

### Oracle Bones & Chinese Writing

1. What does Fu Hao's story of the oracle bone tell us about the Shang Dynasty?
2. What do the questions inscribed on the bones tell us about the Shang?
3. Why do you think the Shang leaders used these methods to help make decisions?

Now read the excerpts below that come from an oracle bone and answer the questions.

These oracle bone divinations are from the reign of Wu Ding. A divination is an attempt to gain insight into something through spiritual means. Through such divinations, the Shang hoped to discover the causes of events, the will of their ancestors and of their highest deity, Di, and the correct course of action to take when faced with difficult decisions.

6. On *dingmao* (day 4) divined: "If the king joins with Zhi [Guo] (an important Shang general) to attack the Shaofang, he will receive [assistance]." Cracked in the temple of Ancestor Yi (the twelfth king). Fifth moon.

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23. [Divined:] "The Fang (enemy) are harming and attacking (us); it is Di who orders (them) to make disaster for us." Third moon.

- 24A. Divined: "(Because) the Fang are harming and attacking (us, we) will raise men."

*Di was in part a god of battle. Some twenty divinations end with the incantatory formula "Di will confer assistance on us," and, when the context was specified, Di's assistance always involved warfare, as in:*

25. Crack-making on *jiachen* (day 41), Zheng divined: "If we attack the Ma-fang (another enemy group), Di will confer assistance on us." First moon.

This next section comes from a series of divinations about childbearing. The portion that says "verification" tells what actually happened after the divination.

**Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of the Late Shang Dynasty:  
On Childbearing**

15A. Crack-making on *jiashen* (day 21), Que divined: "Lady Hao's (a consort of Wu Ding) childbearing will be good." (Prognostication:) The king read the cracks and said: "If it be on a *ding*-day that she give birth, there will be prolonged luck." (Verification:) (After) thirty-one days, on *jiayin* (day 51), she gave birth; it was not good; it was a girl.

1. What do these divinations reveal about Shang society and their concerns?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What seems to be the relationship between Shang rulers and their ancestors and the god Di?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What do the inscriptions indicate about the relative status of males and females in the Shang family structure? What cultural characteristics would explain the desire for a male child?

**Part 2: Explore [Fu Hao's tomb](#)**

1. Why was Fu Hao's tomb such a surprising discovery?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What sorts of things were found in the tomb? What assumptions or inferences would historians and archaeologists likely draw from these findings?

**Summary: How did the Shang establish and structure authority and manage interactions or roles within their society?**

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