

## WINDOWS ON THE WORLD BACKGROUND

### *History*

#### AFRICA

**Northeast Africa** *Kush culture, ended A.D. 350* After Assyria drove the Kushites from Egypt in 654 B.C., the Kushites were restricted to the Middle Nile (modern Sudan), until 350 A.D. Kush was also called the kingdom of Meroe, when the capital was moved from Napata to Meroe, after 600 B.C. Its culture was a unique Egyptian-Nubian blend: a written language, expressed first in Egyptian hieroglyphs, then in local cursive script; worship of divinities drawn from both cultures; burial of kings in pyramids but not mummified in the Egyptian style. Wealth flowed in from control of trade routes and mines. Slow decline, culminating in defeat by Axum in about A.D. 350. For the next 200 years, Kush was inhabited by people known to ancient scholars as the Nobatae and as the X-Group by modern archaeologists. The heirs of Kush continued to practice Meroitic crafts and customs. *Axum culture, began 300 B.C.* Axum (also spelled Aksum) originated as a local power and from the third to the sixth century A.D. was the greatest market of the region. Its growing strength caused a clash with the mercantile state of Kush, leading to the latter's conquest by king Ezana in A.D. 350.

**West Africa** *Nok culture, ended A.D. 200* The Nok people raised crops and cattle. A transitional people, they worked with both stone and iron. Nok artifacts include iron tools, stone axes and other stone tools, and stone ornaments. Nok culture was well established and traces of its influence can still be identified in the lives of the Numan and other peoples of the area today.

#### AMERICAS

**Andes** With the collapse of the broadbased Chavín culture, several local cultures emerged, each influenced by the Chavín style. *Paracas culture, about 600–175 B.C.* Centered on modern Peru's south coast, the Paracas people wove fine textiles used for wrapping the mummified corpses of their dead. They also practiced skull deformation by binding the skulls of infants. *Nasca (also Nazca) culture, 200 B.C.–A.D. 500* The Nasca people lived on Peru's south coast. There is some as-yet-unexplained similarity between the multicolored designs of Nasca pottery and the polychrome textiles of the contemporaneous Paracas culture. The Nasca Lines, a great achievement of ancient America, have given rise to outlandish speculation about their origin and purpose. *Moche culture, began 200 B.C.* Moche, also called Mochica, was the dominant culture on the north coast of modern Peru

until about A.D. 600. The Moche built several cities, including their capital, Moche, and created a system of canals to grow maize, beans, and other crops. Pyramid-platform sites—concealing tombs of Moche warrior-priests—have been found, but only the tomb at Sipán (excavated in 1987) has yielded a cache of jewels and gold treasure.

**Mesoamerica** After the decline of the Olmec culture, separate regional styles and kingdoms arose, lasting until about A.D. 700–900, including Teotihuacán, Maya, Zapotec, and Totonac. *Teotihuacán culture* Founded by an unknown people, Teotihuacán influenced the rest of Mesoamerica, especially in its heyday (A.D. 400–600); its trade involved distant regions. The city was ruled by priests who conducted state rituals that included human sacrifices. Perhaps two-thirds of the populace worked the nearby farms, and the rest engaged in crafts (working with ceramics or obsidian, a volcanic glass) or trade. *Mayan culture* The Maya developed one of the most sophisticated cultures in the Western Hemisphere. Based on farming, the culture was centered on cities containing temples, pyramids, palaces, plazas, and ball-courts. At its height, it included about forty cities, with populations ranging from 5,000 to 50,000. The Maya created a vibrant tradition in sculpture and architecture. They also invented a form of writing with hieroglyphics, which was only deciphered in the 1900s. Mayan books—known as codices—were written on a paper made from tree bark. Most of our knowledge of the classic Maya culture derives from extant codices, architectural works, and inscriptions and reliefs.

**Native North America** *Hopewell culture, about 200 B.C.–A.D. 500* Highly organized village society. Elite built earthwork tombs, reflecting high social and religious status. Trade with Rocky Mountain region, northern Great Lakes, and Gulf Coast. Ohio sites served as distribution centers for ceremonial goods and products. Decline between A.D. 200 and 700 in north central area of Hopewell culture, though no decay in the south. *Southwest, about A.D. 100* Ancestors of Hohokam, Mogollon, and Anasazi tribes migrated into region from Mesoamerica. *Hohokam culture, Pine Lawn period, about 200 B.C.–A.D. 500* Villages in the Mogollon Mountains; gathering and simple farming; first potters in the southwest, perhaps imported from Mesoamerica. *Anasazi culture, Basket Maker period, A.D. 100–500* Anasazi (from the Navaho, *the Ancient Ones*) settled in the Four Corners region; hunters, gatherers, and farmers (maize and pumpkins).

## ASIA

**China** *Ch'in Dynasty, 221–206 B.C.* Shih Huang-ti's victory over his rivals was partly because his soldiers used new long iron swords. He enhanced his authority among peasants by assuring a regular food supply, based on a system of irrigation. *Han Dynasty, 210 B.C.–A.D. 220* A stable period except for the

interregnum (A.D. 8–23) under the usurper Wang Mang. At its height the Han Empire rivaled the size of the Roman Empire. Inspired by Confucianism, Han rule was marked by strong centralized control. The Han imprint on China was so great that today the Chinese word used to identify a Chinese person means “a man of Han.”

**India** *Mauryan Empire, about 325–185 B.C.* The Mauryan Empire, enriched by farming and trade, was India’s first empire. It was a centralized bureaucracy with a warrior ruler. It included most of the subcontinent and much of present-day Afghanistan (taken from the Hellenistic Seleucid rulers). Described in ancient sources as being of low origins, the Mauryan rulers early on learned the importance of regular collection of land taxes. The empire’s founder, Candra Gupta (Chandragupta) Maurya, was called Sandrocottos in ancient Greek accounts of Alexander the Great’s campaigns.

**Japan** *Yayoi culture, about 300 B.C.–a.c. 300* Yayoi culture is named for the wheel thrown ceramics with smooth surfaces that characterized this period. Yayoi ceramics introduced tableware, in addition to ritual vessels. Japan’s history begins in first century B.C., with first mention in Chinese sources. Chinese influence probably accounts for the introduction of wheel thrown ceramics and wet-rice farming. *Kofun period, began A.D. 300* First steps at political unification under the Yamato clan, in late fourth to early fifth century.

## ***Culture***

### AMERICAS

**Andes** *Moche culture: Moche Stirrup-Spout Vessel* Moche pottery, among the finest in the ancient Andes, typically had a stirrup spout for pouring, as these vessels were, in fact, water jars. Decorated with portrait heads or sometimes figures, this pottery was executed in a naturalistic style and with great skill.

**Mesoamerica** *Veracruz culture: Animal Figure on Wheels* The wheel was known in Mesoamerica as shown by this toy’s wheels, but the wheel was not used as a labor saving device, perhaps because there were no indigenous draft animals, such as horses or oxen.

### ASIA

**China** *Ch’in Dynasty: Section, Great Wall of China* The building of the great wall was part of Shih Huang-ti’s strategy for uniting the Chinese people and enlisting their support for his rule. Finding existing walls in several individual states, he

linked the walls together and extended them into an over one-thousand-mile long protective border. *Han Dynasty* Horse The arts flourished under the Han and set such a high standard of achievement that all subsequent dynasties sought to emulate them. Among the finest achievements of the Han were superb tomb sculptures, as in this bronze statue of a galloping horse with one foot poised on a flying swallow. This horse sculpture, dating from the second century A.D., is one of many that were found in Gansu, in northwest China. Cast in bronze in a fully naturalistic style, this horse is dynamic and alert. The Chinese ruling classes, like those of ancient Greece and Rome and of Europe until about 1900, depended on the horse for warfare and thus encouraged artists to represent the horse in sculpture and painting.

**India** Edict Column at Sarnath Carved in an imperial workshop in Sarnath, the Sarnath, or Asoka, pillar, topped by the front half of four identical lions joined back to back, was typical of Mauryan art with its naturalism, animal images, and carefully modeled work. It was made of fine-grained sandstone.