

Qin's Clay Army News

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A 2000+ year old head of one of Emperor Qin's Terra Cotta Soldiers excavated from China soil

The practice of planning and constructing Qin's terra cotta soldiers is brought to life with this fascinating find.

In China, near the ancient city of Chang'an, Shanxi (province) there ruled Qin Shi Hungdi (r.221 - 210 BCE) also known as the First August Emperor of Qin. "As the leader he unified China under a central government and introduced a variety of standardization...also remembered for being a cruel megalomaniac obsessed with immortality...the technical and administrative achievements of his reign...marked a turning point in Chinese history" (CP 30). His desire to have an entire army ready for his afterlife resulted in the army of terra cotta soldiers. Qin's vision: "Life-sized, minutely detailed

terra cotta warriors, lined up in perfect military formation and numbering over 7000 in total, to guard the emperor in the afterworld...The figures [unearthed currently]...include armored and unarmored infantrymen, standing and kneeling archers, cavalrymen with horses, charioteers, petty officers, and commanders. Armored foot soldiers appear most often...The Charioteers wore caps that indicate their rank as officers and extend both arms forward to grasp the reins. The standing archers, with turned bodies, are dressed in simple and light uniforms that allowed for speed and maneuverability. The kneeling archers wear waist-length suits of scaled armor that simulates leather, their arms are flexed for cradling the

crossbow. All details of the clothing, the armor, and the faces are modeled with great care, down to the stippled tread of the sole of the archer's sandal" (CP 30). This attention to detail was so important because of Qin's certainty in the unseen forces of the afterlife. This belief would have transferred down among the supervisors and laborers who were assigned this task of creating an army that would potentially be led by their resurrected emperor who would continue to protect and expand his dynasty. Their daily adherence to the importance of quality workmanship and unconscious participation of this practice would reinforce this reflection of the importance of the afterlife. As the scale of the clay army grew, the impression of its truth



would multiply, and without being completely aware, the laboring forces and the people of this region of China would be part of this religious practice.

Key Elements in Terra Cotta Soldiers

The Yellow Emperor, the law and Chancellor LiSi and are key elements in this practice of planning and constructing the terra cotta army. The Yellow Emperor, Formally known as Xuanyuan Huangdi was "the third of ancient China's mythological emperors, a culture hero and a patron saint of Daoism" (EB 2). "Huangdi is held up in some ancient sources as a paragon of wisdom whose reign was a golden age. He is said to have dreamed of an ideal kingdom...on waking from his dream, Huangdi sought to inculcate these virtues in his own kingdom, to ensure order and prosperity around the inhabitants...Upon his death he was said to have become an immortal...Huandi himself is credited with defeating barbarians in a great battle somewhere in what is now Shanxi -- the victory winning him the leadership of tribes throughout the Huang H (Yellow River) plain" (EB 2). The significance of the Yellow Emperor to the Qin Dynasty is his reported immortality. Qin saw a direct connection between this ideal ruler who reached immortal status and himself. This is what Qin aspired to and so this emperor turned

god, is a blueprint for Qin to follow and believe in...hence his desire for a fully functioning strategic and powerful army (terra cotta soldiers) to be ready for battle when he transcends to the afterlife. As the thousands of workers are laboring over the construction of the clay soldiers, it would be hard to imagine that it would not reinforce the emperor's belief in the hereafter, and therefore their own belief in the same thing. Since the emperor is a highly efficient, educated and powerful man (like the Yellow Emperor), they would assume that he knows more than they do and accept his belief of the unseen forces that govern the immortality of a worthy individual as factual.

The laws were paramount in the success of Qin's huge dynasty and in the construction of the terra cotta soldiers. "The law code promised draconian punishment but also equal justice to everyone. The code, fragments of which archeologists have discovered written on bamboo slips, has been ranked among the most influential legal system in world history... The Qin administrators knew how to foster efficiency through standardization. "Precise laws specified the fines in such cases [of poor workmanship determined by the identification stamp]...The emphasis on obedience, precision, productivity and quality were the messages that the foremen and laborers most likely heard, and were

reinforced by the required identification stamp or punishment that was received if something failed to meet the high standard of the emperor or LiSi.



Worker's id stamp on clay head (see arrow above)

"Only a well-observed sequence of steps in the production process and a tight schedule could guarantee that work went smoothly...The [stamp identifying workers] names guaranteed the quality of craftsmanship. If the overseers found a figure to be faulty, they were able to track down a man whom they could hold responsible. Precise laws specified the fines in such cases" (CP 34-36). Qin built his empire by establishing order, organization, standardization, precision, quality and accountability of everything; the clay soldiers were no exception.

LiSi, chancellor for Qin "was instrumental in implementing the



unification of the empire and in forging its administrative structures...LiSi also took extraordinary measure to prepare a worthy tomb for his ruler...the people in this district were responsible for the construction and later the maintenance of the imperial necropolis” (CP 31). The chancellor to Qin would most likely have made sure that the pits of the terra cotta soldiers were created with the same attention to detail and quality as the emperor’s tomb that he oversaw.

Comparing and contrasting my daily practice with the practice portrayed in the unearthed statue

My daily practice parallels the planning and construction of the terra cotta soldiers in several ways. I use my ears to listen to the song, "You Raise Me Up", just like the laborers use their ears to listen to direction on how to construct the ideal clay soldier. I use my mind to imagine the subject matter of the song; the emperor, LiSi, the foremen, laborers and citizens would do the same, imagining the battlefield soldiers come to life in the afterlife, lead by Qin. I use my hands to go about my daily practice in a systematic order: place ipod into music player, push button to play song from the beginning, sing each verse in chronological order, create a visual in my mind of the unseen forces the song implies. The foremen and the laborers also use their hands to go about their

daily job (which is also a practice) in a systematic order: they create a pit, make molds ("The technique used to make the drainage pipes must have been similar to the technique for making circular torsos, legs, and arms from slabs of clay rolled into tubes" - CP 35)., created the separate body parts, then attached them in a specific order, then painted and varnished them. My daily practice is similar to the planning and construction of the clay army in substance and use of words. The words of my song are powerful, and there is strength and meaning in them, especially in the words, "sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity". The words are sung and the content repeated. The laborers and curious citizens can find power in the completed soldiers and the sheer magnitude of the undertaking. The words, in the form of directions, and the power of the emphasis on precision would have made this an important job, especially because it had a direct connection with the success of battle in the afterlife. The words and their meanings would have been repeated many, many times throughout the daily practice, until the project was completed. Similarities in the thoughts, emotions and moods involved in my daily practice and the planning and construction of the clay soldiers are significant. There is a parallel in the building up of emotion that is possible in both practices. In my song, it begins with a single instrument playing, then Josh Groban and I sing the first verse, an orchestra is added slowly getting

louder and more intense. As the song continues, it grows bigger, louder, more powerful, is raised to the next key up re-emphasizing the intensity of the message and emotion of the power of an unseen force. After the climax of the song is begins to ease back with less orchestration, fewer instruments, quieter voice until it ends with a single instrument, bringing the emotion or mood back to the individual. This is similar in an abstract way to the practice of constructing the soldiers. It began with one man's obsession with immortality. As he brought others into his desired vision, it grew to include LiSi, foremen, laborers and the citizens of China. It also grew from a single terra cotta soldier, to two to over 7000 (estimated). This increase would emotionally affect the workers and the citizens as the magnitude of the army was viewed and interacted with by the laborers. Because the initial vision was always to create an army for the afterlife, it would be viewed as such, increasing the power and the impactfulness of the unseen forces as the army grew. When the emperor died, it was covered up, so no one could view it, and as citizens and laborers went on to other things in their lives, the impact lessened and it eventually returned to being a single emperor's vision once again. When the emperor died, it was covered with dirt, so no one could view it, and as citizens and laborers went on to other things in their lives, the impact lessened and it eventually returned to being a single dead emperor's vision once again.



There are some major differences between my daily practice and the practice of planning and constructing the terra cotta soldiers. My daily practice involves an electronic ipod and speaker to play and amplify the music. I am also alone and I do this daily practice for about 5 minutes a day in the morning. I do not interact or see the singer, which is Josh Groban. In this Chinese practice there are no electronics available, only forged tools used by many laborers for long periods of time each day for many years. No one observes me while I sing, but these workers are observed by their foremen and most likely by the curious community. My daily practice is inside where the elements are always the same, whereas this practice takes place outside in the ever changing elements. I only use my mind, voice and ears while singing, but the Chinese workers use their entire bodies to manually construct the labor intensive statues. There is a huge difference in the amount of words used in the planning and construction of the clay soldiers compared to my song. My song repeats the chorus which is the main point of the song, similar to a chant. I would imagine that directions on proper use of tools, and requirements for perfection of the soldiers are repetitive, but the duration would be years rather than minutes, and the words used to inform and or correct workers would not reflect any emotional insight of an unseen force. Since my daily practice takes place every morning, I anticipate

that uplifting spirit I feel each new day when I sing and hear my song. Its hopeful message encourages me, "I am strong, when I am on your shoulders, you raise me up to more than I can be...sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity". I would imagine that the workers do not look forward to a long, hard day's work on the soldiers, nor do they feel uplifted. However, I would guess the practice of constructing this army does affect their subconscious and as these soldiers multiply there is a tangible presence that would make an impact on the laborers. Their permanence, scope, physicality and eventual magnitude would be a strong statement regarding the actuality of the afterlife. This would intensify the reflection of the unseen forces, not only for the foremen, workers, and citizens, but for LiSi and even Qin himself. In addition, the many different faces that were carved into the clay soldiers would have looked similar to the faces of the workers or citizens themselves, as well as a friend or relative and that would have added to the relate-ability and power of the clay soldier in the eyes of the Chinese people making it easier to envision their potential in the afterlife.

Discovering this ancient terra cotta head brings us a little closer to understanding the practices and people of the past.

The practice of planning and constructing the terra cotta soldiers influenced the community in a number

of ways. By working or observing its practice daily, it reinforced the unseen forces that began with Qin's unflinching belief in the afterlife and his place and function in it. With his education, influence and power, it was understandable that the laborers and community would assume that this powerful emperor would be correct in his beliefs, which added to their own reflections of the unseen forces. As the workers laboriously brought life to clay, their precision, organization and quality of craftsmanship reinforced their daily practice. As the clay army grew, the sheer magnitude of this tangible and permanent example added even more reality to the laborers and citizen's long term outlook and intensity of belief in the afterworld.

The communities involvement, which consisted of the laborers and the Chinese citizens, reflecting on the unseen forces brought about by participating in the practice of planning and constructing the terra cotta soldiers is both contagious and visual. As the thousands of workers and presumably, thousands of interested citizens participated and watched as Qin's terra cotta soldiers were being created, they would be affected in similar ways. As they shared with each other their thoughts and opinions about this huge clay army, their common beliefs would reinforce each other, creating a stronger intensity of the belief in the afterlife.



This contagious reflecting on the unseen forces would multiply as more of the community participated, resulting in an entire dynasty's common belief. The visual impact of thousands of clay soldiers in battle ready positions would be so impressive to the community that it would be hard not to be affected by the reason Emperor Qin requested them. The long term outcome of working on or watching the progress being made would bring a commonality to the community, strengthening the experience of seeing this magnificent clay army, and bringing the community closer together as they share their own thoughts, insights and points of view with each other, possibly picturing themselves as one of the terra cotta soldiers, come to life in the afterlife of Emperor Qin, assisting in his "other-world" battle.

Below, the air of the 21st century has effected the excavated clay head, resulting in its eventual broken state, but this is how we discover the past - piece by piece.



It is said that, "nobody, not even the First Emperor, ever saw the terra cotta army in its entirety. The breathtaking view of the now world-famous columns of soldiers only became possible after excavation in 1974. Obviously, the army did not need to be seen to serve its purpose" (CP 33). Qin may have not seen his masterpiece in his mortal life, but maybe as an immortal...

Stay tuned for next month's newsletter, when we investigate Korea!

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