

2,400-year-old horse and chariot pit unearthed in China

Archaeologists in central China's Henan Province have excavated a 2,400-year-old pit containing horses and chariots beside a tomb possibly belonging to a lord.

The No. 3 Horse and Chariot Pit is one of a cluster of tombs belonging to noble families of the Zheng State, a vassal state during the Spring and Autumn (770-476 B.C) and Warring States periods (475-221 B.C), near the city of Xinzheng.

Since February, four chariots and 90 horse skeletons have been unearthed from the pit, the largest of the three within the cluster that have been excavated so far.

The total number of horses buried in the pit may exceed 100, said Ma Juncai from the provincial cultural heritage and archaeology institute, who led the excavation.

"As the main tomb has been looted and no written records have been found yet, it is difficult to identify the tomb owner," he said, adding it may belong to a Lord from the late Spring and Autumn Period judging from the size of the tomb and the details of items found inside.

Bronze artifacts have also been discovered in the pit, which Ma said provides important information on technology, production, social status and funeral practices of the period.

Ma said he believes the chariots were for daily use by a Lord and his wife.

One of chariots is significantly larger and more extravagant. Measuring 2.56 meters long and 1.66 meters wide, it is equipped with rain and sun protection and decorated with bronze and bone artifacts.

Li Hongchang, director of the Zheng State Horse and Chariot Pit tourist site, said that it is believed that during the Zheng State horses were usually killed first, then placed into a pit beside the owner's tomb with dismantled chariots added on top.

Excavation of the tombs and the surrounding 20 hectares of land has already found 18 large pits containing horses and chariots and more than 3,000 tombs.