Shang Dynasty

Originally, it was believed that the Yangshao culture in the Huang He Valley (Yellow River Plain) was the original Neolithic Chinese culture. However, more recent discoveries throughout China tell us that several cultures evolved in China between the years 5000-3500 B.C. These first cultures settled near rivers so that they could grow rice, fruit, and vegetables. At the same time they relied on fish from the Yellow River as a steady source of food. Eventually, these first people would domesticate the dog and the pig. King’s in this time period ruled through a system based on family name and kinship alliances.

The Shang dynasty was the most dominate of a group of almost 300 clans. At the time, it was not uncommon for subordinate clans to have ambitions of their own. Maintaining control over the clans became a full time job, and the Shang rulers were always under threat. From 1600 to 1050 B.C., 30 kings ruled over the Shang Empire. The Shang emperors maintained control of the empire through inter-marriage and bronze weapons. Archaeologist tell us that the Yangshao started working with bronze before the year 2000 BC. Bronze weapons gave the kings superiority over both the commoners and its neighbors. The kings kept control by constantly waging war. The wars expanded the Shang boundaries and filled its treasury with money. Defeated clans were forced to pay tribute to the Shang. War also provided the Sang with slave laborers. Sometimes the Shang used the slaves for ritual sacrifice.

Largely, the Shang armies were well trained and the horse and elephant cavalry was unstoppable. Before long, the Shang acquired the spoke wheel chariot from Central Asia. The Shang manned their chariots with long-handled axes, archers, and spears. Their soldiers wore bronze helmets and as they raced through a town people ran in fear for their lives. Making things even worse for the enemy, the Shang chariots were followed by an amazing elephant cavalry. The Shang had an endless supply of soldiers. The Shang population was enormous, and no matter how many soldiers were lost in a battle they could always find more.

The major religion of the Shang was based on ancestor worship. They believed that their ancestors had power over the living. The Shang kings were believed to be descendents of the highest god who they called Di. At times, during strict ritual ceremonies, the king carried out human sacrifices. The Shang sacrificed children, old people, women, and men. Mostly these people were servant slaves, but sometime they were from a higher status. All were sacrificed so that they could serve their masters in the next life. The Shang also sacrificed rhinoceroses, horses, and elephants. Some uncovered Shang tombs have wielded hundreds of bodies.

The majority of the people in the Shang dynasty were slaves or laborers. Most spent their lives building tombs, palaces, forts, and other public projects. The walls around the capital city of Zhengzhou was 60 feet high and 30 feet wide and required 10,000 laborers working everyday for at least 10 years. All of these structures were built out of wood or adobe mud so little has survived. However, hundreds of tombs have been uncovered, excavated, and sometimes plundered.
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Answer using complete sentences

1. Where did the first Neolithic Chinese cultures get their food?

2. What did the Shang call their god?

3. Why were bronze weapons important?

4. How did the Shang man their chariots?

5. What types of animals did the Shang sacrifice?

6. What has been found in excavated Shang tombs?

7. Why have very few of the structures built in the Shang dynasty survived?

8. Why were people sacrificed?

9. What happened when the Shang waged war?

10. Describe the walls around Zhengzhou.