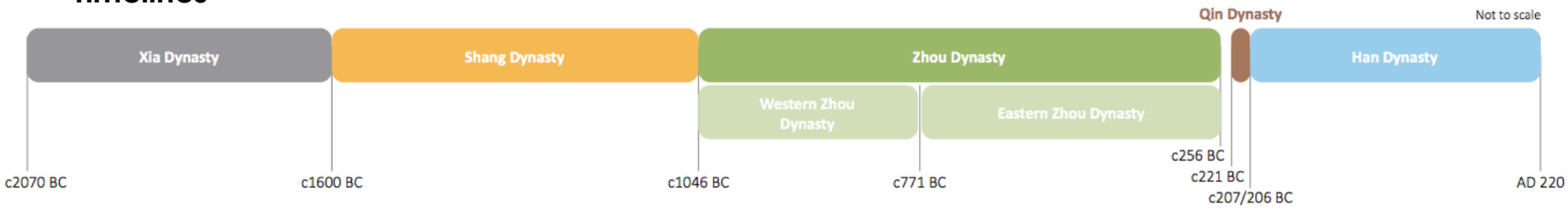
Year 5: History Shang Dynasty Knowledge Organiser

Timelines



1675 B.C.	1646 B.C.	1600 B.C.	1500 B.C.	1300 B.C.	1200 B.C.	1046 B.C.
Tang overthrows Xia and begins to rule in Yellow River area	Tang rules his people well for 29 years and his son succeeds him	Oracle bones are carved	Large scale bronze production occurs	Capital of the dynasty moved to Yin (modern day Anyang)	Death of Lady Fu Hao / Dynasty begins to decline 1250BC Fu Hao's tomb is built	End of the Shang dynasty and start of the Zhou dynasty

Subject Specific Vocabulary

ancestor	a person from whom someone is deceased
Confucianism	a philosophy based upon the ideas of the philosopher, Confucius
deity	a god or goddess
imperial	relating to an empire
oracle bones	bones used to communicate with ancestors and gods
ritual	a ceremony that involves a series of actions performed in a fixed order
sacrifice	to kill an animal or a person and offer them to the gods
shaman	a priest who is believed to communicate with spirits
tyrant	a ruler who has unlimited power over other people and uses it unfairly and cruelly

Shang Dynasty



The Shang Dynasty is the earliest ruling dynasty in the recorded history of China. The Xia Dynasty is thought to have gone before, however there is no recorded evidence to support this. The Shang Dynasty reigned during China's Bronze Age, from c1600 to c1046 BC, and were known for their advances in bronze work, silk manufacture, jade carving and military technology.

End of the Dynasty

The last Shang Dynasty king, Di Xin, was a cruel dictator. He was known as the 'tyrant.' Di Xin was an indulgent and boastful man, and very unpopular with his people. Finally, c1046 BC, an army from the neighbouring Zhou state invaded and defeated Di Xin. The Shang Dynasty was over, and the Zhou Dynasty had begun.



jade plaque, c3500–c2000 BC

Jade is a hard and rare stone, made from the mineral nephrite, which is difficult to shape and carve. Jade was used for jewellery, ornaments, weapons, tools and ritual objects. It was precious and a symbol of purity and virtue.



Houmuwu ding from Yinxu

Bronze working skills were a major advance during the Shang Dynasty. People learned o smelt copper, tin and lead to make bronze. Skilled craftspeople created vessels that were used for rituals and offerings to the gods. Bronze weapons, such as dagger and spearheads, also gave the Shang Dynasty warriors an advantage over their enemies.



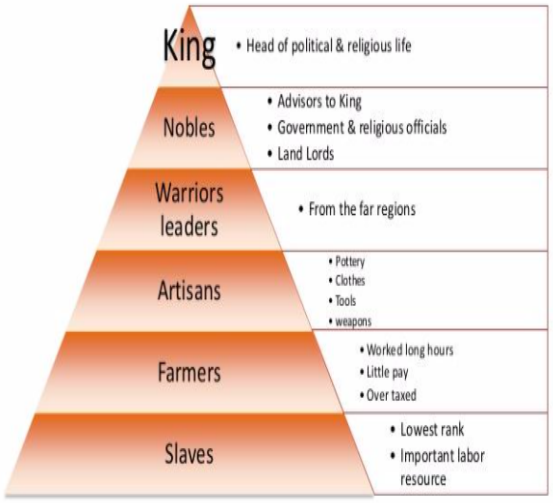
Silk was a popular and highly desirable fabric. It was made from threads produced by silkworms. Exquisite fabric was made for clothes and luxury goods, which were worn by the nobility and traded.

Everyday Life

People in the Shang Dynasty lived in cities, towns and villages. Wealthy people lived in large houses made from wattle and daub, while poorer people lived in small houses made by digging into soft rock. The oldest man in each household was the head of his family. A person's social class determined the job that he or she was allowed to do. People ate rice, millet and fish and drank beer and yellow rice wine. Wealthy people ate a lot of meat.

Power and hierarchy

There was a strict social hierarchy in the Shang Dynasty, with the king at the top and peasants and slaves at the bottom.





Wang Yirong

Scholar, Wang Yirong, discovered evidence of the Shang Dynasty in 1899, when he found ancient Chinese writing on bones that he had been given to treat malaria. He traced the bones to the modern day city of Anyang. The Shang Dynasty capital of Yin was discovered in Anyang in 1928. Excavations at the site, known as 'Yinxu', or 'Yin ruins', uncovered the remains of palaces, temples and tombs. Archaeologists also found many bronze and jade objects, as well as thousands of oracle bones. These finds provided a wealth of information about how people lived and worshipped.



Fu Hao

Lady Fu Hao led many military campaigns. She had important generals serving under her, as well as 13 000 soldiers. Fu Hao's army became famous for defeating the Tu-Fang, fierce rivals of the Shang, in one single battle. She went on to lead several successful military campaigns against neighbouring kingdoms.

Religion

People in the Shang Dynasty worshipped the king of the gods, Shangdi. They also prayed to lesser gods who controlled aspects of the world, such as the sun, wind, rain and moon. People made offerings and sacrifices to please their deceased ancestors. They believed that the soul lived after death, so they buried objects, including ritual vessels containing food and drink, for the dead to use in the afterlife.



Shangdi surrounded by attendants

Links to prior learning

In China, the Bronze Age started slightly later than in other parts of the world, c1600 BC. However, the techniques used by metalworkers in the Shang Dynasty were unknown in other Bronze Age civilisations.

Religion also differed, with worship and offerings to the ancestors being an important part of their belief system. Consulting the oracle bones was also unique to the Shang Dynasty.