

The Shang Dynasty

Learning Objective:

To find out about Shang royal burials.





Can you
remember the
names of any of the
Shang kings?

1st King	Da Yi (Tang the Great)
2nd King	Tai Ding
3rd King	Wai Bing
4th King	Zhong Ren
5th King	Tai Jia
6th King	Wo Ding
7th King	Tai Geng
8th King	Xiao Jia
9th King	Yong Ji
10th King	Tai Wu

This table shows the order of the first ten Shang kings according to the history books that were written around the year 200 BC. However, the evidence found on the oracle bones contradicts the order and some of the other facts, such as how the kings were related to each other. There has been no evidence found at all for two of these kings, Zhong Ren and Wo Ding.



How else do you think we can learn about the rulers of the Shang Dynasty?

The oracle bones are not the only archaeological evidence we have for the Shang Dynasty. Many archaeological sites have been excavated containing artefacts from this era.

Kings and other important people were buried in tombs when they died. Many objects were put in these tombs, perhaps to help the person in the afterlife. These objects can tell us a lot about the Shang Dynasty.



Many royal tombs were robbed in later years but an undisturbed tomb was discovered in 1976.

Royal tombs contained lots of jade objects.
Jade is a hard, green stone that was used to
make ceremonial weapons. There were also carved
objects in the shapes of humans and animals.





http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Altar_vessel_BM_OA1956.10-16.1.jpg

Many bronze objects have also been found in royal tombs. These objects, now green with age, would have shone like gold when they were new. Intricate ceremonial objects, serving dishes, cooking vessels and ornaments were all made from bronze and left in tombs.



Grey pottery



White pottery

There was also lots of ceramic pottery in the royal tombs. Most of the pottery was grey pottery that was used by ordinary people. However, some white pottery has been found too. White pottery was rare and was used exclusively by royalty. Very few pieces of white pottery from the Shang Dynasty have survived.

The objects in royal tombs tell us that sacrifices were offered when a king died. Sometimes, hundreds of slaves would be killed and buried along with the king.

This bronze vessel is called a dǐng. They were originally used for cooking and storage but later they became vessels to hold sacrifices when a member of the royal family died. These sacrifices were usually food and drink.



People during the Shang Dynasty also offered sacrifices to their dead ancestors. This was because it was believed that they could influence the course of events. People believed that if they failed to offer sacrifices to their ancestors, disaster would befall their family. Sacrifices were also offered to natural powers such as the mountains and the sun.



What does this tell you about beliefs during the Shang Dynasty?