice Liu, for her continuous support and understanding.

Kuang Yu Chen

Explanatory Notes

1. The main body of this book is a collection of 120 pieces of oracle bone inscriptions (OBI) from the late Shāng Dynasty (~1300-1046 BCE). The inscriptions deal with many aspects of Shāng royal house, including calendar, astronomy, royal kinship, sacrificial rituals, hunting, agriculture, and war. For each piece we present rubbings (*tàběn* 拓本), tracings (*móběn* 摹本), text in OBI font, transcription in English, reading (straight translation in English), annotations and practice. The book is intended for readers who are interested in Shāng civilization and Early China. The book can be used as either a textbook for teaching or a tutorial for self-learning.

2. The primary source of OBI inscriptions used in this book is ink-squeezed rubbings from *Jiǎgǔwén héjí* 甲骨文合集 (*Collections of Oracle Bones*). Only a few came from other collections. As the quality of rubbings varies, we provide *móběn*, which means ‘tracing or line drawing,’ to ensure that all graphs are clearly legible. To facilitate the reading of OBI inscriptions directly on the bone or plastron, the order of reading is indicated on *móběn* by arrows.

3. In addition, we present the OBI characters in a text format using digital OBI font so that the reader can easily compare the OBI text with the transcribed text in English.

4. Transcription: We have provided a graph-to-graph transcription of OBI in English to help the reader to appreciate how the English reading of the inscription comes about. In the transcription, missing OBI graph or graphs (due to damage) are indicated by ‘...’. The bracket sign [] is used to indicate the missing graphs that can be reconstructed based on the context.

5. Reading: The OBI inscriptions are translated in English in a straightforward style. With regard to the graph *zhen* (貞) used in the Preface of the Charge, scholars are divided on whether *zhen* (貞) was an indicative or an interrogative verb. Depending on the context, we treat *zhen* (貞) as an indicative verb, and the charge as a prayer or statement. Occasionally, we follow the original definition of *zhen* (貞) in *Shuowen* 說文 (*Explanation of Graphs*) and treat it as an interrogative verb and the charge as a question.

6. Annotation: We first give the source of the OBI rubbing and then the diviner group of that oracle bone piece according to *Jiǎgǔwénhéjí Fēnzǔfēnlèi Zǒngbiǎo* 甲骨文合集分組分類總表 (*Periodization and Classification of Oracle Bone Collections*). Although most of the inscriptions cannot be precisely dated, they can be roughly dated by the reigns of kings, based on a number of criteria, including the name of diviner, the style of inscriptions, the ancestral titles used. Thus, every piece of oracle bone inscription can be assigned into one of the five periods, from King Wu Ding to King Di Xin. Within each Period, the bone inscriptions can be further grouped into several clusters according to the engraving styles (see Annotation of Piece 2). The reader can consult *Jiǎgǔwénzì Gǔlín* 《甲骨文字詁林》 (*A Forest of Oracle Bone Graphs*) for more detailed information and

references related to the annotation of each OBI graph. The translation of Chinese personal name follows the standard Pinyin, except for scholars from Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas, who may have used other spelling methods.

7. Practice: We have included one to four additional rubbings containing inscriptions relevant to the selected piece. Learning to read these rubbings can serve as tutorial practice.

8. The book includes the following appendices:

Appendix 1: Vocabulary List

Appendix 2: References and Bibliography

Appendix 3: Introduction to Oracle Bone Scholarship

Appendix 4: *Gānzhī* Table (Table of Sixty Day Cycle)

Appendix 5: King List (adapted from “*Jiǎgǔxué Jiǎnjiè*” 《甲骨學簡介》).

Appendix 6: Five-Ritual Cycle (adapted from “*Shāngdài Zhōujiè Zhìdù*” 《商代周祭制度》).

Appendix 7: A comparison of OBI with Egyptian, Sumerian and Mayan Scripts

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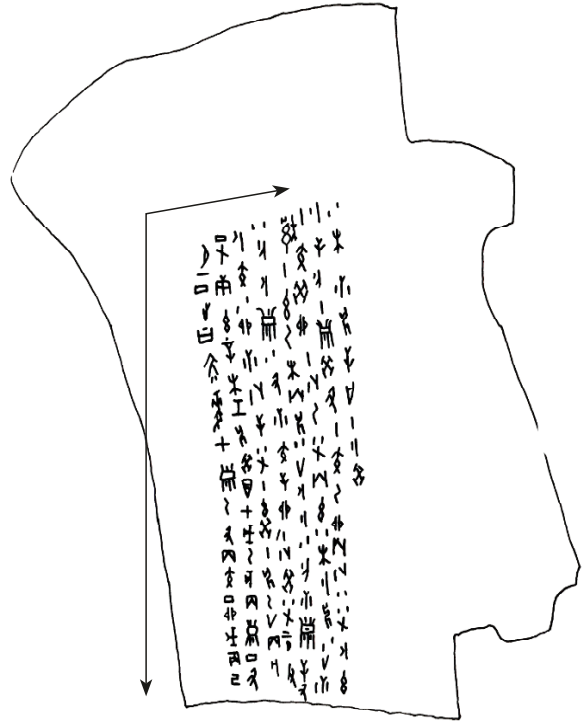
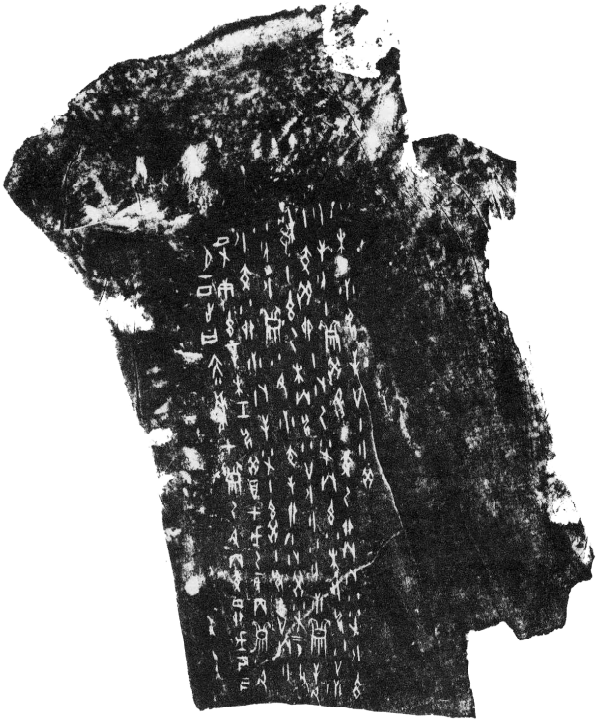
*All pieces, except Piece 6, 48, 116—120, are from *Jiǎgūwén héjì*.

The numbers listed here refer to their list number in *Jiaguwen heji (Collection of Oracle Bones)*, these numbers are prefixed with *Heji* in this book.

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Piece 1

Gānzhi Cycle



OBI

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Transcription

month one normal say eat wheat *jiǎ zǐ yǐ chǒu bǐng yín dīng mǎo wù chén jǐ*
sì gēng wǔ xīn wèi rén shēn guǐ yǒu jiǎ xū yǐ hài bǐng zǐ dīng chǒu
wù yín jǐ mǎo gēng chén xīn sì rén wǔ guǐ [wèi] jiǎ shēn yǐ yǒu bǐng xū
dīng hài wù zǐ jǐ chǒu gēng yín xīn mǎo rén chén guǐ sì two month fū
X jiǎ wǔ yǐ wèi bǐng shēn dīng yǒu wù xū jǐ hài gēng zǐ xīn chǒu
rén yín guǐ mǎo jiǎ chén yǐ sì bǐng wǔ dīng wèi wù shēn jǐ yǒu gēng
xū xīn hài rén zǐ guǐ chǒu jiǎ yín yǐ mǎo bǐng chén dīng sì wù wǔ
jǐ wèi gēng shēn xīn yǒu rén xū guǐ [hài]

Reading

The First Month is called (the time of) ‘wheat eating’ .

Jiǎzǐ, yǐchǒu, bǐngyín, dīngmǎo, wùchén, jǐsì, gēngwǔ, xīnwèi, rénsēn, guǐyǒu.

Jiǎxū, yǐhài, bǐngzǐ, dīngchǒu, wùyín, jǐmǎo, gēngchén, xīnsì, rénwǔ, guǐwèi.

Jiǎshēn, yǐyǒu, bǐngxū, dīnghài, wùzǐ, jǐchǒu, gēngyín, xīnmǎo, réncén, guǐsì.

Second Month, (the time of) ‘fū X’ .

Jiǎwǔ, yǐwèi, bǐngshēn, dīngyǒu, wùxū, jǐhài, gēngzǐ, xīnchǒu, rényín, guǐmǎo.

Jiǎchén, yǐsì, bǐngwǔ, dīngwèi, wùshēn, jǐyǒu, gēngxū, xīnhài, rénzǐ, guǐchǒu.

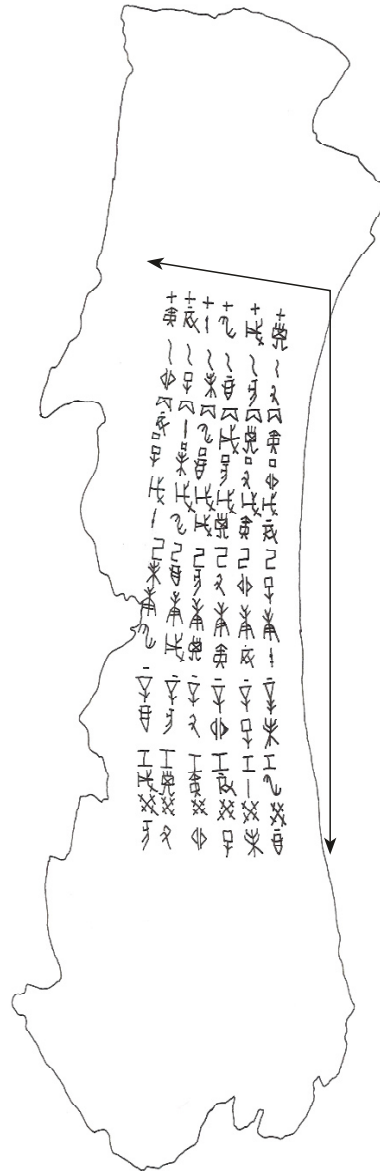
Jiǎyín, yǐmǎo, bǐngchén, dīngsì, wùwǔ, jǐwèi, gēngshēn, xīnyǒu, rénxū, guǐhài.

Annotation

1. This piece (*Heji* 24440) belongs to the diviner *Chū* Group (出組 Period 2). It contains the *gānzhī* (干支) name of all 60 days, starting with *jiǎzǐ* (甲子) and ending with *guǐhài* (癸亥). A modern version of *gānzhī* cycle is shown in Appendix 2.
2. There are ten *gān* (干, stems, heavenly stems) and twelve *zhī* (支, branches, earthly branches). The combination of one *gān* and one *zhī* in an orderly manner forms 60 pairs, which were used in Shāng to denote each day.
3. The graph 𪛗, 𪛘 *mài* (麥) refers to crops, most likely wheat. Here, the term 食麥 *shí mài* (食麥) ‘eat wheat’, refers to some ritual activity that was performed in the first month, possibly a tradition that is still retained in the following passage of the *Yuèlìng* (月令) section of the *Lǐjì* (《禮記》):

“The son of Heaven occupies the apartment on the left of the Qīng Yáng (Fane); rides in the carriage with the phoenix (bells), drawn by the azure-dragon (horses), and carrying the green flag; wears the green robes, and the (pieces of) green jade (on his cap and at his girdle pendant). He eats wheat and mutton. The vessels which he uses are slightly carved, (to resemble) the shooting forth (of plants).” (天子居青陽左个。乘鸞路，駕倉龍，載青旗，衣青衣，服倉玉，食麥與羊，其器疏以達。) (see <http://chinese.dsturgeon.net/index.html>) This piece started with the second month by stating ‘二月，父𪛗’，which we translated as ‘Second Month, (time of) *fū X*’ because the graph 𪛗 is not recognizable. Nonetheless, the term ‘*fū X*’ probably refers to some ritual activity associated with the Second Month.
4. Shāng scribes or engravers produced bone inscriptions by first engraving the vertical strokes for each graph, then turned the bone piece 90 degrees to engrave the horizontal strokes. As horizontal strokes are missing in many graphs in this piece, it would suggest that the engraving work for this piece is incomplete.

The graph *wèi* (未) is missing from the third column (as part of the day name *guǐwèi* 癸未), and the graph *hài* (亥) is missing from the last column (as part of the day name *guǐhài* 癸亥).
5. The graph 𪛗 depicts food stuff held in a utensil (*guǐ* 簋) with lid covered. Some scholars consider the top part a ‘mouth’ sign. It is transcribed as *shí* (食) ‘food’ or ‘to eat’. The horizontal strokes here are missing in this bone graph.
6. The piece (*Heji* 37986) shown below gives a complete Shāng *Table of 60 days- Gānzhī*, from *jiǎzǐ* (甲子) to *guǐhài* (癸亥).

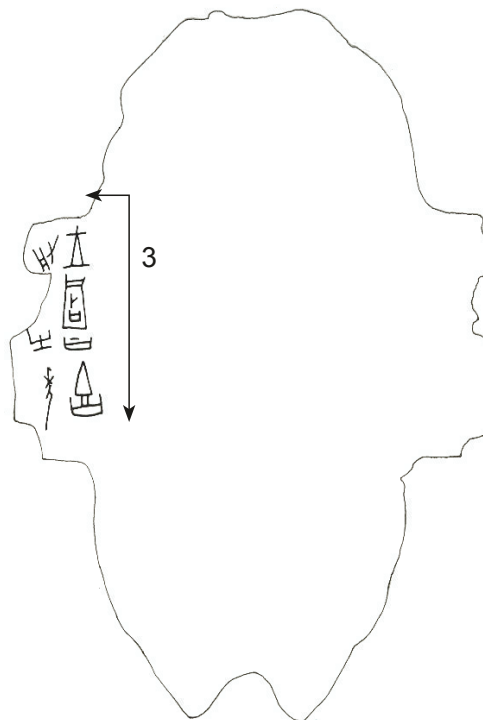
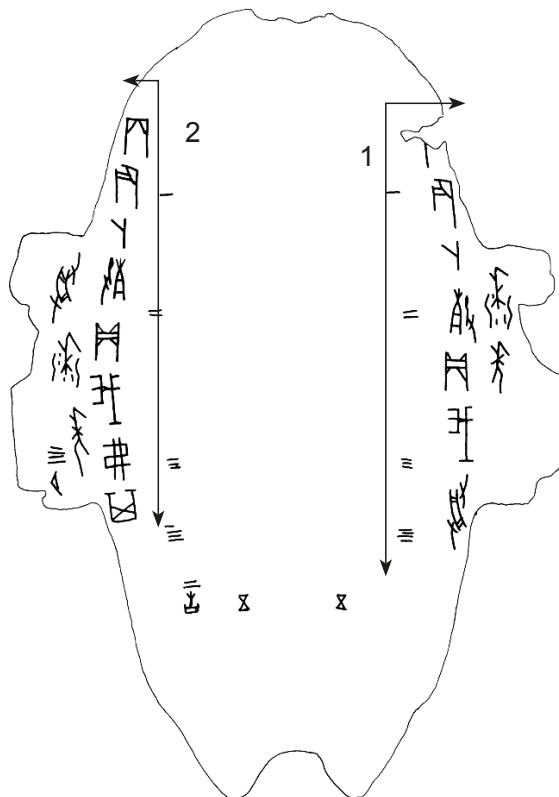


37986

Table of Shāng *Gānzhi*

Piece 2

The Millet Harvest



OBI

(obverse side)



(reverse side)

**Transcription***bǐng chén* crack Quē divine we receive millet harvest*bǐng chén crack* Quē divine we not *qí* receive millet harvest

four moon

second report

king prognosticate say auspicious receive abundant harvest

Reading

(obverse side)

[1] Crack-making on *bǐngchén* (day 53), Quē divined: Will Shāng State receive the millet harvest?[2] Crack-making on *bǐngchén*, Quē divined: Will Shāng State possibly not receive the millet harvest? Fourth month. Second presentation.

(reverse side)

[3] The King prognosticated and proclaimed: Auspicious. We will receive abundant harvest.

Annotation

1. This piece (*Heji* 09950) belongs to the *Diǎn Bīn* Group (典賓類, Period 1). The obverse side of the plastron recorded two lines of inscriptions, one positive and one negative, about whether the Shāng would receive abundant harvest. The reverse side is a prognostication made by King Wǔ Dīng, proclaiming that there would be a good harvest.

2. Graphs and Idioms

The graph 𠄎 (*bǔ* 卜 ‘to make crack’) depicts a crack sign caused by applying heat at a hollow bored from the opposite side of the bone or plastron. This pictograph was used to indicate the initiation of divination ritual. It is the most frequently used script in OBI.

The graph 𠄎 (*què* 𠄎) is the name of a diviner, serving in King Wǔ Dīng’s court.

The graph 𠄎 (*zhēn* 貞 ‘to divine’) depicts a cauldron *dǐng* (鼎). It is used as a Loangraph here, meaning ‘to divine’. The use of *zhēn* (貞) as ‘to divine’ may also have something to do with the possibility that the cauldron could be an integral component of the divination process.

The graph 𠄎 (*wǒ* 我) depicts a saw-like weapon. It is used as loangraph for a first person pronoun ‘I, me, we, or us’.

The graph 𠄎 (*shòu* 受 ‘receive’) depicts two hands holding a boat or something. It is used as a syssemantograph (compound ideograph), meaning ‘to receive’ or ‘to give’.

The graph 𠄎 (*shǔ* 黍 ‘glutinous millet’) is a pictogram. Millet was the most important crop in ancient China.

The graph 𠄎 (*nián* 年 ‘harvest’) is a compound *xíngshēng* word, composed of a pictogram 𠄎 for crop and a graph 𠄎 as a phonetic component. The graph is used in Shāng strictly for ‘harvest’.

The graph 𠄎 (*fú* 弗) depicts the use of rope to strap arrows or wood plank. It is used in OBI strictly as a negative adverb, meaning ‘not’.

The graph 𠄎 (*qí* 其) depicts a winnowing basket *jī* (箕). It is a loangraph in OBI used as a grammatical particle, meaning ‘perhaps’, ‘may’, or ‘ought’.

The graph 𠄎 (*yuè* 月 ‘moon, month’) depicts a new moon and is a pictogram for ‘moon’ or ‘month’.

The graph 𠄎 (*gào* 告 ‘to report’) depicts a tongue extending from the mouth, meaning ‘to report’, either from the king to the ancestor spirit or from the subordinate to the superior.

The graph 𠄎 (*wáng* 王 ‘king’) depicts a battle axe, which the king wielded as a sign of supreme power. The graph is used as a loangraph for ‘king’.

The graph 𠄎 (*zhān* 占) depicts a crack sign and a mouth sign encircled in a shoulder bone. It is used as a syssemantograph, meaning *zhān* (占) ‘to prognosticate’.

The graph 𠄎 (*yuē* 曰) shows an open mouth with sound coming out. The graph means ‘to

announce, to proclaim’ or ‘to be’. In OBI, the prognostication was always performed by the King or in certain cases, by Zi (子), the crown prince or the elder of the clan.

The graph 吉, transcribed as *jí* (吉), is a prognostication term, meaning ‘auspicious’ or ‘lucky’. The graph 𠄎 is used to mean (i) *yòu* (又) ‘again’, (ii) *yǒu* (有) ‘to have’, (iii) *yòu* (佑) ‘to bless’, and (iv) *yòu* (侑) ‘a sacrificial offering ceremony’. The origin of this graph is unclear.

3. A standard complete oracle bone inscription (OBI) consists of five components:

- (i) Preface: It includes the *gānzhī* date of cracking, the name of diviner, always a single character, and the place name if the divination was performed outside the royal capital during hunting trip or military campaign.
- (ii) Charge: This is the main body of OBI; it typically includes both positive and negative question (or statement) put to the ancestral spirit inquiring whether the event would or would not occur.
- (iii) Prognostication: This part always started with the introductory phrase ‘*wáng zhān yuē* 王占曰’, meaning ‘The King prognosticates and proclaims’. What follows is the prognostication that the King made after reading the divination cracks.
- (iv) Verification: This part usually contains the word *yǔn* (允), meaning that the event indeed happened as predicted.
- (v) Crack number and crack notation: Crack number (*zhàoxù* 兆序), from 1 to 10, and crack notation (*zhàoyǔ* 兆語) are typically engraved next to cracks on the bone, shell or plastron. They are technical terms related to the divination process and interpretation of the cracks. Their significance is not fully understood yet.

The following shows how to identify these components in this piece, which lacks verification part:

(i) Preface	(ii) Charge (positive)	(i) Preface	(ii) Charge (negative)
bǐng chén crack Quē divine	we receive millet harvest	bǐng chén crack Quē divine	we not qí receive millet harvest

(i) Preface	(v) Crack notation
four moon	second report

(iii) Prognostication

king prognosticate say auspicious receive abundant harvest

4. We translate *bǔ* (卜) as ‘crack’ or ‘crack-making’, depending on its use as a noun or as a verb. The reconstructed minimal Old Chinese (OCM) pronunciation of this word is *pôk, suggesting that the sound was derived from the cracking of a turtle shell or animal bone after

heat was applied. The graph itself depicts a crack generated from applying heat to the bone or shell. We translate *zhēn* (貞) as ‘to divine’; this action was always performed by a royal diviner. The job of *zhān* (占) ‘to prognosticate after reading the cracks’ is performed almost exclusively by the King. Occasionally, prognostication can be performed by *Zǐ* (子), either a powerful leader within the royal lineage or the crown prince.

5. *Wǒ* (我) in OBI can mean: (i) we; (ii) the statelet *Wǒ*; or (iii) the place called *Wǒ*. Here it could refer either to the *Shāng* state or to the *Wǒ* state. Since *wǒ* appears much more frequently in OBI corpus than any other statelets, it would seem more reasonable that *wǒ* here means ‘we’ and refers to the *Shāng* rather than the statelet *Wǒ*.
6. *Èr gào* (二告, 二𠄎) is a crack notation. The precise meaning here is unclear. There are two possible interpretations: (i) ‘the second prayer’, or ‘the second presentation’ as proposed by *Hú Hòuxuān* (胡厚宣) and *Shāng Chéngzuò* (商承祚); and (ii) ‘greatly auspicious’ as proposed by *Sūn Yìràng* (孫詒讓) and *Zhāng Bǐngquán* (張秉權). Since the graph 𠄎 *jí* (吉) ‘auspicious’ is clearly different from the graph 𠄎, we use the first interpretation here.
7. The graph 𠄎 *yǒu* in phrase such as *shòu yǒu yòu* (受𠄎又) or *shòu yǒu nián* (受𠄎年) can be interpreted as (i) a word with an attributive and pronominal function, meaning ‘this’ or ‘in this case’; (ii) ‘abundant, bountiful’ according to Keightley; (iii) an honorific. From the context, the second interpretation is better.
8. The graph 𠄎 *qí* (其) is used as a grammatical particle, meaning ‘may’ or ‘perhaps’. When a diviner tests two charges, one positive and one negative, *qí* often precedes the charge that the diviner viewed as the less preferred one.
9. Table 1 shows the classification of the *Shāng* OBI into five periods according to the chronology of the late *Shāng*, from from King *Wǔ Dīng* to King *Dì Xīn*. The number in the parenthesis (e.g. K21) indicates the accession order of the king. Based on a number of criteria, including archeological data, diviner, style of engraving, ancestral titles and events, a particular piece of oracle bone can be dated to one of these five periods. The regnal years are based on the report of *Xià-Shāng-Zhōu Chronology Project* (夏商周斷代工程, *Xià Shāng Zhōu Duàndài Gōngchéng*).

Table 1 Periodization of Shāng Oracle Bone Inscriptions

Period	Kings	Regnal Years (BCE)
1	Wǔ Dīng (K21)	1250—1192
2	Zū Gēng (K22) Zū Jiǎ (K23)	1191—1162
3	Lǐn Xīn (K24) Kāng Dīng (K25)	1161—1148
4	Wǔ Yī (K26) Wén Wǔ Dīng (K27)	1147—1113 1112—1102
5	Dì Yī (K28) Dì Xīn (K29)	1101—1076 1075—1046

Practice

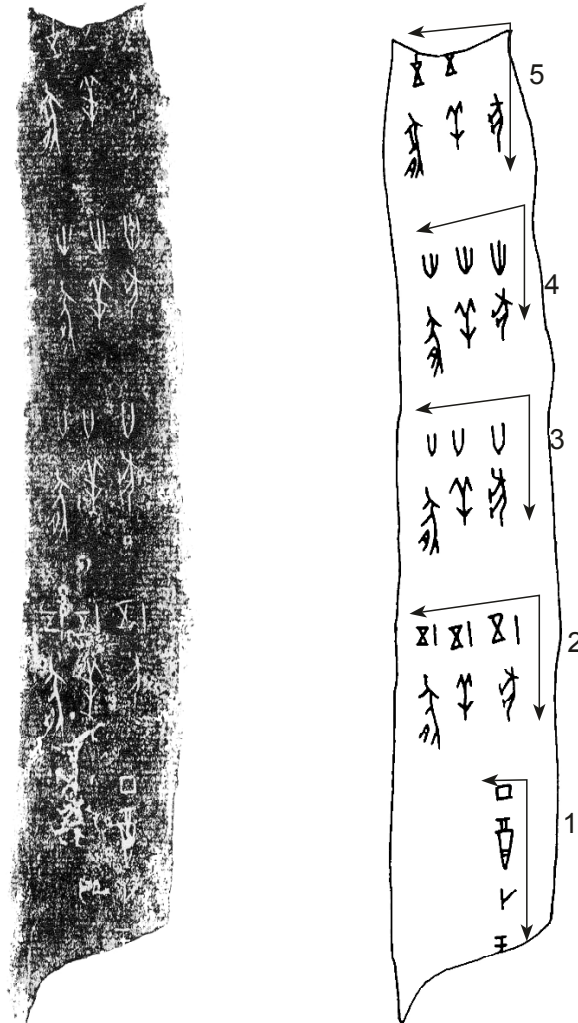
09956

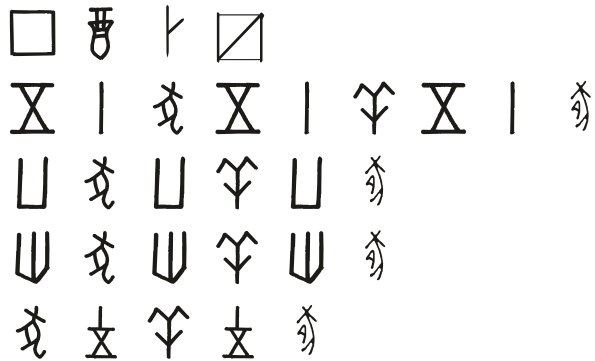


09965

Piece 3

Fifteen Dogs



OBI**Transcription**

dīng yǒu bǔ

fifteen dog fifteen sheep fifteen piglet

twenty dog twenty sheep twenty piglet

thirty dog thirty sheep thirty piglet

[fifty] dog fifty sheep fifty piglet

Reading

[1] Crack-making on *dīngyǒu* (day 34) ...

[2] Fifteen dogs, fifteen sheep, and fifteen piglets.

[3] Twenty dogs, twenty sheep, and twenty piglets.

[4] Thirty dogs, thirty sheep, and thirty piglets.

[5] Fifty dogs, fifty sheep, and fifty piglets.

Annotation

1. This piece (*Heji* 29537) belongs to the diviner *Wuming* Group (無名組, Period 3 and 4). The piece is related to a divination about how many sacrificial animals should be used. The significance of the combined use of dogs, sheep, and piglets is not clear.
2. Graphs and Idioms
 The graph 𤝵 (*quǎn* 犬) is a pictograph. Note the slight upswing of the tail.
 The graph 𤝹 (*yáng* 羊) is a pictograph for sheep or goat.
 The graph 豕 (*tún* 豚 ‘piglet’) depicts a pig with a sign of meat cut, indicating suckling pig.
 The graph 卅 (*niàn* 廿 ‘twenty’) shows two signs of ‘ten’ connected, meaning twenty.
 The graph 卅 (*sà* 卅 ‘thirty’) shows three signs of ‘ten’ connected, meaning thirty.
 The graph 𠫪, transcribed as 卅十, shows the sign of ‘five’ and ‘ten’ connected, meaning fifty.
3. Note the distinction between the expression of 15 and 50 in OBI. To express the number 50, the two numerical graphs, five and ten, are joined together.
4. The sequence of the divination recorded on the bones is to be read from the bottom up. In this piece, the number of sacrificial animals increased from 15 to 50.

Practice



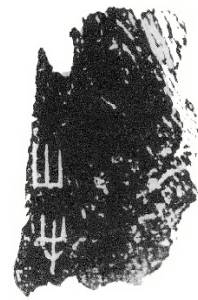
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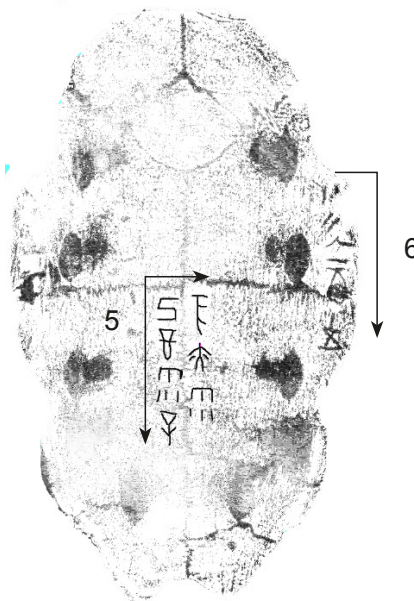
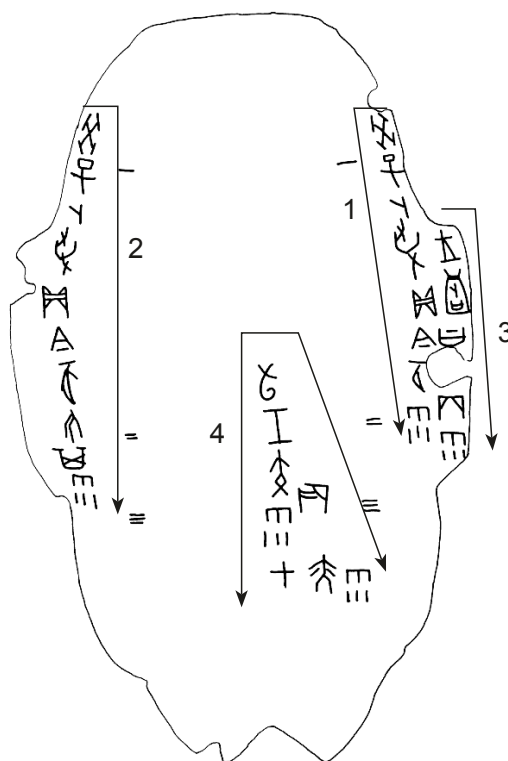
33578



33579

Piece 4

Rain in the First Month



OBI

(obverse side)

𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎
 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎
 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎
 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎
 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎

(reverse side)

𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎
 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎 𠄎

Transcription*guǐ sì crack Zhēng divine this one month rain**guǐ sì crack Zhēng divine this one month not qí rain**king prognosticate say bǐng rain**xún rén yín rain**jiǎ chén also rain**jǐ yǒu rain xīn hài also rain*

Què enter 250

Reading

(obverse side)

[1] Crack-making on *guǐsì* (day 30), Zhēng divined: This first month there will be rainy.

[2] Crack-making on *guǐsì*, Zhēng divined: This first month there may not be rainy.

[3] The King prognosticated and proclaimed: It will rain on *bǐng* (*-shēn*, day 33).

[4] Ten days later, on *rényín* (day 39), it rained; on *jiǎchén* (day 41), it also rained.

(reverse side)

[5] On *jǐyǒu* (day 46) it rained, on *xīnhài* (day 48) it also rained.

[6] Què sent in 250 (tortoise shells).

Annotation

1. This piece (*Heji* 12487) belongs to the diviner *Diǎn Bīn* Group (典賓類, Period 1). The obverse side contains preface, charge, prognostication and verification. A part of verification also appears at the back of the plastron. The charge deals with whether there will be rainfall in the first month. On the back, there is a marginal notation (*jiǎqiáo kècí* 甲橋刻辭) at the plastron bridge, recording that Què (雀) brought in to the court 250 pieces of turtle shells.

2. Graphs and Idioms

The graph 𠄎 (*zhēng* 爭) is a diviner who served in King Wǔ Dīng's court.

The graph 亓 (*jīn* 今) means 'at present/this moment/today/now'.

The graph 雨 is a pictograph for the modern word *yǔ* (雨) 'rain/to rain'.

The graph 不 is transcribed and used as *bù* (不) 'no/not'.

The graph 旬 (*xún* 旬) refers to the ten-day cycle, from *jiǎ* (甲) to *guī* (癸).

The graph 腋 shows two dots underneath the armpit of a man, meaning *yè* (腋) 'armpit'. It is used as loangraph for *yì* (亦) 'also'.

The graph 雀, transcribed as *què* (雀), is the name of a friendly statelet of Shāng.

The graph 入 is transcribed and used as *rù* (入) ‘to enter/to bring in’. In OBI, ‘personal name + *rù*’ indicates that the person makes a tribute by bringing in bones or plastrons to the court.

The graph 百 is transcribed and interpreted as *bǎi* (百) ‘hundred’.

3. The months in Shāng OBI are numbered as ‘first month’, ‘second month’, etc. In general, each year consisted of 12 months. Sometime a thirteenth month is added to account for the leap year. The first month in Shāng does not necessarily match the January of the modern time. Keightley instead uses ‘First moon’, ‘Second moon’ etc. to translate.
4. In addition to the *gānzhī* cycle and the 12 month cycle, the Shāng also used a 10-day week (*xún* 旬) to denote time. The first day of this 10-day week always fall on a *jiǎ* day, so divination about the coming week is always made on the *guǐ* day, the last day of the previous 10-day cycle.
5. Què (雀) is a statelet, probably within the Shāng polity. Here, the graph refers to either the leader of Què or a representative from Què.

Practice



12433



12499