

Knowledge Organiser - The Shang Dynasty

The Shang Dynasty was one of the earliest known Chinese dynasties and ruled over parts of China for over 500 years, beginning around 1600 BCE. It is famous for being one of the first societies in China to use writing, with inscriptions found on oracle bones. The Shang people lived in cities led by powerful kings and believed strongly in ancestors and gods, often making offerings to communicate with them. They were skilled craftsmen, especially in bronze work, and created weapons, tools and ceremonial objects. Archaeologists have learned a great deal about the Shang Dynasty through discoveries at sites such as Anyang archaeological site, which was one of its ancient capitals. The Shang people believed in many gods and honoured their ancestors through ceremonies and offerings. They used oracle bones to ask questions about the future, making them one of the earliest forms of Chinese writing.

Shang Society

Shang Society Shang society was divided into different classes. At the top were the ruling class under the royal family, then came priests, an administrative class, warriors, craftsmen, traders, farmers and slaves. Most people were farmers who grew millet, wheat and barley but not much rice as this was grown further down south. It is also thought that silkworms were used to produce silk.

Houses

Farmers, craftsmen and peasants lived outside of the town walls in houses built of timber, over compacted earth floors. The walls were covered by wattle and daub and the roof was made of thatch. Inside the cities however, the King, nobles and priests lived in palaces made of wood and clay bricks. They had flower gardens, grew spices and had decorated painted tiles and artworks made of bronze, jade and pottery inside their homes.

Tomb of Fu Hao

In 1976, archaeologists discovered the tomb of Fu Hao at the site of the ancient Shang capital, Yinxu. Because the tomb and its contents were intact, the discovery had a significant impact on our knowledge of the Shang dynasty and some of its people. Thousands of items were found in Fu Hao's tomb, demonstrating how wealthy and powerful she was. The skeletons of six dogs and 16 horses were also found in the tomb. These were probably Fu Hao's pets and advisers, sacrificed to accompany her into the afterlife.

Shang Dynasty



Key Vocabulary

1	Ancestor	A person related to you who lived a long time ago.
2	Anyang	A Shang royal city found by archaeologists in the 1920s.
3	bronze	A strong metal alloy made from copper.
4	Dynasty	A society ruled by a series of rulers from the same family.
5	Emperor	An emperor is a man who rules an empire or is the head of state in an empire.
6	Oracle	An object or person that transmits a god's communication about the future.
7	Oracle bones	Bones used in divination ceremonies. The first examples of Chinese writings have been found written on these bones.
8	Pagoda	A religious temple that is built as a tower with many tiers and roofs.
9	Pictographs	Picture characters on oracle bones which are seen as the oldest form of Chinese writing.
10	Yellow river	From the Bayankala mountains, the river runs through 9 provinces of China to the Bohai

Kings in Shang Dynasty

Cheng Tang (Tang of Shang)	Wu Ding	Di Xin (King Zhou of Shang)
		