



• ANCIENT BEGINNINGS •

# The Shang Dynasty

In the Stone Age (Neolithic period), different groups lived in separate communities across the vast land of China. The first dynasty or line of rulers we know about was called the Shang. According to legend, there was a Xia dynasty before them but archaeologists have not yet found any written records from this era. Many things, however, including writing on bronze vessels and oracle bones, survive from Shang times. States fought each other for land until the Shang kings gained control in northern China and set up large cities. Peasants grew food for everyone and craftspeople made tools, weapons, clothing, ornaments and household goods from bronze, silk, jade, clay and other materials. The royal family lived inside a walled palace with their advisers, and diviners who predicted the future. When a king died, servants and animals were sacrificed to go with him to Heaven.

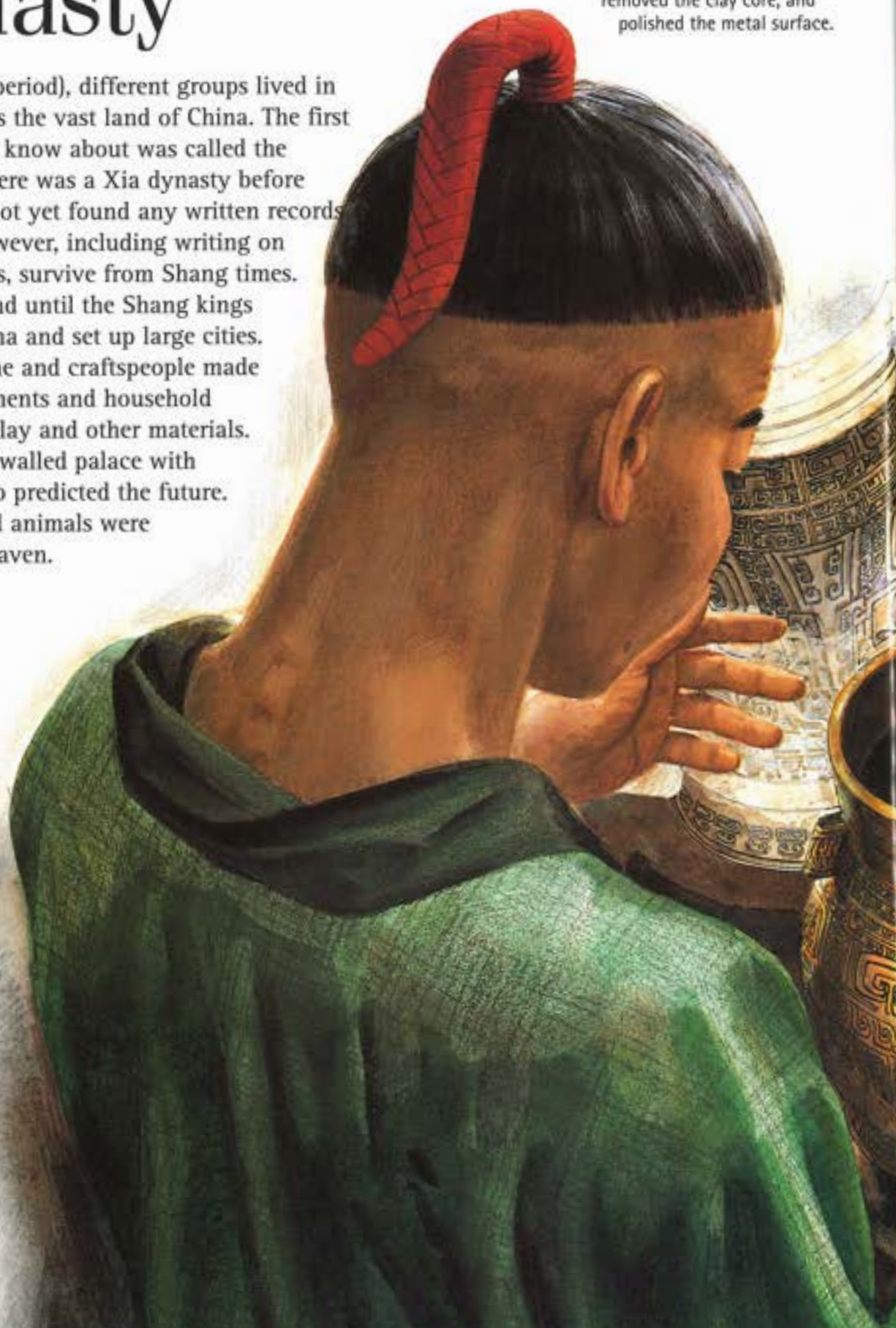
## AN AGE OF BRONZE

The large number of containers and other objects made from bronze that survive from the Shang period show advanced methods of production. Artisans adapted ways of working in clay to working in metal. Molten bronze was poured into carved ceramic molds. When the metal cooled, the bronzesmith broke the mold, removed the clay core, and polished the metal surface.



### WINE CONTAINER

The Shang liked to drink warm wine. This bronze vessel, made by the clay mold method of casting, was used to hold wine.





## READING THE ORACLE BONES

The Shang believed that spirits of dead ancestors "spoke" to the living through oracle bones. These were the polished shoulder bones of oxen and sheep or the undershells of turtles. A diviner scraped furrows in an oracle bone and inscribed a question on it such as "Is it safe to go on a journey?" Then he scorched the bone and read the cracks that resulted from the heat as the answer to the question.



### BURIED BRONZE

China's soil continues to reveal secrets about ancient times. In 1986, brickworkers accidentally uncovered this statue, taller than any man, and life-size heads with strange features.







#### LINKED DISKS

The belts and pendants of the wealthy were decorated with jade. This complicated piece is cleverly made from a single jade pebble.



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# The Zhou Dynasty

**W**arlike Zhou people from the Wei River Valley in the northwest conquered the Shang and began a dynasty that lasted for more than 800 years. Zhou rulers enlarged the Shang kingdom and gave land to their relatives and advisers. At first, these noblemen were loyal to the Zhou kings. But during the Spring and Autumn periods and in the time of the Warring States, the local lords raised armies, forcing many peasants to become foot soldiers, and competed with one another for power. The Zhou era brought important changes. Cities grew in size and number, and merchants began to carry trade goods between them. Metalworkers forged iron tools and weapons. The use of iron plows made farming easier and increased food production. Scholars reacted to the unsettled times by thinking of ways to make ancient China a more peaceful country.

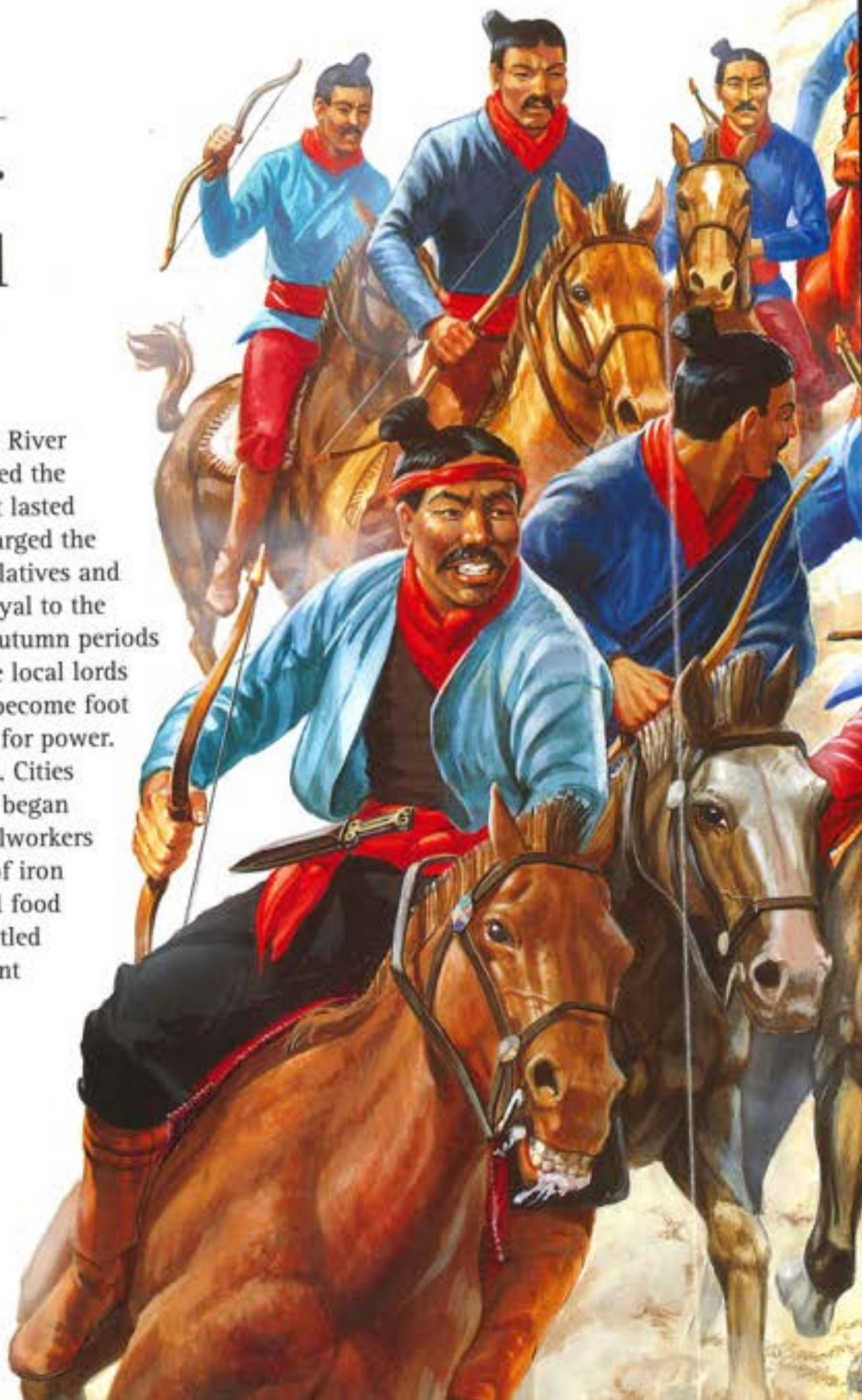


#### JADE DISK

Jade, more precious than gold in ancient China, was found in river beds and on mountain peaks. Jade was hard to carve, and elaborate objects sometimes took years to make.

#### MILITARY PROGRESS

New fighting methods were introduced during the long clashes in the Warring States period. Mounted warriors, armed with bows and arrows, replaced the old-fashioned chariots. Low-born foot soldiers could now rise in rank to become officers in the army.







Q: What did the army use instead of war chariots?

## SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Many scholars who lived in Zhou times thought about law and order. Their ideas shaped society in the centuries to come. Three systems emerged most strongly. Confucianism taught obedience within the family and respect for ancestors. The followers of Daoism wanted as few rules as possible. A third school of thought, called Legalism, said that everyone must obey the state's ruler and contribute to the army and food production.



### BURIED FOR CENTURIES

Unusual tomb goods survive from Zhou times. This bird may have guarded against evil spirits or been used to carry a musical instrument. Words on its beak say "For Zeng Hou Yi's eternal use."




Bronze bird with antlers



Bronze ritual vessel



**THE ART OF INLAY**  
Zhou metalworkers began to inlay the surfaces of bronze vessels, weapons and chariot parts with silver and semi-precious stones or glass.

Discover more in Three Ways of Thinking 





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# The Qin Dynasty



Qin Shi Huangdi

**T**he powerful Qin conquered the six major kingdoms that remained at the end of the Warring States period. The king thanked his ancestors for his success and decided to drop the title wang, which meant "king." He renamed himself Shi (meaning "first" Huangdi (meaning "emperor and divine ruler"). The First Emperor was very important because he unified ancient China by making strict laws, taxing everyone in the country and introducing one script for writing. He commanded his subjects to build roads and canals, and to join existing walls into one long defensive wall. Qin Shi Huangdi did not agree with the teachings of Confucius and other scholars, and ordered their books to be burned. The First Emperor paid magicians, called alchemists, for potions to help him live forever. After his death, his dynasty soon collapsed.

## STANDARD COINAGE

Early bronze coins were cast in some unusual shapes. The First Emperor introduced a standard system of money throughout China.



## STANDARD WEIGHTS

Qin Shi Huangdi also standardized weights and measures. These included the bronze and terra-cotta cups used for measuring liquids and grains, and the bronze and iron weights that balanced scales.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Qin Shi Huangdi, who wanted to live forever, has survived in one way. Qin, pronounced to sound like "chin," gave us the word "China." In a way, the First Emperor's name will never die.

## TIGER IN TWO PIECES

An army commander had one part of this model tiger. Messages from the emperor arrived in the second piece to prove that the battle orders were not forged.



## PROTECTING THE EMPEROR

In March 1974, well-diggers discovered a silent army guarding the tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi. Pit One contained more than 3,000 life-size foot soldiers and teams of chariot horses.



## THE TERRA-COTTA WARRIORS

**Q**in Shi Huangdi's military companions for eternity march in three pits to the east of his tomb. A fourth pit—the work unfinished at the end of the dynasty in 207 bc. The heads and bodies of the foot soldiers, charioteers and archers (like this one) were made in molds, but no two faces are the same. Some are bearded, others are clean-shaven. Eyes, noses, lips and ears are in many different shapes.





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# The Han Dynasty

**L**iu Bang, a government official, gained power and founded the Han dynasty, which lasted for more than 400 years. Han emperors strengthened the Qin system of government and extended ancient China's boundaries. They developed a civil service, based on the teachings of Confucius, to run the empire and keep records in a central place. Scholars who wanted to become government officials had to study very hard. The government organized the salt and iron mines, and state factories began mass-producing objects—from iron and steel farming tools to silk cloth and paper. Han emperors began to control the eastern end of the Silk Road that linked Asia and Europe. Buddhism, one of the most important foreign influences, started to spread throughout ancient China. The Han dynasty finally collapsed after a succession of weak child emperors and droughts and floods.

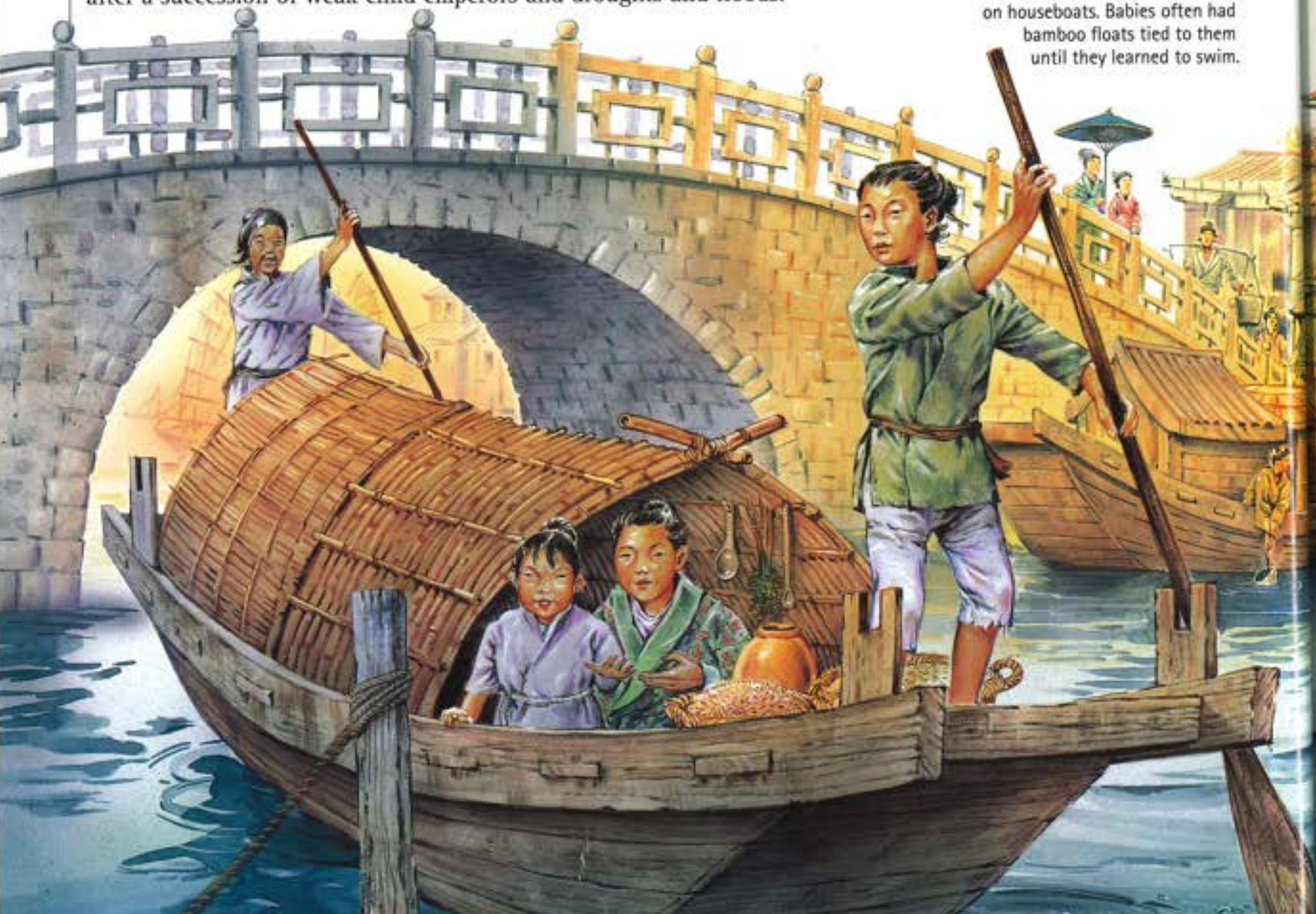
## GILDED BRONZE LEOPARDS

These graceful animals with garnet eyes and inlaid silver spots came from Princess Dou Wan's tomb. They were used as weights.



## WATER HIGHWAYS

During the Han era, the people were ordered to build canals to link the cities. These inland waterways made trading, collecting taxes and distributing food during famines much easier. Some families lived on houseboats. Babies often had bamboo floats tied to them until they learned to swim.







**AMUSEMENTS FOR THE AFTERLIFE**  
Acrobats were popular entertainers in ancient China. This tray of tumbling pottery figures was made to amuse the dead in the afterlife.

**GOVERNMENT TRANSPORT**  
Important government officials traveled by horse and carriage. Small models of these were made for their tombs so they would not have to walk in the afterlife.



## THE GRAND CANAL

In the Sui period, Emperor Yang decided to link the Yangzi and Yellow rivers by joining new and existing canals. This waterway of 1,550 miles (2,500 km) carried grain and soldiers across his empire. The Grand Canal took more than 30 years to build, and all men 15–50 years of age worked on the project. Every family living nearby also had to send an old man, a woman and a child to the labor force.

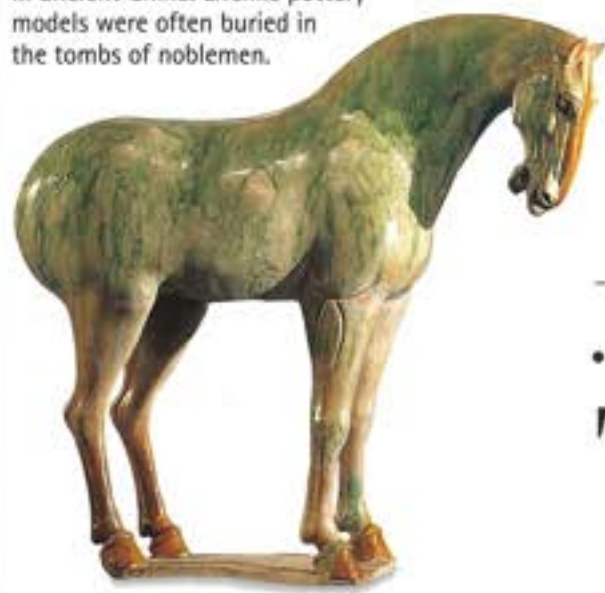


Q: Why did the Han dynasty collapse?





**IMPORTANCE OF HORSES**  
Horses were a sign of great wealth in ancient China. Lifelike pottery models were often buried in the tombs of noblemen.



**CITY MARKETS**  
Chang'an was the capital of the Han, Sui and Tang empires. By the Tang era, the busy western market was crammed with warehouses. Foreign merchants brought goods from central and western Asia, India and beyond.



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# The Tang Dynasty

The Tang dynasty ruled ancient China for 300 years. This was a time when art, craft, music and literature further developed, and people called it a golden age. Boundaries expanded again as Tang armies fought successfully against the Koreans in the north, the Vietnamese in the south, and the Tibetans and Turks in the west. The Chinese traded with people from these lands and learned much more about the world beyond China. Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism were still very important, but traders brought other religious ideas to China along the Silk Road. Visiting craftspeople to the city of Chang'an taught local artisans different ways of making things. Clothing showed the influence of foreign fashions. The wealthy developed a taste for imported foods. They ate dumplings in 24 flavors, tasty sauces, and ice cream made from chilled milk, rice and camphor. Tea, made from the leaves of bushes grown in the warm south, reached northern China's markets during the Tang period, and rich people also enjoyed this new drink.



**PATTERNS FROM PERSIA**  
Chinese artisans copied traditional Persian decoration. The mounted hunter on the side of this jug is copied from a Persian design.



**SKILLED ARTISTS**  
This is part of a painting on silk called *The Eight Noble Officials*. The figures in their flowing garments show the lively style used by Tang artists.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Chang'an was laid out in a square. The four walls had three gates in each wall. Each gate had three gateways—the emperor alone used the central one.





## FOREIGN WAYS

During the Tang period, gold and silver became more highly prized than before, and rivaled jade and bronze in value. Persian metalworkers, who fled from their own country and came to live in Chang'an, taught the Chinese more delicate methods of using these precious metals. Tang jewelers began to beat them into thin sheets and to make objects from threads of metal.



## STROLLING PLAYERS

Goods for sale were loaded onto the backs of camels and into wagons pulled by oxen. Foreign traders, Chinese merchants and the local crowd enjoyed performances by street acrobats and storytellers.

## FOREIGN TONGUES

Among the noisy chatter in the market place, the people of Chang'an heard travelers speaking languages from other parts of the world.

