

What we know about the early Chinese empires is drawn from two main sources, written records and archaeological discoveries. Unlike the early Egyptians and Romans the Chinese left very few imperial monuments above ground. Instead their energies went into building public works such as the Great Wall and the Grand Canal. The only stone buildings remaining are tombs, pagodas, and stone monuments that have limited memorial features. The lack of visible remains complicates the interpretation. However there is a great wealth of written records that cover a range of information such as dynastic histories, biographies, ritual ceremonies, and events of the court. The scholar of the court was responsible for recording selected events and this could be interpreted or reinterpreted to accommodate the rulers or the times. With all that is recorded, it is strange that to this date, no textual reference to the first emperor's great terra-cotta army has been found. This leads you to wonder what else has been omitted from the recorded texts regarding Emperor Qin's reign. Fortunately, the ancient Chinese tradition of burying the dead with whatever is needed in the next world means that the soil is rich with clues to the past.

Both historians and archaeologists have gathered as much information as possible about the first emperor and continue to gather more information through research. They know that in 221 BC, King Ying Zheng (259-210 BC) came from one of the mightiest states in China, Qin, and defeated the most powerful states one right after another before appointing himself the title of Qin Shi Huangdi which means in Chinese, the first sovereign emperor. There are several other recorded descriptions of the first emperor by his advisors. Wei Lao, one of his closest advisors, refers to him in an unflattering manner, "...his chest is like that of a bird of prey and his voice like that of a jackal. He is merciless, with the heart of a tiger or a wolf." A lot of mystery still surrounds his life and death, but merciless is a good word to describe an emperor who condemned more than seven hundred thousand men to the building of his palace and his tomb. Perhaps it was his great fear of dying that led him to obsession with construction of his mausoleum shortly after the start of his reign at age 13, or perhaps it was lack of faith in a dynasty that he created. The unification of China had not been successful before his reign.

Today you are going to be reading both secondary and primary documents to answer the focus question. You will have a chance to work with a group to generate some theories. Later you will use both your prior knowledge and what you have learned from this investigation to answer the focus question and support it with details from the documents used in this task.