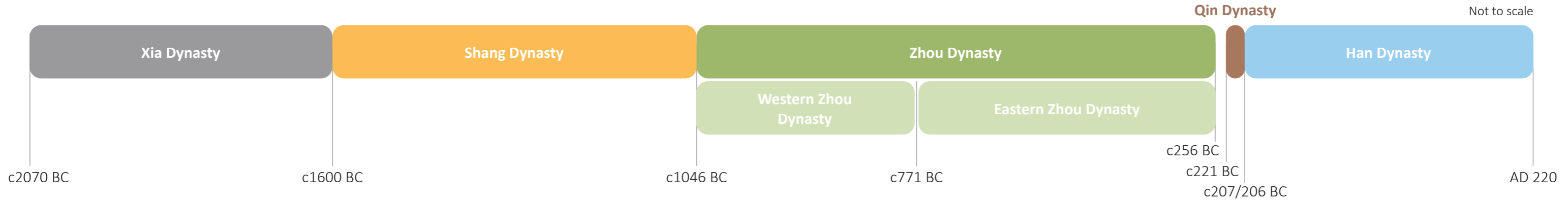


Dynamic Dynasties

A dynasty is a system of rule where the throne passes from one member of a ruling family to another. Dynasties have ruled China for 4000 years, from c2070 BC until 1912. During that time, around 15 different dynasties have held power. Each dynasty made important changes to the country, but many aspects of life in China started during the first five dynasties.



Shang Dynasty

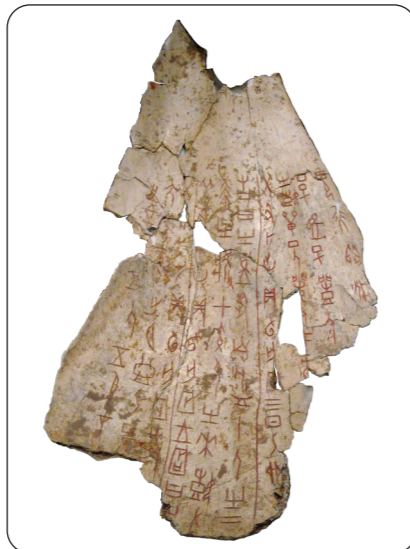
The Shang Dynasty is the earliest ruling dynasty in the recorded history of China. The Xia Dynasty is thought to have gone before, however there is no recorded evidence to support this. The Shang Dynasty reigned during China's Bronze Age, from c1600 to c1046 BC, and were known for their advances in bronzework,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

Yinxu

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.

Oracle bones

Oracle bones are pieces of sheep or cow bone, or turtle shell. Shamans or kings wrote questions on these bones to ask for guidance from the deities. Holes in the bones were then heated until they fractured. The patterns of fractures were interpreted as the answers to the questions. In this way, Shang Dynasty kings consulted the deities about the outcome of harvests, droughts, health issues and military strategies.



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

Bronze

Bronzeworking skills were a major advance during the Shang Dynasty. People learned to 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 daggers and spearheads, also gave the Shang Dynasty warriors an advantage over their enemies.



Houmuwu ding from Yinxu

Jade

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.



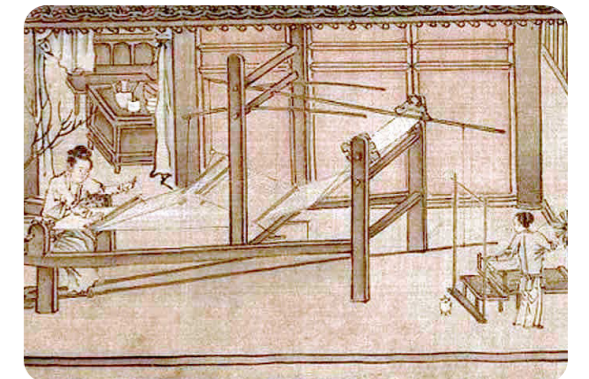
jade plaque, c3500–c2000 BC



jade bi

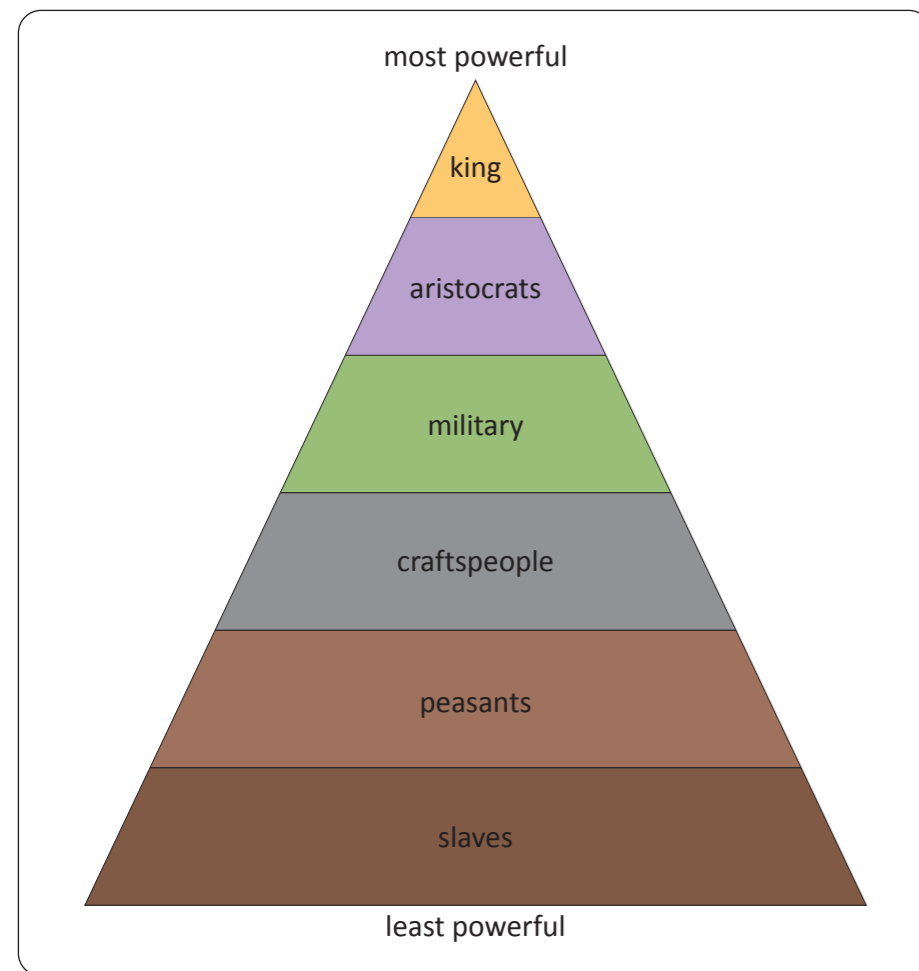
Silk

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.



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.



Warfare

Warfare was a way of life in the Shang Dynasty. The king led the army. Foot soldiers were armed with bronze daggers and axes, and archers used powerful composite bows made from layers of animal bone, tendons and wood. Two-wheeled chariots, pulled by a pair of horses, carried an archer, a spearman and a charioteer. The chariots allowed the soldiers to travel quickly over long distances. Soldiers wore protective armour and bronze helmets.



bronze dagger-axe

Fu Hao

Fu Hao was a wife of the Shang king, King Wu Ding. She became the Shang Dynasty's most influential military leader and commanded an army of 13,000 men. She was buried in her own tomb, surrounded by important objects including ritual vessels and weapons.

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. People had a wide variety of jobs, such as farmers, miners, bronzeworkers, craftspeople, soldiers and government officials. 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.



Comparisons with other Bronze Age civilisations

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.

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.

Other dynasties

During the Zhou Dynasty, power moved from the king to the feudal lords of individual states. Iron began to replace bronze, and warfare advanced with crossbows and horses. Confucius also created his influential philosophy of Confucianism. Seven states fought for power during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. The Qin Dynasty united the warring states and introduced the first emperor of the whole of China, as well as a new government structure. Building also began on the Great Wall of China, and the Terracotta Army was made. The Han Dynasty developed an advanced system of government and opened the Silk Road trade route, which connected China with the western world.



Great Wall of China

Legacy of ancient China

The legacy of ancient China can be seen today. Ancient Chinese beliefs, such as Confucianism, are still followed and the imperial system lasted for over 2000 years. Silk and jade objects are still luxury items. The characters used in Chinese writing are over 5000 years old. The Great Wall of China is one of the New Seven Wonders of the World and ancient Chinese inventions, such as the magnetic compass and paper are used all over the world.



Chinese calligraphy

Glossary

ancestor	A person from whom someone is descended.
Confucianism	A philosophy based on the ideas of the philosopher, Confucius.
composite	A new material that is made up of more than one existing material.
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.
smelt	To melt metals at a high temperature.
tyrant	A ruler who has unlimited power over other people and uses it unfairly or cruelly.
virtue	The quality of being morally good.



Groundbreaking Greeks

Ancient Greek lands were made up of the Greek mainland, surrounding islands and Greek colonies across the Mediterranean Sea. Ancient Greece was almost entirely surrounded by sea, and the mountains on the mainland made travelling by land difficult.



Significant periods of Greek history

Ancient Greek history can be divided into seven main periods or civilisations: Neolithic, Minoan civilisation, Mycenaean civilisation, Dark Age, Archaic period, Classical period and Hellenistic period. Greece is often referred to as the birthplace of Western civilisation because of the advances that its people made in politics, science, mathematics, philosophy, literature and art.

Minoan civilisation

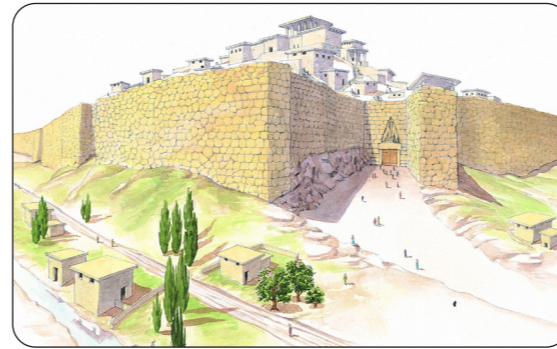
The Minoan civilisation existed between c3000 BC and c1100 BC on the Greek island of Crete. At the civilisation's peak, around 10,000 people lived in 90 cities. As Europe's first developed civilisation, the Minoans lived in towns with roads, wells and a basic sewerage system. They were capable farmers and skilled craftspeople. Their architects oversaw the building of palaces. They were also skilled in making pottery. They traded goods, such as olive oil, pottery and cloth. The Minoans also used an early writing system known as Linear A.



Reconstruction of the palace of Knossos

Mycenaean civilisation

The Mycenaean civilisation existed between c1600 BC and c1100 BC on the Greek mainland. They took control of Crete in c1450 BC. The Mycenaean were excellent warriors. They invaded and settled in areas around the Mediterranean Sea and developed trade links with Egypt, Cyprus and many Greek islands. The Mycenaean chiefs lived in palaces within fortified hilltop citadels. The Mycenaean people were influenced by the Minoans. They developed the Minoan Linear A script into Linear B and were the first people to speak the Greek language.



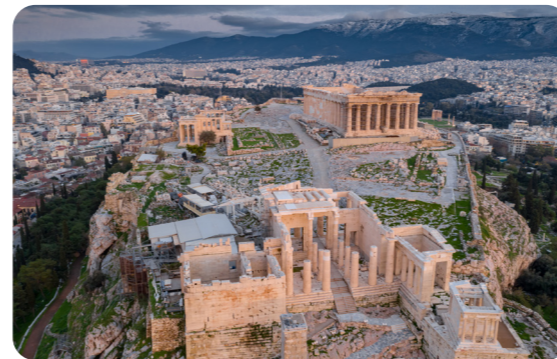
Artist's impression of the citadel at Mycenae

Dark Age and Archaic period

In c1100 BC, the Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations collapsed and society began to decline. Greece entered its Dark Age. Many people left Greece and skills, including writing, were lost. The few remaining people lived in small family groups and reared livestock for food. They also began to mine iron to make spears and tools. Then, around 800 BC, Greece entered the Archaic period. This was characterised by the re-emergence of society, government, art and architecture. A new alphabet was devised, the population grew, city states developed and the first Olympic Games were held.

Classical period

The Classical period started in c500 BC and ended in 323 BC. It is known as the golden age of ancient Greece because many discoveries and advancements were made. People in the Classical period believed in gods and mythology from earlier periods, although philosophers and scientists at the time began to challenge those beliefs. Their architecture featured symmetrical designs and columns. Like the Minoans and Mycenaean before them, people in Classical Greece established trade links both within Greece and with surrounding countries.



Aerial view of the Acropolis

City states

During the Classical period, ancient Greece was a collection of city states, rather than one united country. Each city state, known as a *polis*, included a city and its surrounding villages, farms and land. Each city state had its own government and hierarchy, although they spoke the same language and followed the same religion. The design of each city was also similar. They all had a connection to the sea for trade and transport, outer walls for protection, a variety of buildings inside the city walls and an acropolis built on a hill. Despite similarities and trade links between the city states, they were often at war with each other in a bid to gain power and land.

Family life and social class

In ancient Greece, class and gender determined the roles people could play in society and at home. Only male citizens were allowed to vote and make decisions. Below them in society came men called *metics*, who were not citizens and lastly, slaves. Men worked as politicians, landowners, artists, architects, sculptors, scientists and scholars. Women were expected to run the home, bring up the children, supervise the slaves and make clothing. They were not allowed to own land, vote or take part in politics.

Significant people

Ancient Greece is known for its many great thinkers, including philosophers, political leaders, scientists, mathematicians, historians and writers.

Pythagoras (c580–c500 BC) was a philosopher and mathematician. He developed a method to help people to calculate the longest side of a right-angled triangle.

Cleisthenes (c570–c508 BC) was a political leader in Athens. He developed the first democratic system.

Pericles (c495–429 BC) was a political leader in Athens. He ordered the construction of the Acropolis and Parthenon.

Socrates (c470–c399 BC) was a great philosopher. He used questions to help people to examine their knowledge and beliefs.

Hippocrates (c460–c375 BC) was a doctor. He carried out medical research and became known as the 'father of medicine'.

Plato (c427–c347 BC) was a philosopher and student of Socrates. He founded the first university in Athens.

Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) was a military leader. He expanded Greece's territory to create the ancient world's largest empire.



Timeline

c6000–c3000 BC	People start to farm and make produce in Neolithic Greece.
c3000–c1100 BC	The Minoan civilisation exists on the island of Crete.
c1600–c1100 BC	The Mycenaean civilisation exists on the Greek mainland.
c1450 BC	The Mycenaeans take control of Crete.
c1100–c800 BC	Greek cities are destroyed or abandoned during the Greek Dark Age.
c800–c500 BC	Greece develops quickly and city states are founded in the Archaic period.
776 BC	The first Olympic Games are held in Olympia.
c507 BC	Cleisthenes introduces the world's first known democratic system to Athens.
c500	The Classical period begins.
356 BC	Alexander the Great is born.
323 BC	Alexander the Great dies and the Classical period ends.
323–30 BC	Greece becomes divided during the Hellenistic period.
30 BC	Ancient Greece is conquered by the Romans.

Lasting legacies

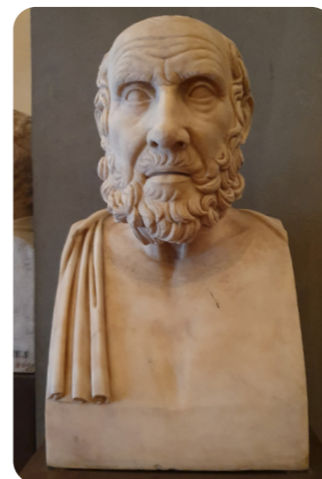
Democracy

The world's first democratic system was created in Athens in the fifth century BC. The system was designed to give the Athenian people a say over how their city was run. Today's democratic systems, although different from Athens', follow the same principles and allow ordinary citizens to have a say in how their country is governed.



Philosophy and mathematics

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were some of the greatest philosophers of their time, and their ideas are still influential today. Socrates' method of questioning and discussion, known as the 'Socratic method', is still used in schools and universities. The ancient Greeks also made hugely significant advances in mathematics and the ideas of mathematicians, such as Pythagoras and Archimedes, are still relevant today.



Olympic Games

The Olympic Games were invented in ancient Greece. It was one of the greatest sporting and religious festivals of its time and drew in competitors and spectators from all parts of Greece. Today's Olympic Games share some of the same core values of excellence, respect and friendship that underpinned the original Olympic Games.



Arts and culture

Theatre was an important tradition in ancient Greece. Over 40 plays have survived from the Classical period. Poetry was another source of entertainment and education. Epic Greek poems have provided information about historical and mythological events. Sculpture was an important part of ancient Greek art and their method of painting designs onto pottery was also distinct and inspired many other civilisations.



Glossary

acropolis	The upper fortified area of a Greek city that is usually built on a hill.
architect	Someone who designs buildings and makes sure that they are built correctly.
Athenian	A person from Athens.
citadel	A central fortified area of a city or town.
city state	A city and the area surrounding it with an independent government.
civilisation	A highly developed culture, including its social organisation, government, laws and arts.
democracy	A political system, which allows people to have a say in the way their country is governed.
empire	A group of countries or states ruled by a single authority, such as an emperor or monarch.
mathematician	Someone who studies, teaches or is an expert in mathematics.
mythology	A collection of religious and cultural stories.
Parthenon	A temple on the Acropolis in Athens.
philosopher	Someone who studies basic ideas about knowledge and reasoning.
warrior	A soldier with skill and experience in fighting.

