

XI'AN

—LEGACIES
OF
ANCIENT
CHINESE
CIVILIZATION



MORNING GLORY PUBLISHERS

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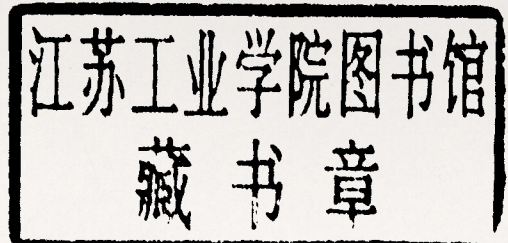
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XI'AN

Legacies of Ancient Chinese Civilization



INTRODUCTION

Like the Nile of Egypt, the Ganges of India, and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers of western Asia, the Yellow River of China is the site of one of mankind's oldest civilizations. It has long been considered the cradle of the Chinese nation, a nation which comprises almost one quarter of the world's population. The brightest jewel on this river is the city of Xi'an. Here, on the plains made fertile by the river, the civilization of China was born and nurtured, reached its apex and acquired its lasting historical significance. It is impossible to understand the history of the Chinese people, the progeny of the Yan and Yellow Emperors, their culture's origins and development or even the background of the China of today without an understanding of this region. The city that we know of as Xi'an today and its environs were China's political, economic, and cultural center for over two thousand years. Almost all who come to China, be they foreign nationals or overseas Chinese, feel they must visit Xi'an. Some visitors come to explore the origins of an ancient civilization and enjoy the rare treasures of a faraway past, while others, with closer ties, come to seek their roots and pay respects to their ancestors.

Ancient Xi'an is similar to other historically famous capital cities in some ways, but it also possesses some very distinctive features that few other cities can claim.

Most notable and familiar are the city's very long history and brilliant ancient culture. The beginnings of Xi'an might be traced all the way back to Lantian man, a prehistoric being who lived well over a million years ago. During the Neolithic Age, the primitive inhabitants of Banpo village formed clan communes that were materially quite well developed. From the humble beginnings of this early civilization sprang the culture that would grow and thrive through the Zhou and Qin dynasties and come to full flower in the eras of the Han and Tang. These dynasties created such a sophisticated economy,

brilliant culture, and magnificent architecture that Chang'an (as Xi'an was named then) became the greatest metropolis in the world.

A second notable feature of the ancient city of Chang'an was its extensive, orderly layout. The Tang built a palace city where the emperor lived on the heights of the Longshou plains north of the city. It stood apart from the central imperial city where government officials lived and worked, and was separate from the outer city, the home of the common people. This method of building and dividing the city gave emphasis to the feudal hierarchy, reflecting the levels of privilege of the various inhabitants. A large thoroughfare called Zhuque served as the north-south central axis of the city, dividing it into an eastern and a western district. Other streets, running north to south or east to west, crisscross in a chessboard pattern to form many smaller districts called *fang* and *li*. The main streets were wide with trees planted along them in an orderly way, and city management was very strict. There was even a functioning sewer system. The ancient capital of Chang'an was obviously a milestone in the development of Chinese urban design.

Another distinctive quality of this historic city is the abundance of cultural relics of high quality. As Beijing is noted for its palaces, gardens, and mausoleums dating from the Ming and Qing, imperial China's final two dynasties, Xi'an is no less famous for its ancient treasures buried for many centuries. Although much of the brilliant culture created over the millennia has been lost to time, many relics still remain, stored in a scattered network of tombs and pits.

Over the last century, and particularly since the founding of the People's Republic, many of these treasure troves have been unearthed. Through this effort, the ancient capital with all its hidden wonders is gradually being restored to us. The remains of Lantian man and crude stone implements created through

the skills of primitive humans have been recovered. Painted pottery with mysterious patterns, bronze objects with their antique charm, beautifully designed bricks and tiles fired two thousand years ago along with tricolor Tang figurines as real as life present an ever-expanding picture of the skills of the ancient craftsmen. Terra-cotta warriors in battle array, sepulchral murals in the dazzling colors of the Tang, cinerary boxes of pure gold and silver, caskets of many layers, and even the sacred bones of the Buddha have been unearthed, bringing us closer to the rites and rituals of these ancient times.

Finally, ancient Xi'an was, for many centuries, the center of a cultural and commercial interchange that benefited both East and West. The Han dynasty officially opened the country's frontiers to the West as, later on, the Tang would go further by exposing China to the entire world. Not merely permitting, but actually encouraging the inflow of foreign culture, the Tang started a process in the wake of which envoys, merchants, scholars, and missionaries from east and west would come to China. Braving the hazards of deserts and seas, these pioneers journeyed to the ancient capital of Chang'an to promote friendship and the interplay of cultures, returning home to spread Chinese civilization and goodwill to the far corners of the globe! Thus ancient Xi'an became both the origin and terminus of the historic Silk Road, a hub of international economic and cultural exchange, and a cosmopolitan city where people of different nations and backgrounds lived side by side. Chinese and Western dance, music, painting, sculpture, sports, food, fashion, and religion met and mingled, complementing each other. Ancient Xi'an could boast not only of a rich indigenous culture but also of many exotic styles, customs, and art treasures.

Although books about Xi'an have been published before, many of them deal with only one or a few particular aspects of

the city. The very few that are more inclusive prove inadequate in view of important discoveries made in recent years. *XI'AN — Legacies of Ancient Chinese Civilization* endeavors to present a comprehensive and factual account of this historic city, supported by well documented materials and numerous photographs. The contents are arranged chronologically, — from Lantian man, Banpo culture and the beginnings of Chinese civilization, through the Zhou, Qin, Han, Sui, and Tang dynasties when this historic city was the country's capital. Historical events, the lives of important personages, court life, ancient imperial palaces and gardens are all portrayed to give the reader a fuller sense of Xi'an's past grandeur. The city's construction and layout at different periods, art and culture, religion and festivals are also among the subjects covered. Through these interrelated subjects, the editors hope to present both panoramic and detailed views of the history and culture of Xi'an.





EDITOR'S NOTE

Definitions of specialized words and phrases that are not explained in the text, as well as notes on important persons, places, and writings, are given in the Glossary at the back of the book.

Chapter I

Early Human Activities

