

0. HARSH LAWS - Story Preface

1. YING ZHENG

2. HARSH LAWS

3. TERRA COTTA SOLDIERS



A statue of China's First Emperor—also known as Shi Huangdi, Qin Shi Huang, Qin Shih Huandi, Shih Huan-ti and Shi Huangti—stands at Xi'an, Shaanxi, China. As First Emperor, in the 3rd Century BCE, he was the first individual to rule over a unified China. Photo by Dennis Jarvis; online via Ancient History Encyclopedia. License: CC BY-SA 3.0

To accomplish so much in so short a time, the First Emperor of China imposed tough laws. If a member of a public works team didn't show up at the job site on time, for example, his entire team would be killed.

Confucian scholars disapproved of the Emperor's methods - and said so in their commentaries, articles and poems. The Emperor's response was harsh. He followed his prime minister's advice who

...urged the burning of the histories of all the former states except Qin [Ch'in], folk collections of poetry and articles and books by scholars of schools with views different from those of the Qin. [The First Emperor] ordered this done, but books on medicine, agriculture, and copies of condemned books were preserved in the Imperial capital. A year later he arrested some 400 Confucian scholars, the most active of whom had continued to attack him, and had them buried alive.

(See "Traditional History: Soldiers of the Qin," at Columbia University's East Asian Curriculum Project.)

Ancient sources report that burying people alive was an old practice among the Qin. Nearly 400,000 soldiers (scroll down halfway) were killed in that fashion after Qin's defeat of Zhao in 260 BC. At the time, servants were also buried alive to ensure their masters received appropriate care and attention after death.

Despite his ruthlessness, the first Emperor spared soldiers from a similar fate in his own tomb. Instead, about 700,000 workers over 36 years constructed his mausoleum and created thousands of life-size terra cotta soldiers to stand guard over Shi Huangdi after his death.

Those soldiers are now known as the 8th Wonder of the World.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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The Emperor's Shadow

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Illustration - Before the Emperor

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