

Over two thousand years ago, China's first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi, had thousands of life-size clay soldiers created to guard him in his tomb. The first of these statues was found in 1974, and they are still being unearthed today. Read the passage about these ancient warriors and answer the questions that follow.

from *The Incredible Story of China's Buried Warriors*
by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent

DISCOVERY

1 One morning in the early spring of 1974, a couple of farmers in the countryside near Xi'an, a large city in central China, decided to dig a well. As they turned over the soil, broken pieces of statues began to emerge. It wasn't the first time people in the area had found such things. Over the years bits of pottery, the heads and arms of ancient statues, and occasionally even an entire clay figure had been unearthed. Archaeologists—scientists who study the way people lived long ago—were fascinated by these findings. So when they heard about the farmers' new discovery, they were quick to investigate.

2 The archaeologists dug carefully in all directions from the site of the well. As they worked, they were astonished to find a huge underground vault filled with thousands of life-size warriors made of terra-cotta, a kind of hard-baked clay. Along with the very real-looking soldiers were many full-size horses, weapons, and the remains of wooden chariots. Three smaller pits were also found. Two of these contained more soldiers and warhorses. Altogether it was an amazing find—a gigantic army frozen in time for more than two thousand years.



Archaeologists were filled with amazement as they unearthed thousands of life-size clay warriors.

An Underground Empire

3 The terra-cotta warriors were buried about a mile east of the tomb of China's first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi. Shihuangdi lived in the third century B.C. The location of his tomb, under a large mound of earth that rises 250 feet (76 meters) above the surrounding plains, has been known for centuries. But no one knew that a huge army lay hidden nearby. What was it doing there?

TO LIVE FOREVER

- 4 Qin Shihuangdi had two goals in life. The first was to unite China. The second was to live forever. He believed that he could achieve his second goal and become immortal if he could just find a substance called the elixir of life. During his reign Shihuangdi made five journeys to sacred mountains in search of that magical potion.

The Eternal City

- 5 Even as Shihuangdi searched for immortality, he was building his own tomb and underground empire. Perhaps he thought that if he could not find eternal life in the physical world, he might at least live forever in the world of the spirits.
- 6 Work on the tomb complex began shortly after the First Emperor came to power and continued throughout his rule. More than 700,000 people labored on the project, but it was still not completed by the time the emperor died thirty-six years later.
- 7 Shihuangdi's underground city is the largest known tomb complex devoted to a single ruler. From the giant mound of earth that rises above the tomb itself, the city stretches for more than nine miles (fifteen kilometers) in all directions. So far, archaeologists working at the site have uncovered the remains of a palace as well as miniature bronze chariots, perhaps intended to help the emperor's soul on its journeys after death. They have uncovered the skeletons of people, horses, and rare animals. Their most interesting find so far, however, are the pits holding the First Emperor's clay army. The largest of these pits is 775 feet (236 meters) long and 321 feet (98 meters) wide—about the size of five football fields.

“A Sea of Warriors”

- 8 Thousands of warrior statues stand poised for battle in the pits near the emperor's tomb, ready to protect and defend his fabulous eternal city. Shihuangdi's real army was reportedly one million strong, “a sea of warriors with the courage of tigers.” The statues were meant to represent these courageous soldiers as closely as possible.
- 9 Of the thousands of clay warriors unearthed so far, no two are exactly alike. Young men eager for battle stand beside older, more thoughtful soldiers. A general calmly surveys his troops,



The First Emperor's warriors stand shoulder to shoulder, poised for battle.



An archer kneels as if ready to unleash an arrow from his bow, which has been lost.

while a broad-cheeked swordsman glares fiercely. Because each statue has its own unique personality—and because they all look so lifelike—some archaeologists believe that soldiers in the emperor’s living army must have posed for them.

10 The Qin army was made up of the tallest, strongest men in the empire. The terra-cotta warriors are tall, too. On average the figures are 5 feet, 11 inches (1.8 meters) in height. Some are as tall as 6 feet, 7 inches (2 meters)—probably taller than any of the emperor’s real warriors.

Dressed for War

11 The faces of the statues show that the emperor’s army included men from many different parts of China. Some figures have the facial features of present-day farmers from China’s plains, while others look like shepherds from the country’s northern grasslands. Altogether the statues represent ten different head shapes. To the Chinese, each shape indicated a different type of personality. For example, a person with a broad forehead and pointed chin was thought to be watchful and alert. Many warriors with these features are found in the front of the clay army, where a special alertness to approaching danger would be valuable.

12 The statues’ hairstyles vary, too. Most of the warriors have long hair that is braided and gathered up into a knot on top of the head. Some wear the knots in the center of the head, others off to a side. Some have a beard or mustache, while others are clean-shaven.

13 Clothing styles also vary greatly. Armor capes in many different styles protect the warriors’ chests, shoulders, and upper arms. In real life these armor garments were made of leather with pieces of bronze attached. Some warriors lack armor, allowing them to move quickly. The army’s leaders look different from the foot soldiers. The generals wear double-layered robes with plates of armor across the chest, and the tips of their shoes turn up. While most of the lower-ranking soldiers are bareheaded, those of higher rank may wear flat caps.

14 In some cases clothing style has helped archaeologists identify the regions the emperor’s soldiers came from. For example, the style of clothing and the skullcaps worn by the cavalrymen (soldiers who ride on horseback) indicate that these soldiers came from the lands along China’s northern borders. The northern peoples were known as skilled horsemen, so it is not surprising that they would be chosen to serve in the great army’s cavalry.

15 All the many different statues, arrayed in battle formation, form a strong and balanced force, ready to face any enemy. Like the real army of Qin, the terra-cotta warriors seem well able to protect an empire.



The blanket and saddle were molded in clay on the backs of the cavalry horses.

Warhorses

Unlike the warriors, the horses that serve in the First Emperor's clay army are not unique individuals. More than six hundred chariot and cavalry horses have been uncovered, all with the same basic form. Each horse is life-size, at 5 feet, 8 inches (1.7 meters) tall. Each is powerfully built, with a sturdy body and strong legs. The manes are cut short and the forelocks (locks of hair on the forehead) are divided in half and brushed to the sides. The horses look alert, with heads raised and ears pricked forward.

Four chariot horses stand side by side before each chariot. Their harnesses, made of golden beads and bronze tubes, have fallen from their bodies. The cavalry horses wear blankets topped with saddles. The saddles were shaped from clay and painted in shades of red, white, brown, and blue. Each cavalry horse also has a bronze bit as well as a bridle and reins made from stone tubes strung on wires.

Before the pits were discovered, historians thought that the saddle was invented during a later dynasty. Now we know that the Qin also saddled their horses.