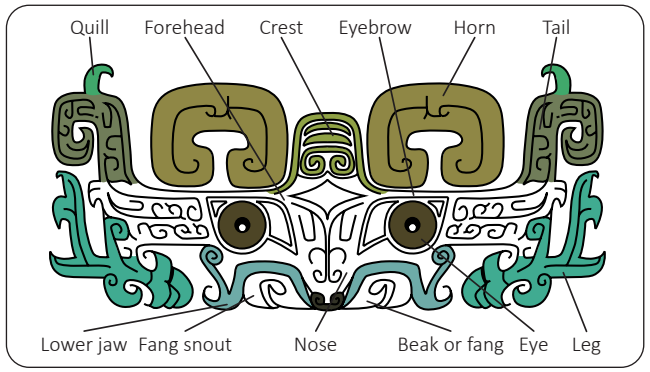
# Taotie

A taotie is a gluttonous creature in Chinese mythology, which is always hungry no matter how much it eats. Its name translates to 'legendary voracious beast'. Images of taotie appear on ancient Chinese bronze artefacts, such as masks and ritual vessels called *dings*. It is unclear why the people of the Shang Dynasty used the taotie motif. It could have symbolised greed, warned people against seeking wealth and power or helped priests and shamans to communicate with dead ancestors during religious rituals.

## Design features

The diagram below shows a symmetrical taotie design. The taotie's face has large eyes and styled fangs, horns and eyebrows. Cleverly, each side of this taotie design also represents a one-legged beast called a *gui* dragon. Both dragons are facing each other and have a large eye and curled tail. The tail is made of a square spiral shape called a thunder and cloud pattern.




## Shang Dynasty bronzes

During the Shang Dynasty, craftspeople used a complex technique called piece-mould casting to make highly-decorated bronze vessels and objects.

### Piece-mould casting instructions

1. Make and decorate a clay model of the bronze object to be cast.
2. Press clay around the model.
3. Cut the clay into pieces and carefully pull it away from the model. These pieces will be used as a mould. Fire the pieces of the mould so that they harden.
4. Put the pieces of the mould back together. Add a fired piece of clay, called a core, into the middle of the mould. This will ensure that the bronze object is hollow.
5. Pour molten bronze into the mould and leave it to cool and harden.
6. Break the mould away to reveal the bronze object.



Bronze ritual vessel, c1600–c1046 BC

## Simple casting methods

### Silicone casting

Fill a silicone mould with plaster, glue or clay. Leave to harden, then turn the cast out to reveal the design.



### Clay casting

Press objects into the surface of a clay slab to make a mould. Pour plaster into the mould. Leave to harden, then peel the clay mould away to reveal the cast.



### Paper casting

Layer and press strips of wet paper onto the mould object until fully covered. Leave to dry, then peel off the paper to reveal the cast.



## Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| **bronze** | A yellow-brown metal alloy of copper and tin. |
| **cast** | An object formed by putting a molten or soft material in or on a mould. |
| **molten** | A substance made liquid by heat. |
| **mould** | A typically hollow container, used to give shape to a molten or soft material when it cools and hardens. |

Image from: Getty Images/Sepia Times



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