ancient civilization that arose about 3300 B.C. in the valley of the Indus River and its tributaries, in the northwestern portion of the Indian subcontinent, i.e., present-day Pakistan, and was at its height from about 2600 B.C. to about 1900 B.C. At its greatest extent, its geographical reach exceeded that of Egypt or Mesopotamia. Since 1921 this civilization has been revealed by spectacular finds at Mohenjo-Daro, an archaeological site in NW Sind, and at Harappa, in central Punjab near the Ravi River. These sites, each of which measures more than 3 mi (5 km) in circumference, were once great urban centers, the chief cities of the Indus civilization. They had large and complex hill citadels, housing palaces, granaries, and baths that were probably used for sacred ablutions; the great bath at Mohenjo-Daro was c.40 ft (12 m) long and 23 ft (7 m) wide. Beyond the citadels were well-planned towns, laid out in rectangular patterns. Houses, often two-storied and spacious, lined the town streets; they had drainage systems that led into brick-lined sewers. The economy of the Indus civilization was based on a highly organized agriculture, supplemented by an active commerce, probably connected to that of the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia. The arts flourished there, and many objects of copper, bronze, and pottery, including a large collection of terra-cotta toys, have been uncovered. Most notable, however, are the steatite seals, exquisitely engraved with animal figures and often bearing a line of pictographic script. On some seals are depicted a bo tree or, as some authorities hold, a Babylonian tree of life, and others have as their central figure the god Shiva, who later became preeminent in the Hindu pantheon. The writing, long a riddle to archaeologists, has yet to be satisfactorily deciphered; the language appears to be structurally related to the Dravidian languages. The origin, rise, and decline of the Indus valley civilization remain a mystery, but it seems most probable that the civilization fell (c.1500 B.C.) to invading Aryans.
