

Life in The Shang Dynasty

The Shang Dynasty was one of the earliest ruling families in ancient China, governing from roughly 1600 BC to 1046 BC. The civilisation developed along the Yellow River, whose fertile floodplains made excellent farmland. Ordinary people were mostly farmers, growing staple crops including rice, wheat and millet, and raising animals such as pigs, oxen and silkworms.

Society was organised in a clear hierarchy. At the top was the king, who had both political and religious power. Below him were nobles and priests, then skilled craftsmen, and finally the farmers and slaves at the bottom. Religion shaped everyday life. The Shang worshipped many gods and believed their royal ancestors had divine powers. Priests would heat animal bones or tortoiseshells and read the cracks that appeared — these were known as oracle bones — to answer important questions about harvests, wars or the weather.

The Shang are particularly admired for their bronze-working skills. Craftsmen produced beautifully decorated vessels used in religious ceremonies. The Shang also developed a writing system of over a thousand characters, which is closely linked to the Chinese script still used today. Soldiers were equipped with bronze weapons, leather armour and horse-drawn chariots, making the Shang army a powerful fighting force.

Questions

1. Approximately when did the Shang Dynasty end?
2. Why was the Yellow River important to the Shang people?
3. Name two animals that Shang farmers raised.
4. Describe the order of Shang society from top to bottom.
5. What two types of power did the king hold?
6. How did priests use oracle bones?
7. Name two things that the oracle bones were used to answer questions about.
8. What were bronze vessels used for?
9. Approximately how many characters did the Shang writing system contain?
10. What does the way priests used oracle bones tell us about how the Shang people made important decisions?



Text C Quiz



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