Shang Dynasty Oracle Bones

ABOUT THE SOURCE The Shang dynasty ruled an empire in China from around 1766 BC to 1100 BC. This dynasty is the earliest Chinese civilization for which archaeological evidence exists. Oracle bones are an important part of this archaeological record. The Shang believed that they could get advice from their ancestors’ spirits through these bones. The ancient Chinese inscribed the bones and asked them questions about issues that concerned them. A bone was then touched with a heated metal point to create cracks on its surface. A specially trained priest called a diviner then interpreted the cracks to reveal the answer to the question.

As you look at the photograph pay close attention to the symbols inscribed on the bones.

Notice how the symbols have been carved or etched into the bones.

The oracle bone on the right is about six inches long from top to bottom.
WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Make a Comparison**  How are the two bones in the picture similar and different?

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2. **Identify**  The picture symbols on the bones represent ideas or objects. What are two ideas or objects that appear to be represented by the symbols on the bones?

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3. **Draw Conclusions**  What can you conclude about Shang civilization from the image?

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