Hebei is located right in the centre of China. From a map we can see that Hebei lies along both sides of the middle section of the ‘mighty’ Yellow River and that mountains2 include the province on its southern and northern sides. Hebei has a long history and is a place of ancient Chinese culture.

Did you know? In ancient times, Hebei was an economic, political and cultural centre of China. As a result, countless ancient objects have been unearthed there. Seeing these treasures gives us an insight into the lives of the people who once owned these objects.

Here we introduce a number of major sites in Hebei where important objects have been discovered. We will examine when and where they were discovered, as well as their features and historical significance.

What is a "SITE" in archaeology?
A site is where an ancient village, city, house, workshop, temple or cemetery once stood.
The Peiligang Site is named for the village where it was found in Xinzheng City in Henan Province. There, in 1977, a team of archaeology students doing fieldwork training discovered items used by people in ancient times. These early Neolithic items were between 7,000 and 9,000 years old. Because of the unique shape and style of the objects, the archaeologists who discovered them identified them as objects belonging to a particular culture, to which they gave the name Peiligang Culture.

At the Peiligang Site, many items and tools used on a daily basis by the original inhabitants were found. These proved that our ancestors once lived settled lives in a village on this spot. At Peiligang, pottery containers used for the cooking and storage of food were also found. These pots were shaped by hand, and their forms and decoration are simple and plain.

Many stone tools used in farming were also discovered, and these included sickles, shovels and axes. Besides, implements for processing grain and turning it into food were found, such as objects for rolling the grain and removing the husks from it. Together with the burned grains of sorghum found at Peiligang, proved that agriculture was already practised.

What is culture?
Culture is a term used to describe the things created by a group of people in ancient times.

How is a culture named?
An archaeological culture is often named after the place where that unique culture was first found.
The Yangshao Culture was discovered in the village of that name found north of Mianchi in Henan Province. In 1921 archaeologists discovered the remains of an ancient village here and they unearthed many stone, bone and pottery objects. These were between 5,000 and 7,000 years old. Yangshao Culture was named after the village where these types of objects were first found.

Yangshao Culture covered a very big area. Apart from the village where it was first discovered, items of the culture have been found all along the Yellow River - in Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu and Inner Mongolia, but Henan was the centre of the culture. The objects of Yangshao Culture found in different areas had their own particular shape, style and decoration.

Yangshao Culture is often called 'Painted Pottery Culture', because painted pots were typical of the culture. These pots are decorated with patterns inspired by everyday life and nature. For example, we can see fish, flowers, stars, the sun, the moon, the planets and animals. This shows that the Yangshao people worshipped nature and admired beautiful objects.

WHAT IS PAINTED POTTERY?
Painted pottery is the name for a type of neolithic pottery decorated with particular painted colour designs. The colours were first painted on the clay which was then fired. Most neolithic painted colour designs are geometric shapes, animals and plants.
THE YIN RUINS (YINXU) AT ANYANG

The Yin Ruins were found in the area of Xiaotun Village on the banks of the Huan River in the northwestern suburbs of Anyang in Henan Province. Since 1928 archaeologists have conducted a number of digs here and uncovered a large capital city of the Shang dynasty which was more than 3,000 years old.

In the Western Han dynasty, Sima Qian in his famous history of China called Records of the Historian wrote: "In the 273 years from when King Pan Gong moved his capital to Yin until the destruction of King Zhou, the last ruler of the Shang dynasty, Yin remained the capital city". This ancient book shows that many kings of the Shang dynasty made "Yin" their capital. After the Shang dynasty was destroyed by King Wu of the Zhou dynasty, "Yin" fell into ruins. In 1899, it was discovered that turtle shells and animal bones unearthed in Xiaotun Village were inscribed with writing. This writing, which was called oracle bone inscriptions, explained many of the mysteries regarding the ancient city of Yin that had fallen into ruins thousands of years ago.

Many very valuable items have been discovered at the Ruins of Yin. As well as pottery, large numbers of bronze vessels have been found. Most of these were used for storing, preparing or drinking wine, seeming to bear out the ancient story that the Shang kings destroyed their empire because of their excessive indulgence in wine drinking. The most important discoveries, however, are the huge number of inscribed oracle bones and shells that have been unearthed. When the last Shang kings had prophecies told about the future, these were recorded on turtle shells and animal bones, and these inscriptions record the events of the Shang dynasty and the lives of its people.

What are Oracle Bones?
Oracle bones are a general term for tortoise plastrons and animal bones. Most inscribed animal bones were the ox scapulae.

Why Did Yin Provide such Important Evidence for the Existence of the Shang Dynasty?
From the 14th century BCE, when King Pan Gong moved his capital to "Yin" (the area in and around today's Xiaotun Village) until King Wu's conquest at Shang, "Yin" was the capital for 273 years — a period in which there were 12 kings belonging to eight generations. Like the famous Chang'an (Xi'an) capital of the Tang dynasty, Yin was the political, economic and cultural centre of the era.

What is a甲骨文?
甲骨文是指甲骨文，其时有文字的股骨头主要是牛脑胛骨。
鹿邑位於淮河流域，那裡有一座太清宮，歷史悠久，據稱大思想家老子的出生地就在這裡。歷史學家為追尋太清宮的悠久歷史，及探索歷代帝王和民間百姓祭祀老子的遺跡，1997年，考古隊伍便開始在太清宮發掘，無獨有偶，竟意外地發現了一座西周王族大墓——長子口墓。

長子口墓被視為近年商周考古的重大發現。墓中出土許多不同種類的器物，有陶器、青銅禮器、兵器、工具、車馬器和許多精美的玉器。當中較為重要之發現，是在墓中青銅器上發現有「長子口」這三個字的銘文，說明墓主人是長子口。

從長子口墓的格式與規模、隨葬物的數量與組合，可算西周墓葬中首屈一指，說明長子口的身分與地位是高於一般諸侯。

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What is an inscription?
An inscription is a name for ancient writing that was carved on stone, or inscribed or cast in bronze. These inscriptions praise the good deeds of the living or the dead, or they might record some instruction or other data.

The Tomb of Changziku at Luiyi

West Zhou (1046 BCE - 771 BCE)

Who was Changziku?
From the inscriptions of the bronze vessels found in his tomb, we know that Changziku must have lived during the end of the Shang dynasty and the beginning of the Zhou dynasty. He would have been an aristocrat of the Shang dynasty (1100 - 1046 BCE). After Shang was overthrown by Zhou, he was made king of a fief in Luiyi County and so after his death he was buried in keeping with the burial customs of the Shang period.
The Cemetery of the State of Guo in Sanmenxia

Sanmenxia is in western Henan on the banks of the Yellow River and it has long been important for communications between the lands lying to its west and east. The Guo State Cemetery is situated at Shangcunling, a site north of Sanmenxia City. The cemetery was discovered in 1956, and from the 1950s to the 1990s two very large excavations were conducted there, leading to the discovery of more than 500 tombs. The cemetery where these tombs were found was used from the late Western Zhou period down to the early Spring and Autumn period. The cemetery contains very large tombs belonging to kings and princes, as well as small tombs belonging to ordinary people. Almost certainly the cemetery was for the use of everyone who lived in the State of Guo.

The State of Guo was one of the fiefdoms in the early Western Zhou dynasty. Guo State survived until 655 BCE when it was destroyed by the Jin State. A strict ritual system was exercised during the Western Zhou dynasty and the number and types of bronze vessels which different classes of aristocrats were permitted to use were strictly defined. This enforced and reinforced the social hierarchy of that period. Because of the existence of this ritual system, we know that the highest ranking person buried in the Guo State Cemetery was Guo Ji, because in his tomb a set of seven ding ritual vessel - the largest number - was found. Above him in rank was only the Zhou emperor who could use a set of nine bronze ding. We can conclude that Guo Ji was the ruler of the Guo State under the Zhou royal household.

Many rich discoveries were made in the tomb of Guo Ji, and the importance of these finds was acknowledged in 1990 when the tomb was rated as one of the ten major archaeological finds of that year. To date, around 5,200 items have been discovered in his tomb, including bronze, gold, iron, jade, stone and agate items, as well as straw, hemp and silk objects. The bronzes and jades were especially plentiful, and these were rare objects from a royal household.

What are Ritual Objects?
Ritual vessels or objects were vessels used by aristocrats in rituals or ceremonies that accompanied sacrifices, feasts, receptions, warfare and banquets. Bronze ding, gui food vessels and zhong bells are examples of ritual vessels and objects.
Mount Xi is found inside the royal cemetery of the rulers of the State of Liang in the Mandangshan Mountains in Yongcheng, eastern Henan. In the Mandangshan Mountains in 1922, archaeologists discovered the Tomb of King Xiao of the Liang State of the Western Han dynasty. For the next two years, they dug and uncovered tombs of all sizes in what to date is the largest royal cemetery of the Western Han period that has been discovered.

Although the tombs and graves on Mount Xi were robbed and damaged many years ago, teams of archaeologists have succeeded in discovering many rare and valuable objects. In the graves on Mount Xi, objects made of bronze, iron, and crystal were found, as well as beads of jade and large quantities of finely carved jades. The most amazing discovery was a jade burial suit made up of more than a thousand pieces of jade plaques pierced at the four corners with traces of gold wire. The burial suit was carefully restored, so that today we can see how the bodies of kings were dressed in their graves in the Han dynasty more than two thousand years ago. The lavish burial goods found in Han tombs give evidence of the status of the tomb owners and their beliefs of afterlife.

HOW ARE THE ROYAL CEMETERIES IN THE MANDINGSHAN MOUNTAINS LAID OUT?
The 2,000 year old royal cemeteries of the kings of Liang in the Mandangshan Mountains in Yongcheng consist of three main cemetery areas - Mount Ba’o, Mount Tianzi and Mount Xi.

WHY WERE SO MANY JADES DISCOVERED IN HAN DYNASTY TOMB?
The ancient people believed that jade preserved the body and prevented it from rotting. In the Han dynasty burials, jade was very lavish and the custom of burying jades with the dead was very fashionable of the period.
Origins of Chinese Civilization — Cultural Relics from Henan Province

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