

Historical Inquiry of Ancient China

Directions: Analyze the different primary and secondary sources. Your analysis will consist of annotating the sources and identifying evidence about Ancient China.

Bone Oracle from the Shang Dynasty



Conclusions

A bronze Wine vessel (called a Guang) from Shang Dynasty China.



Conclusions

Sericulture was already highly developed as early as the 14th century BC, so that the Chinese must have begun rearing silkworms long before that time. On many bronze articles of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th–11th century BC) are impressions of silk fabrics or fragments of spun silk. Silk-weaving technique was obviously already quite advanced at that time. A host of facts show that silk articles were becoming increasingly important in the social and economic life of the time, and that they had become media for the exchange of goods. The ensuing demand for silk fabrics led necessarily to the development of silkworm-raising in order to provide more and more raw material . . .

In the Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century–221 BC) cultivation of mulberry trees and rearing of silkworms flourished widely in both north and south China. Silk was the main material used in clothing the ruling class. Silk production from worm to fabric was women's chief productive activity.

—Wang Zichun, from *Ancient China's Technology and Science*, 1983

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Conclusions

There can no longer be any doubt that it was in China that the art of bronze was born. It only took the ancient Chinese a few centuries to attain the highest degree of mastery in the art, as proved by the pieces found at Anyang; this suggests that the beginnings of the Bronze Age may perhaps have coincided with those of the Shang dynasty . . . Bronze-casting brought with it on the one hand a number of highly important technical innovations such as horse-drawn chariots, writing, calendars, and new architectural forms, and, on the other, a social dichotomy that was to be of vital importance for Chinese history, by which society was divided into townsfolk (warrior noblemen and hunters) and the peasantry.

—Jacques Gernet, *Ancient China: From Beginnings to the Empire*, 1964

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Conclusions

Oracle bone inscriptions translated. Written during the Shang dynasty (ca. 1554-1040 BCE).

*The Shang people practiced divination by boring a series of pits into either a tortoise plastron (the bottom part of the tortoise shell) or a cattle scapula. A hot bronze rod was applied, producing cracks, which were interpreted as answers to questions (often expressed as a pair of two possible outcomes) that the king and/or his diviner had posed.

Oracle-Bone Inscriptions On Warfare

6. On *dingmao* (day 4) divined: "If the king joins with Zhi [Guo] (an important Shang general) to attack the Shaofang, he will receive [assistance]." Cracked in the temple of Ancestor Yi (the twelfth king). Fifth moon.

23. [Divined:] "The Fang (enemy) are harming and attacking (us); it is Di who orders (them) to make disaster for us." Third moon.

24A. Divined: "(Because) the Fang are harming and attacking (us, we) will raise men."

24B. Divined: "It is not Di who orders (the Fang) to make disaster for us."

Di was in part a god of battle. Some twenty divinations end with the incantatory formula "Di will confer assistance on us," and, when the context was specified, Di's assistance always involved warfare, as in:

25. Crack-making on *jiachen* (day 41), Zheng divined: "If we attack the Ma-fang (another enemy group), Di will confer assistance on us." First moon.

Conclusions

**Selection from the Classic of Odes:
King Wen (Ode 235)**

*The Classic of Odes (also known as the “Book of Songs”) was compiled around 600 BCE from an oral tradition going back perhaps as long as four centuries earlier to the Zhou Dynasty.

1
King Wen is on high,
Oh, he shines in Heaven!
Zhou is an old people,
but its Mandate is new.
The leaders of Zhou became illustrious,
was not God’s Mandate timely given?
King Wen ascends and descends
on the left and right of God.

4
August was King Wen,
continuously bright and reverent.
Great, indeed, was the Mandate of Heaven.
There were Shang’s grandsons and sons,
Shang’s grandsons and sons.
Was their number not a hundred thousand?
But the High God gave his Mandate,
and they bowed down to Zhou.

7
The Mandate is not easy to keep;
may it not end in your persons.
Display and make bright your good fame,
and consider what Yin had received from Heaven.
The doings of high Heaven
have no sound, no smell.
Make King Wen your pattern,
and all the states will trust in you.

Conclusions
