

# THE FIRST EMPEROR

CHINA'S  
ENTOMBED  
WARRIORS

SLIDE SHOW

ART  
GALLERY  
NSW





## INTRODUCTION

Discovered by villagers in 1974, the underground army of the First Emperor of China, Qin Shihuang, is one of the most significant and spectacular archeological discoveries of modern times, while Qin Shihuang remains one of the most remarkable and intriguing figures in China's long and extraordinary history.

Born in 259 BCE, Qin Shihuang became king of the small but ambitious state of Qin at the age of just 13 years and over the next 25 years defeated his neighbouring rival states to unite the realm and form China much as we know it today. While the dynasty that established lasted only 15 years, in the brief time he created a new political and cultural order that would endure for over 2000 years. The name of his dynasty, Qin (pronounced 'chin'), is widely regarded as the origin of the English word China.

Now, over 35 years after the first accidental discovery, the story of the first Emperor's brief but revolutionary reign and his quest for immortality continues to unfold through the ongoing excavation of his entombed army and burial sight.

For all the military vigour, his administrative reforms,  
his unification of an empire, perhaps the First Emperor's  
greatest legacy was in the precipitating a revolution in art

Edmund Capon (Director, Art Gallery of New South Wales)

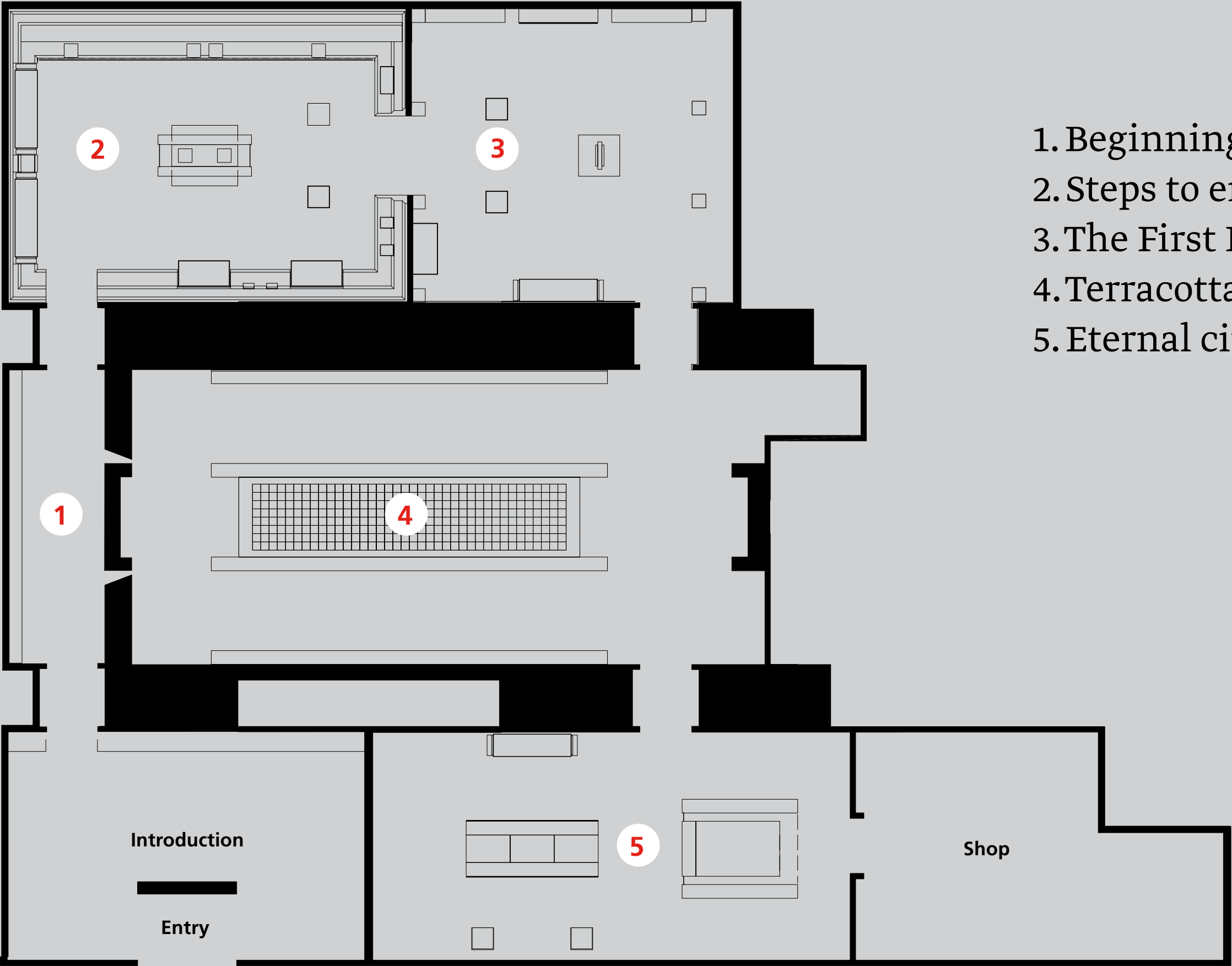


As soon as the First Emperor became king of Qin, excavations and building had been started at Mt Li, while after he won the empire more than 700 000 conscripts from all parts of the country worked there.

Sima Qin, *Records of the grand historian*, 89 BCE



EXHIBITION FLOORPLAN



## EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Featuring over 120 rare objects from the First Emperor's burial site and other tombs, this exhibition takes you on a journey from the beginnings and rise of the Qin empire to the life and rule of the First Emperor, his quest for immortality, and his death, burial and legacy.





‘The emperor, never hearing his faults condemned, is growing prouder and prouder while those below cringe in fear and try to please him with flattery and lies.’

Qin court scholars Hou and Lu,  
*Records of the grand historian*, 89 BCE



## FIRST EMPEROR

Born Zheng (meaning 'upright') Ying, China's First Emperor came to the throne at the age of 13 years. His ruthless will soon became evident. After defeating the last of his rival states in 221 BCE, he declared himself Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor, of unified China. With brutal determination, he implemented a series of reforms and building works that laid the foundations for four centuries of relative peace, stability and expansion under the following Han dynasty and remained evident in the governance of China until the early years of the 20th century. He was a merciless ruler, renowned for allegedly burning books and burying alive all who displeased him. He was also obsessed with his own immortality and made a number of extravagant excursions in search of the 'elixir of immortality'. It was on one such journey that he died in 210 BCE.





## THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

Long before the First Emperor came to power, the various states in northern China had built fortresses and walls to keep their enemies out.

After the First Emperor had conquered all these states, he sent his general with thousands of men to join together and rebuild the existing towers and walls to form one great, long wall that stretched right across northern China.

The wall was built through the desert and up mountains by thousands of workers in the freezing cold of winter and the heat of summer – all without any machinery! They used dirt, timber, gravel, reeds and water all pounded by teams of men until it was hard as rock.

## JOURNEY INTO THE AFTERLIFE

In ancient China, people believed that when they died, they began another life. They were often buried with things they might need in this next life, called the afterlife.

Bronze vessels and paraphernalia were placed in the tombs and burials of deceased rulers and nobility. These furnishings, particularly vessels used for food and drink, were intended to support and sustain the deceased in the afterlife; the idea of recreating, albeit in symbolic form, the earthly life in the tomb was a crucial part of that quest for immortality as the vast burial of the First Emperor attests. The number and style of vessels and accoutrements was strictly regulated in accordance with the deceased's rank in the hierarchy.

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Incense burner (cat no 18) Fengxiang County Museum



Bo bell (cat no 1) Baoji Bronze Museum

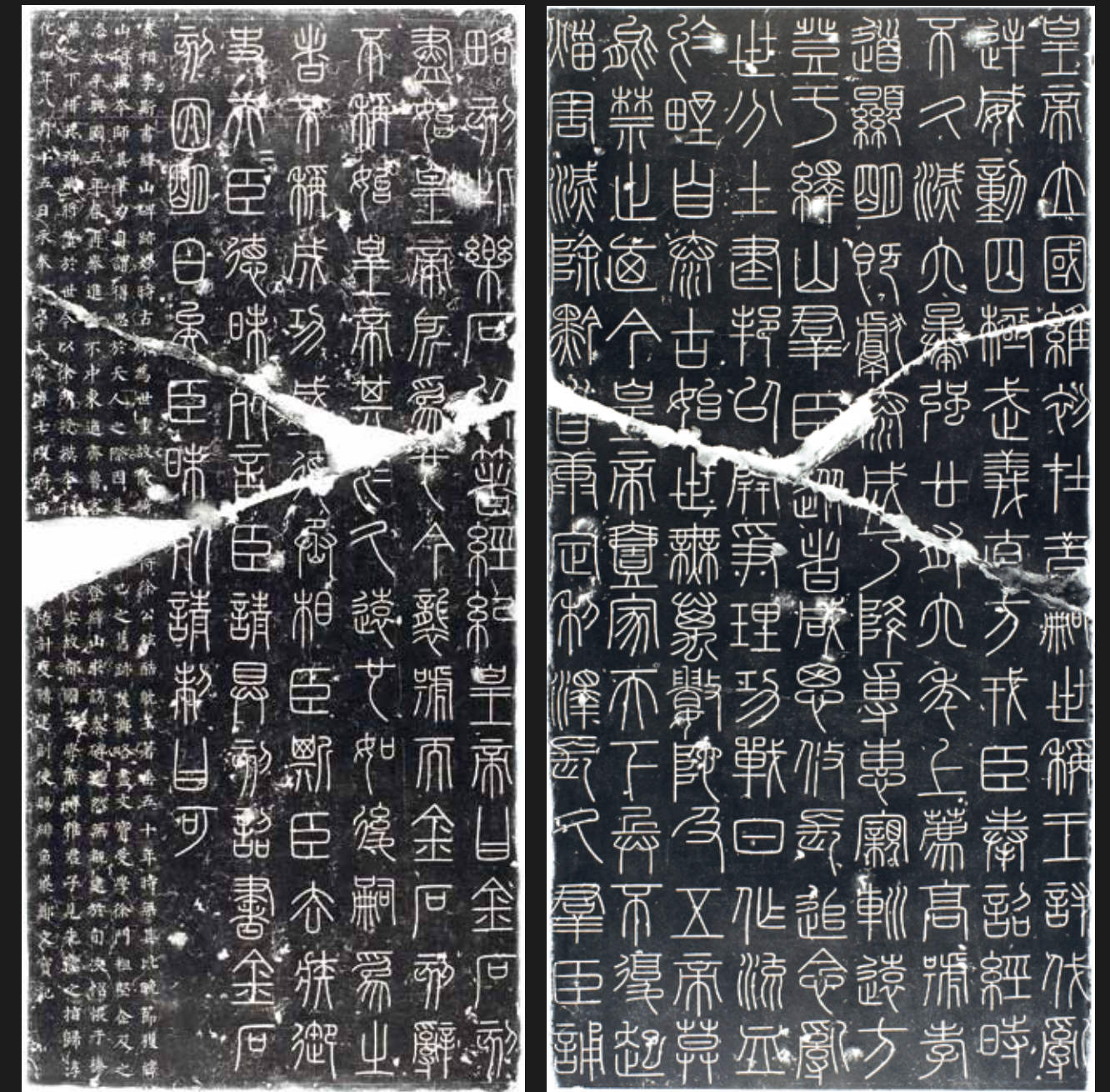


## FIRST EMPEROR'S CHINA

The First Emperor ordered that all writing, weights, measures and coins be the same. This made it easier for people throughout his empire to buy and sell goods and to communicate with each other. It also brought unity to all the people of Qin and helped strengthen his empire.



Coins from seven states (cat no 105) Terracotta Warriors and Horses Museum



Qin Imperial inscription (cat no 108) Art Gallery of NSW



## THE FIGURES



There are ten main figure types that make up the First Emperor's terracotta army: eight warrior types and two horses – the cavalry horse and chariot horse. An example of each is featured in Room 4.

Within each type, the figures are broadly similar but variation in their detail indicates that each was individually finished by hand. No two figures are identical.

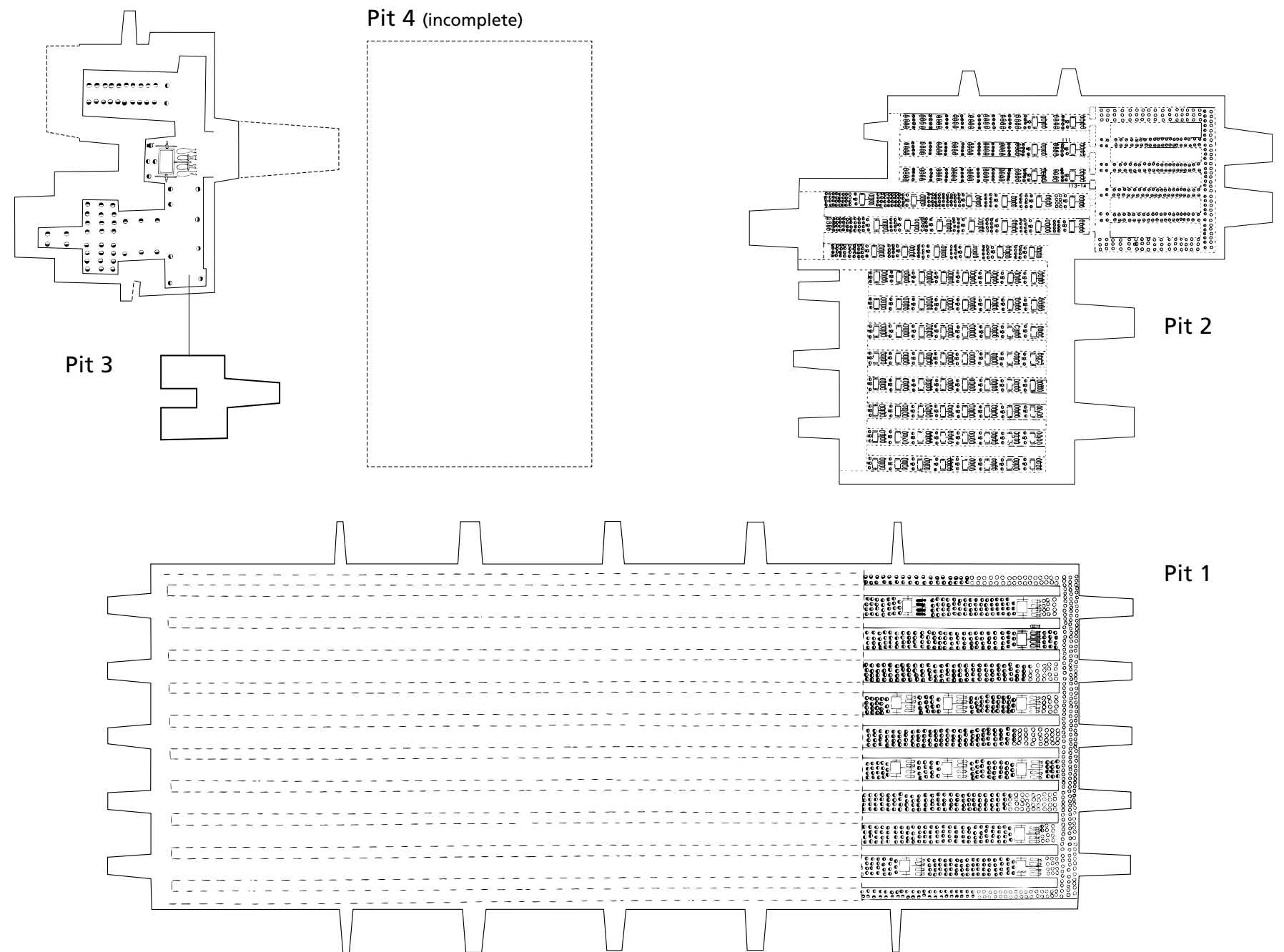






## BATTLE FORMATION OF THE TERRACOTTA ARMY

Covering an area of 25 000m<sup>2</sup>, the terracotta army pits are thought to contain 8000 life-size soldiers, 140 chariots, 560 chariot horses and 116 cavalry horses. To date more than 1900 warriors have been unearthed, along with many thousands of weapons, all real and many still razor sharp. From Pit 1 alone, over 40 000 weapons and arrowheads have so far been recovered. The army's location (1.5km east of the emperor's burial mound) and orientation (facing east, with its back to the tomb) confirm that its function was to guard and secure the entrance to the First Emperor's tomb.





## THE TOMB

The First Emperor wanted to live forever (to be immortal). He searched throughout China for special potions that would extend his life. He also built a vast tomb so that when he died he would have all the things he would need in the afterlife. His tomb was like an underground city, with a palace, stables, offices, an armoury and even an imperial zoo. He also had a number of his palace officials buried with him so they could serve him in his afterlife.



Crane with fish in its beak (cat no 90)  
Terracotta Warriors and Horses Museum



Stone armour (cat nos 93 and 94)  
Terracotta Warriors and Horses Museum



## AN UNFINISHED STORY



Excavation at the site of the First Emperor's tomb complex continues today, and every day new treasures are found.

Archaeologists have been working for 35 years to excavate the First Emperor's army, and they are still far from finished. Archaeologists also think that each warrior took 150 days to make, with 1000 master potters working on the job.





## THE FIRST EMPEROR: CHINA'S ENTOMBED WARRIORS

ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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