

## The Jade Princess and the Terracotta Soldiers

*... from the first Emperor of China to the Han Dynasty, unique artistic burial antiquities*

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**Meet the artists:** Generations of artists serving the royals of China.

**Meet the subject:** The clay army is an enormous collection of terracotta pieces representing the armies of Qin Shi Huang, the first Emperor of China and Jade-smiths working for the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.), began creating shrouds for the dead royals, suits of jade stone to cloak the bodies of the Emperor his family and their consorts and ensure them of long 'lives' after death.

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## The Jade Princess and the Terracotta Soldiers *(continued)*

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Kneeling armored archer (bow removed from his grip)

## The Jade Princess and the Terracotta Soldiers (*continued*)

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In situ, part of the army of more than 6,000 terracotta soldiers stand ready to serve their emperor, each – like a snowflake – different from the next, with a different face, body, gently adjusted pose, and uniquely styled armor or padded clothing; they were created during the reign of the emperor, before his death (210 B.C.).

## The Jade Princess and the Terracotta Soldiers (*continued*)

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The jade burial shroud of Princess Dou Wan.

## The Jade Princess and the Terracotta Soldiers (*continued*)

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The burial shroud of her husband, the Prince Liu Sheng (154 B.C. – 113 B.C.) of the Han Dynasty. Both Sheng and his wife were buried with intricate jade suits that each contained over 2,000 pieces of jade.

# The Jade Princess and the Terracotta Soldiers *(continued)*

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## Meet the artists:

Generations of artists serving the royals of China.

To create the clay soldiers discovered by accident in 1974, Chinese artists with enormous cadres of worker assistants served Qin Shi Huang, the first Emperor of China, working in tiered bureaucratic layers of control, creating funerary art that included a vast escort army of soldiers, archers, charioteers complete with chariots and steeds, camp followers and commanders in the field... all of terracotta clay, fired and then painted in garish colors, realized in life-size.

Jade-smiths working for the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.), began creating shrouds for the dead royals, suits of jade stone to cloak the bodies of the Emperor, his family and their consorts and ensure them of long 'lives' after death. This practice was finally banned in 223 A.D. because tomb robbers were vandalizing the burial places, seeking to melt down the suits for the gold and silver used as wire to connect all the small pieces of jade.

## Meet the subjects:

The clay army is an enormous collection of terracotta pieces representing the armies of Qin Shi Huang, the first Emperor of China (born 259 B.C. – died 210 B.C.), reigned 221 – 210 B.C. A form of funerary art, the clay army was buried nearby to the tomb of the emperor in 210 B.C. to protect the emperor in the afterlife. The figures are sturdy, standing at attention, yet each figure realistically shifts weight or makes a slight turn or nod, a cocking of arm or head, facial expressions varied, clothing unique to each individual. The impact of the groups of soldiers, in tiered ranks, is powerful, restrained and protective. A sense of dignity and authority pervade the space.

Glittering with the sparks of gold and silver ties, the gleaming jade stones in muted tints of green seem to be serenely awaiting the afterlives of their protected royal personages. The precision and detail are exquisitely lovely but the message of death, with a solemn hope for a possible life afterwards, overlays it all. The jade suits were an expensive luxury that the Han Dynasty indulged in during their centuries of reign. Jade remains a Chinese symbol of immortality. *“The suits are the completion of a magical transformation of a deceased individual’s body, accomplished through a layering of jades. The first layer would have been the set of jade plugs... , which were inserted into the nine bodily orifices to seal the corpse. Next came a layer of small and large disks. The corpse was then encased in this suit, its head resting on the accompanying pillow. The ensemble of jades protected the body and the soul in their entirety, enabling the deceased to attain immortality.”\**

# The Jade Princess and the Terracotta Soldiers *(continued)*

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## Curious fact:

Accidental discoveries: both the large pits full of terracotta soldiers and the tombs with jade-suited royals were found by accident, the 'soldiers' by farmers digging a well in 1974, the 'shrouds' by a modern soldier who fell into a hole while on duty in 1968.

## More info-bites:

- The suits: were considered the stuff of myth and legend until the first discovery in 1968 of two complete jade burial suits in an ancient tomb.
- The suits: included a jade-covered codpiece for the male royal's genitalia; in addition, pointed bits of jade were found that had been inserted in every hole in the body (mouth, nose, anus, ears, etc.) to 'seal' it.
- The clay soldiers: were a humane change from earlier practices of burying actual slaves and animals in the royal tombs to accompany their master on his afterlife journey.
- The clay soldiers: each was originally painted in bright, almost fluorescent colors. The paint curled and fell off upon exposure to air after 2000 years beneath the earth, leaving only the earth-colored clay behind.

## How the ancient artists did it:

### The Suits:

The jade suits were constructed of neatly cut flat 'plates' of jade green stone, pierced at the corners and tied together with real gold or silver wire, a simple stuffed mannequin (later to be replaced by the actual dead body) was used as a form on which they were constructed. Each burial suit is created with more than 2,000 pieces of jade, using gold wire to tie together the prince's and using silver wire for the princess. These were very expensive and extremely labor intensive to make; it is estimated that it took 10 years to make a single suit.

### The Soldiers:

The heads, necks, bodies and legs of the terracotta soldiers and other figures were made separately from soft yellow earth with flecks of marble grit added for strength, pressed into molds for basic shapes, and carefully arranged to create unique poses, then glued together with 'mud' (clay slip) before a final coating of 'mud' was applied universally over each figure. After detailed carving and decorating, the figures of the terracotta warriors were fired in kilns. Painting appears to have been done after the figures had been fired rather than have them re-fired with glazes.

# The Jade Princess and the Terracotta Soldiers *(continued)*

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Want to hear and see more?

## **For the Soldiers:**

National Geographic (4 minutes) tour of the dig site and some of the finds regarding the terracotta army: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsUE-ZtcUFg>

Simple description of the rule of the Emperor Qin Shi Huang, whose tombs housed the terracotta army, using animations (4 ½ minutes),

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mP5p4QbvPtc>

BBC report (4 minutes) presents the discovery and subsequent study of the terracotta army:

Link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4c\\_ADqshdSA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4c_ADqshdSA)

## **For the Suits:**

Exhibition “Dreams of The Kings: A Jade Suit for Eternity” at China Institute at New York (each part is only slightly more than 2 minutes long)

Links: Part 1 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8RXIlrmxIs>

Part 2 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eiK-KicYZM>

Listen to an audio description: #213. Burial Suit for Dou Wan at the Met (NYC)

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/696308>

\* source of quote: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/696308>, *the Metropolitan Museum of Art show that included “Burial Ensemble of Dou Wan”*