

ANNUAL REPORT: Yangguanzhai 2018 FIELD SCHOOL

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Students drawing profiles of the central reservoir

The first week of the field school was held at China Northwest University with lectures on the geography and prehistory of the Wei River Valley, basic concepts of archaeological work, antiquarianism in China, production of prehistoric pottery, and research and discoveries at the Yangguanzhai site. Prof. Zhang Hongyan introduced us to the collection of Neolithic pottery in the university labs and gave us a tour of the Northwest University museum. Prof. Qian Yaopeng accompanied us to the Banpo Museum to give us a tour. Dr. Elizabeth Berger conducted a practical exercise in human osteology for the students. During this week, we also went to the Shaanxi History Museum, this time without a guided tour, so that everyone could explore the immense exhibition at their own pace. We finished the first week with a tour to the museum of the Terracotta Warriors of the First Emperor.

We spent the following four weeks in the field. When the weather would get too hot or rainy for fieldwork, we used the opportunity for additional trips to the Mausoleum of Han Emperor Jingdi with its own terracotta army, the local research base of the Shaanxi Province Archaeological Academy with its extensive conservation labs, the Museum of Antique Bronzes in Baoji, and the current excavations of imperial sacrifices to Heaven during the Qin and Han Dynasties at the Xuechi site.

We conducted our excavations this year in a central location of the Neolithic settlement of Yangguanzhai. This area is dominated by a large artificial reservoir dug by the Neolithic inhabitants. This reservoir has been excavated to a large extent by the team of the Shaanxi Province Archaeological Academy at Yangguanzhai. However, it was surrounded by a large amount of pits and houses, not all of which had been investigated yet. The students formed four

groups to tackle different areas around the reservoir. The Yangguanzhai Field School had worked in this area in 2016 and some of our teams continued the previous work directly.

One group started by excavating the remains of a heavily disturbed child urn burial south-east of the reservoir. Only small cranial fragments and a long bone fragment were left of the skeleton, and parts of the ceramic vessels that originally contained the burial were missing. It is not possible at this point to single out a cause for the disturbance of the burial, but the team of students listed and discussed some potential reasons during their mid-season presentation. After having fully excavated the remains of the burial, this team moved to the north side of the reservoir to excavate a medium-sized pit. With the pit being right next to the reservoir and the deposit showing the influence of water, there is the possibility that this was a levigation pit used in the production of pottery.

Two of our groups worked in adjacent areas south of the reservoir that had been investigated by the 2016 Field School. This was a rather challenging area to work in, as the presence of numerous intersecting and overlapping pits and houses created a very complicated stratigraphy. One group concentrated on the excavation of a large pit. The artifact-rich fill of this pit formed no continuous layers, but certain events are visible in localized areas within the pit, such as the deposit of a thin silt layer by rainfall or inundation, or hardened surfaces created by human activity. In the western part of the pit, a smaller hole had been dug and filled with calcium carbonate. We extracted samples from the fill of the large pit for micromorphological study. The group in the adjacent area also detected patches of calcium carbonate covering large pits filled with refuse. They might have been placed there deliberately to make the area full of refuse pits negotiable on foot or even stable enough to build upon, as in this area we have direct evidence of a house being constructed partly on top of a filled pit. The small foundation trenches of that house were filled with calcium carbonate as well. Built on top of the remains of that house, in turn, had been at least one kiln, evidenced by large accumulations of slag.

The fourth group worked inside the southeast part of the reservoir to uncover additional layers of its fill. Aside from finding a lot of artifacts, including an almost-complete bowl, the students detected swirls in the silt sediment, indicating that it was deposited by high-energy influx of water, i.e. flooding or heavy rainfall. This could only have happened if the reservoir was not already filled with standing water at the time. Thus, we managed to find further evidence for our hypothesis that there were fluctuations in the level of water filling the reservoir. Furthermore, the southern bank of the reservoir appears to have been worked with the aim of allowing access to the water at different levels.

Apart from the regular process of excavation, screening, written documentation, and drawing of profiles, we conducted additional exercises in drawing and using the Luoyang spade for coring. All students took part in the flotation of samples collected in previous years and everybody washed and classified the artifacts they had excavated in this season. During the four weeks of fieldwork, the field school staff as well as visiting scholars provided additional lectures on radiocarbon chronology, geoarchaeology, and interaction between archaeologists and local communities.

Some of our findings this year might be included in a comprehensive site report of Yangguanzhai that the team of the Shaanxi Province Archaeological Academy is currently working on. Our work at Yangguanzhai will play a role at the annual meeting of the SAA in 2019 in a panel on Technology and Design in 4th and 3rd millennium BCE China. Last but not least, the features and finds that we have uncovered this year as well as some of our documentation and photographs of our work will be featured in the future site museum of Yangguanzhai.