The Terracotta Army

Ancient China

History for Kids >> Ancient China

The Terracotta Army is a part of a massive burial tomb built for Emperor Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China. There are over 8,000 life size statues of soldiers buried along with the emperor.

Tomb for Emperor Qin

Emperor Qin wanted to live forever. He spent much of his life and resources searching for immortality and the "elixir of life". He also spent a huge amount of resources building for himself the largest single tomb built to a leader in the history of the world. He felt this huge army would protect him and help him to keep his power in the afterlife. He died and was buried in 210 BC, over 2000 years ago.

The Soldiers

The soldiers of the Terracotta Army are life-size statues. They average around 5 feet 11 inches tall with some soldiers being as tall as 6 foot 7 inches. Despite there being so many statues, no two soldiers are exactly alike. There are soldiers of all ages with different ranks, facial features, and hair styles. Some of the soldiers look calm, while others look angry and ready to fight.

The soldiers were even designed with different clothing and armor. Men from the cavalry are dressed different than foot soldiers. Some soldiers don't have armor. Perhaps they were supposed to be scouts or spies.
Terracotta Soldier and Horse by Unknown

As impressive as the soldiers are today, they were likely much more impressive 2,000 years ago. The soldiers were painted to look even more realistic and then covered with a lacquer finish. They also held real weapons such as crossbows, daggers, maces, spears, and swords.

**How did they build so many soldiers?**

To build 8,000 life size statues must have taken a large army of workers. Archeologists estimate that over 700,000 craftsmen worked on the project for several years. The bodies of the soldiers were made in an assembly line fashion. There were moulds for the legs, arms, torsos, and heads. These pieces were then assembled together and custom features such as ears, mustaches, hair, and weapons were added later.

There are between 8 and 10 different head shapes for the soldiers. The different head shapes represent people from different areas of China as well as different personalities of the soldiers. The heads were made from moulds and then customized and attached to the bodies.

**Other Statues**

The tomb is most famous for its large rows of soldiers, but there were plenty of other statues to accompany Emperor Qin in the afterlife. There were 150 life-size cavalry horses and 130 chariots with 520 horses buried with the army. In other areas of the tomb, figures of government officials and entertainers have been found.

Archeologists have had to reconstruct the soldiers from thousands of pieces. Photo by Richard Chambers.

**When was the army discovered?**

The Terracotta Army was discovered by farmers digging a well in 1974, over 2,000 years after it was covered over during the burial of Emperor Qin. The army was located about a mile from the tomb of the emperor.

**Interesting Facts about the Terracotta Army**

- The horses in the army are saddled. This shows that the saddle had been invented by the time of the Qin Dynasty.
- There are four main pits that house the army. They are around 21 feet deep.
- The bronze weapons of the soldiers were found in excellent condition because they were coated with a thin layer of chromium which protected them for thousands of years.
- Most of the statues were found broken into many pieces which archeologists have been carefully putting back together for many years.
- Terracotta is a common type of hard-baked clay. Once the soldiers were shaped with wet clay, they would have been allowed to dry and then baked in a very hot oven called a kiln so the clay would harden.
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