

China plans new terracotta warrior excavation

June 10 2009, By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN , Associated Press Writer



In this October 16, 2004, file photo life-sized sculptures of warriors stand in the pit where they were unearthed in 1974, in Xian, China. China plans to excavate more terracotta warriors at the famed ancient tomb of the first emperor.

Archeologists hope to uncover more figures of officers to add to the 1,000-plus statues already excavated, the official China Daily newspaper said Wednesday June 10, 2009. (AP Photo/Sergey Ponomarev, File)

(AP) -- China plans to excavate more of the life-size terracotta warriors at the famed ancient tomb of the country's first emperor.

Archaeologists hope to uncover more of the elaborately carved officers to add to the 1,000-plus statues already excavated, the official China Daily newspaper said Wednesday. Special care will be taken to preserve the figures' painted details, which have faded almost entirely in those already taken from the earth and exposed to air.

The new dig is the third undertaken since the tomb was first uncovered in 1974 outside the western city of Xi'an and will focus on a 2,152-square foot (2000-square meter) patch within the tomb's main pit that holds the bulk of the warriors.

The tomb and its accompanying museum are among China's biggest tourist draws, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

Exhibited where they were found and protected inside a massive shed, the fierce figures with enigmatic expressions are among the best-known images of China.

Reproductions in sizes ranging from midget to full size are sold in gift shops around the country and an exhibition of 20 figures and dozens of [artifacts](#) from the tomb broke ticket sale records when it traveled last year to London, California, Houston, and Washington, D.C.

Tomb museum director Cao Wei said maintaining the figures and ensuring their paint does not oxidize would be far more challenging than the relatively simple task of excavating them.

"The only difficulty lies in how to preserve them afterward," Cao said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press, adding that would be the responsibility of the Shaanxi provincial antiquities bureau overseeing the excavation.

In all, the tomb's three pits are thought to hold 8,000 life-sized figures of archers, infantry soldiers, horse-drawn chariots, officers and acrobats, along with 130 chariots with 520 horses and 150 cavalry horses.

It is believed they were created to protect the immortality-obsessed emperor in the afterlife.

At between 6 feet and 6 feet 5 inches (183-195 centimeters) tall, the statues weigh about 400 pounds (180 kilograms) each and are intricately detailed. No two figures are alike, and craftsmen are believed to have modeled them after a real army.

The tomb was looted less than five years after Emperor Qin Shihuang's death by a rival army that set a fire that destroyed the wooden structures housing the warriors, damaging most of them. Since their discovery, the figures have suffered perils ranging from mold due to humidity to decay from exposure and coal dust produced by local industry.

A fourth pit at the tomb was apparently left empty by its builders, while Qin's actual burial chamber at the center of the complex has yet to be excavated.

Qin, who died in 210 B.C. at the age of 50, created China's first unitary state by conquering rival kingdoms. A figure of fear and awe in Chinese history, he built an extensive system of roads and canals along with an early incarnation of the Great Wall of China, while unifying measurements and establishing a single written language, currency and legal statutes.

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