THE STORY CHINESE BOOKS

The Story of Chinese Books

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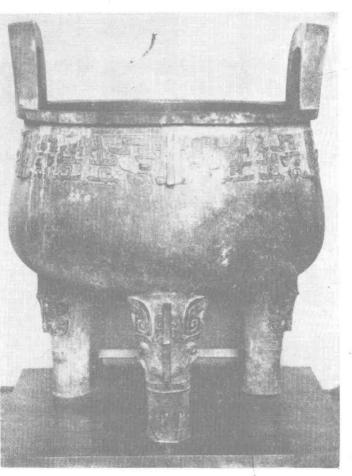


Oracle bone inscription from the Shang Dynasty



Ming wen (inscribed writing) on a Zhou Dynasty bronze vessel

Bamboo strip from the Warring States Period



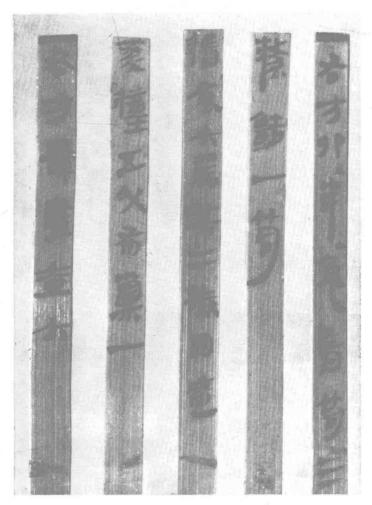
Da Yu tripod of the Zhou Dynasty

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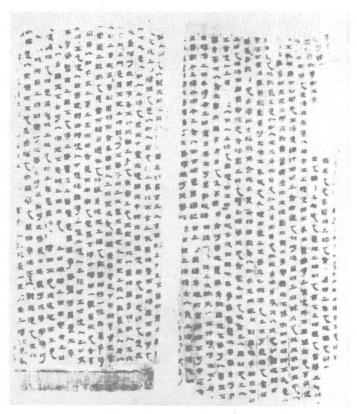
Rubbing from the Da Yu tripod inscription



Fragment of a stone classic carved during the Xiping reign of the Eastern Han Dynasty



Bamboo strips unearthed from a Han tomb



A part of The Book of Lao Zi (Edition B) written on silk fabrics, unearthed from a Han tomb



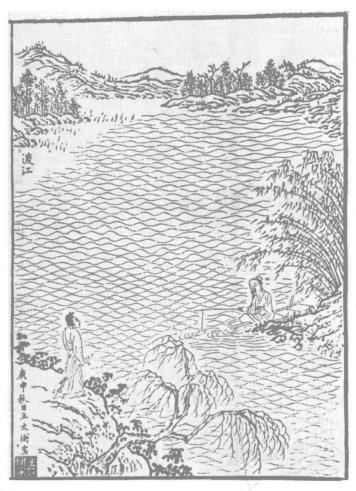
The world's oldest extant printed book, the Diamond Sutra of the Tang Dynasty

The Diamond Sutra

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Song Dynasty block-printed Zuo Qiuming's Commentary on "The Spring and Autumn Annals" (in butterfly binding)

光赤四回長空鎖干文文 寶麗騰僧伽子衣馬 《定為神軍詞諡為昭初沙川三門門官水百 ,所以何則問為語開新效如來高澤秀明實際 以終即為水添香出編輯美茶花葉之山水飲 到是)生活 **一种人类的** 人山提珠蘭看想随芳草都列水流是一發 且夕醉吟身栖思久比春雨中寄苦快速下断 THE STATE 对底H 回 心即枕上渚香溪花開霜酬陽自能類乐宝石 着日馬羅袖松春廟起姓务水無僧實難得有 CONTRACTOR OF THE PARTY OF THE



Ming Dynasty woodcut picture printing

Specimen of Bai Juyi's Anthology, printed by movable copper type during the Ming Dynasty

Foreword

Books have played an important role in the history of mankind. With each stage of development in human society, books have become even more important in people's lives, and today they are playing a still greater role in society. But it has taken a long time for books to become what they are today.

The Chinese book has a history of over 3,600 years, an interesting history and one full of anecdotes.

Before paper was invented, people of different nations throughout the world inscribed their messages on a great variety of materials. Stone, reeds, wax plates and parchment were used by Europeans. Baked clay was used by the Babylonians. Pattra was used by the Indians. And tortoise shells, bones, bronze, stone, bamboo strips and wooden slats and silk were used by the Chinese.

The materials that were used determined the size and form of Chinese books. A "book" carved on stone might be several metres high and more than a metre wide, while each strip of bamboo or each slat of wood in a book measured about a third of a metre in length and one or two centimetres in width. A silk scroll was usually a third of a metre high and several metres long.

Before they were printed by modern methods, Chinese books were carved, incised and copied by hand. Inscriptions carved or incised on the surface of shells and bones are known as "books on tortoise shells and animal bones". The earliest ones date back to the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th-11th centuries B.C.). As they recorded statements of oracles received by slave owners and were not meant for repeated reading and studying, they are not books in the ordinary sense.

In the 13th and 14th centuries B.C., the ancient Chinese began to carve or cast inscriptions on bronze ware, and thus they produced "books on bronze". For example, the famous Da Yu ding (tripod), cast early in the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-770 B.C.), records the fact that a nobleman was rewarded by the king with land, clothing, chariots, horses and a large number of slaves.

Inscriptions carved on stone tablets are often called "books of stone". The earliest one was carved in A.D. 175, the fourth year of the reign of Xiping of the Eastern Han Dynasty (A.D. 25-220). The tablet was inscribed with Confucian classics and placed outside the Imperial Academy in the city of Luoyang so that everybody could read it.

Words carved on stone or bronze are not books in the regular sense, of course, but they played the role of books. The first real book appeared in China at the end of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.). It was called a *jian ce*, or bamboo book, and was written with a brush on strips of bamboo or slats of wood. More than 4,900 such bamboo strips were retrieved during an excavation at Yinqueshan, Shandong, in 1972. The writings on the bamboo strips are copies of classics written before the Qin Dynasty (221-207 B.C.), including works such as Sun Wu's Art of War, Sun Bin's Art of War, The Book of Weiliao Zi, Six Strategies, The Book of Guan Zi and The Book of Yan Zi. The most significant of these is Sun Bin's Art of War, which had been considered lost for more than 1,000 years.