

Terracotta Army



The Terracotta Army is a collection of terracotta sculptures depicting the armies of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China. It is a form of funerary art buried with the emperor in 210–209 BCE with the purpose of protecting him in his afterlife.

The figures, dating from approximately the late 200s BCE,[1] were discovered in 1974 by local farmers in Lintong County, outside Xi'an, Shaanxi, China. The figures vary in height according to their rank, the tallest being the generals. The figures include warriors, chariots and horses. Estimates from 2007 were that the three pits containing the Terracotta Army hold more than 8,000 soldiers, 130 chariots with 520 horses, and 150 cavalry horses, the majority of which remain in situ in the pits near Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum.[2] Other, non-military terracotta figures have been found in other pits, including officials, acrobats, strongmen, and musicians.[3]

HISTORY OF TERRACOTTA ARMY

History

The construction of the tomb was described by historian Sima Qian (145–90 BCE) in *Records of the Grand Historian*, the first of China's 24 dynastic histories, written a century after the mausoleum's completion. Work on the mausoleum began in 246 BCE, soon after Emperor Qin (then aged 13) succeeded his father as King of Qin, and the project eventually involved 700,000 conscripted workers.[5][6] Geographer Li Daoyuan, writing six centuries after the first emperor's death, recorded in *Shui Jing Zhu* that Mount Li was a favoured location due to its auspicious geology: "famed for its jade mines, its northern side was rich in gold, and its

southern side rich in beautiful jade; the first emperor, covetous of its fine reputation, therefore chose to be buried there".[7][8]

Sima Qian wrote that the first emperor was buried with palaces, towers, officials, valuable artifacts and wondrous objects. According to this account, 100 flowing rivers were simulated using mercury, and above them the ceiling was decorated with heavenly bodies, below which lay the features of the land. Some translations of this passage refer to "models" or "imitations"; however, those words were not used in the original text, which also makes no mention of the terracotta army.[5][9] High levels of mercury were found in the soil of the tomb mound, giving credence to Sima Qian's account.[10] Also, the Emperor is well documented for building monumental statues in human form during his reign, such as the Twelve Metal Colossi.[11][12]

Necropolis

The necropolis was constructed as a microcosm of the emperor's imperial palace or compound,[citation needed] and covers a large area around the tomb mound of the first emperor. The earthen tomb mound is located at the foot of Mount Li and built in a pyramidal shape,[25] and is surrounded by two solidly built rammed earth walls with gateway entrances. The necropolis consists of several offices, halls, stables, other structures as well as an imperial park placed around the tomb mound.[citation needed]

The warriors stand guard to the east of the tomb. Up to 5 m (16 ft) of reddish, sandy soil had accumulated over the site in the two millennia following its construction, but archaeologists found evidence of earlier disturbances at the site. During the excavations near the Mount Li burial mound, archaeologists found several graves dating from the 18th and 19th centuries, where diggers had apparently struck terracotta fragments. These were discarded as worthless and used along with soil to backfill the excavations.[26]

The tomb appears to be a hermetically sealed space approximately 100 by 75 metres (328 ft × 246 ft).[27][28] The tomb remains unopened, possibly due to concerns over preservation of its artifacts.[27] For example, after the excavation of the Terracotta Army, the painted surface present on some terracotta figures began to flake and fade.[29] The lacquer covering the paint can curl in fifteen seconds once exposed to Xi'an's dry air and can flake off in just four minutes.[30]

CONSTRUCTION OF TERRACOTTA ARMY

Construction

The terracotta army figures were manufactured in workshops by government laborers and local craftsmen using local materials. Heads, arms, legs, and torsos were created separately and then assembled by luting the pieces together. When completed, the terracotta figures were placed

in the pits in precise military formation according to rank and duty.[57] In 2021, morphological studies have shown that there is a strong resemblance between the statues and that of the local region's modern inhabitants, which has led some scholars to theorize that the high level of stylistic realism stems from the figures being modelled on actual soldiers.[58][59] The faces were created using molds, and at least ten face molds may have been used.[38] Clay was then added after assembly to provide individual facial features to make each figure appear different.[60] It is believed that the warriors' legs were made in much the same way that terracotta drainage pipes were manufactured at the time. This would classify the process as assembly line production, with specific parts manufactured and assembled after being fired, as opposed to crafting a figure as one solid piece and subsequently firing it. In those times of tight imperial control, each workshop was required to inscribe its name on items produced to ensure quality control. This has aided modern historians in verifying which workshops were commandeered to make tiles and other mundane items for the terracotta army.

A COLLECTION OF 120 OBJECTS

Exhibitions

The first exhibition of the figures outside of China was held at National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Melbourne in 1982.[81]

A collection of 120 objects from the mausoleum and 12 terracotta warriors were displayed at the British Museum in London as its special exhibition "The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army" from 13 September 2007 to April 2008.[82] This exhibition made 2008 the British Museum's most successful year and made the British Museum the United Kingdom's top cultural attraction between 2007 and 2008.[83][84] The exhibition brought the most visitors to the museum since the King Tutankhamun exhibition in 1972.[83] It was reported that the 400,000 advance tickets sold out so fast that the museum extended its opening hours until midnight.[85] According to The Times, many people had to be turned away, despite the extended hours.[86] During the day of events to mark the Chinese New Year, the crush was so intense that the gates to the museum had to be shut.[86] The Terracotta Army has been described as the only other set of historic artifacts (along with the remnants of the wreck of the RMS Titanic) that can draw a crowd by the name alone.[85]