

Chinese Civilization(1600-1046 BC)

The Shang Dynasty is the earliest ruling dynasty of China to be established in recorded history, though other dynasties predated it. The Shang ruled from 1600 to 1046 B.C. and heralded the Bronze Age in China. They were known for their advances in math, astronomy, artwork and military technology.

Beginning of the Shang Dynasty

The earliest written records in [Chinese history](#) date back to the Shang Dynasty, which, according to legend, began when a tribal chief named Tang defeated the Xia Dynasty, which in 1600 B.C. was under the control of a tyrant named Jie.

This victory is known as the Battle of Mingtiao, fought during a thunderstorm. Jie survived the battle but died later of illness. Tang is known for establishing a low number of drafted soldiers in the army and for beginning social programs to help the kingdom's poor.

Shang Dynasty Achievements

People of the Shang Dynasty are believed to have used calendars and developed knowledge of astronomy and math, thanks to inscriptions on tortoise shell that have been unearthed by archaeologists.

The Shang calendar was at first lunar-based, but a solar-based one was developed by a man named Wan-Nien, who established a 365-day year through his observations and pinpointed the two solstices.

Shang Dynasty artisans created sophisticated bronze works, ceramics and trinkets made from jade. Unlike their Bronze Age counterparts, artisans during the Shang Dynasty used piece-mold casting as opposed to the lost-wax method. This meant that they first made a model of the object they wanted to create before covering it in a clay mold. The clay mold would then be cut into sections, removed, and re-fired to create a new, unified one.

By 1200 B.C., Shang armies were equipped with horse-drawn chariots. Before that, there is evidence of bronze-tipped spears, halberds (pointed axes) and bows.

The language of the Shang Dynasty is an early form of modern Chinese. Chinese characters first appeared during the Shang Dynasty inscribed on cattle bone and tortoise shells. There is evidence of two numerological systems, one based on numbers from one to 10 and the other from one to 12.

Shang Cities

During the Shang Dynasty, there were several large settlements, including Zhengzhou and Anyang, though these are not believed to be as densely urban as [Mesopotamian](#) settlements during the same time.

Anyang became the capitol around 1300 B.C. under King Pan Geng and at the time was called Yin. Zhengzhou is renowned for its walls, which ran for four miles and were 32 feet high and 65 feet thick.

Anyang is believed to be the city that Shang kings ruled from for more than two centuries, with altars, temples and palaces located at the center. Surrounding the political center were artisans comprising an industrial area of stone carvers, bronze workers, potters and others, and then small housing structures and burial sites.

Shang Dynasty Religion

Much of the history of the Shang Dynasty has been deciphered from oracle bones found in Anyang, which present a kingdom at war, with narratives of shifting alliances with other powers.

Prisoners of war were used as slaves or sometimes slaughtered for sacrifice. Within the religion, sacrifice was practiced, sometimes in large groups.

Within Shang culture, the king also functioned as a priest. It was believed that ancestors communicated through the god Di, and the Shang king led in the worship of Shangdi, considered the supreme

ancestor, as well as communicating with the other ancestors. The wishes of the ancestors were received by a group of mystics and then interpreted by the king.

Shang Graves

In the first half of Shang rule, royal burials included the burial of subordinates in the chambers alongside their ruler. By the end of the dynasty, the number of bodies in each burial had risen. One grave in Anyang dating to around 1200 B.C. housed the unnamed ruler's cadaver accompanied by 74 human bodies as well as horses and dogs.

Shang rulers would even send out hunting parties to capture members of primitive tribes to the northwest to use as sacrificial bodies in royal burial sites.

The Anyang grave of Lady Hao from around 1250 B.C. features not only 16 human sacrifices, including children, but a large number of valuable objects, including ornaments and weapons made from bronze and jade, stone sculptures, bone hairpins and arrowheads and several ivory carvings. The grave also includes 60 bronze wine vessels with images of animals.

Lady Hao is believed to be the wife of King Wu Ding, who ruled for 59 years. Bone inscriptions reveal that she led several significant military campaigns in her life.

Fall of the Shang Dynasty

The Shang Dynasty came to an end around 1046 B.C. The final king in the Shang lineage, King Di Xin, was considered a cruel leader who enjoyed torturing people, leading to calls for the end of his rule.

Entrusted with an outpost to protect the western frontier of the kingdom, the Zhou army, led by King Wu, marched on the capitol city. Di Xin armed nearly 200,000 slaves to supplement the defending army, but they defected to the Zhou forces. In what is known as the Battle of Muye, many Shang soldiers refused to fight the Zhou, some even joining the other side.

Di Xin committed suicide by setting fire to his palace. The incoming Zhou dynasty would rule for 800 years, though the Shang Dynasty had left an indelible mark on the timeline of Chinese history.