



# Fu Hao

**Read the information about Fu Hao and the discovery of her tomb, then answer the comprehension questions in as much detail as you can.**

## **An Exciting Discovery**

In 1976, a team of archaeologists led by Zheng Zhenxiang – the ‘First Lady of Chinese Archaeology’ - made a remarkable discovery at the site of the ancient Shang capital, Yinxu, in modern day Anyang: the tomb of the Shang military general and high priestess Fu Hao.

Fu Hao's tomb is the only Shang tomb discovered to date that has not been looted. Therefore, the contents of the tomb, along with inscriptions on oracle bones, are very important and they have provided important evidence not just about Fu Hao but also about the Shang people too.

## **Lady Fu Hao**

Fu Hao was one of King Wu Ding's sixty wives who worked as a military general and high priestess. She was obviously well respected by King Wu Ding as he requested her to lead ritual ceremonies, including presenting sacrifices and oracle bone divining. This was very unusual for a woman at the time and demonstrated how powerful Fu Hao was.

In her role as a military general, Fu Hao was responsible for leading thirteen thousand soldiers into battle and she was in charge of other important generals such as Zhi and Hu Gao. Under Fu Hao's leadership, the Shang fought battles against a number of different tribes and in one single battle they were finally able to defeat the Tu-Fang tribe, who had fought the Shang for many years. Fu Hao was not only the first known female military leader, but also the most successful and powerful military leader of her time, male or female.

Fu Hao had a son called Prince Jie and oracle bones have been found which express concern for Fu Hao's safety during childbirth.

## **The Tomb**

Fu Hao's tomb is dated to around 1200 BC. It was smaller than other royal tombs and it was outside the main royal cemetery. The tomb was a large pit with a wooden chamber inside and in the centre of the chamber was Fu Hao's coffin. Evidence was found above ground of a building structure where memorial ceremonies and rituals were probably held.

## **Contents**

A huge number of items were discovered inside Fu Hao's tomb, proving how important and powerful she was. There were over four hundred and fifty bronze items weighing a hefty one and a half metric tonnes, which included: one hundred and thirty weapons, twenty-seven knives, twenty-three bells, four tigers and four mirrors. In addition to this there were over seven hundred and fifty items made from jade; five hundred and fifty items made from bone, including many hair pins and arrow-heads; sixty-three stone items; eleven pottery items and five ivory items. There were also almost seven thousand cowrie shells which demonstrated her family's wealth and importance.

Inside the tomb were also the skeletons of six dogs which were located in their own small pit below Fu Hao's coffin. It is likely that these were Fu Hao's pets who were sacrificed when she was buried. Around the edge of the tomb were the skeletons of sixteen humans who were probably Fu Hao's advisers, also sacrificed so that they could continue to serve her in the afterlife.

## **Historical Significance**

The discovery and excavation of Fu Hao's tomb has provided us with knowledge of not only Fu Hao herself but also how Shang society was organised, their traditions and customs and the importance of the artefacts inside. It is quite remarkable that we have been given such a clear view into this fascinating ancient civilisation and some of the extraordinary people who lived at the time.