

# Nanyue King Museum

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## [Introduction]

The Nanyue King Museum, formerly named Nanyue Tomb Museum, was set up at the site of the tomb of a Nanyue King, Zhao Mo by name, who styled himself “Emperor Wen ” and was the second king of the Nanyue Kingdom , being on the throne for 16 years in 137 – 122BC . The Nanyue Kingdom was a local state in South China in the period of China’s Western Han Dynasty . It lasted 93 years with 5 kings in succession and submitted to the Western Han in 111 BC .

The tomb of Zhao Mo was discovered in 1983 ,20 meters under the Elephant Hill at Jiefangbei Road in Guangzhou . With an area of about 100 square meters. It is constructed with 750 blocks of red sandstones, with 7 chambers in all. This tomb is the most important Han Tomb so far discovered in South China – its size is the largest, the political and social status of its occupant is the highest and the number of historical relics unearthed is the greatest – and so is considered as one of the 5 major archaeological finds in modern China. Articles unearthed from the tomb, totaled over 1000 pieces or sets, fall mainly into 4categories: copperware, ironware, earthenware and jade ware. Among all the articles unearthed, the gold seal inscribed with the words “The Seal of Emperor Wen” is the most precious because it’s the first emperor’s seal so far discovered in China’s archaeological excavations. Now the tomb and the unearthed artifacts are all on display in the Nanyue King Museum.

## [Gold Seals]

The gold seal of Emperor Wen unearthed from the Nanyue King’s tomb is the only extant emperor’s seal left over from the Qin and Han Dynasties. Until it was excavated, emperor’s seals of the Qin and Han Dynasties were known only in historical documents. Moreover , the emperor’s seals record in historical documents are said to be made of white jade with a handle of a tiger , but this seal of Zhao Mo’s is made of gold with a handle of a dragon . It was made in the Nanyue Kingdom and was the real that Zhao Mo actually used

during his lifetime.

Besides the gold seal of Emperor Wen , a gold seal of “ Taizi”(meaning “the prince ”) and a gold seal of “You Furen ” (meaning of the “ wife of the king” ) were also unearthed from the tomb , but they are knobbed with a turtle instead of a dragon . Other gold articles unearthed include gold belt hooks, bubble-like gold flowers and among -shaped leaves and so on.

## [Silverware]

A white silver box unearthed from the tomb is quite unusual. It was found in the main coffin chamber, with half of it containing a kind of substance that looked like medicinal pills. Judging from its shape and ornamental design , which are greatly different from those of the traditional Chinese silverware , and by chemical analysis of the pills , archaeologists believe that it is a product of Persia and its contents are a kind of Arabian medicine . Other silver articles unearthed from the tomb are washbasins, wine-vessels, belt hooks and so on. They were all utensils for the royal family.

## [Copperware]

Bronze articles excavated from the tomb amount to 500 pieces and more .They are kitchen utensil , tableware , musical instruments , horse cart harness , implements for production and other daily utensils such as tripods , mirrors , basins and candlewood-burners .They are all articles of excellent workmanship distinctive local feature , which not only represent the technological level of metal-casting of the Nanyue Kingdom but also serve as an evidence for the history of the founding of the city of Guangzhou .One big bronze-basin when unearthed , was found containing bones of pig cow , goat , chicken , fish and turtle , which is an evidence to prove that these animals were some of the staples of people's diet .

## [Musical Instrument]

A lot of musical instruments were discovered in the east side-chamber of the tomb .Among them the one called “Gou Diao” is especially worth mentioning .It is a chime of bronzes , 8 pieces in all , totaling 191 kilos in weight ,with one bigger than other and the biggest one is 64 centimeters high and 40 kilos in weight .On the surfaces of the 8 bronzes are cast with an epigraph “Made in the Official Conservatory in the Ninth Year of Emperor Wen ” , which shows that the instrument was made in Nanyue Kingdom in the year 129 BC .And , although over 2100 years old , they still produce clear and accurate notes !

## [Weapons]

Weapons unearthed from the tomb are many and varied :dagger-axes , copper sword , iron swords armors and iron spears , to mention just a few .One copper dagger-axes is engraved with an inscription from which we can know

that dagger-axes was made in the Qin and brought to the South .One spear is believed to be a weapon actually used by the king himself or for use as an article to be carried by a guard of honor , because it is gorgeously decorated with inlaying gold and silver designs .Besides weapons for combat , a bronze tally in the shape of a tiger was also discovered .The tiger tally was a object of credential issued to officials as imperial authorization for troop movement or for use on diplomatic occasions .It is the only gold-inlaying tiger tally still in existence in China .

## [Jade ware]

Jade articles unearthed from the tomb include a jade garment sewn with silk threads , 56 pieces of jade discs (called “bi” in Chinese ) , 9 jade seals , 130 pieces of jade pendant , jade boxes , jade cups , etc .Using jade garments as cerements for clothing the dead was a practice peculiar to the Han Dynasty .Such jade garments discovered before were sewn with gold , silver or bronze stands .But the jade garment for Zhao Mo was sewn with silk strands – the first and the only one so far discovered in China .This jade garment , 1.73 meters long , is made of 2291 pieces of jade that are strung together with red silk strands , forming different beautiful patterns .Of the 56 pieces of jade discs , 47 were discovered in the main coffin chamber , of witch one is 33.4 centimeter and is the biggest of its kind so far unearthed in archaeological excavations in China .Of the 9 seals unearthed , 3 were found on Zhao Mo’s body and are inscribed respectively with the words “Zhao Mo” , “Tai Zi ” (the prince) and “seal of emperor” , which is an evidence for the fact that Zhao Mo overstepped his authority to style himself “emperor” to break away from the Han exercise local power .

## [Earthenware]

Altogether 371 pieces of earthenware were discovered in the Nanyue King’s tomb .Among them are 4 pieces of earthen jars and tripods that are stamped with the words “Article of Chang Le Gong” . “Chang Le Gong” (meaning Palace of Everlasting Joy ) was the name of the residential quarter for the mother and queen of the Han Dynasty emperor in the imperial palace in Chang’an (the present-day Xi’an ) .Do these 4 earthenware articles suggest that there was also a “Chang Le Gong” in the Nanyue king palace ? In recent years , archaeologists have excavated on trial 500 square meters of the ruins of the Nanyue king palace in the original site of Guangzhou’s Children’s park .They discovered that the place under excavation occupied just the same position in the Nanyue king palace as the Chang Le Gong was located in the Han imperial palace was located ? These questions remain yet to be decided by further studies and research work.

## [Sacrificial Persons]

In the tomb , fifteen persons were found buried alive with the dead : one

in the front chamber , who was perhaps a eunuch ; one in the east side-chamber , who was buried together with musical instruments and was probably a musician ; four women in the east side-chamber , who were concubines of the king ; seven in the west side-chamber , who were found staying together with kitchen utensils and would be cooks or kitchen helpers ; two in the passageway , possibly guards of the tomb ; and one in the outer coffin , probably a cart-driver .

The institution of burying the living with the dead sovereigns had prevailed in Center China during the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1766-770BC.), but was on the whole abolished in the Han Dynasty (206BC – AD220) .The discovery of the sacrificial persons in the tomb of the Nanyue king shows that this cruel and savage institution was still practiced by the ruling class of the class of the Nanyue Kingdom.