Dragon Bones

Dragon Bone Medicine

The 19th century traditional Chinese medicine included the use of 'dragon bones', which were ground up and used in tonics and creams to treat illnesses and soothe wounds.

These 'dragon bones' had been dug up and re-buried by Chinese farmers for thousands of years before their supposed medicinal benefits were exploited.

1. Why do you think 'dragon bones' were used in Chinese medicine?
2. What special qualities would you expect 'dragon bones' to have?
3. What else do you know about traditional Chinese medicine?

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Wang Yirong's Story

In 1889, a collector of Chinese bronzes called Wang Yirong bought a number of these 'dragon bones' from an antiques dealer.

It was Wang who first realised that the 'dragon bones' might not actually be from dragons after all.

It is reported that when Wang was sick with malaria, he and his friend Liu E studied the dragon bones before they were ground into powder. They noticed that they had writing on them, which matched the writing on Wang's bronzes.

Why was Wang's discovery so significant?

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Use the following questions below to help you research traditional Chinese medicinal practises such as "dragon bones". Make sure you answer in full sentences and in as much detail as possible.

How were "dragon bones" used in traditional Chinese medicine?

Why do you think "dragon bones" were used in traditional Chinese medicine?

How did Wang Yirong discover that the "dragon bones" used in his medicine were not actually dragon bones after all?

Why do you think that "dragon bones" were renamed Oracle Bones?

How important do you think Liu E's work was?

If Lou Zhenyu traced the source of the Oracle Bones to Anyang in 1908, why did it take until 1928 to fully prove the existence of the Shang Dynasty?

What type of bones were used as Oracle Bones?

What did the diviner do?

Sometimes the diviner asked the question again in a different way.

Why do you think this was the case?

What else was discovered about the Shang Dynasty from the Oracle bones?

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