China's First Emperor

By around 480 BC, China was made up of seven kingdoms which were constantly at war with each other. By 221 BC, the kingdom of Qin (pronounced "chihn") had conquered all the others, and the King of Qin controlled a huge empire. He called himself Qin Shi Huangdi, which means "First Emperor of China".

The Great Wall of China
Shi Huangdi had a massive wall built to protect his Empire from attacks by northern tribes (later called the Huns). The Great Wall was made by joining together smaller walls put up by earlier rulers. It has been strengthened since, and is still the biggest man-made structure in the world.

Controlling the nobles
To prevent nobles from rebelling against him, Shi Huangdi forced them to move to the capital city, Xianyang, where he could keep an eye on them. Weapons belonging to the nobles' armies were taken away and melted down.

Uniting the Empire
Shi Huangdi built new roads and canals to link the different parts of his Empire. He also made everyone use the same type of coins and the same weights and measures. This made it much easier for people to trade with each other.

To make sure that his orders could be understood by everyone, Shi Huangdi introduced a standard form of writing throughout the Empire.

Punishing protestors
Shi Huangdi believed that people were evil and had to be forced to obey the law. Anyone who disobeyed was brutally punished. He ordered the burning of any books that did not agree with his ideas, and scholars who protested were thrown into a pit and buried alive.

The terracotta army
When Shi Huangdi died in 210 BC, he was buried in a huge tomb guarded by an army of over 7,500 life-size model warriors. The warriors were made of terracotta (a type of pottery) and carried real weapons. It is said that crossbows were set to fire automatically at anyone who tried to break into the tomb.