Lecture 3: The Bronze Age Economy

Conventional historiography of the Three Dynasties (Xia 夏, Shang 商, Zhou 周)
--Xia only known from Zhou records

Beginning of Bronze Age: Erlitou 二里頭 Site (c. 1900 BCE)
--Urban society; but identification with Xia state unproven

State Formation under Shang (c. 1550-1045 BCE)
--Sources of Shang history: archaeological sites; oracle bone inscriptions (jiaguwen 甲骨文) (divination); & ritual bronze vessels (sacrifice)
--Shang capital cities: Zhengzhou 郑州 and Anyang 安阳
--King Wuding 武丁 (c. 1250-1200 BCE) restored unified monarchy & established capital at Anyang
--Tomb of Lady Hao 妇好 (consort of King Wuding): richest inventory of any surviving Shang tomb

Structure of Shang State
--Productive base little changed from Longshan era
--Developed technologies to mobilize resources: (1) metal-working (2) writing (3) state system (three distinguishing characteristics of “civilization”)
--Capital and satellite towns under rule of separate lineages

Shang Social Order: A Four-Class Society
(1) royal clan 王族
(2) lesser nobility 子族, “clans of descendants”
(3) “the multitude” 眾
(4) slaves 奴

Cities as Sites of Political Authority
--Shang capital at Anyang: above all, a necropolis (city of the dead)
--Ritual role of king and capital

Founding of Zhou, 1045-256 BCE
--Zhou polity divided between (1) royal domain & (2) regional rulers
--Patrimonial state established through investiture (fengjian 封建)
--Zhou king shared inherited sovereignty with rest of his clan (contrast with European feudalism)
--Waning power of Zhou kings after 900 BCE