Dr Alain Thote

Born in 1949 in Paris, he graduated from HEC Business School and obtained his PhD in Chinese Studies with distinction. He was Research Officer at the National Scientific Research Council (CNRS) and in charge of an archeological excavation program in China. In September 2001, he became Director of Studies at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), in the Section “Art and Archeology of the pre-imperial China”. He is also Director of the Research Center on Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan Civilizations and since September 2014, he has been the Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies at the Collège de France.

As a permanent lecturer at the EPHE in Paris and a member of several scientific committees and councils, he has collaborated on numerous articles and has published works dealing with his field of research. He has also lectured at the University of Heidelberg and the Institute of Fine Arts at the University of New York and travels regularly to Asia as a guest speaker. He was decorated with the insignia of the Chevalier des Palmes Académiques and was elected as a member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in June 2009.

Dr Alain Thote will be introduced by and in conversation with -

Dr Françoise Lauweart

Master of anthropology ULB and PhD in Studies of East Asia Paris VII / Collège de France. Taught Chinese history, literature and language at ULB - member of the Laboratory of Anthropology of Contemporary Worlds and the EAS Center attached to the ULB’s Maison des Sciences humaines. Special Interests: Kinship Studies, Writing, Imperial China Law
The first Emperor of China and its secret army: from an immortality quest to the building of an eternal grave

In 1974, the discovery of pits full of warriors’ statutes in life-size, next to the Qin Shihuangdi’s grave, revolutionized our knowledge of the first imperial dynasty of China, founded in 221 before our era. Today, these statutes look so familiar to us that we identify them at first sight. And yet, on several aspects, mystery persists and questions about their creation remain unsolved. For instance, how can we interpret the “realism” of the Terracotta Army considering Chinese art’s evolution in opposition to that realism and in which the idea of sculpting life-sized statutes had never sprouted and is completely absent from urban space? Why was an army formed, moreover ready for battle, even though such a disposition had never been adopted in China before, neither for a king nor a prince? When Sima Qian (around 145-86 BC) described Qin Shihuangdi’s grave after the sovereign’s demise, the first Chinese historian and founder of the discipline in China insisted on the gigantism of the undertaking, but he seemed to have ignored the existence of the statutes on which thousands of artists, foremen and laborers have worked for months and probably years.