

children's illustrated encyclopedia

Ancient Empires



 Orpheus

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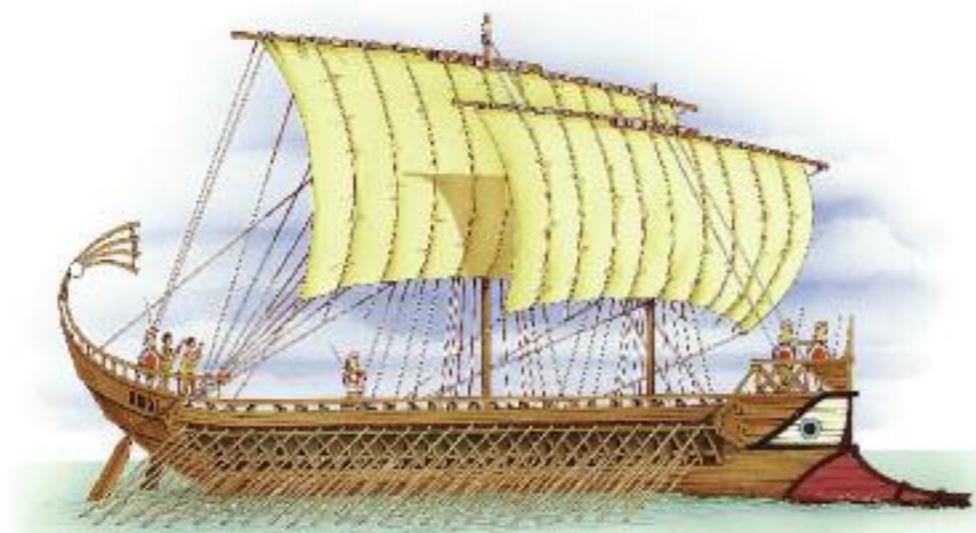
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Abbreviations: BC before Christ; AD anno Domini (“in the year of the Lord”, indicating years numbered from the birth of Christ); c. circa (“about”)



CONTENTS

ANCIENT GREECE

- 4 **ANCIENT GREECE**
The Mycenaeans • Trojan Wars • City-states • Greek warfare
- 6 **LIFE IN ATHENS**
The Acropolis • Worship • Theatre • Democracy • Medicine
- 8 **ALEXANDER THE GREAT**
Alexander's conquests • Science in the Hellenistic Period

THE ROMANS

- 10 **THE ROMANS**
Republic and empire • Roman army • The Government
- 12 **TOWN LIFE**
Inside a Roman house
- 14 **ROMAN BUILDERS**
Roads and aqueducts • At the baths
- 16 **SPORTS**
Chariot races • Gladiators • Emperors



CHINA

- 18 **ANCIENT CHINA**
Early settlers • Shang dynasty • First writing
- 20 **CHINA**
The first emperor • The Great Wall
- 22 **THE HAN EMPIRE**
Great inventions • A Han city
- 24 **THE SILK ROUTE**

WORLD CIVILIZATIONS

- 26 **INDIA**
Early Indus civilization • Mauryan empire • Hinduism and Buddhism
- 28 **ANCIENT AMERICA**
First settlers • The Olmecs • Teotihuacan • Peruvian kingdoms • Moche and Nazca
- 30 **AFRICA**
Early Saharan art • Nok
- 31 **OCEANIA**
Early settlers • Polynesian sailors • Easter Island statues
- 32 **INDEX**

ANCIENT GREECE

THE HISTORY of ancient Greece begins with the Mycenaeans, a warlike people who created a powerful and wealthy civilization in about 1550 BC.

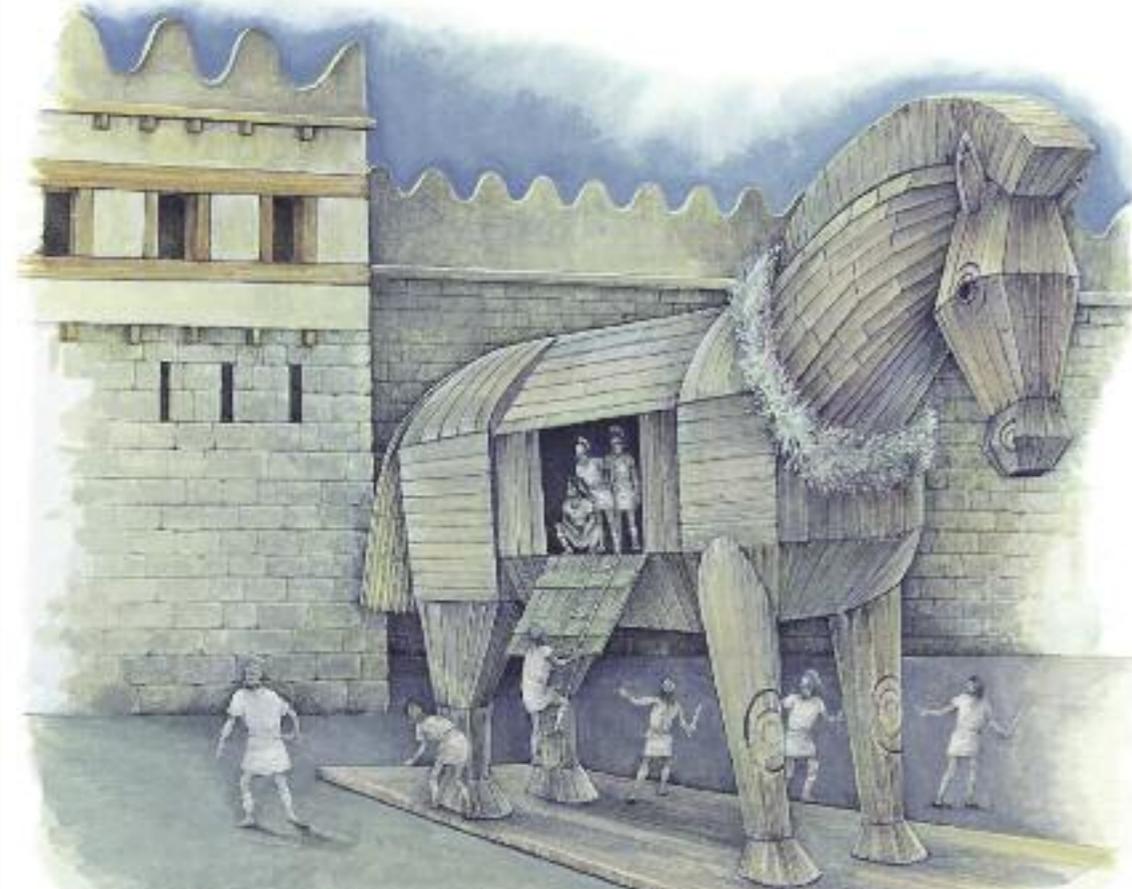
The first settlers in Greece lived in simple stone houses and farmed the land. These people, who later came to be called the Mycenaeans, began to trade around the Mediterranean and came into contact with the Minoan civilization on Crete. They borrowed many ideas and skills from the Minoans and began to make superb craftwork of their own.

The Mycenaeans were very different from the Minoans, however. The Minoans were a peaceful race, but the Mycenaeans were warriors. Their palaces were surrounded by massive walls. Inside, former rulers were buried in large, beehive-shaped tombs, called *tholoi*. From their palace strongholds, the Mycenaeans set off on raids around the Mediterranean.



Four gold death-masks of kings were found in the royal tombs at Mycenae. This one was once thought to be the mask of Agamemnon, a king of Mycenae at the time of the Trojan War. Experts now think it is 300 years older, so could not be his.

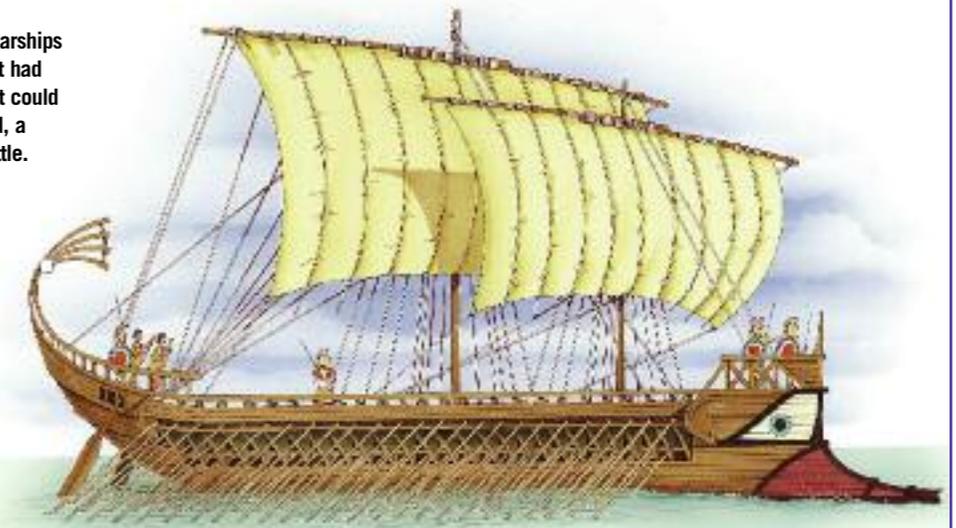
Legends about the Mycenaeans date back thousands of years. One, told in the *Iliad*, by the Greek poet, Homer, gives an account of the war between Greece and Troy. The Mycenaean king, Agamemnon, set out to rescue his brother's beautiful wife Helen, who had been captured by the Trojan prince, Paris. After 10 years of fighting, Agamemnon's army finally defeated Troy by trickery. Greek soldiers hid inside a wooden horse (*below*), which was towed into the city by the triumphant Trojans, thinking the Greeks had gone home. At nightfall, the Greeks emerged to capture the city.



A foot soldier from the Greek city-state of Sparta was called a hoplite. He wore armour over a short pleated tunic. Hoplites carried a shield and fought with a spear or a sword.

The Mycenaean civilization disappeared around 1200 BC. Afterwards, there was a period known as the Dark Ages until about 800 BC, when the Greek civilization began to develop. Greece was not one country but a series of separate city-states. City-states fought each other to gain more power.

The Greeks had fleets of warships called triremes. Although it had square linen sails so that it could take advantage of the wind, a trireme was rowed into battle. The ship was rowed by three rows of oarsmen, one above the other. The rowers at the bottom level were inside the ship and their oars came out through portholes. On the front of the ship was a battering ram for ramming holes in enemy ships.



GREEK WARFARE

City-states consisted of a main city or town and the villages around it. Each one was ruled by powerful nobles. Sometimes the nobles were overthrown by a tyrant, someone who took power although he had no right to do so.

By about 500 BC, each city-state had its own army. One of the most formidable came from the city-state of Sparta in the south. By this time, the Classical Age (*see page 6*) had begun in Greece and the city-state of Athens was a haven for thinkers and artists. To the Spartans, however, the important thing was to make war.

Most of the Greek armies were made up of young men who trained as soldiers for two years after they left school. They were called up to join the army if there was a war (when they were known as conscripts). The Spartans, however, had a full-time army who were always ready to fight.

All Greek armies fought in a phalanx formation. The soldiers formed closely packed rows so that their shields partly protected their neighbour. Then they advanced on the enemy like a battering ram. The first few rows held their spears out in front of them so they could strike the enemy from a distance. The close formation made them difficult targets, so the phalanx was a very effective way of fighting.

LIFE IN ATHENS

THE CLASSICAL AGE was a time when Greece flourished in the arts, philosophy and science. The city-state of Athens was at its most powerful during this period. The city had been destroyed by the Persians in 480 BC, but it was rebuilt in great splendour. One of the most magnificent projects of all was the group of buildings on the Acropolis, a rock that still dominates Athens today. At the heart of the Acropolis buildings was the Parthenon, a marble temple dedicated to the city's goddess, Athena.

Much of what we know about the ancient Greeks comes from the arts and literature of the time. Pottery was often decorated with scenes from everyday life. Sculptors created beautiful statues, philosophers wrote down their thoughts and ideas, and dramatists created plays based on real-life events.

The ancient Greeks worshipped many gods and goddesses. The 12 most important gods were said to live on Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. Zeus was the chief of the Olympian gods.

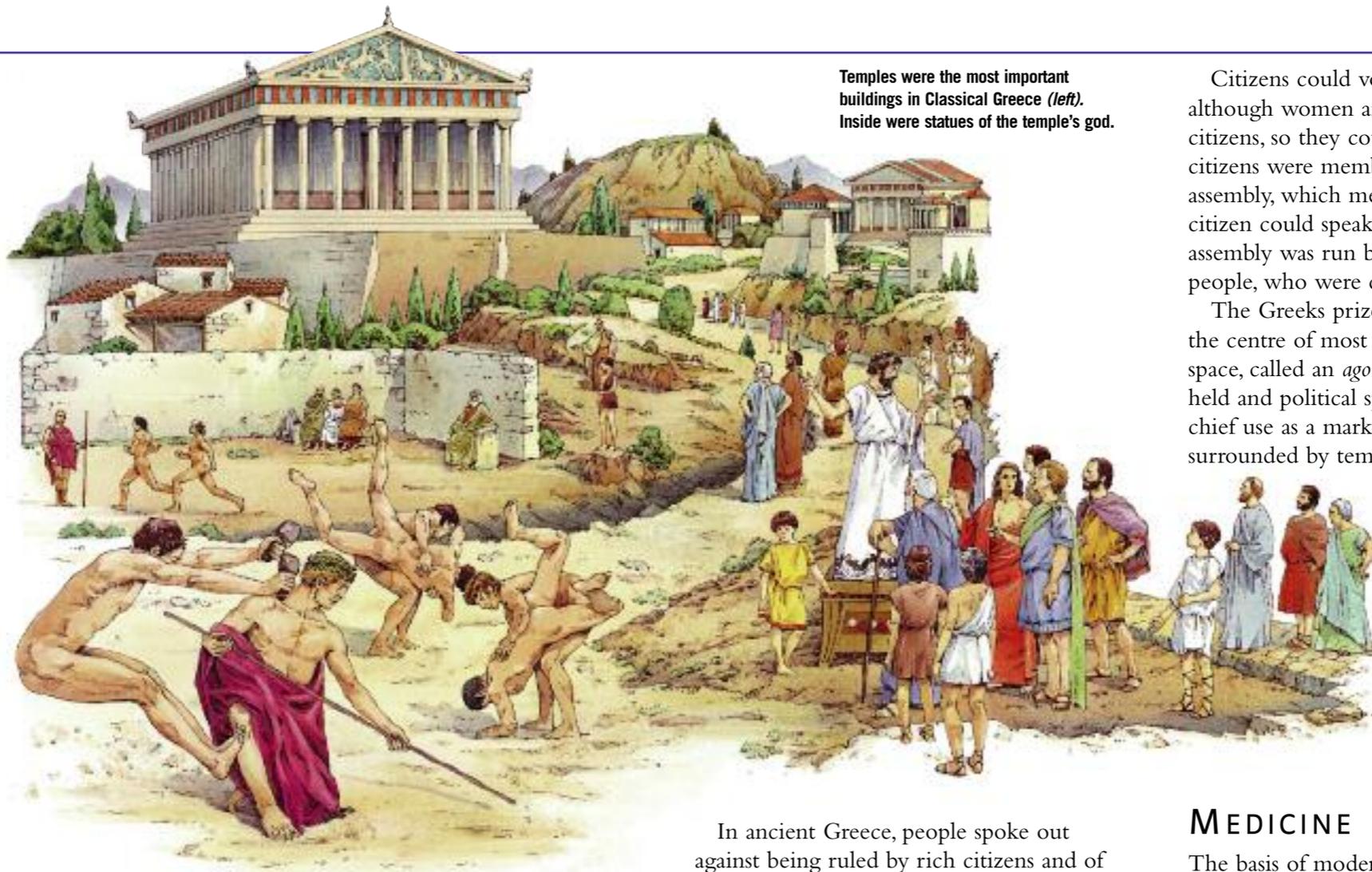
Modern theatre had its roots in ancient Greece. The audience sat on stone seats in the semi-circular, open-air auditorium. The actors wore large Comedy or Tragedy masks so that the audience could see them. These masks are still the symbol of the theatre today.



Greek athletes practised for the sports festival held every four years at Olympia in southern Greece. This festival was the forerunner of the Olympic Games which are still held today.

Every large city had a theatre and drama was popular entertainment. The earliest form of theatre was a festival of songs and dances. Later, playwrights such as Sophocles and Aristophanes began to write plays which actors could perform. There were two main types, comedies and tragedies. Many of these plays, written centuries ago, are still famous today.

Plays were performed on 10 days of each year. Audiences went to the theatre for the whole day. They would usually see three tragedies or three comedies and a short play called a satire, which poked fun at a serious legend or event.



Temples were the most important buildings in Classical Greece (left). Inside were statues of the temple's god.

Citizens could vote for their leaders, although women and slaves did not count as citizens, so they could not vote. Athenian citizens were members of the city's assembly, which met once a week. Any citizen could speak at these meetings. The assembly was run by a council of 500 people, who were chosen by drawing lots.

The Greeks prized freedom of speech. In the centre of most Greek cities was an open space, called an *agora*, where meetings were held and political speeches made. Besides its chief use as a marketplace, the *agora* was surrounded by temples and law courts.

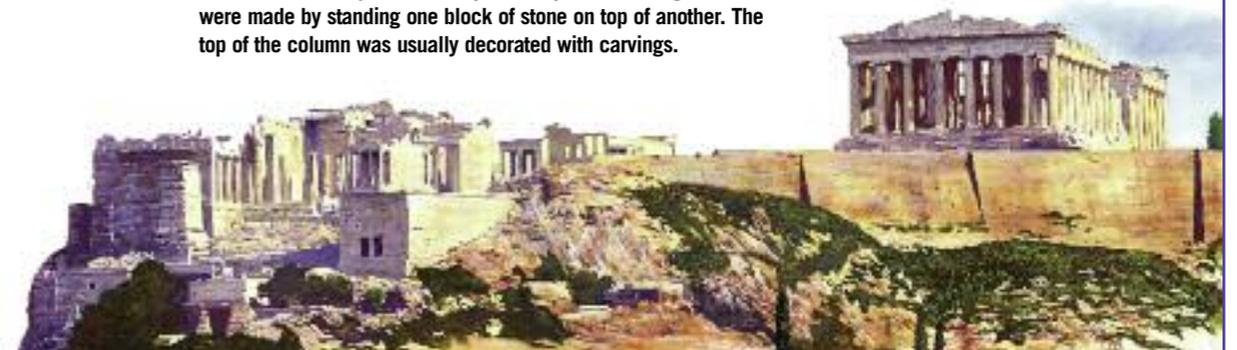
Here a man is making a political speech in an open space in a Greek city. If people were dissatisfied with a member of their government, they could vote for a public figure to be removed from office. Athenian citizens made their feelings known by writing his name on pieces of broken pottery, called *ostraka*.

In ancient Greece, people spoke out against being ruled by rich citizens and of having no say in how they were ruled. A new system of government, called *demokratia*, which means "government by the people", was introduced in Athens. Our English word "democracy" comes from this word. In Greek democracies, all citizens had a say in how the city-state was run, much as people have a say in democracies today.

MEDICINE

The basis of modern medicine also comes from ancient Greece. During the Classical Age, a man called Hippocrates founded a school of medicine on the Greek island of Kos, where diagnosis of illness was based on examination of patients. Doctors had to take the Hippocratic Oath, which outlined their duties and responsibilities. Doctors still have to take this oath today.

The ruins of the Acropolis temples can still be seen in Athens today. The Greeks used columns like the ones supporting the Parthenon for many of their temples and public buildings. Columns were made by standing one block of stone on top of another. The top of the column was usually decorated with carvings.



ALEXANDER THE GREAT

ALEXANDER the Great came from Macedonia, a wild mountainous area on the northern borders of Greece. His father Philip became king of Macedonia in 359 BC and united all of Greece under his rule. When he died in 336 BC, Alexander became the new king at the age of 20.

Alexander had been taught by the Greek writer and philosopher Aristotle and this gave him a love of Greek poetry and art. But he was also a brave and brilliant soldier and his main interest was in building up a mighty empire for Greece.

Alexander was a fearless leader with a desire to conquer new lands. He set out with an army of 30,000 foot soldiers and 5000 cavalry. He fought for 11 years to expand the Greek Empire.

Alexander's first battle was with the Greeks' old enemy, the Persians. In 334 BC he marched into Asia and defeated Darius III, the king of Persia, and his army. Alexander now set out to bring the whole of the Persian Empire under Greek rule. His next move was to capture the Phoenician town of Tyre and then to defeat Egypt. He went on to capture the three palaces of the Persian kings at Babylon, Susa and Persepolis. He spent three years vanquishing the eastern part of the Persian Empire, then marched on to conquer the northern part of India in 326.

By now, Alexander and his army had been on the march for 11 years. He wanted to go further into India but his soldiers were tired of fighting and wanted to return home. Alexander agreed to turn back but died of a fever in Babylon in 323 BC. He was only 32 years old.

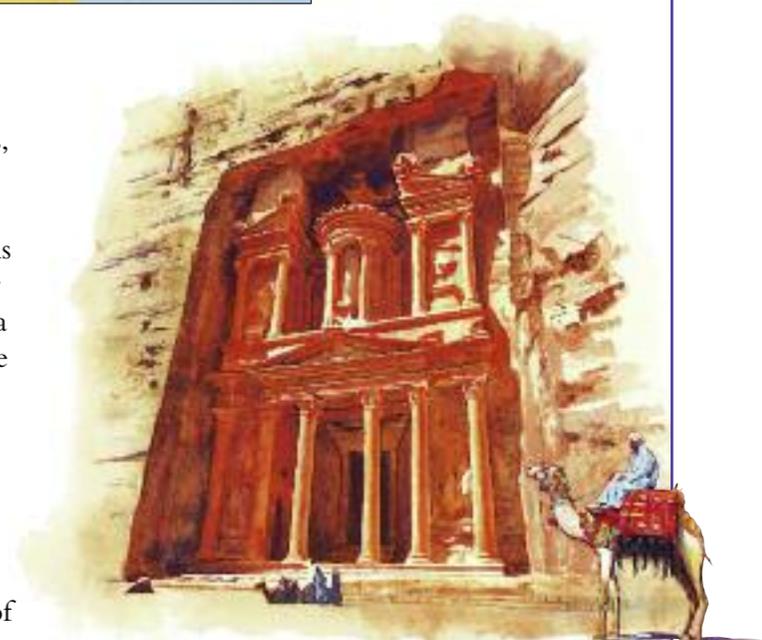
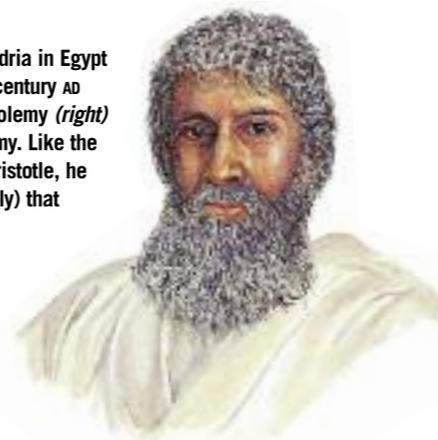


Alexander the Great formed an empire that consisted of a good part of the world then known to the Greeks. His travels took him down through the Near East and into Egypt, then across Asia and into northern India. To Alexander, India marked the end of the known world and he wanted to go on, but his soldiers refused. His horse, Bucephalus, which had carried him on his march, was killed in the battle against the Indian king, Poros, in 326 BC.

As Alexander defeated more lands, he formed Greek colonies to stop the newly conquered peoples rebelling. The colonies, 16 of which were cities called Alexandria, were governed by his own soldiers. But Alexander died without a final plan for his massive empire. The lands were eventually divided into three parts, Macedonia, Persia and Egypt, with a Greek general in charge of each. The period between Alexander's death and the defeat of the Greek empire by the Romans in 30 BC is known as the Hellenistic Period.

The Hellenistic Period was an age of scientific discovery, and the city of Alexandria in Egypt was its main centre of learning. Many poets and scholars came to study at Alexandria. The mathematicians Pythagoras and Euclid worked out their rules in geometry there, while other scholars studied medicine and the movement of the stars.

It was at Alexandria in Egypt during the 2nd century AD that Claudius Ptolemy (right) studied astronomy. Like the Greek thinker Aristotle, he believed (wrongly) that the Earth lay at the centre of the Universe, with the Sun and the other planets all moving round it.



The city of Petra in Jordan was inhabited by a people called the Nabateans. They were greatly influenced by Hellenistic architecture.

With no single leader, Alexander's empire was vulnerable to attack and was gradually taken over by the Romans. Egypt, the seat of learning, survived for longer than the rest of the empire, but the Roman emperor Augustus conquered it in 30 BC. The queen was Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemy family to rule in Egypt. She killed herself with her Roman lover, Mark Antony.

The legacy of Greece was revived during the Renaissance, or "rebirth", of thought and art in 15th-century Europe, and has influenced people ever since.

THE ROMANS

THE ROMANS came from the part of Europe we now call Italy. They built up an empire that was even larger than that of Alexander the Great (see page 8).

Groups of people from northern Asia began to settle in Italy between 2000 and 1000 BC. One group, which spoke a language called Latin, settled on the banks of the River Tiber. In time, this settlement became the city of Rome.

The Romans had several kings but the people were not happy with the way they were treated. They decided to set up a republic with a leader who was chosen by the people for a set length of time. If they did not like the way the leader did things, they could choose another leader at the end of that time.

Rome was a republic for nearly 500 years, during which time the Roman army conquered many new lands. But in 27 BC, after the Roman defeat of Egypt and the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra (see page 7), a dictator once again took control. This was Augustus, the first Roman emperor. By this time the Roman Empire had a population of 60 million people.

Britain was one of the Romans' conquests. Queen Boudicca and her tribe, the Iceni, rebelled against the Romans and recaptured many of their towns in Britain before she was defeated.



Roman foot soldiers were known as legionaries. A legionary wore an iron helmet and armour over a woollen tunic and a leather kilt. He had to carry his sword, a dagger, a shield, a spear and all his provisions.

The first Roman army was made up of ordinary citizens, but at the height of the empire the soldiers were highly trained professionals. The army was divided into legions of about 6000 foot soldiers or legionaries. A legion consisted of 10 cohorts each of which had six centuries, or companies of 100 men. A group of 700 cavalry rode on horses with each legion.

A Roman soldier was trained to carry all his own equipment, which consisted of clothes, a tent, food and cooking pots as well as his armour and weapons. The army often marched more than 30 kilometres a day. Nothing stood in their way. If they came to a deep river they built a floating bridge by tying rafts of wood together.

THE GOVERNMENT

When Rome became a republic the people were determined that no-one should have too much power, so they elected officials known as magistrates, who governed the land. The most powerful magistrates were the two consuls who were elected to serve for one year and were expected to govern Rome in agreement with each other. After a year, most magistrates became members of the senate, who advised new officials.

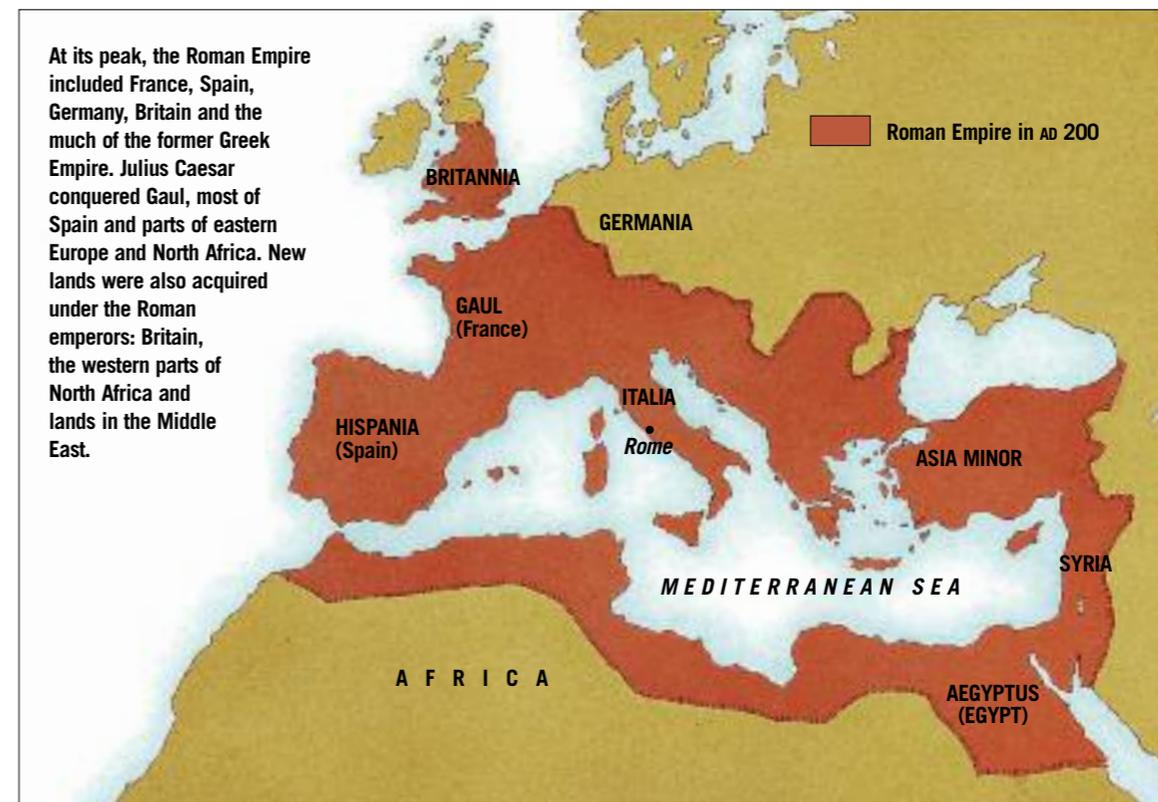
Julius Caesar was a brilliant general who conquered many lands for Rome. He was elected consul in 59 BC, but it was not long before he wanted to govern Rome in his own way. He became governor of parts of southern Gaul (now France) and brought northern Gaul under Roman rule. He returned to Rome in triumph and began to rule it as a dictator (someone who has absolute power) in 46 BC. But some senators were jealous of Caesar and wanted to regain power for the senate. In 44 BC a group of senators stabbed him to death in the senate house in Rome.



After Caesar's death, two prominent Romans began to struggle for power. One was a fellow consul of Caesar's, Mark Antony, who became the lover of Cleopatra, queen of Egypt. The other was Caesar's great-nephew, Octavian. Octavian declared war on Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC and defeated them at the Battle of Actium. Antony and Cleopatra killed themselves. Octavian became the first emperor of Rome, called Augustus, in 27 BC.

Emperors ruled over the Roman Empire for over 400 years. They were not kings but they had absolute power over their people. The emperor's "crown" was a laurel wreath, a sign of military success.

The first emperor, Augustus, reigned from 27 BC to AD 14. He brought peace to the empire, but before his death he chose his own successor. From then on, the Romans could not choose their leader.



At its peak, the Roman Empire included France, Spain, Germany, Britain and the much of the former Greek Empire. Julius Caesar conquered Gaul, most of Spain and parts of eastern Europe and North Africa. New lands were also acquired under the Roman emperors: Britain, the western parts of North Africa and lands in the Middle East.

TOWN LIFE

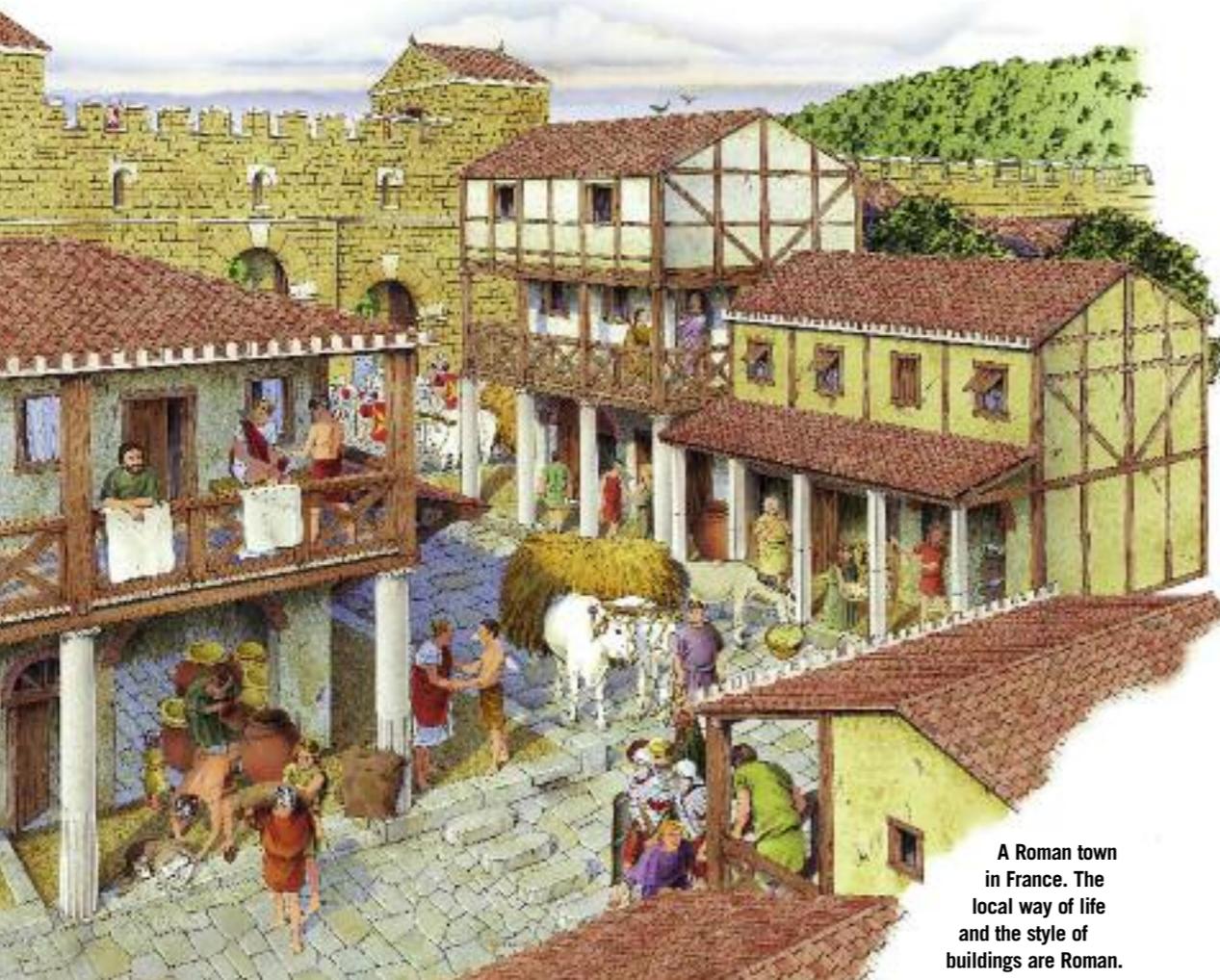
AS THE ROMANS conquered new lands and built up their empire, they introduced their own lifestyle to the conquered peoples. Many signs of Roman habitation can still be seen today.

The Romans adopted many ideas from the Greeks, but their civilization had many distinctive aspects of its own. The Romans were excellent engineers and builders—and they liked their home comforts.

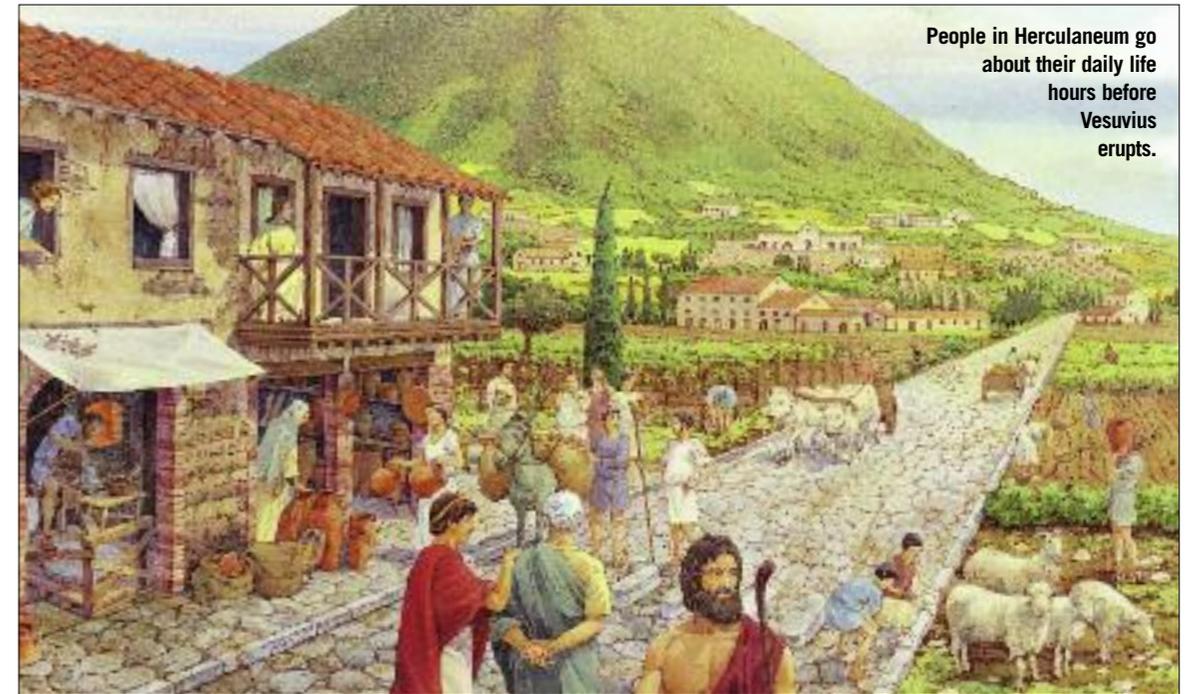
Archaeologists have found examples of Roman towns throughout the empire. The first Roman houses were built of brick or stone but the Romans also used what seems a very modern material, concrete. Some later Roman houses were built of concrete decorated with brick or stone.

The streets in the towns were laid out on a grid system, which means that they were straight and crossed one another at right angles. Many of the towns were first built as forts for the soldiers. Others were built for Roman citizens who decided to settle in the conquered lands. Roman settlers brought seeds from Italy to plant and grow their own food. Today, some fruit and vegetables which originally came from Italy have become native to the lands they were taken to by the Romans.

Farmers from the countryside brought their produce into the towns to sell in the market. The *forum* was the main marketplace as well as the centre of government. The Romans used coins; people bought things for a set price rather than barter and exchange of goods.



A Roman town in France. The local way of life and the style of buildings are Roman.



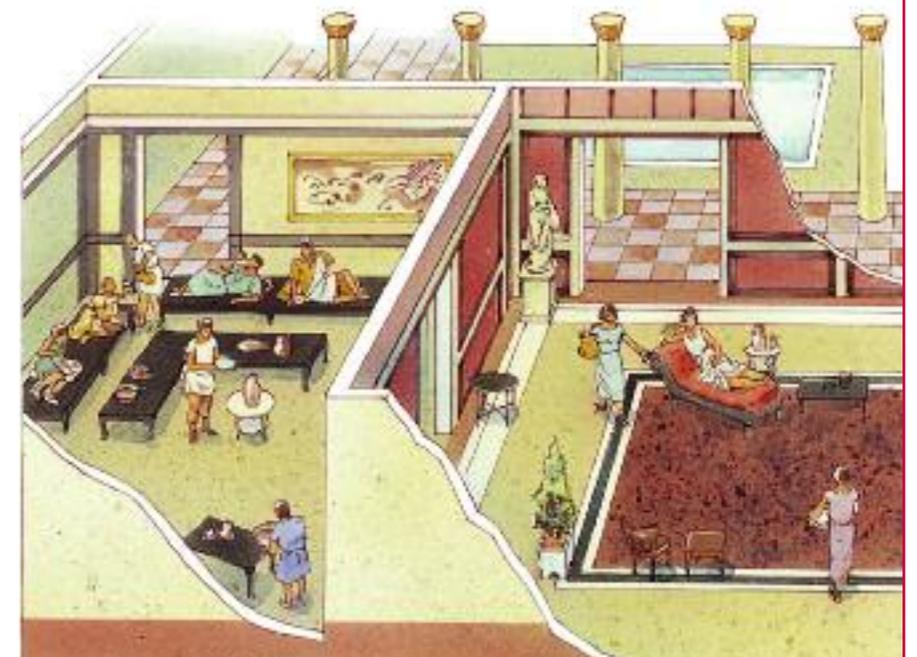
People in Herculaneum go about their daily life hours before Vesuvius erupts.

Much of our evidence about Roman houses and towns comes from the ruins of two cities, Pompeii and Herculaneum, which were destroyed in AD 79, when the volcano Vesuvius erupted. Pompeii was buried under hot ash, while Herculaneum disappeared under mud washed down from the volcano. Thousands of people were killed. Whole streets of shops and houses have been excavated in both cities.

Wealthy Romans lived in spacious villas with several rooms. At the centre of the villa was the *atrium*, the main hall, which had an open roof to let in light. A pool called an *impluvium* caught rainwater that came in through the open roof. The rooms of the villa were arranged around the atrium.

Poor people's homes were very different. Some people lived in flats above shops, or in houses divided into rooms or flats.

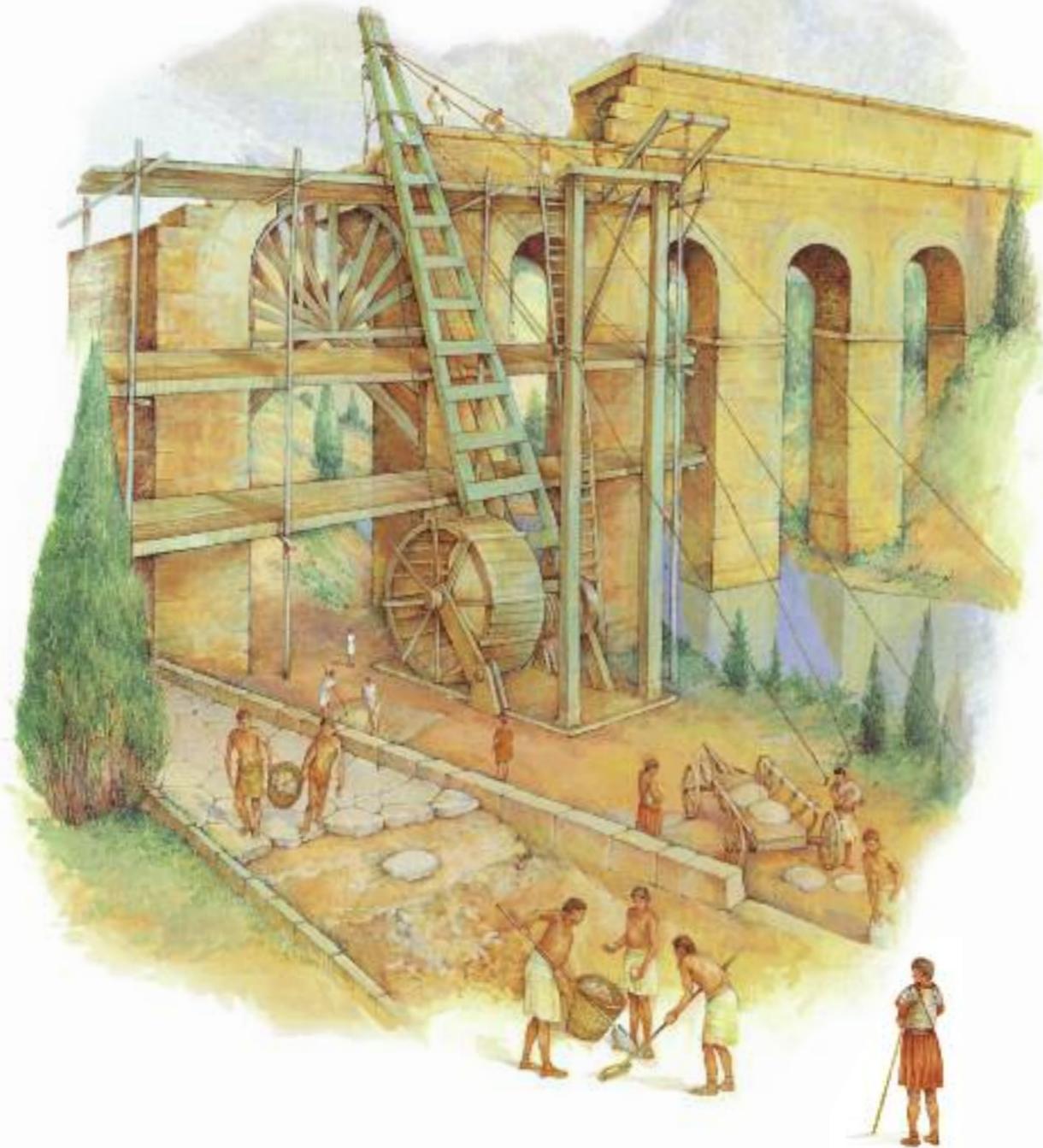
People who lived in town houses enjoyed a life of luxury. Much information about the furniture in the houses comes from wall paintings at Pompeii. People lay on couches to eat their meals, which were laid out on low tables by slaves. Clothes, food and books were stored in wooden cupboards and chests. Women and honoured guests could sit on chairs, but everyone else sat on stools. Besides these, there was little furniture. As well as bedrooms and living rooms, houses had libraries. The inhabitants of the house could stroll in a courtyard, or worship at the shrine of the household god.



ROMAN BUILDERS

THE ROMANS were skilful builders and engineers. They built 85,000 kilometres of roads throughout their empire and many aqueducts to carry water from rivers or lakes to the towns, some of them huge stone structures built across valleys.

Building an aqueduct and a road in a valley during Roman times.



Roman roads were planned by surveyors who travelled with the army. The roads were planned to take the shortest route and to be as straight as possible. When the route had been decided, soldiers and slaves dug a wide trench. The road was then built by packing layers of stone, sand and concrete into the trench.

AT THE BATHS

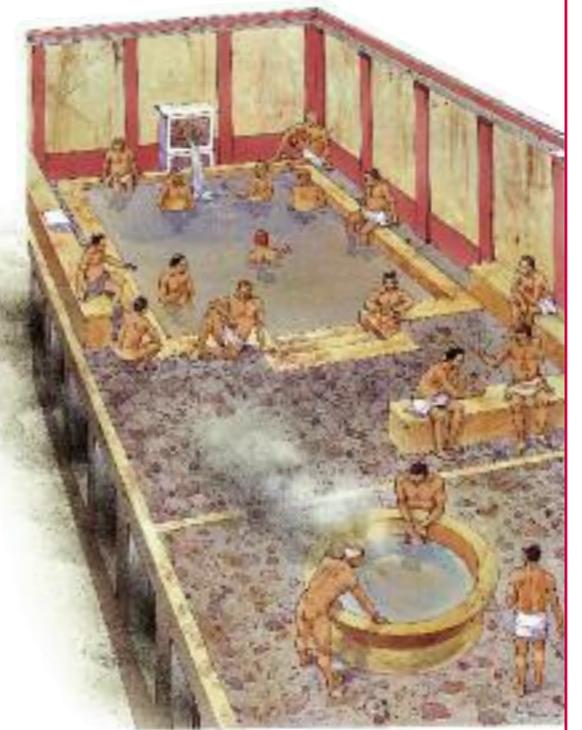
Wealthy Romans had baths and central heating in their houses. The heating was provided by the hypocaust (heating system) below ground, which passed hot air through channels in the walls.

Most towns had public baths that anyone could visit. Besides a way of keeping clean and healthy, it was an opportunity to meet friends and make conversation. The baths had several rooms and bathers passed through each one. In the main room, the *caldarium*, a slave rubbed oil into the bather's body. The bather soaked in a large warm bath, then went into a room where a basin of very hot water filled the air with steam (the *sudatorium*, after the Latin word *sudor*, meaning sweat). The bather scraped off the oil and dirt with a device called a *strigil*. Bathers coming from the *caldarium* went next into the *tepidarium*, to cool off a little before entering the *frigidarium*, where there was a cold bath to plunge into. This closed the pores of the skin.

In between the various stages of bathing, people sat and chatted or enjoyed a swim in the large warm bath. People also did some vigorous exercise, such as going to the gym (the *sphaeristerium*), before visiting the baths.

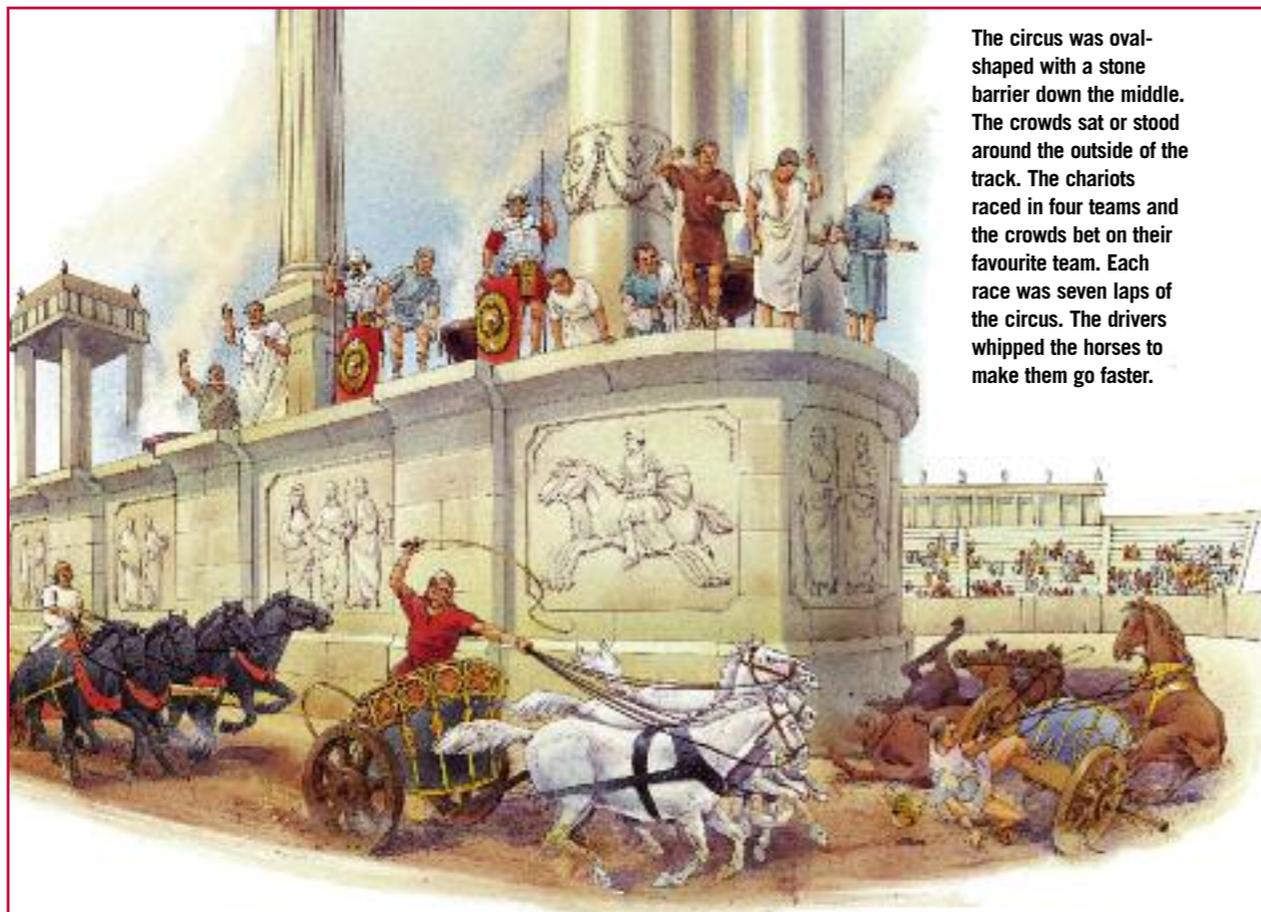
The Romans built public baths in towns throughout their empire. Some of these can still be seen today. The water in the Great Bath at Bath, England, still flows along the channels made by the Romans.

The Roman aqueduct of Pont du Gard, near Nîmes in France, as it looks today, nearly 2000 years after it was built. The Romans looked for a river or lake that was slightly higher than the town it was supplying. Then they built the aqueduct so that it sloped gradually downhill towards the town. The rows of arches across valleys had to keep the same slope as the rest of the channel.



Men went to the baths after work. Women could only use them at certain times.

The water for baths and all other purposes was brought along aqueducts. The word aqueduct comes from the Latin words for "water" and "to draw along". The aqueduct was a channel for carrying clean water from rivers and lakes to the towns, usually at ground level or through underground pipes. Aqueducts across valleys were built up on arches. About 200 Roman aqueducts can still be seen throughout the former empire.



The circus was oval-shaped with a stone barrier down the middle. The crowds sat or stood around the outside of the track. The chariots raced in four teams and the crowds bet on their favourite team. Each race was seven laps of the circus. The drivers whipped the horses to make them go faster.

SPORTS

THE ROMANS had about 120 public holidays each year. On these days, Roman citizens went out to celebrate by going to the theatre, or watching a chariot race or a fight between gladiators.

Chariot races and gladiator fights were held in the town's *circus*, which was a large, oval-shaped arena.

Chariot races were very dangerous. The drivers raced their horse-drawn chariots at top speed round the arena. They were allowed to ram and bump into each other, and chariots often overturned. Even though drivers wore protective clothing, they were sometimes killed. But the crowds loved chariot racing. They flocked to watch them in their thousands, and shouted and cheered as the chariots raced round.



When the emperors died, the Roman people worshipped them as gods. Christians refused to do this. So, from about AD 250, thousands of Christians were put in prison or thrown to the lions in front of watching crowds at an arena. In fear of their lives, Christians met in catacombs (underground cemeteries, *left*) to pray in secret. In AD 313 emperor Constantine made Christianity legal.

GLADIATORS

Gladiators were slaves or criminals who were trained to fight to the death as the crowds looked on. They fought with shields and swords, or with tridents and nets. Gladiator fights and chariot races were both popular forms of entertainment. Rich citizens who wanted to be elected to office organized chariot races and gladiator fights that poor people could go to.

The emperor would often be present at gladiator fights. If a gladiator was wounded and asked for mercy, the emperor decided whether his life should be spared or not. If he had fought well, he was allowed to live. If not, the emperor signalled the victorious gladiator to kill him.

EMPERORS

Some Roman emperors were good rulers, like the first emperor, Augustus. He did not try to expand the empire but brought many years of peace to the people. Other emperors were brutal. Tiberius strengthened the empire but became a tyrant feared by all. His successor Caligula continued the reign of terror. Caligula was probably mad; he once made his horse a consul and had a palace built for it!



It is said that Nero, a vain man who saw himself as a great musician, played on the lyre as Rome burned.

One of the most cruel emperors was Nero, who was Caligula's nephew. In AD 64 a great fire destroyed part of Rome. Nero blamed the Christians and had many killed. In fact, he may have started the fire himself.

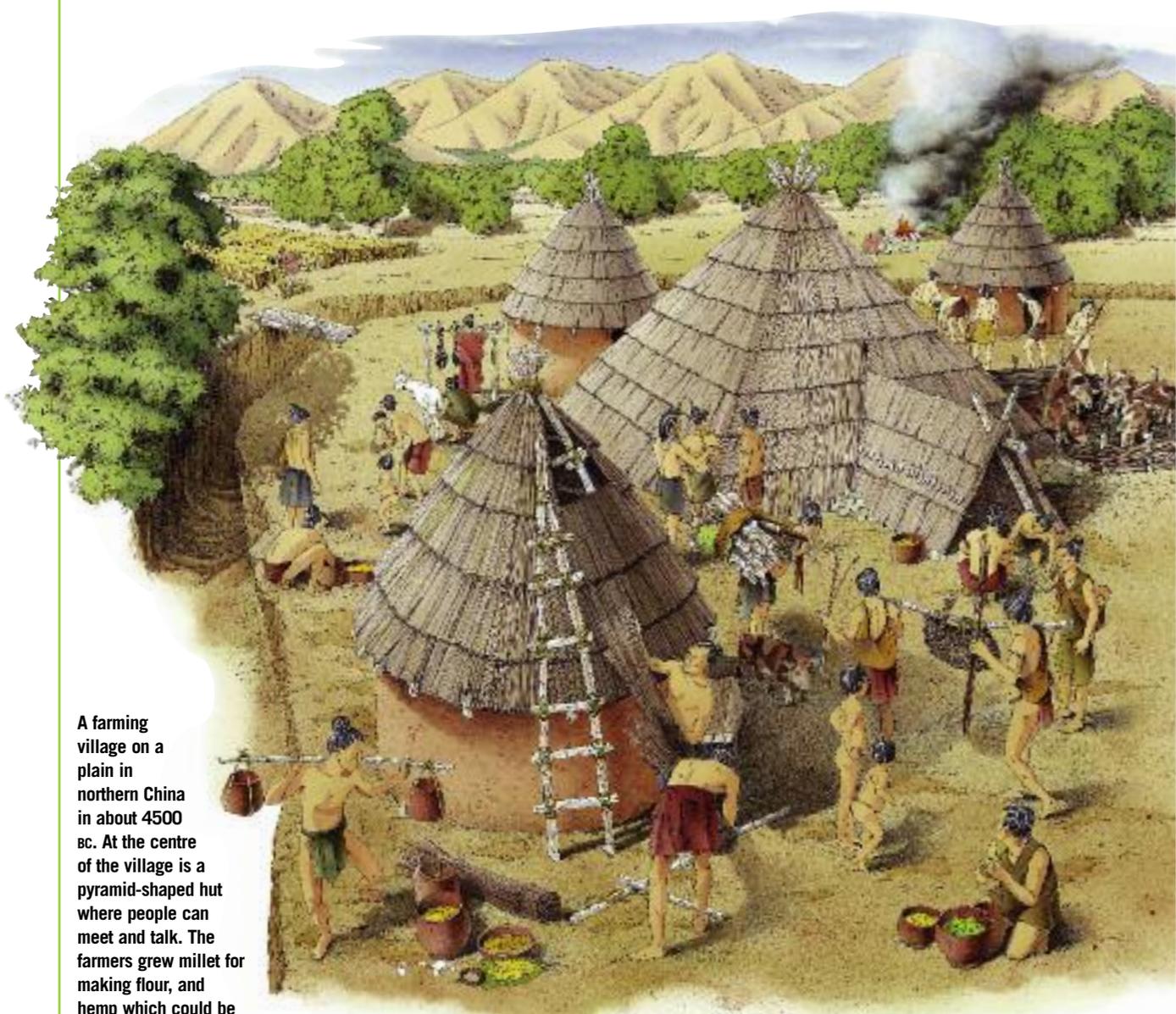


ANCIENT CHINA

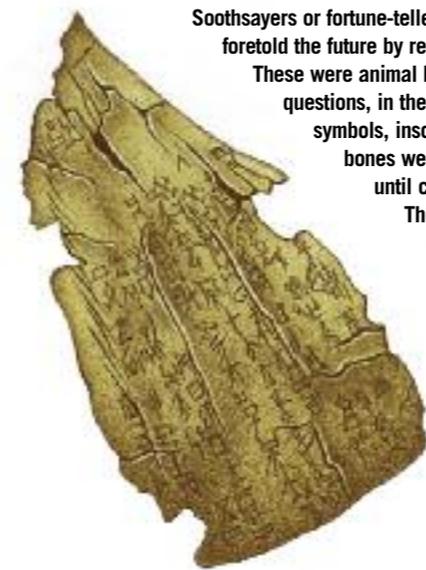
THE CHINESE civilization grew up on the banks of the Huang (Yellow) River in northern China more than 7000 years ago. It developed in isolation from the rest of the world for hundreds of years. Indeed, the Chinese people did not even realise that there were other civilized people in the world until the second century BC. Until then, the only other people they came across were nomads from lands to the north and east.

Bones of *Homo erectus* have been found in China. The first settlers may have been descended from them, or from later groups of wandering *Homo sapiens*. Farmers cultivated crops in the deep, fertile soil on the river banks (the yellow soil that gave the river its name), and lived in small villages of huts made from mud and sticks. Farming methods became more efficient so farmers could produce enough food to feed people outside their own families. The population increased and began to spread to other parts of China.

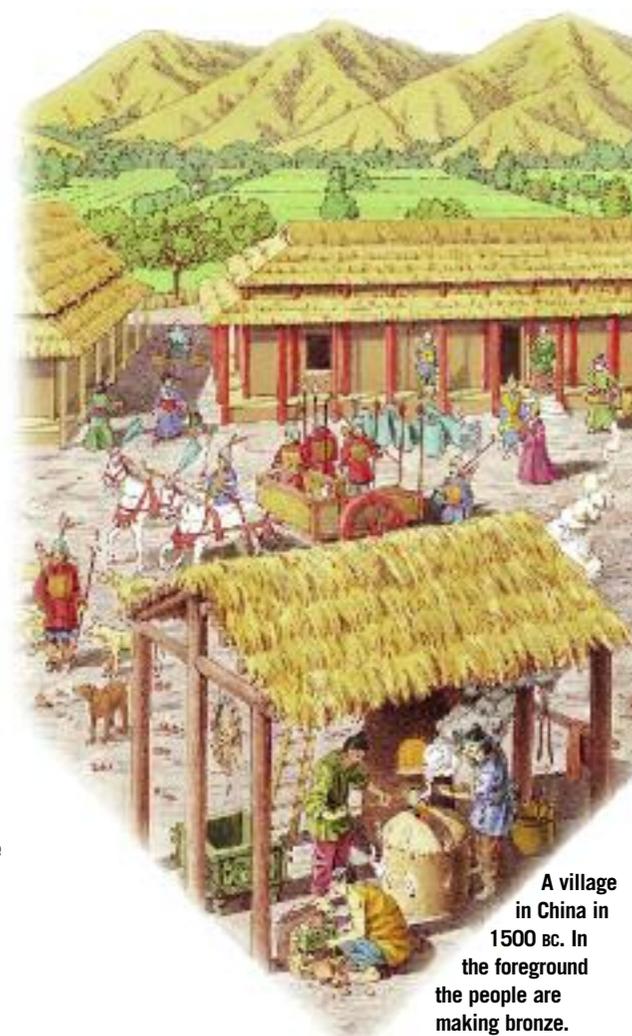
As the Chinese civilization developed, ruling families, or dynasties, began to take power. The first such dynasty was the Shang which came to power in about 1750 BC. By this time, there were some fairly large towns where people carried out different trades and crafts. Metalworkers used bronze, an alloy (mixture) of copper and tin, to make vessels for the king and noblemen. Bronze vessels found in Chinese burial grounds of this period have inscriptions on them, showing that the Shang had developed their own form of writing.



A farming village on a plain in northern China in about 4500 BC. At the centre of the village is a pyramid-shaped hut where people can meet and talk. The farmers grew millet for making flour, and hemp which could be woven into a rough cloth.



Soothsayers or fortune-tellers in Shang times foretold the future by reading oracle bones. These were animal bones that had questions, in the form of picture symbols, inscribed on them. The bones were heated over a fire until cracks appeared. The places where the cracks crossed the inscriptions were supposed to give the answers from the gods. The symbols are the first known examples of writing in ancient China.

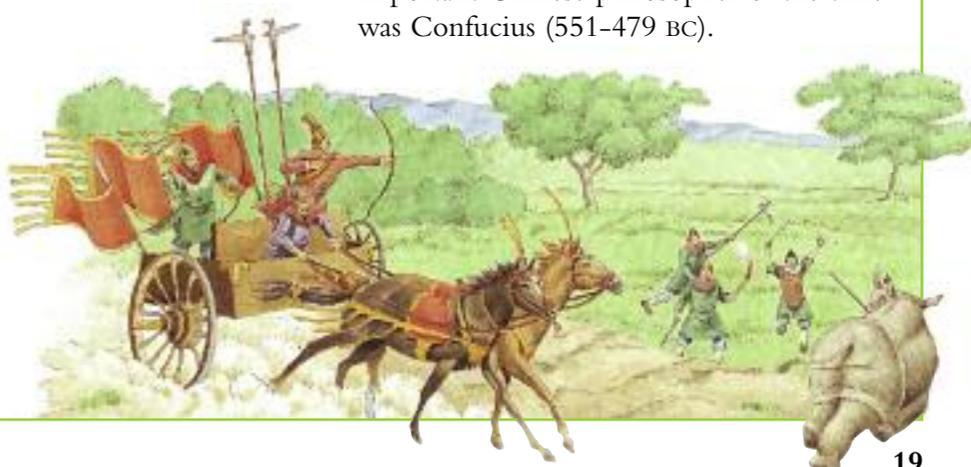


A village in China in 1500 BC. In the foreground the people are making bronze.

China was prosperous during the Shang dynasty. Ordinary people had to pay taxes to support the king and nobles. Craftsmen worked in many other materials besides bronze. They made wooden chariots for nobles and officials to ride around in, and ornaments in jade, a semi-precious stone.

The Shang dynasty was overthrown in about 1100 BC by a people from the valley of the River Wei, a tributary of the Yellow River. They founded the Zhou dynasty which lasted for about 850 years. This was a time when Chinese scholars began to study philosophy, the meaning of life. The most important Chinese philosopher of the time was Confucius (551-479 BC).

The use of bronze meant that people could make strong tools and weapons in Shang China. Copper is a soft metal but when mixed with tin to make bronze, it becomes stronger. The Bronze Age had already begun in other lands, but the Chinese developed bronze independently. They made bronze weapons for hunting as well as warfare. Noblemen enjoyed hunting rhinoceros and tigers.



CHINA

THERE WAS a long period of unrest in China between 475 and 221 BC. The Zhou (see page 19) were still in power but the separate states in China gradually became independent and began to fight each other.

China was united again under a powerful group of warriors, the Qin, who gradually subdued the power of the warring states and brought them under Qin rule. After many battles, the leader of the Qin assumed the role of emperor in 221 BC. He called himself Qin Shi Huangdi, which means “first emperor of the Qin”. Shi Huangdi ruled over a vast empire from his capital city, Xianyang.

Shi Huangdi was a ruthless, determined man but he had one great fear—death. In ancient times, people worshipped many different gods. Most people also believed in an afterlife. But this was the unknown and many feared what might happen to them. Shi Huangdi was no exception. Soon after he became emperor, he began to plan his tomb and 700,000 workers started to build it. The emperor wanted his tomb to be guarded by an army of 600,000 life-size soldiers made of clay.



The Qin emperor had to keep up a large army to protect his new empire. His warriors had bronze spears and swords, or fired arrows using a crossbow. An ordinary soldier was protected by body armour made of metal scales rivetted together. He wore a scarf to prevent the armour rubbing his neck. His hair was coiled up into a top-knot and tied with a scarf.

Shi Huangdi’s terracotta army lay undisturbed for many hundreds of years until some Chinese labourers found some statues while digging a well. Archaeologists began to excavate the area and in 1974 they found the emperor’s tomb. The army of warriors, some of them on horseback and carrying weapons, were well preserved and show us what soldiers looked like at the time. Each soldier has a different face, so they may have been portraits of the men in the emperor’s real army.

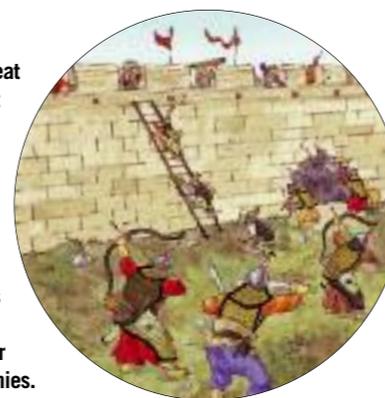
The terracotta soldiers were originally painted in brilliant colours. These had faded by the time they were found.



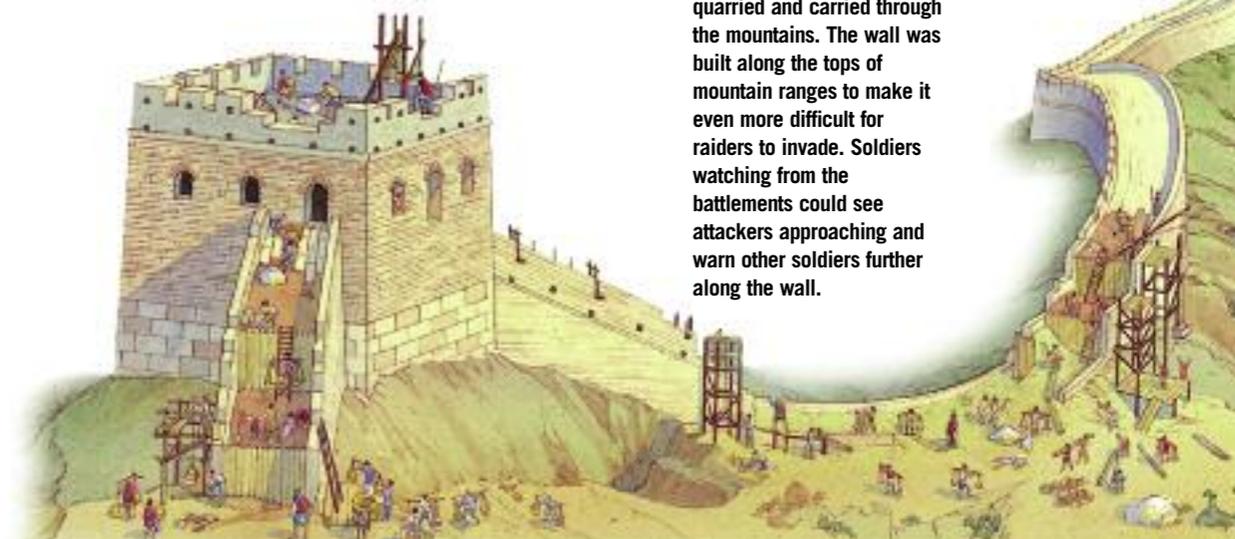
THE GREAT WALL

Despite Shi Huangdi’s power and his army, his empire was under constant threat from tribes such as the Huns, nomads who lived to the north of China. These fierce horsemen did not live in one place but moved around, raiding and plundering towns and villages, taking whatever they wanted and killing the inhabitants. Shi Huangdi decided to build a massive wall across China’s northern border to keep the invaders out. By the time it was finished, the Great Wall of China stretched for 2400 kilometres.

When there was a threat of invasion at any part of the Great Wall, the nearest soldiers signalled to the others by lighting a fire. They rushed to help repel the invaders, firing arrows from the battlements and using catapults for hurling stones at enemies.



The Great Wall was an incredible construction for its time. Millions of men worked on building it and every piece of stone had to be carried to the site in baskets. The wall had towers every 200 metres, which were the living quarters of the soldiers who guarded it.



Building the Great Wall of China. Stone had to be quarried and carried through the mountains. The wall was built along the tops of mountain ranges to make it even more difficult for raiders to invade. Soldiers watching from the battlements could see attackers approaching and warn other soldiers further along the wall.



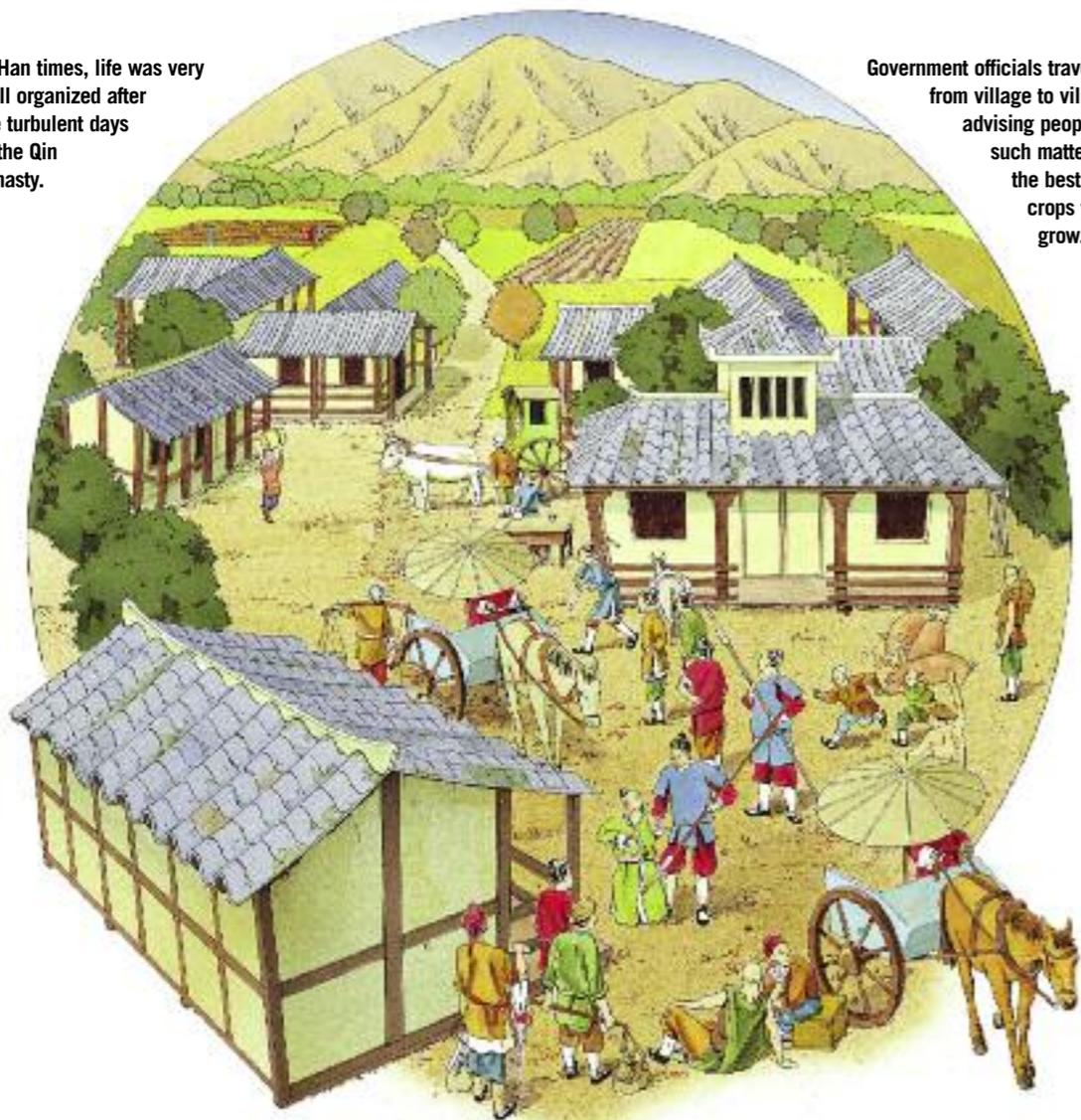
The Great Wall today.

Shi Huangdi died suddenly in 210 BC and the Qin dynasty was taken over by a new dynasty, the Han, in 206. Work on the Great Wall went on for centuries after the death of the emperor who had started it. Most of the wall we see today was built between the 14th and the 16th centuries AD, during the Ming dynasty. By the time the wall had been rebuilt and added to, it was 6000 kilometres long. It is 10 metres high and wide enough for 10 men to march side by side along the top. It is still the largest structure ever built by people.

THE HAN EMPIRE

THE HAN DYNASTY ruled the Chinese empire for more than 400 years. This was a period of great prosperity for China. There were long periods of peace and the Chinese army added vast tracts of new land to the already powerful empire.

In Han times, life was very well organized after the turbulent days of the Qin dynasty.



Government officials travelled from village to village, advising people on such matters as the best crops to grow.

The Han period was a time of great technical achievement. The Chinese invented many things that we take for granted today. One of the most important inventions was paper, which was first manufactured in AD 105. The earliest paper was made from tree bark, old rags and fishing nets pulped together with water, then flattened and dried in thin sheets.

The teachings of Confucius (see page 19) became very important during this time. These stressed that it was better to govern people wisely than to rule them by force. Under the Han emperors, officials were instructed to help people as much as possible. This was also a time when scholars began to write histories of China.

Chinese scientists were the first to understand magnetism, and invented a compass more than 2000 years ago. The stirrup was another early invention. Stirrups gave mounted soldiers more control over their horses and so helped them in battle. These and other inventions did not reach the West until hundreds of years later.



An early Chinese seismograph, a machine for recording earthquakes.

The seismograph (above) was invented in AD 132. It is a vessel with eight dragons' heads around the bowl and toads sitting below. When the machine is shaken during an earthquake, a rod inside swings and opens one of the dragons' jaws. A ball falls out and drops into the mouth of the toad sitting directly below, recording the direction of the earthquake.

Another invention, the wheelbarrow (see below), is in some ways an improvement on the type we use today. The Chinese wheelbarrow was invented in the first century BC. The things being carried in the barrow are distributed on either side of a large wheel so that the weight is balanced. The barrow has long handles and is easier to push than modern versions.



China was remote from the rest of the world for hundreds of years after the Han dynasty. Much of our knowledge about the Chinese way of life comes from models left in tombs. The Chinese were skilled craftworkers and made precious objects out of jade and bronze. Bronze models of horse-drawn chariots tell us what the full-size vehicles may have looked like. The chariots had two wheels and a canopy shaped like a parasol (see illustration, opposite). Government officials rode in them when they travelled the countryside, inspecting villages. Models of buildings have also been found in tombs. Stone tomb slabs show scenes of everyday life in Han China.



This tiny bronze flying horse is an example of Han craftwork.

A HAN CITY

The capital of the early Han empire was the city of Chang'an. The roads in the city were arranged on a grid system (they crossed each other at right angles). The traffic on the roads would have included two-wheeled chariots and goods wagons taking produce to market.

There were several marketplaces in the city, where people could buy food and materials such as silk, wood and leather. Musicians, jugglers and storytellers entertained people as they went about their business in the streets. The city was divided into sections, each one surrounded by a wall. Inside the walls, the houses were packed tightly together, protected from the bustle of the city.

THE SILK ROUTE

THE HAN CHINESE were traders whose merchants took silks from China to the West. An overland road, known as the Silk Route, linked cities in the Middle East to the early Han capital, Chang'an.

The Silk Route was 6400 kilometres long and passed through dangerous territory where bandits waited to rob travellers. The merchants rode on camels and travelled in groups called "caravans" for protection. They carried silks, spices and bronze articles to trade in the West.

The merchants came to various cities along the Silk Route and had to obtain permission to pass. The cities demanded a portion of the merchants' goods in payment before letting them through. So these cities became rich because of the Silk Route.

The illustration (*below*) shows a caravan of merchants setting out from China to travel to the West. Behind them is the Great Wall. The merchants' camels are followed by pack animals carrying the goods they are trading. The merchants will probably return with ivory, precious stones, horses and other goods from the West.

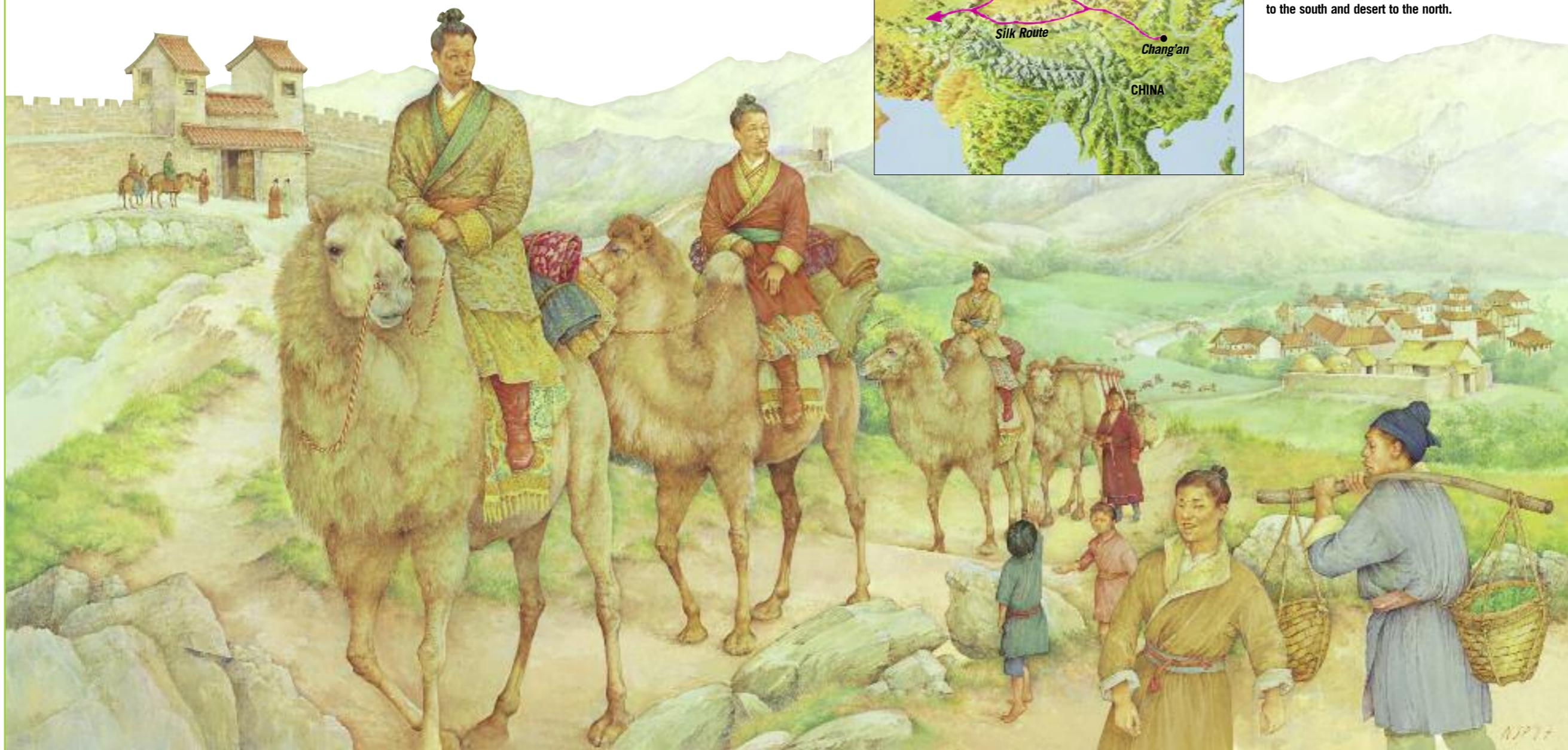
As trade increased between East and West, more and more foreign merchants travelled to China, and many lived in Chang'an and other cities. Chang'an grew to be the largest city in the world.

It was through the merchants that some of China's secrets began to reach the West. Merchants would return to Europe with tales of what they had seen in this mysterious, unknown land, and some of the amazing things the people had invented.

Merchants continued to travel along the Silk Route for hundreds of years but it had become less important by about AD 1000. The cities along the route had become more and more powerful and could control the trade that passed through. There was always the threat of attack by bandits or groups of nomads who set upon the merchant caravans. As sea travel became safer and cheaper, that became the more popular way of transporting goods.



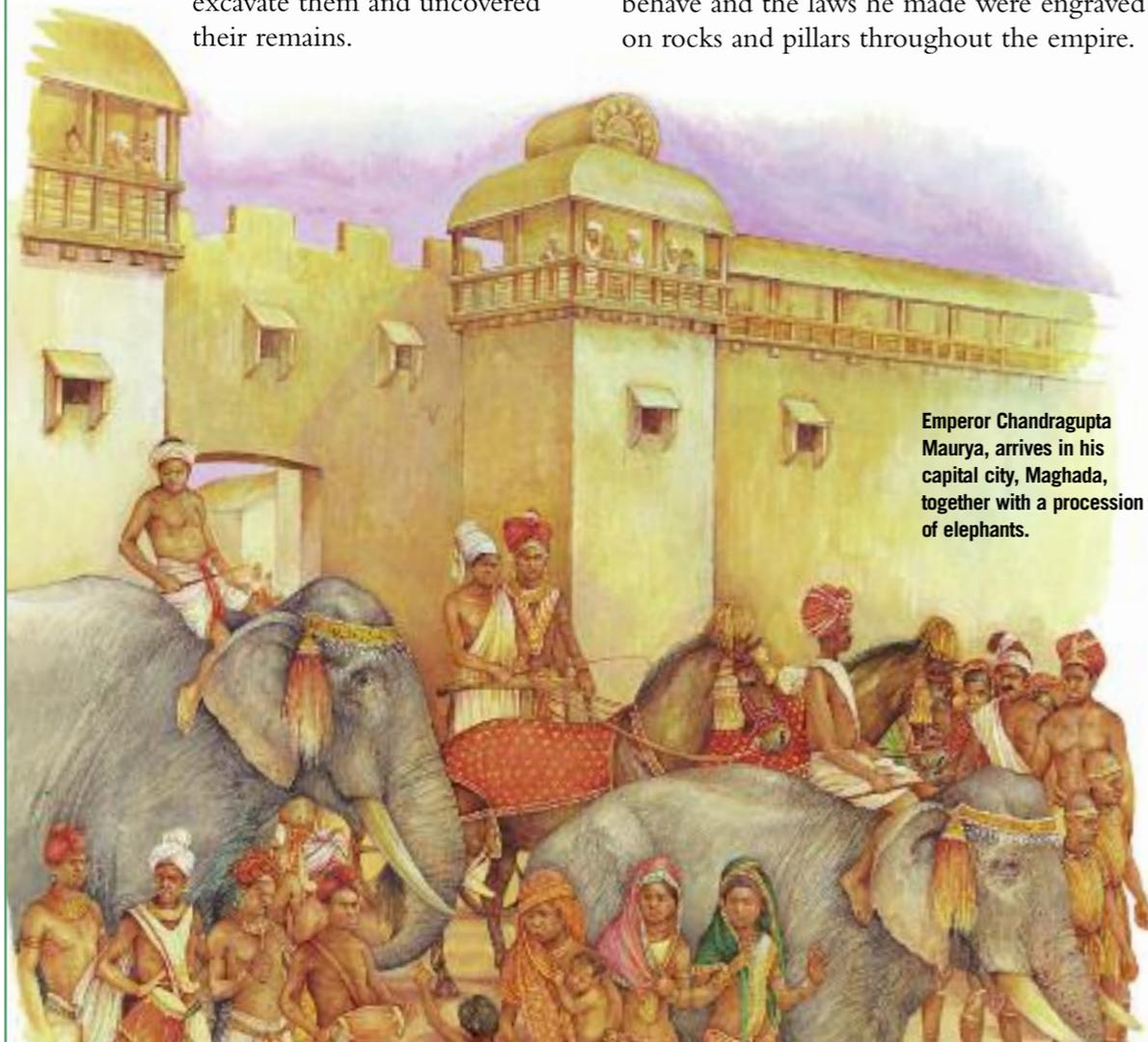
The Silk Route ran from Chang'an to cities in Central Asia and on to the Middle East. It passed between the high mountains of Tibet to the south and desert to the north.



INDIA

THE INDIAN civilization is one of the oldest in the world. Farmers had begun to build villages near the valley of the River Indus by about 6000 BC. These settlements formed the basis of a civilization which developed from about 2400 BC. The two capital cities of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro had streets of brick-built houses laid out on a grid system, and both cities had their own water and drainage systems. One of the first civilizations to have the wheel, the people also developed methods of writing.

Harappa and Mohenjo Daro flourished until about 1750 BC, when all the people left them, perhaps because of years of severe flooding. The cities lay in ruins until 1922 when archaeologists began to excavate them and uncovered their remains.



Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, arrives in his capital city, Maghada, together with a procession of elephants.

By the 3rd century BC most of northern and central India had become one empire. This was called the Mauryan Empire after Chandragupta Maurya, who founded it in 322 BC after Alexander the Great had left India (see page 8).

Maurya, followed by his son Bindusara, brought most of the rest of India into the empire. By the time the third emperor, Asoka came to power, there was only one state left to conquer: Kalinga on the east coast. Asoka managed to overthrow Kalinga, but caused so much bloodshed that he was overcome by guilt. He converted to the Buddhist religion and set about governing his empire in a more peaceful manner.

Asoka set up trading links with neighbouring lands and built a network of roads. His beliefs about how people should behave and the laws he made were engraved on rocks and pillars throughout the empire.



Buddha found enlightenment as he sat under a fig tree.

HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

When Asoka came to the throne, there were several different religions in India, including Hinduism, which later became India's main religion. Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama (c.563-483 BC), but it only had small groups of followers until the reign of Asoka, who encouraged the spread of the religion throughout his empire. Siddhartha Gautama, who was later known as Buddha, was an Indian prince who became dissatisfied with the life of a nobleman. He left home to find a simpler and enlightened way of life.



When Buddha died, parts of his body were buried under mounds called "stupas" like this one in different parts of India.

Siddhartha spent six years trying to find an answer to the sufferings of the world. Then one day he sat down under a fig tree (which came to be known as the Bo Tree or Tree of Enlightenment) and concentrated his mind. He sat there for 49 days, until he achieved enlightenment, a state of peace that was free from all human suffering.

Siddhartha became known as Buddha, "the enlightened one". He taught people how to live peaceful, good lives together by being unselfish and thinking of others. He also showed them how to meditate to find the meaning of life.

After Asoka's death, Hinduism became more popular again. Buddha was not a god and he was not worshipped as one. At first, there were not even statues of him. The Hindus believe that there is one supreme being, Brahman, who appears in the shape of many different gods and goddesses.



There are hundreds of Hindu gods and goddesses, but some are particularly important and feature in many festivals. The three most important gods are Brahma (above left), Vishnu (above right) and Shiva (right).

The three main gods are Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer. Shiva is sometimes also seen as a loving god. Vishnu appears in many forms, including Lord Krishna who is worshipped as a holy child, as a mischievous youth and as a brave warrior.

Buddhism and Hinduism became rival religions. Hindus had statues of their gods, so statues of a Buddha figure were introduced to make Buddhism more popular. The years of rivalry produced some of the finest sculpture in the world.

ANCIENT AMERICA

PEOPLE SETTLED in America quite recently compared to the other continents. They developed their civilizations independently from other parts of the world. They did not even know that there *were* other parts of the world.

People, hunting mammoth, deer and other animals, crossed into America from Asia between 35,000 and 15,000 years ago. It was the time of the Ice Age. Because so much water was frozen in icecaps, the sea levels were much lower than they are today. What is now the Bering Strait was then dry land. When the Ice Age ended, about 10,000 BC, the ice melted and the sea level rose, cutting America off from elsewhere.

In some parts of the continent, people had to rely on plants rather than animals for food. The first farmers worked the land in what is now Mexico and Peru.

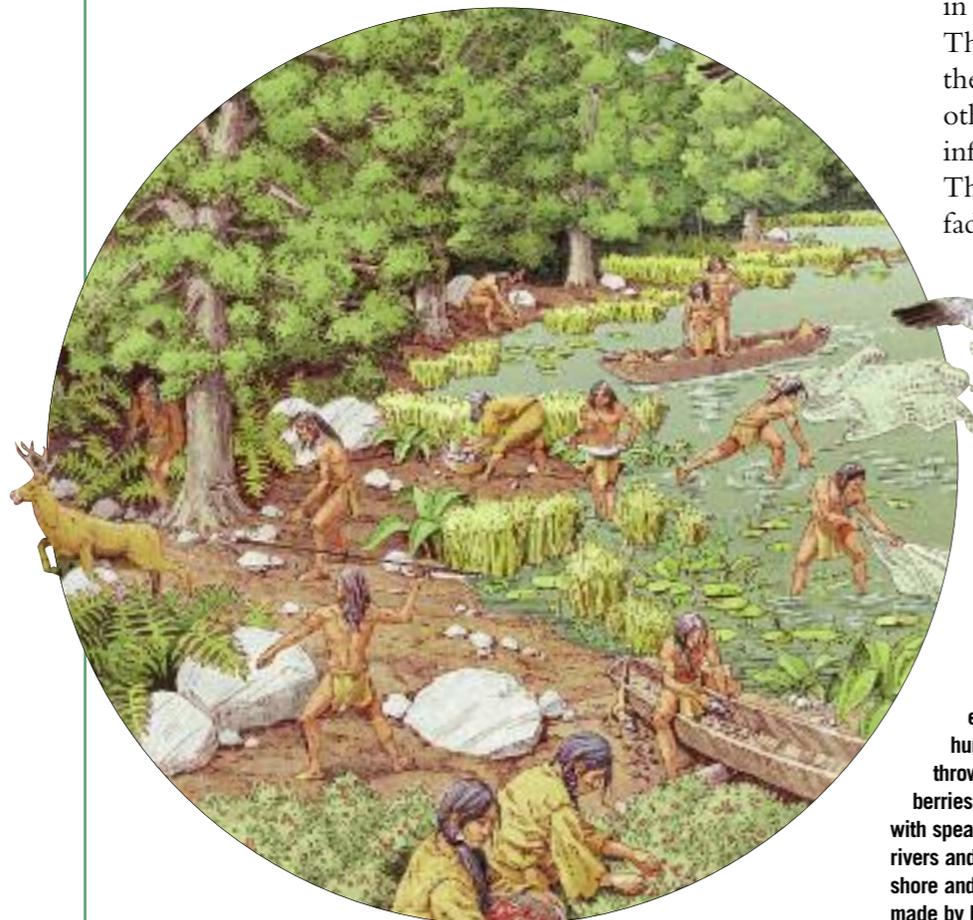


Giant stone heads like this one were carved by the Olmecs, the first civilization in Mexico. Each head weighs up to 20 tonnes. The heads look similar but they are all different and are portraits of Olmec rulers. The pattern on the helmet shows who the ruler is.

THE OLMECS

The Olmecs lived in the swampy lands near the Gulf of Mexico. They developed their civilization from about 1200 BC. The people were artists and traders who did not seek to conquer other parts of America. They worshipped gods and built pyramid temples, a style that was adopted by later Mexican civilizations.

Olmec traders travelled far and wide within Mexico, searching for raw materials, such as jade, for their craftwork, and trading in the finished products. Their travels brought them into contact with other peoples who were influenced by their art. The Olmec civilization faded in about 300 BC.

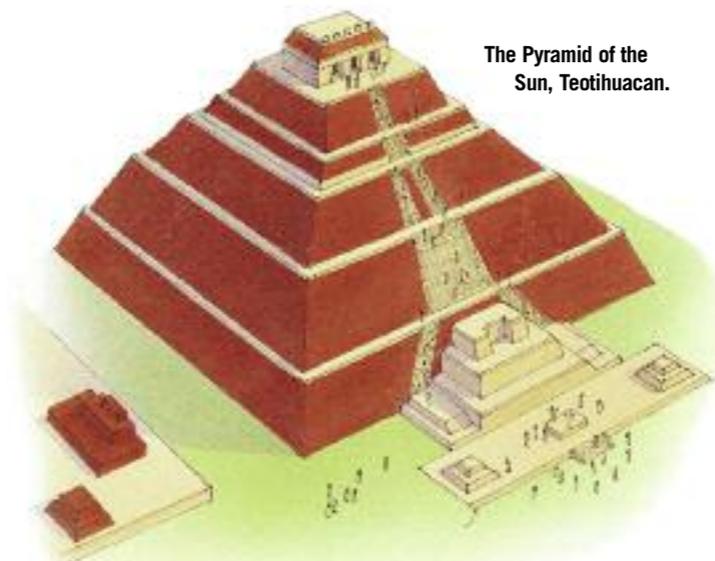


This scene shows a forest near the coast of North America in about 1500 BC. As the climate became warmer after the end of the last Ice Age, trees began to grow once more, forming dense forests. Hunters turned to hunting forest animals, such as deer. Like the people of the Middle East and elsewhere, the Native American hunters invented and used spear-throwers. The women gathered berries and nuts while the men hunted with spears, or fished with nets in the rivers and lakes. They fished from the shore and, in deeper water, from canoes, made by hollowing out tree trunks.

TEOTIHUACAN

The next major development in Mexican civilization was the building of the great city of Teotihuacan (about 50 kilometres from present-day Mexico City). The site of Teotihuacan was a place of pilgrimage: a cave, said to be the birthplace of the Sun. The huge Pyramid of the Sun was built over this cave in the 1st century AD and a magnificent city was laid out around it. The pyramid can still be seen today.

At its peak, about 200,000 people lived in Teotihuacan. It was one of the largest cities in the world. Wealthy people lived near the centre, while farmers and craftworkers had simpler homes on the outskirts.



The Pyramid of the Sun, Teotihuacan.

Teotihuacan was destroyed in AD 750 and all its inhabitants moved away. But it remained a place of pilgrimage. It probably influenced the Aztecs, when they built their city of Tenochtitlán hundreds of years later.

PERUVIAN KINGDOMS

A giant pyramid was also built by the Moche people of Peru in South America. This was the Huaca del Sol (also known as the Pyramid of the Sun), which towered 41 metres above the plains on which it stood. On its summit were palaces, temples and shrines. More than 143 million mud bricks were used to build this massive structure.



Warrior-priests were the lords of Moche society. They dressed in elaborate finery and head-dresses, and wore priceless gold jewellery.

The Moche were brilliant potters and metalworkers who built up a kingdom of thousands of people. Their civilization lasted for 800 years until AD 800. Moche rulers were warrior-priests who were extremely rich and powerful. They led their armies out to conquer neighbouring peoples and presided over the sacrifice of prisoners to the gods.

The Moche traded with other peoples in Peru. Among these were the Nazca, who lived on the edge of the desert further south. The Nazca people carved hundreds of lines in the desert's sandy surface, and a series of strange pictures, including images of birds, monkeys, spiders and others. They can only be properly seen from the air. Why the Nazca people made these lines and pictures—long before planes were invented—remains a mystery.



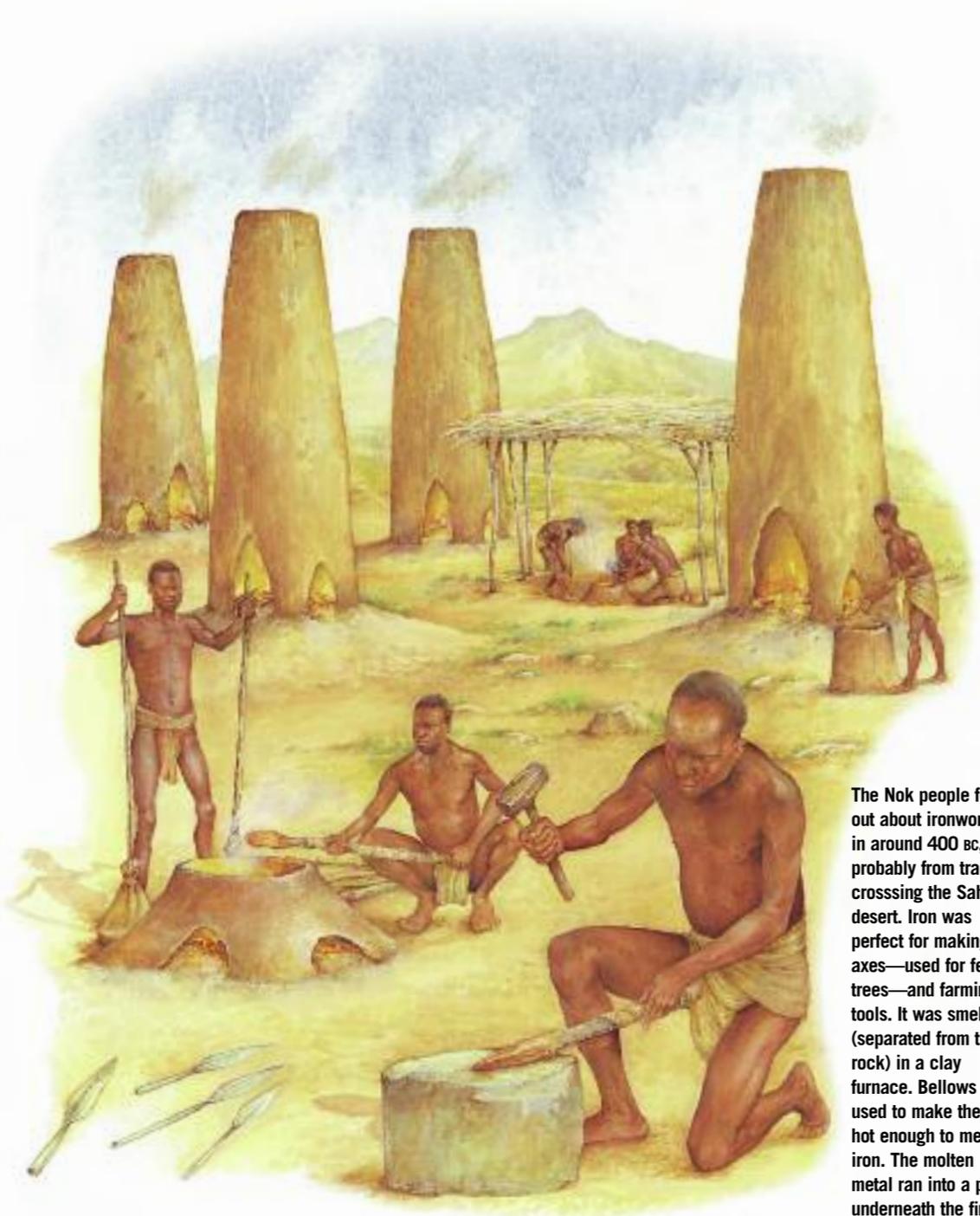
No-one knows what the Nazca pictures mean, but they may have played a part in a religious ritual.

AFRICA

THE EARLIEST forms of art in Africa are paintings left on rocks in the Sahara Desert, a green and fertile region 8000 years ago. Bands of hunter-gatherers lived there, but as the Sahara dried up they moved away. Some went east to found the ancient Egyptian civilization. Others moved south.

By about 500 BC some people had learned to mine and work metals such as iron. As they spread over Africa, they took this knowledge with them.

The earliest examples of African sculpture were found at Nok in Nigeria. These terracotta heads and figures date from between 500 BC and AD 200. They may have inspired artists of a later civilization at Ife in Nigeria.

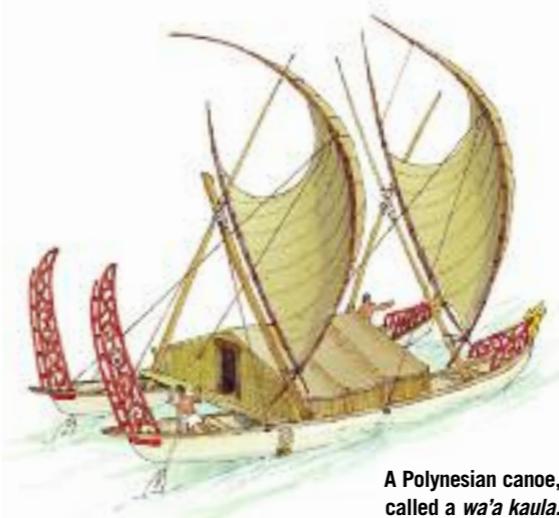


The Nok people found out about ironworking in around 400 BC, probably from traders crossing the Sahara desert. Iron was perfect for making axes—used for felling trees—and farming tools. It was smelted (separated from the rock) in a clay furnace. Bellows were used to make the fire hot enough to melt the iron. The molten metal ran into a pit underneath the fire.

OCEANIA

OCEANIA consists of the islands of Australia and New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the other South Pacific islands. The first to be settled were Australia and New Guinea. The people who became the Aboriginals migrated to Australia from Southeast Asia probably about 50,000 years ago. People from Asia also settled on New Guinea about 40,000 years ago.

The other islands were not settled until about 5000 years ago. New Zealand remained uninhabited only until about 1000 years ago. Finding these islands in ancient times involved the risky business of travelling very long distances in canoes. The first settlers were skilled seafarers.



A Polynesian canoe, called a *wa'a kaula*.

Polynesia consists of many islands spread thousands of kilometres apart across the Pacific Ocean. The ancestors of today's Polynesians constructed large canoes, some big enough to hold 100 people, to explore and settle these islands. Groups of people came from the mainland of Asia and found their way across the sea by observing the stars. Discovery of the islands was gradual and it was several thousand years before they were all inhabited.

The Aboriginals of Australia were hunter-gatherers, but the people of New Guinea became farmers about 9000 years ago. There is evidence that they grew yams, coconuts, bananas and sugar cane.

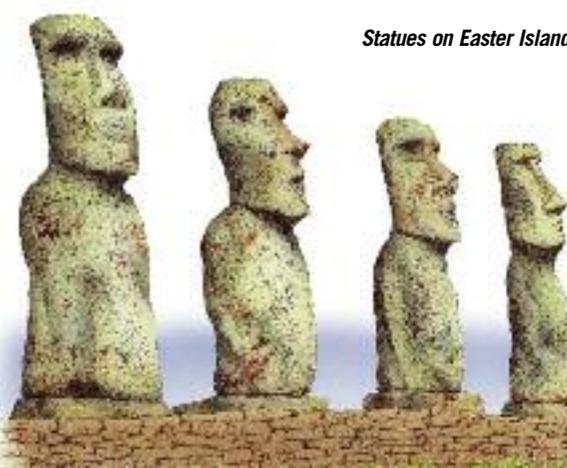


The Aboriginals believed in an everlasting spiritual life known as "Eternal Dreaming". Their music, poetry, dancing and sculpture were all inspired by their religious beliefs. One musical instrument was a long wooden tube called a didgeridoo. The weather was very important to the Aboriginals. Many of their rituals involved the fertility of the land and the growth of new plants.

Easter Island lies 3700 kilometres off the coast of Chile, South America. There are about 600 massive stone heads dotted about on the island. Who built them, and how and why they did so, remains a mystery.

Settlers probably reached Easter Island between AD 400 and 500. They built long altar platforms on the seashore where religious rituals took place. The heads were not carved till later. They stood on the altars, facing inland, but they were probably not statues of gods. They are more likely to be ancestors of the island's inhabitants.

The statues were carved at the quarries where the stone came from—only the eyes were added once the statues were in position. No-one really knows how these huge blocks of stone were put in place.



Statues on Easter Island

INDEX

Page numbers in **bold** refer to main entries.

A

Aboriginals 31
Acropolis 6, 7
Africa **30**
Alexander the Great **8-9**, 10, 26
Alexandria 9
America, ancient **28-29**
Antony, Mark 9, 10, 11
aqueducts 14
archaeologists 12, 20, 26
armies 10, 14, 20-21, 22
art 8, 30
artists 5, 28, 30
Asia 8, 10, 28
Athens 5, **6-7**
Augustus (Octavian) 9, 10, 11, 17
Aztecs 29

B

Babylon 8
baths, Roman public 15
Boudicca, Queen 10
Brahma the Creator 27
Brahman 27
Bronze Age 19
Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) 27
Buddhism 26-27
buildings 12
ancient Greek 7
Chinese 23
Roman 13, **14-15**
burials 19, 27

C

Caesar, Julius 11
Chang'an 23, 24-25
China **18-25**
army 20-21
burials 19
cities 23, 25
craftsmen 19
dynasties 19, 20-22
emperors 20-21
empire 20-25
farming 18
gods 19, 20
government 22
houses 23
inventions 22-23, 25
philosophy 19
science 22
tombs 20
towns 19
trading 24-25
weapons 19
writing 19
Chinese 18-19
Christians 16-17
cities 5, 6, 9, 13, 23, 25, 26, 29
city-states 5, 7
civilization,
Aztec 29
Chinese **18-25**
Egyptian 30
Greek **4-9**
Ife 30
Indian **26-27**

Mexican 28-29
Minoan 4
Moche 29
Mycenaean 4
Nazca 29
Olmec 28
Phoenician 8
Roman **10-17**
civilizations, American **28-29**
Classical Age 5-7
Cleopatra 9-11
concrete 12
Confucius 19, 22
Constantine 16
Crete 4

DEF

Darius III 8
democracy 7
drama 6
Easter Island 31
Egypt, ancient 8-11, 30
emperors,
Chinese 20-21, 22
Indian 26
Roman 9-11, 16-17
Euclid 9
Europe 10, 25
farmers 4, 12, 18, 26, 28, 29, 31
festivals 6, 27
fishing 28
forum 12

G

gatherers 28
Gaul 11
Gautama, Siddhartha *see* Buddha
geometry 9
gladiators 16-17
gods 6, 13, 16, 19, 20, 27, 28, 29
government 7, 12
Great Wall of China 21, 24
Greece, ancient 4, **5-9**
armies 5
arts 6
astronomy 9
festivals 6
first settlers 4
gods 4
government 7
laws 7
legends 4
medicine 7, 9
philosophy 6
playwrights 6
poetry 4, 8
politics 7
science 6-7, 9
ships 5
sport 6
temples 6-7
theatre 6
warfare 5, 8-9
women 7
writers 8
Greeks, ancient 4-9, 12

H

Han Empire **22-23**
Hellenistic Period 9
Hinduism 27
history, recording 22
Homer 4
Homo sapiens 18
houses 4, 12-13, 23, 26

Huaca del Sol (Pyramid of the Sun) 29
Huang (Yellow) River 18-19
Huns 21
hunter-gatherers 30-31
hunting 19

IJKL

Ice Ages 28
India, ancient 8, 9, **26-27**
burials 27
cities 26
emperors 26
festivals 27
gods 27
religions 26-27
roads 26
sculpture 27
trading 26
Indus, River 26
inventions, Chinese 22-23, 25
iron 30
Jordan 9
kings 8, 10, 19, 28-29
Latin 10
laws 7, 26
literature, ancient Greek 6

M

Macedonia 8-9
masks 4, 6
Maurya, Chandragupta 26
Mauryan Empire 26
medicine 7, 9
Mediterranean Sea 4
Middle East 24
Ming dynasty 21
mining 30
Minoans 4
Moche 29
Mohenjo Daro 26
music 31
Mycenae 4

NO

Native Americans 28
noblemen 19, 5
nomads 18, 21, 25
Oceania, ancient, **31**
Octavian *see* Augustus
Olmecs 28
Olympic Games 6

PQ

painting 30
palaces 4, 29
paper 22
Parthenon 6-7
Persepolis 8
Persian Empire 8-9
Peru 28-29
Philip of Macedonia 8
philosophy 19, 6
Phoenicians 8
pilgrimage 29
poetry 4, 8, 31
politics 7
Polynesia 31
Pompeii 13
pottery 6, 29
Ptolemy, Claudius 9
Pyramid of the Sun, Mexico 29
Pyramid of the Sun, Peru *see* Huaca del Sol
pyramids 29

Pythagoras 9
Qin dynasty 20-21

R

religions 26-27, 29, 31
republic 10-11
roads 14, 24-25, 26
Roman Empire **10-17**
army 10, 14
builders 14-15
emperors 16-17
gods 13, 16
government 10-11, 12
houses 12-13
laws 11
public baths 15
public holidays 16
roads 14
sports 16-17
theatre 16
town life 12-13
trading 12
women 13, 15

S

scholars 9, 19
science 6, 9
sculpture 27, 30, 31
Shang dynasty 19
Shiva the Destroyer 27
shrines 29
Silk Route **24-25**
slaves 7, 13, 14, 17
soldiers 5, 8-9, 10, 12-13, 14, 21
Sophocles 6
Sparta 5
sports 6, **16-17**

T

temples 6-7, 29
Teotihuacan 29
terracotta 20, 30
theatre 6, 16
Tiber, River 10
Tiberius 17
tombs 20, 23
Chinese 20
Mycenaean 4
tools 19, 30
towns 19, 5, 12-14
trading 19, 24-25, 26, 28, 30
transportation 25
Trojan horse 4
Troy 4
tyrants 5, 17

VW

Vesuvius 13
villages 18, 5
Vishnu the Preserver 27
voting 7
War, Trojan 4
wars 4-5, 19
weapons 19
Wei, River 19
wheel 26
women 7, 13, 15, 28
writing 19, 26

XYZ

Xianyang 20
Yellow River *see* Huang River
Zeus 6
Zhou dynasty 19, 20