



# Life in Hu

# by Patrick Wertmann illustrated by Brad Walker

ave you or your friends ever thought about what it would be like to travel back in time and see how people lived their daily lives, let's say 2,000 years ago? Thanks to a discovery made in 2011 in a suburb in northwestern Beijing, this is now possible. Like so many recent archaeological discoveries, it happened by accident. It was made by a team of local archaeologists about to conduct a routine investigation before construction began on a road. A team member was checking the site with his Luoyang shovel—a small U-shaped tool that Chinese archaeologists frequently use when he suddenly hit upon

something that would lift the veil of time.

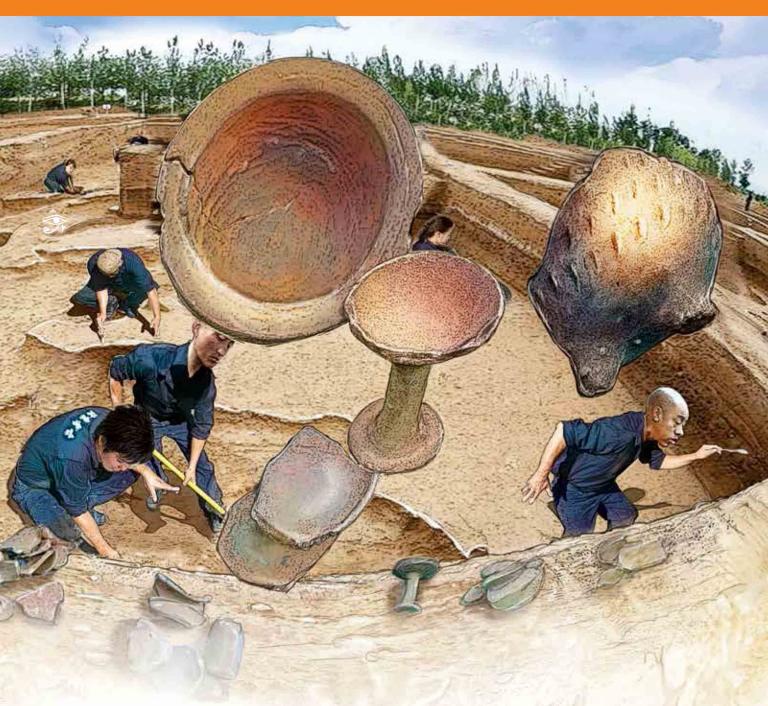
### What Were These Finds?

Uncovered were the wellpreserved remains of a village, now called Hujiaying, that had been built close to a now dried-up river. Among the finds were the foundations of 24 houses, 21 ash pits where people dumped their garbage, 11 kitchen stoves, and many utensils used in everyday life. (See illustration above.) What makes this village so interesting is the fact that it dates back more than 2,000 years, to the Eastern Zhou period (770–221 B.C.). In addition, all earlier finds from this time in the environs of

Beijing had been burials. The discovery of this village offers the first glimpse into the actual lives of the people who lived there.

### What Were Their Houses Like?

Further digging revealed that each had been built half underground, at a depth of approximately five feet. The layouts varied—some were oval, while others had a rectangular or irregular shape. Each covered an area that measured approximately 33 feet by 33 feet, and its entrance was located on the northwestern, eastern, or southern side. Some



houses had an oven that had been made from stone or earth. There was even one that had been built inside an earthen wall—just like a modern fireplace. If you visit the site, you will notice round holes in the ground. In times past, wooden poles had been stuck inside to support a roof made of straw and mud. Today, only the holes remain.

## Farmers or Nomads? Perhaps Both?

Many other, smaller finds have been made that are helping us to reconstruct everyday life at the time. Among these are items made of pottery—jars, three-legged pots, and cups with stems, to name just a few. An analysis of their shapes and styles offer evidence that the people who

made and used them combined characteristics of an agricultural society known to be from central China with those of nomadic peoples living in the **steppe** regions to the north of Beijing.

The location of this site was important, as it lay between these two culture zones and the influence of each is easy to detect. The items that were made



of stone, bronze, or iron—axes, spindle whorls, knives, and sickles, for example—tell us about farming practices and handicrafts at the time.

Weapons, such as arrowheads, allow us to imagine how the people hunted their food. In fact, we can determine exactly which animals the people hunted or domesticated for agricultural purposes by studying the many animal bones excavated at the site.

Thus, the finds at the Hujiaying site offer us a picture of a society that combined the features of two very different cultures. On the one hand, the people constructed permanent houses and practiced farming as a way of life. On the other hand, finds, such as their pottery, tell us that they were living the nomadic life as well.

### The Ouestions Remain

From studying the remains of these people, we know that they were very tall. So, why were their houses so small? There were also no traces of beds. So, do you think they were comfortable in their homes? How do you think they would have slept? Did these people stay in their village throughout the year or did they travel as nomads? What do you think?

# Solving a Conundrum

conundrum (kuh-NUHN-druh m) is a riddle or puzzle, and that is exactly what faced archaeologist. Stephen McBride in 2015 at Camp Nelson Heritage Park. McBride has directed excavations for decades at this Civil War Army depot that once sprawled across 4,000 acres in central Kentucky, but he had never seen anything like this!



Field school students were working in the depot's commercial district, excavating a stone-lined fire pit (above) just north of the store where Army personnel could buy clothing, tobacco, and other merchandise. "What's this?" a student asked, holding out a dirty piece of clear flat glass. McBride had found thousands of pieces of clear flat window glass before, but this one was different (below). It was whole and had ground edges. It was small (1 3/8 by 1 5/8 inches)—too small for a windowpane. As



work
continued, so
did the
conundrum.
Students
uncovered a
fragment of
brass. This was
not so odd,
except that the

fragment was actually a piece of foldedup brass, a "stack of brass," as McBride explained to me. Very odd! Then, nearby, they discovered another folded brass object, as well as other fragments of glass and unfolded brass.

Because brass does not corrode like iron, McBride could unfold the brass artifacts in the lab. The stack came apart in pieces at the folds. Eight pieces formed a hollow rectangle 2 5/8 by 3 1/4 inches (below, right). A second uncovered brass object came apart in four pieces. It was a larger hollow rectangle (3 1/2 by 4 5/6 inches) and had what appeared to be "flaps" on each side (see hollow rectangle below, left). Had these finds been borders for something—a picture frame, perhaps? But why here?



Can you solve this conundrum?

(Answer is on page 41.)

......

**A. Gwynn Henderson**, staff archaeologist and education coordinator at the Kentucky Archaeological Survey, consulted with W. Stephen McBride, Director of Interpretation and Archeology at Camp Nelson Heritage Park.

For more about
Camp Nelson archaeology,
check out "The Depot Has It" in
DIG magazine July/August 2004,
pages 26–29.

To learn more about the archaeological work McBride has conducted at Camp Nelson, click on: http://heritage.ky.gov/kas/kyarchynew/camp+nelson.htm

For more about Camp Nelson Heritage Park, go to: www. campnelson.org/home.htm