

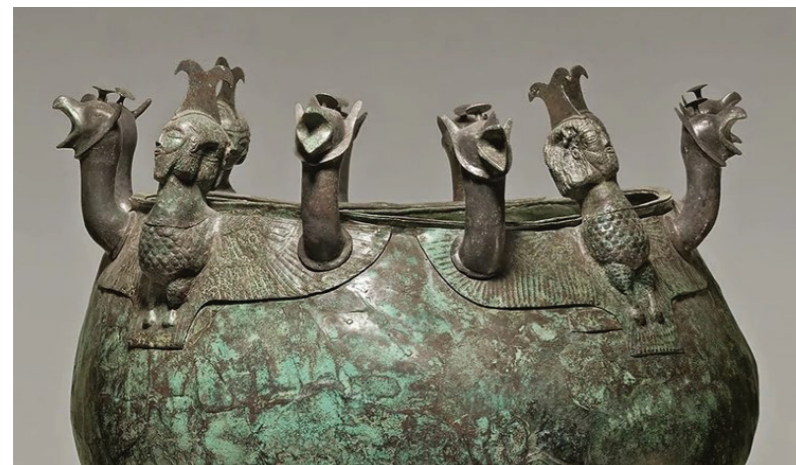
Cauldron Attachment in the Form of a Griffin's Head

Greek, possibly from Samos, late 7th century BCE

Bronze

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Wright S. Ludington, 1981.64.22

Like the Ancient Chinese, ancient Greeks also used zoomorphic imagery on bronze vessels for ritual use. A griffin is a mythical creature with the head of an eagle and the body of a lion. This head was once attached to a cauldron, which would have been left at a shrine as a votive offering to the gods. This head and neck were cast as a single piece through the lost-wax method. The stippled surface, which imitates feathers or lion's fur, was probably hammered after the piece cooled.



Bronze cauldron with griffin and siren attachments (image cropped). Salamis, Cyprus, ca. 8th–7th century BCE. Cyprus Museum, Nicosia.

Jue Ritual Wine Vessel

China, Shang dynasty, 12th–11th century BCE

Bronze

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase, Special Asian Acquisition Fund, 2002.51

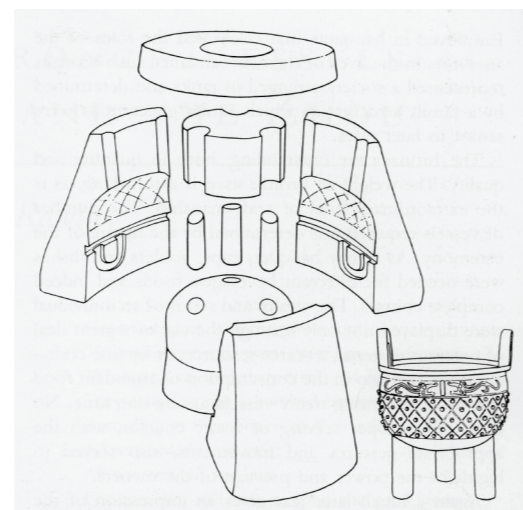
Liding Ritual Food Vessel

China, Shang dynasty, 11th century BCE

Bronze

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase with funds provided by the estate of Herbert N. Peters, Santa Barbara St. Mary's Retreat House and Carroll and Suzanne Barrymore, 2001.35

The rituals of the Shang dynasty required regular sacrificial offerings of food to appease the power "on High," bring rain, and maintain the cosmic as well as political order. Bronze vessels, like these, were found in tombs of clan rulers indicative of their societal position and control of natural resources. Later, during the time of Confucius (551–478 BCE), this system of rules and ritual observances came to be known under the name of *li* [礼; 禮], a concept centering on human relationships, including those with one's ancestors. The liding vessel has a pair of "eyes" on either side and a "nose" flanked by *kui*, or dragons. It was believed that these large-eyed mask-like creatures, later known as *taotie* [饕餮], were warnings to the living against overindulgence in food or other excesses.



Drawing of the ceramic piece-mold required for casting a bronze ritual food vessel. From Jessica Rawson, *Mysteries of Ancient China* (1996).

Piece-Mold Casting

These ancient Chinese ritual vessels were cast using the piece-mold method. Clay slabs were pieced together to form the shape of the vessel, then molten bronze was poured in. When the piece cooled, it was separated from the clay. Archeologists have excavated ancient foundries filled with clay models and mold fragments produced as part of the mold-making process.

Long before the earliest known bronzes were cast (1900–1600 BCE), potters in China had been firing clay for thousands of years. Bronze artisans drew on existing kiln and clay technologies when they devised the piece-mold method. Archeologists, who have assayed excavated clay models, have noted they were made from loess, a silty earth with some clay, that had organic and other impurities removed so it could withstand the molten metal.



Model and mold fragments with dragon motifs, late Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BC). Terracotta, 3¼ × 21¼ × 9/16 in. From trench B128, Xiaotun, Anyang, Henan province. Collection of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, R016666.

Table Leg

Roman, 2nd century CE

Bronze

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Wright S. Ludington, 1981.64.28

The figure at the top is the god of wine who the Romans called Bacchus. Nude, youthful, and athletic, he holds a wine pitcher with one hand and extends what appears to be a cup with the other. His head is likely crowned with ivy. Perhaps, this leg was part of a *triclinium*, a table found in the dining rooms of wealthy Romans.

Axehead

Persian, Luristan, 1350–800 BCE

Bronze

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Bequest of Wright S. Ludington, 1993.1.53

This axehead looks like examples from other museum collections that are said by convention to come from Luristan, a region of Iran near the Iraqi border. They are generally dated to c. 1000 to 600 BCE. Because no writing by the ancient Lur people has been discovered, very little is known about them. Moreover, starting in the 1920s and 1930s, unsupervised and illegal excavations fueled by the Western antiquities trade destroyed archeological evidence of the origins of these objects. The axe's eye, the opening that receives the now missing haft (or handle), is decorated with spikes that resemble tiny lions. While this might be a reference to the use of axes in hunting, this object was probably not used to hunt, dig, or split materials. Instead, it could have had a religious or ceremonial use, or served as a form of money or debt collateral. It might have been a symbol of status and authority for its owner.

Mirror

Etruscan, 4th–3rd century BCE

Bronze

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Wright S. Ludington, 1981.64.7

Though centered in present day Tuscany, the Etruscans lived in the northern and central part of the Italian peninsula from about 900 BCE to their conquest by the Romans in 27 BCE. Speaking a language unrelated to Latin, they were master metalworkers as this sophisticated mirror attests. The side of the mirror facing towards the back was once highly polished and reflective. Today, it has a beautiful verdigris, the result of elemental copper forming copper carbonate and many other copper compounds. The Etruscans traded extensively around the Mediterranean, including with the Greeks, and the scene on the mirror might be from Homer's *Iliad*. It is possible this is Menelaus, who holds the knife and threatens his future wife, Helen of Troy. A recent scholarly article on this mirror argues that it is more likely a generalized depiction of violence against women in ancient Greece without reference to a specific story.



Diagram of the scene on the mirror.