

Event A: The Unification of China



In this image, we see Qin Shi Huang Di seated on a throne, giving an order to an attendant.

Focus Question: What steps did Qin Shi Huang Di take to unify China?

Information About the Unification of China

Qin Shi Huang Di's Conquest of China

- When Qin Shi Huang Di (pronounced CHIN-SHIH-HWONG-DEE) became king of the state of Qin in 246 B.C.E., he possessed one of the strongest armies in the land. At the age of 21, the king—known at the time as King Zheng (pronounced JUNG)—and his trusted advisor, Li Si (pronounced LEE-SUH), developed a plan to conquer Qin's rivals. Li boasted, "The conquest of the other states in China would be like sweeping the dust from the top of a kitchen stove."
- Qin Shi Huang Di's armies consisted of foot soldiers, archers, and soldiers on horseback and in chariots. These armies, which were as large as 600,000 men, carried bronze double-headed knife-axes and crossbows. According to one historian, Qin's rivals usually suffered at least 20,000 casualties in each ferocious battle. While Qin Shi Huang Di probably never engaged in battle himself, he used spies, bribery, and alliances to ensure that rival states did not join together against him. Qin Shi Huang Di conquered all of the rival states by 221 B.C.E., and declared himself First Emperor of the newly united empire.

The End of Feudalism and the Establishment of Bureaucracy

- One of Qin Shi Huang Di's first acts as emperor was to end feudalism throughout China. Feudalism was a system in which wealthy lords ruled over lands they inherited and the peasants who lived and worked on them. Feudal lords did not have to answer to any central authority. As a result, peasants lived at the mercy of the lords, and the ruling dynasty had little or no governing power.
- Emperor Qin replaced the feudal system with a highly organized *bureaucracy*, or a government system composed of bureaus and appointed officials. First, he divided the empire into 36 units known as *commanderies*. As emperor, Qin Shi Huang Di had supreme power over all 36 commanderies. Each commandery was overseen by three court-appointed officials: the Civil Governor, the Military Governor, and the Imperial (royal) Overseer. The Civil Governor was responsible for the region's laws and *agriculture* (farming), and the Military Governor oversaw the armies. The Imperial Overseer supervised the other two officials and kept the emperor directly informed of all government matters. Finally, Qin Shi Huang Di divided each commandery into counties. Each county was overseen by a court-appointed judge, who helped enforce the laws of the empire.
- Qin Shi Huang Di wished to protect his new empire by preventing rebellions and dangerous alliances from being formed. Therefore, he had his rivals' weapons melted "into bells and bell supports, and made into twelve metal human figures, each weighing thousands of pounds." In addition, Emperor Qin forced more than 120,000 ex-feudal lords and their families to move to the empire's capital in Xianyang (pronounced SHEE-AHN-YAHNG), where he kept a close watch on their activities.