

The Shang Dynasty

Sorting Cards A

Read the information about each of the first Shang kings. The history books and the archaeological evidence from the oracle bones disagree about the order of the kings.

Can you put the kings in the order you think they ruled? You will have to decide whether you trust the written history or the archaeological evidence more.



Da Yi (Tang the Great)

Date: 1675 - 1646 BC

The first king of the Shang. He is said to have overthrown the last cruel ruler of the Xia Dynasty.

Tai Ding

Date: Unknown

The history books say he died young and did not become king, but the bones found at Dàyì Shāng say he was the second king of the Shang.

Wai Bing

Date: Unknown

The history books say he was the second Shang king but the bones say he was the fourth. He only ruled for two years.

Zhong Ren

Date: Unknown

He is said to have ruled for four years after the death of his brother Wai Bing. The bones don't mention him at all.

Tia Jia

Date: 1535 - 1523 BC

The history books say he is the fourth king but the archaeological evidence says that he is the third king.

Wo Ding

Date: Unknown

In the history books he succeeded his father Tai Jia to the throne and ruled for 19 or 29 years. He is not mentioned in the bones.

Tai Geng

Date: Unknown

The history books say he was the sixth Shang king, but the bones say he was the fifth, after Wai Bing. Both agree Xiao Jia came after him, but the history books say he was Tai Geng's son while the bones say he was Tai Geng's brother. He ruled for 5 or 25 years.

Xiao Jia

Date: Unknown

Was he the seventh king, as described in the history, or the sixth as on the bones? Was he succeeded by his brother Yong Ji or his son Tai Wu? He ruled for 17 years.

Yong Ji

Date: Unknown

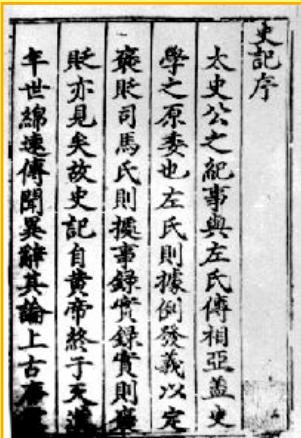
The history books say he ruled before Tai Wu, the bones say he ruled after Tai Wu. He ruled for 12 years.

Tai Wu

Date: Unknown

Did he succeed his brother Yong Ji, as the history says, or his father Xiao Jia, as the bones say? He ruled for 75 years.

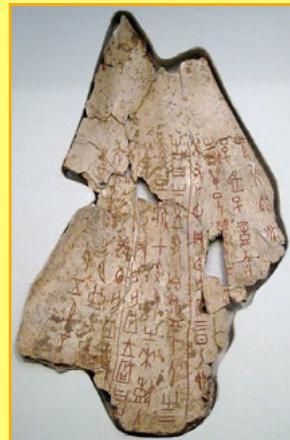
The Shang Kings



The front page of 'Records of the Grand Historian' written c.200 BC

Around the year 200 BC, historians started to write down what they knew about the kings of the Shang Dynasty.

They recorded their names and the order they reigned. More than 2,000 years later, oracle bones were discovered with writing on which described the kings and when they ruled. Some of the information was different to that in the history books so which evidence is correct?



An example of an oracle bone

Shang king	What the history books say	What the archaeological evidence says
Da Yi (Tang the Great)	He is the first king of the Shang. He is said to have overthrown the last cruel ruler of the Xia Dynasty. He set up the capital at Dàyì Shāng.	He is the first king of the Shang but the capital city of Dàyì Shāng wasn't established until much later.
Tai Ding	He died young and did not become king.	He was the second king of the Shang.
Wai Bing	He was the second king of the Shang. He only ruled for two years.	He was the fourth king of the Shang. He only ruled for two years.
Zhong Ren	He ruled for four years after the death of his brother Wai Bing.	There is no evidence of him.
Tai Jia	He was the fourth Shang king.	He was the third Shang King and ruled after Tai Ding and before Wai Bing.
Wo Ding	He succeeded his father Tai Jia to the throne and ruled for 19 or 29 years.	There is no evidence of him.
Tai Geng	He was the sixth Shang king. He was succeeded by his son Xiao Jia.	He was the fifth Shang king after Wai Bing. He was succeeded by his brother Xiao Jia.
Xiao Jia	He was the seventh king of the Shang. He was succeeded by his brother Yong Ji.	He was the sixth king of the Shang. He was succeeded by his son Tai Wu.
Yong Ji	He ruled before Tai Wu.	He ruled after Tai Wu.
Tai Wu	He succeeded his brother Yong Ji.	He succeeded his father Xiao Jia.