

# Shang Dynasty Artefact Collection (HI10025)

The Shang Dynasty 1600-1046 BC is China's earliest civilisation. Archaeologists have found many Shang artefacts that tell us about this ancient civilisation, how they lived, fought and worshipped. This collection has a selection of artefacts to support and enhance your learning about the Shang Dynasty.



Contents: -

1. Zun
2. Ding
3. Jue
4. Bronze Head

## Questions you could ask children about the artefacts

### **Initial Discussion**

- What is this object?
- What is the object made from?
- Does it resemble anything the children have seen?
- What do you think the item was used for and by whom?
- Does anyone know what it is called?

Collect any other questions the children might have about the artefacts and display them as you try to find the answers through your learning sessions.

### **Other questions to consider:**

- Where does the object come from?
- Who might have made this object? And how were they made?
- Why were they made?
- **What do the objects tell us about life in the Shang Dynasty?** *This last question can be returned to at the end of the investigation.*

# All About the Artefacts

## 1. Zun (pronounced zoon)

Zun is an ancient Chinese wine vessel made from bronze or clay. It was used in the Shang Dynasty to hold wine during special ceremonies and feasts. They were often had animals on them like owls or sheep. A Zun shows us how important religion was to the Shang people and how they valued their family and ancestors.

## 2. Ding

A ding is a special metal pot that usually has a round bowl on three legs and two handles at the top. It was used for heating up food and during ceremonies offering food to the gods and ancestors. It was thought that doing this would make them happy and bring you good luck and wealth.

Dings were made of bronze and required a lot of hard work and skill to make. The bigger and heavier your ding was, the more powerful and wealthy you were. Many dings have been found by archaeologists.

## 3. Jue (pronounced jway)

A jue is a special cup made of bronze. Shang kings and priests used them to warm wine or tea as an offering to their ancestors and gods. They believed that honouring the spirits would bring them good luck in battles and in farming.

It tells us that Shang people were expert metal workers and that religion and rituals were an important part of their daily lives.

## 4. Bronze Head

Archaeologists are unsure of what these were and what they might have been used for, but they think they were put on wooden poles or statues and used in religious ceremonies.

These heads often had large wide eyes and big ears. Because bronze was very expensive having a bronze head would have been a sign of status and power.

## Other Shang Artefacts

We can learn about the Shang Dynasty from archaeological evidence. Artefacts from the past can help to show us what life was like during this time.

Archaeologists have found bronze spearheads, arrowheads, axes and even chariots from the Shang Dynasty. Shang people would have been buried with these to protect them in battle and in the afterlife. Wealthy people were buried with their precious belongings, along with their servants and animals, believing they would be needed in the afterlife. Royal tombs such as the famous one of a Shang queen named Fu Hao can tell us a lot about the Shang Dynasty. These tombs prove Shang had a highly organised society with powerful kings, rich nobles and skilled craftspeople.

**Oracle Bones-** These are animal bones or turtle shells used to predict the future. Questions were carved onto the bones as a way to speak to the ancestors. They applied hot metal until the bone cracked and then priests would read the cracks to predict the future and say what the ancestors were telling them. They are an example of the earliest form of Chinese writing and proved that the Shang people believed in an afterlife and ancestor worship. Oracle bones provide us with information about life, politics and religion during the Shang Dynasty.

**Jade-** Jade is a very hard, tough, green stone which had to be worn away slowly with sand and tools to make the ritual weapons, jewellery and animal figurines like the mythical taotie. Shang people believed jade held magical powers and would bring good luck.

By studying artefacts, we can start to build a picture of the Shang Dynasty and what it was like living along the Yellow River.

We can compare it to other periods of history that happened during the Shang Dynasty.

**Shang Dynasty 1600-1046BC**  
**Bronze Age Britain 2500-800BC**  
**Ancient Egypt 3200-30BC**  
**Preclassic Maya 2000BC-250AD**