

Oracle Bone, Or 7694/1595

An inscribed oracle bone (jia gu 甲骨) from the Couling-Chalfant collection at the British Library.

Oracle bones were animal bones, usually ox shoulder bones or the underside of turtle shells, used for divination rituals in ancient China. Dating to the Shang dynasty (c. 1600 – 1050 BC), they bear the earliest extant form of Chinese writing and are the oldest items held in the British Library.

The inscription on the reverse of this particular bone records a lunar eclipse, which can be precisely dated to the night of 27 December 1192 BC.

This model was created for a British Library project on oracle bones that formed part of the UK-China Cultural Exchange 2015, supported by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

For more information see: <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/asian-and-african/>

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