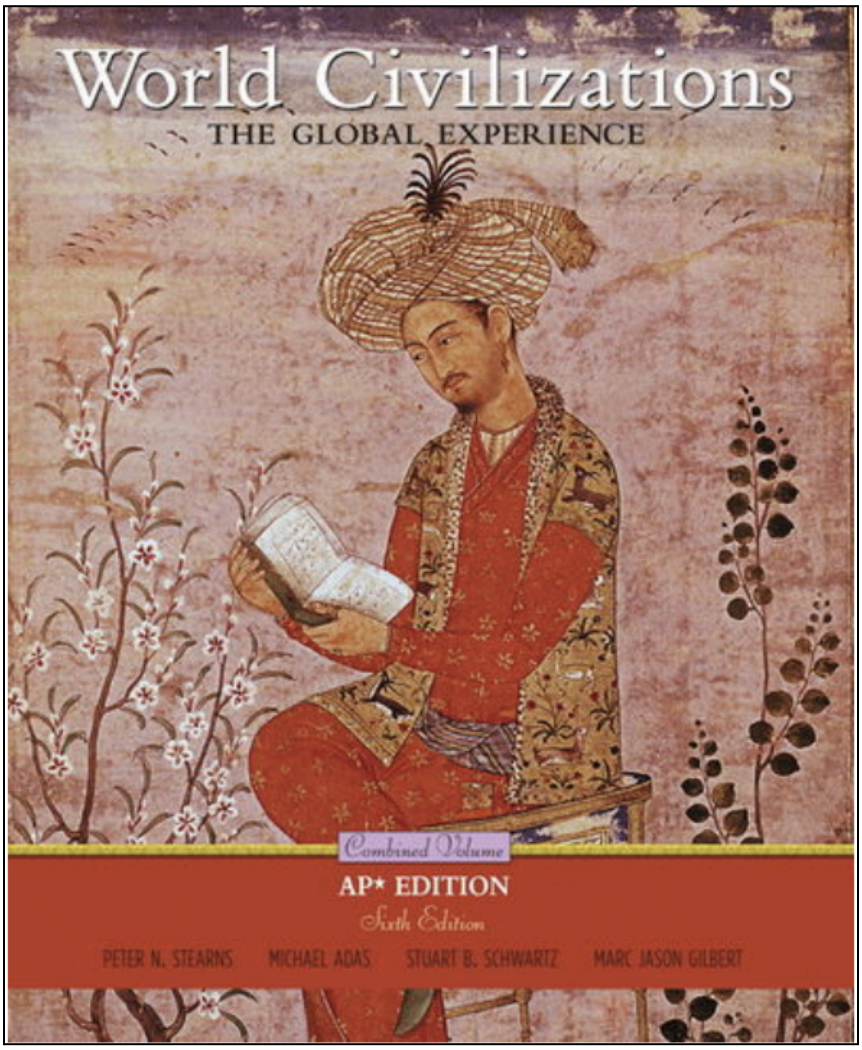
Upper St. Clair High School Summer Assignment	
Course:AP World History (Modern)	
Assignment Title:	Summer Assignment
Due Date:	8/19/2026
Purpose of the assignment:	☑ Review foundational material, concepts, or skills ☐ Build interest ☐ Provide a diagnostic measuring tool to help guide student differentiation & instruction ☐ Establish a supportive class culture & environment ☑ Expose students to required material, concepts, skills, and/or texts that will be referenced throughout the academic year
Resources needed to complete assignment:	☐ Textbook assigned by school ☐ Book(s) supplied by student ☑ Packet provided by teacher (please visit the Interactive Program of Studies) ☐ Other supplies: _____
Estimated time for Completion:	Students may average an estimated 20 hours to complete the assignment, but we encourage students to spend time on this assignment over several weeks.
Impact on Semester 1 Grade	Graded: ☑ Yes ☐ No Teacher Note:

AP World History - Summer Assignment



Contents:

- Instructions for the Summer Assignment
- Prologue
- Overview - The Classical Period, 1000 BCE - 500 CE (p. 34-39)
- Chapter 2: Classical Civilization - China (p. 40 - 59)
- Chapter 3: Classical Civilization - India (p. 60 - 75)
- Chapter 3: Classical Civilization - India (p. 76 - 79)
- Chapter 4: Classical Civilizations in the Mediterranean and Middle East (p. 80 - 103)
- Chapter 5: The Classical Period: Directions, Diversities and Declines by 500 CE (p. 104 - 125

AP World History - Summer Assignment

PURPOSE

- To review critical components of **geography, historical trends and core concepts in world history from 10,000BCE - 600CE**.
- To assess **reading comprehension, writing and analytical skills**. The assignment is intended to provide exposure to the reading comprehension, thinking and writing skills required for the course; improving these skills will be a major focus of our class.
- To foster the development of **global awareness and open-mindedness –** along with the other essential "habits of mind," approaches to learning and time management necessary for participation in an advanced placement course.

REQUIREMENTS

This assignment serves as a mandatory prerequisite for enrollment in the course.

- All assignments must represent independent work and comply with the academic integrity standards and codes of conduct found in the USCHS student handbook.
- Non-compliance with any stated criteria will lead to an automatic zero.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES + DEADLINE: 8/19/26 @ 8:10AM (NO EXCEPTIONS)

All tasks must be finished in accordance with the specified guidelines and submission directions.

- Submit a single file titled "Summer Assignment_Student's Last Name" (image or scanned PDF) uploaded to Canvas**.
- Multiple attachments, separate photos, typed / electronic notes or submissions that are illegible or inaccessible will not be accepted.
- The initial submission is final; no corrections or resubmissions are permitted.
- Late work will be assessed at a starting value of 50%. Students have 14 calendar days from the due date or until the assessment at 8:10am to submit for partial credit. Beyond this window, the grade becomes an automatic zero.

** Should you experience technical issues, it is your responsibility to ensure the assignment is emailed PRIOR TO THE DEADLINE. And you must then contact your teacher during EXTENDED HOMEROOM on 8/19/2026.

QUESTIONS

Throughout the summer, email accounts will be monitored periodically; however, immediate replies are not guaranteed.

Ms. Kierah Hanna - khanna@uscsd.k12.pa.us
Mr. Matt Martocci - mmartocci@uscsd.k12.pa.us

Part 1: Geography Review

This is an independent study and review activity. There is no submission for this part of the assignment.

Directions:

1. **LOCATE** - Identify on a map all of the following regions, geographic features and concepts.

2. **DEFINE** - Describe the significance of all concepts.

3. **STUDY** - **The assessment based on this assignment will be administered on 8/20/26.** The assessment will be a blank map with the task to locate and label selected regions, geographic features and concepts AND provide a definition / description of the concepts.

<table>
<tr><th>Regions</th><th>Physical Features</th><th>Concepts</th></tr>
<tr>
<td>Be able to identify modern nations that are categorized within each region.

● North America
● Central America
● South America
● Caribbean
● Europe
● Southwest Asia
● North Africa
● East Africa
● West Africa
● Sub-Saharan Africa
● Central Asia
● East Asia
● South Asia
● Southeast Asia
● Oceania

Be familiar with the terms: Afro-Eurasia and Mesoamerica</td>
<td rowspan="2">● Atlantic Ocean
● Pacific Ocean
● Indian Ocean
● Mediterranean Sea
● Caribbean Sea
● Black Sea
● Red Sea
● Persian Gulf
● Arabian Sea
● South China Sea

● Indus River
● Ganges River
● Yangtze River
● Yellow River
● Tigris and Euphrates Rivers
● Nile River
● Mississippi River
● Amazon River

● Bosphorus
● Strait of Hormuz
● Swahili Coast
● Sahara Desert
● Sahel
● Mongolian Steppe
● Himalaya Mountains
● Andes Mountains
● monsoons</td>
<td rowspan="2">Early Civilizations
● First River Valley Civilizations c. 10,000-8000BCE
● Political Units c. 800-750BCE

Classical + (Early) Post-Classical Civilizations
● Persian Empire (Acahademenid Dynasty)
● Greek City-States
● Roman Empire c. 300CE
● Byzantine Empire
● Chinese Empire (Qin and Han Dynasties)
● Indian Empire (Mauryan + Gupta Dynasties)
● Aksum / Ethiopia
● Maya
● Aztec
● Inca
● Islamic Empire c. 750CE

Regional and Transregional Trade
● Silk Road Trade Route
● Trans-Saharan Trade Route
● Indian Ocean Trade Network
● Atlantic Trade Network

Proto-Globalization
● route of the Bubonic Plague (Black Death) c. 14th century
● examples of European global exploration c. 15th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography of Belief Systems

Be able to identify the distribution of the world's major belief systems (see map p. 123), including where each originated and spread over time.

● Christianity
● Islam
● Judaism
● Hinduism
● Buddhism
● Confucianism, Daoism</td>
</tr>
</table>

Part 2: Textbook Reading + Note Taking

This reading and note taking activity serves as an introduction to the topics covered in Ancient World History (10,000BCE - 600CE). All tasks must be finished in accordance with the specified guidelines and submission directions.

Directions:

1. **READ** - Actively read the provided textbook **chapters 2-5.**
    - Print copies of the chapters are distributed on Move Up Day (6/4/26) or can be picked up at the HS Counseling Department Office.
    - Electronic copies of the chapters are accessible on the HS Counseling Department website under Summer Assignments (see QR Code link).



2. **TAKE NOTES** - Notes must be **hand-written on paper**.
    - Organize notes following the provided template (see page 3).
    - See Canvas submission instructions (see page 1).

Note: Students are required to bring a PAPER copy of the notes and textbook to all class meetings.

3. **STUDY** - **The assessment based on chapters 2-5 will be administered on 8/24/26**. The assessment will be a combination of objective questions and written responses. Some questions will require the ability to interpret sources (i.e. primary and secondary sources and visual sources) and apply concepts.

Note Taking Template

Chapter # + Title: _____

Citation	Note Taking	Questions + Additions
Record the page numbers next to the correspondi ng notes.	Record notes using the sections and subheadings as an outline.	Formulate 3-5 questions per chapter on the reading for clarification and/or discussion.
	Below is an outline of the first two sections of chapter 1 as an example of how to organize the notes. At the conclusion of each subheading, record main ideas, evidence and relevant dates + vocabulary terms or concepts. **(1) Human Life in the Era of Hunters and Gatherers** ● Late Paleolithic Developments *[ADD YOUR NOTES]* **(2) Neolithic Revolution** ● Geography of Early Agriculture *[ADD YOUR NOTES]* ● Patterns of Change *[ADD YOUR NOTES]* ● Further Technological Change *[ADD YOUR NOTES]*	

Chapter Reflection

For each chapter, reflect on your learning, the major themes and concepts. Ask yourself, “What is the significance of this information?” or “How does this information fit in with what I already know?”. Each reflection should be a paragraph of approximately 3-5 sentences.

Prologue

The study of history is the study of the past. Knowledge of the past gives us perspective on our societies today. It shows different ways in which people have identified problems and tried to resolve them, as well as important common impulses in the human experience. History can inform through its variety, remind us of some human constants, and provide a common vocabulary and examples that aid in mutual communication.

The study of history is also the study of change. Historians analyze major changes in the human experience over time and examine the ways in which those changes connect the past to the present. They try to distinguish between superficial and fundamental change, as well as between sudden and gradual change. They explain why change occurs and what impact it has. Finally, they pinpoint continuities from the past along with innovations. History, in other words, is a study of human society in motion.

World history has become a subject in its own right. It involves the study of historical events in a global context. It does not attempt to sum up everything that has happened in the past. World history focuses on two principal subjects: the evolution of leading societies and the interaction among different peoples around the globe.

The Emergence of World History

Serious attempts to deal with world history are relatively recent. Many historians have attempted to locate the evolution of their own societies in the context of developments in a larger "known world": Herodotus, though particularly interested in the origins of Greek culture, wrote also of developments around the Mediterranean; Ibn Khaldun wrote of what he knew about developments in Africa and Europe as well as in the Muslim world. But not until the 20th century, with an increase in international contacts and a vastly expanded knowledge of the historical patterns of major societies, did a full world history become possible. In the West, world history depended on a growing realization that the world could not be understood simply as a mirror reflecting the West's greater glory or as a stage for Western-dominated power politics. This hard-won realization continues to meet some resistance. Nevertheless, historians in several societies have attempted to develop an international approach to the subject that includes, but goes beyond, merely establishing a context for the emergence of their own civilizations.

Our understanding of world history has been increasingly shaped by two processes that define historical inquiry: detective work and debate. Historians are steadily uncovering new data not just about particular societies but about lesser-known contacts. Looking at a variety of records and artifacts, for example, they learn how an 8th-century battle between Arab and Chinese forces in central Asia brought Chinese prisoners who knew how to make paper to the Middle East, where their talents were quickly put to work. And they argue about world history frameworks: how central European actions should be in the world history of the past 500 years, and whether a standard process of modernization is useful or distorting in measuring developments in modern Turkey or China. Through debate come advances in how world history is understood and conceptualized, just as the detective work advances the factual base.

Humans have always shown a tendency to operate in groups that provide a framework for economic activities, governance, and cultural forms such as beliefs and artistic styles. These groups, or societies, may be quite small; hunting-and-gathering bands often numbered no more than 60 people. World history usually focuses on somewhat larger societies, with more extensive economic relationships (at least for trade) and cultures.

One vital kind of grouping is called civilization. The idea of civilization as a type of human society is central to most world history, though it also generates debate and though historians are now agreed that it is not the only kind of grouping that warrants attention. Civilizations, unlike some other societies, generate surpluses beyond basic survival needs. This in turn promotes a variety of specialized occupations and heightened social differentiation, as well as regional and long-distance trading networks. Surplus production also spurs the growth of cities and the development of formal states, with some bureaucracy, in contrast to more informal methods of governing. Most civilizations have also developed systems of writing.

Civilizations are not necessarily better than other kinds of societies. Nomadic groups have often demonstrated great creativity in technology and social relationships, and some were more vigorous than settled civilizations in promoting global contacts. Moreover, there is disagreement about exactly what defines a civilization—for example, what about cases like the Incas where there was no writing?

Used carefully, however, the idea of civilization as a form of human social organization, and an unusually extensive one, has merit. Along with agriculture (which developed earlier), civilizations have given human groups the capacity to fundamentally reshape their environments and to dominate most other living creatures. The history of civilizations embraces most of the people who have ever lived; their literature, formal scientific discoveries, art, music, architecture, and inventions; their most elaborate social, political, and economic systems; their brutality and destruction caused by conflicts; their exploitation of other species; and their degradation of the environment—a result of changes in technology and the organization of work.

The study of civilizations always involves more, however, than case-by-case detail. World history makes sense only if civilizations are compared, rather than treated separately. Equally important, civilizations (and other societies) developed important mutual contacts, which could have wide impact in reshaping several societies at the same time. And civilizations responded to still wider forces, like migration, disease, or missionary activity, that could reshape the frameworks within which they operated. Civilizations in these wider contexts—as they changed through internal dynamics, mutual interactions, and responses to broader forces—form the basic patterns of world history for the past 5000 years.

PART II

The Classical Period, 1000 B.C.E.–500 C.E.: Uniting Large Regions

Chapter 2 Classical Civilization: China

Chapter 3 Classical Civilization: India

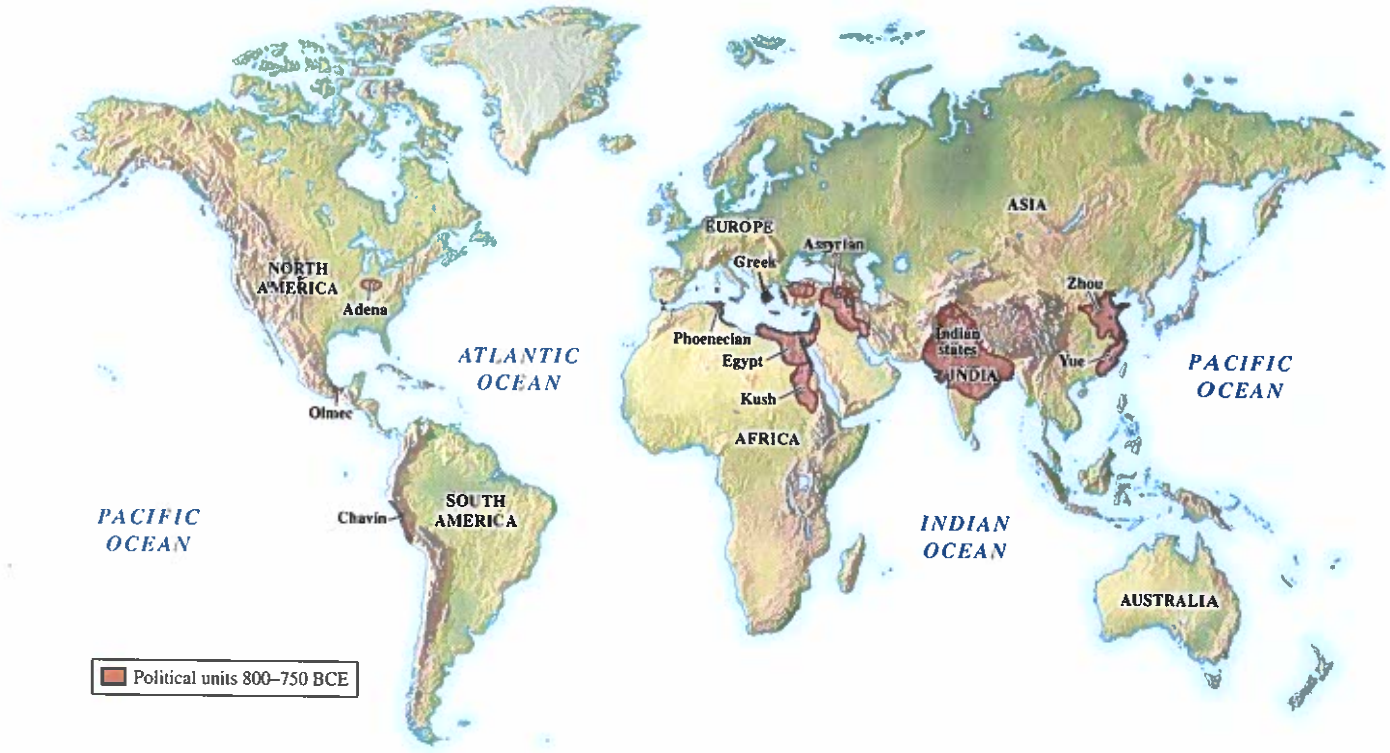
Chapter 4 Classical Civilization in the Mediterranean: Greece and Rome

Chapter 5 The Classical Period: Directions, Diversities, and Declines by 500 C.E.

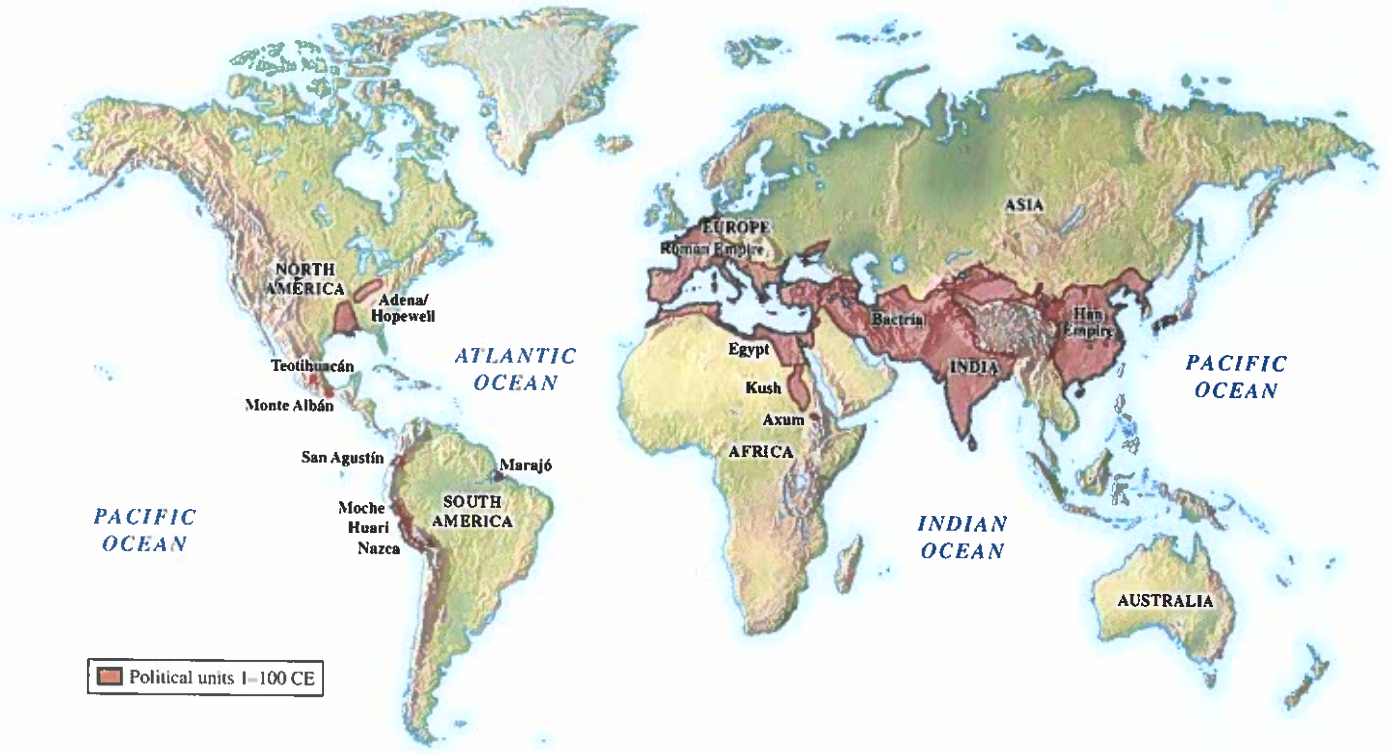
The major development during the classical period of world history was the formation of large regional civilizations in China, India, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, East Africa, and Mesoamerica. These developments can be seen in the accompanying maps. The map on the top depicts the Eastern Hemisphere early in the classical period (around 800 B.C.E.); the map on the bottom shows the same area around 100 C.E. In China and the Mediterranean, what had been a set of small states—or no states at all—had been replaced by two giant empires. India also developed substantial empires at several key points in the classical centuries.

Although much of the world remained outside the main areas of civilization, these areas had by far the largest concentration of population. Furthermore, the influence of these civilizations extended into surrounding regions outside their direct control. Classical civilizations also had important relationships with nomadic groups, mostly from central Asia, who traded with them and periodically attempted invasion. Nevertheless, regions outside the world's main civilizational areas require some separate attention during this long period.

Except for brief interludes, the main civilizations did not share direct borders. Much of the development of each civilization was separate, and the establishment of distinctive cultural and institutional patterns was a key legacy of this period. Nevertheless, trade offered some contacts, as products like silk were carried from east Asia to the Mediterranean. Occasionally interaction was more direct. The conquests of the Greek-trained warrior Alexander the Great resulted in the creation of a short-lived empire that stretched from the Mediterranean into northwestern India. This empire brought into direct contact Mediterranean, cultural Asian, Middle-Eastern, and Indian societies, an encounter that yielded interesting results, some of which are clearly evident in art of the period. For example, a statue sculpted by an Indian artist depicts the beloved Buddha clothed in Greek fashions. This combination of cultural elements, called syncretism, is a common result of significant contact between cultures. It can have lasting implications. Syncretism was not the most common feature of the classical period, but its occurrence hinted at what would develop more fully later.



Political Units of the World, c. 800–750 B.C.E.



Political Units of the World, c. 1–100 C.E.

BIG CONCEPTS

The formation of the classical societies involved two striking features. First was the emergence and standardization (within each society) of key cultural and religious traditions and second, in the political real, was the development of state and empires—again, with each society producing some characteristic political forms within this category. Finally, as the period's third overarching feature, the contacts that did develop among different regions spurred trade and, to some degree, communication. All three of these features would affect world history long after the classical period had itself ended.

TRIGGERS FOR CHANGE

Despite the lack of a clear transition, the classical civilizations that began to emerge about 1000 B.C.E. were measurably different from their river valley predecessors. While they built on the earlier achievements, they grew noticeably larger in their geographic, cultural, economic, and political reach.

What allowed this greater reach was military conquest, made possible by the introduction of iron tools and weapons, beginning about 1500 B.C.E.

As larger empires developed, leaders worked to tie their territories together both commercially and culturally. New trade links emerged, sometimes encouraged by new infrastructure such as canals (China) or postal service (Persia). Religion and philosophy were formalized and disseminated as part of training a cohesive elite. New conquests, possible in part because of technological change, led to further developments intended to integrate larger regions.

Each of the classical societies ultimately declined, and great empires like the Han dynasty in China, the Gupta in India, and the western Roman Empire collapsed altogether. Though these developments did not happen at exactly the same time, together they brought the classical period to a close by 500 C.E.

THE BIG CHANGES

Each of the classical civilizations had its own social structure, religion, political system, system of science, and styles of art. Comparisons of these differences, which have continued to the present day, form a vital part of studying the classical period. To take one example: in the late 20th century the Chinese government proved reasonably effective in mandating drastic changes in birth rates. The Indian government tried and failed to enforce somewhat similar regulations. Many factors accounted for China's success and India's failure in enforcing a population policy, but an important one was the extent to which people in each country accepted as legitimate government monitoring of personal behavior. These differences in attitude can be traced back to the classical period. The civilization styles

5000 B.C.E	2000 B.C.E.	1000 B.C.E.	750 B.C.E.	500 B.C.E.
5000 Early Japanese Settlement	2000 Germans settle in Denmark 1200–700 Vedas composed 1500–500 Polynesian migrations 1122–770 Initial Zhou kingdom	1000 Germans expand southward 900 Maya begins 850–250 Chavin culture (Andes) 800 Rise of Greek city-states 800 B.C.E.–1000 C.E. Bantu migration, sub-Saharan Africa 770–403 Later Zhou kingdom; beginning of China's classical period	750–600 Meroë (Kush) rules Egypt 600 Zoroastrian religion in Iran 600 Legendary ruler in Japan 551–c. 233 Periods of the great Chinese philosophers: Confucius, Laozi, Mencius, Legalists 550 Formation of Persian Empire C. 542–483 Buddha	500–449 Greek wars with Persia; Persia defeated 500–450 Beginnings of Roman republic 470–430 Height of Athenian culture; Socrates and Greek philisophical style 431 ff. Peloponnesian Wars; decline of Greece 330 Alexander the Great 327–325 Alexander's invasion 322–185 Mauryan Empire 300–100 Hellenistic Period 300 B.C.E.–900 C.E. Heights of Maya 264–140 Roman expansion in North Africa (Punic Wars) and eastern Mediterranean

set in the classical period hardly predetermined the future, but they had, and have, undeniable influence.

The first major change, then, was the establishment of cultures that developed over time during the classical period and left durable legacies. All of the major civilizations set up vigorous internal trade that allowed considerable regional specialization—each region within a civilization produced the crops most suitable to its ecology and traded for other necessities.

Each major civilization promoted a common cultural system that would legitimate characteristic social and family customs, integrate elites, and provide bonds between ordinary people and leadership groups. This system might involve more than one component. For example, there was outright, though usually peaceful, competition between Buddhism and Hinduism in India. But the generation of powerful beliefs and their spread within each civilization was an important development in the classical period, and one that had lasting impact.

Each major civilization, at least periodically, conquered other peoples and areas and created large empires. Although empires were not new in world history, those of the classical period in world history were more powerful and widespread than any precedent.

The growth of the classical civilizations, with their impressive achievements and monuments, clearly had an impact on surrounding peoples. Some trade with neighboring regions was common. India had the widest commercial reach, extending all the way into southeast Asia, but Rome also traded with parts of Africa and Asia outside its own empire. Even more widely, nomadic peoples were often attracted toward the centers of civilization as immigrants, soldiers, or invaders. Some nomadic peoples facilitated trade between civilizations. These developments were important at the time and had implications for later patterns in world history. For example, cultural and trade contacts often prepared the way for later nomadic migrations into the classical societies.

The achievements of the major classical civilizations inspired awe, at the time and later. Great developments in philosophy, politics, and art in classical civilizations provided the foundations for subsequent civilizations. Confucianism, for example, would influence other Asian societies besides China, and a number of societies would build on the achievements of Greek science. It is for this reason that the term *classical* is commonly used to refer to this period.

CONTINUITY

While the introduction of iron helped usher in the classical period, the period itself did not witness sweeping technological developments. Most peasants continued to use traditional agricultural tools and methods. Similarly, except for the improved road systems introduced by more powerful governments,

250 B.C.E.	1 C.E.	250 C.E.	500 C.E.	750 C.E.
221 Shi Huangdi proclaimed first emperor of China 202 B.C.E.–9 C.E. Initial Han dynasty; key technical developments of horse collar and water mill 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E. Greater Buddhist influence 133 ff. Decline of Roman republic 100 Germans begin contact with Rome; Slavs migrate into eastern Europe	23–220 Later Han dynasty; invention of paper and compass 27 Augustus founds Roman Empire 30 Crucifixion of Jesus 88 Beginning of Han decline 106 Height of Roman territory 180 Beginning of decline of Rome 200–500 Nasca culture (Andes) 200–700 Mochica culture (Andes) 200–1300 Anasazi in North America 220 Last Han emperor deposed	300 Decline of Meroë 300 Spread of Buddhism 300–400 Yamato claim imperial control of Japan 300–700 Rise of Axum; conversion to Chistianity 300–900 Intermediate Horizon period (Andes) 300–1000 Second wave of Polynesian migrations to Hawaii 312–337 Constantine; formation of Eastern Empire; adoption of Christianity 319–540 Gupta Empire 400 Chinese script imported 401 ff. Large-scale Germanic invasions in Roman Empire	451 First Han invasion 476 Last Roman emperor in West 527–565 Justinian Eastern emperor 580 ff. Spread of Buddhism in Japan 589–618 Sui dynasty 600–647 Harsha's Empire 618 Tang dynasty 700 ff. Spread of Islam; trans-Sahara trade in Africa	800–1300 Mississippian culture 900 Polynesians to New Zealand 900–1200 Toltecs 1000 Height of kingdom of Ghana, Africa

there were no great advances in transportation during this period. Rural culture remained somewhat apart from classical culture, particularly in China and the Mediterranean. Many rural people retained their traditional festivals and polytheistic religious beliefs alongside official religions and philosophies.

Patriarchal culture prevailed in each of the major civilizations of the classical period. Each culture had particular ways of defining women's roles and obligations. Comparisons among the classical civilizations are important in this area, for different styles of patriarchy would affect family life and even art, but the basic idea of patriarchal superiority had already been established. The civilizations simply related a patriarchal system to the particular cultures they developed and emphasized.

Finally, though the classical civilizations all introduced significant innovations beyond their river valley predecessors, they also retained and built on key achievements of the earlier societies. They did not have to reinvent money, the idea of codes of law, or scientific interests such as astronomy. While the classical civilizations left a heritage that shaped future developments, they also drew upon a heritage established in earlier periods.

IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE: OLD AGE

In all the classical civilizations, the achievement of old age won respect. It was seen, legitimately enough, as a sign of good habits and wisdom. Furthermore, in groups where literacy was uncommon, the elderly could be vital sources of information and cultural memory—the kinds of stories that help shape the identity of families and cultures. Respect for the elderly was a sign of good manners in all the classical societies.

But the classical civilizations also differed in their attitudes toward the elderly. Chinese Confucianism placed particular emphasis on venerating the elderly. Even older women, if they were mothers (and especially if they were widows and mothers of sons) had clear status, although officially their sons ran the household.

In Mediterranean cultures, there was greater ambivalence concerning older people. The themes of

wisdom and respect were visible (though they applied much more clearly to men than to women). But the elderly also were depicted as both greedy and laughable as their capacities declined. Stories made fun of old misers or men who lusted after younger women. In the Mediterranean, more attention was paid to the physical and mental deterioration of older people, and while this sometimes produced sympathy, it could also generate scorn. The Greek dramatist Aeschylus wrote about people "old in their bones, dishonored, cut off," and the Bible offered many accounts of enfeebled, foolish elders. Societies that placed great emphasis on military prowess and youthful beauty could be harsh to people past their prime, and in the Mediterranean, there was no systematic set of beliefs, like Confucianism, to cut through these contradictions.

Did these cultural differences matter in the actual way older people were treated? Here, the evidence is sketchier; we know much more about classical value systems than about the details of daily life. What is clear is that this ambivalence toward the elderly had staying power. Even today, many argue, ambivalence about older people that goes back to Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews affects policy and outlook in the West, while in contrast, some east Asian systems write respect for the elderly into their constitutions.

TRENDS AND SOCIETIES

Initial chapters in this section describe developments in each of the major civilizations during the classical period, starting with China in Chapter 2 and India in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 returns to the Mediterranean, to take up the history of Greece and Rome. Chapter 5 returns to the main classical centers, dealing with patterns of decline and with concurrent religious innovations, including the rise of Christianity. The story of the decline of each civilization was distinct, but the overall pattern of change had some important common features.

2 Classical Civilization: China

Establishment of Political Order
Patterns in Classical China
Political Institutions
VISUALIZING THE PAST: Capital Designs and Patterns of Political Power
Religion and Culture
DOCUMENT: Teachings of the Rival Chinese Schools
Economy and Society
THINKING HISTORICALLY: Women in Patriarchal Societies
How Chinese Civilization Fits Together
GLOBAL CONNECTIONS: Classical China and the World

Late in the 6th century B.C.E., a brilliant middle-aged scholar-philosopher applied for a high post in the bureaucracy of the small kingdom of Lu in northeast China. Perhaps because Kong Fuzi—or Confucius as he came to be known centuries later in the West—was widely reputed to be an opinionated and outspoken person, he was denied the position for which he was confident he was well qualified. Angered by this rebuff, Confucius left Lu and took to the road in search of the ideal ruler, who presumably would recognize his talents and offer him employment at a suitable level of distinction at his court.

The China of Confucius's day offered abundant options for a talented political advisor. The declining power of the Zhou kingdom, which had for centuries dominated early Chinese civilization along the Yellow River, opened the way for the rise of a patchwork of rival states. Many of these competing states were ruled by nomadic peoples who had migrated from the north or west. Wars between these upstart forces and the lords of long-established households with imperial pretensions were frequent, banditry was widespread, commerce was threatened, and displaced peasants and warrior bands wandered throughout the countryside. The monarchs of some nomad kingdoms had extensively adopted the distinct culture that had been developing in the Huanghe region since the age of the Shang warrior kings. Nonetheless, Confucius and others in the emerging scholar-gentry—or shi—social strata continued to regard most of the nomads as uncouth, warlike barbarians. Convinced that he was a man with a mission, Confucius undertook a lifelong quest to become the chief advisor to a ruler who possessed the vision and skills to restore centralized control, peace, and order.

One among many wandering scholars in the late Zhou era, Confucius attracted numerous disciples, some of whom became distinguished philosophers in their own right. The master's students preserved, spread, and debated his teachings, and after his death in the early 5th century B.C.E., they compiled his wisdom in what would come to be known as the *Analects*, or collected sayings: hence, "Confucius says."

Over time, Confucius's political and social philosophy became foundational for one of humanity's greatest and most enduring civilizations. In view of the turmoil in China when Confucian teachings were formulated, it is not surprising that they idealized strong rulers and the consolidation of political power. Confucius advocated rule by a highly educated, exclusively male elite, but one that was deemed responsible for the well-being of all of the subjects of the state. Primarily an ethical rather than a religious system, Confucianism sought to establish norms for all aspects of Chinese life, from relationships within the family that stressed respect for one's elders to manners for rulers and subjects. Confucianism also highlighted the importance of art, music, and elegant calligraphy in the cultivation of the scholar-bureaucrats.

Measured in terms of the acquisition of wealth and power, Confucius was a failure. He never found his ideal monarch, or even a suitable post at any of the numerous royal households that jostled for dominance across China. In fact, in the centuries following his death—often appropriately designated as the era of the warring states—political and social disintegration intensified. But the students and disciples of Confucius found a large and enthusiastic audience for his teachings in these troubled times. ■



Figure 2.1 This painting, *The First Emperor of the Han Dynasty Entering Guandang* by Zhao Bozhu seeks to capture the pomp and splendor associated with the founder of the Han dynasty, one of the most powerful and long-lived in Chinese history. By the last centuries B.C.E., large, richly attired entourages, which often moved about among several palaces and walled cities, were deemed essential for the emperors and regional lords who had become the dominant force in Chinese political life.

This chapter focuses on the conditions that gave rise to Confucianism as well as the teachings of rival philosophical systems, such as Legalism, Daoism, and Buddhism. As we shall see, even as late as the end of the 3rd century B.C.E., when Chinese political unity was again restored by the warrior strongman Shi Huangdi's kingdom of Qin, Confucian social norms and political prescriptions were eclipsed by more authoritarian alternatives. But with the rise of the Han dynasty after 207 B.C.E., the teachings of Confucius and several of his more prominent followers came to provide the ideological underpinnings of both the Chinese state and society. In subsequent dynasties, the influence of Confucianism waxed and waned, but even after its alleged extinction in the crisis-ridden decades of the 20th century, it has persisted as a major cultural force to the present day. Confucianism has also exerted a pervasive and enduring influence on other societies throughout Asia, from Japan and Korea through central Asia and southward into present-day Vietnam. China's Confucian ideals, scholar-gentry bureaucracy, technological advancements, and prosperous agrarian state captivated major thinkers in Europe and the United States—from Jesuit missionaries to Thomas Jefferson.

Establishment of Political Order

A period of political disorganization led to concerted efforts to promote political order, with cultural emphases to match.

The Zhou dynasty's ability to control its vassals broke down in the 8th century B.C.E. and led to a long period of political conflict and social turmoil throughout China. Political structures developed in key phases, with cultural traditions contributing as well. In both the Yellow and the Yangzi river basins, many states rose and fell, each seeking to replace the Zhou as the paramount power in east Asia. Chinese expansions to the south and west created periodic instability as local peoples tried to defend themselves. Internal conflicts left China vulnerable to outside invaders, and between the 8th and 3rd centuries B.C.E., nomadic peoples often raided the farming areas of the north China plain. Many of the nomads settled down and eventually assimilated the distinct culture that had been developing in the region since the age of the Shang warrior kings. Some of these invaders captured existing states; others established new dynasties that further intensified the already complex political maneuvers and wars for supremacy.

1200 B.C.E.	500 B.C.E.	250 B.C.E.
1029–258 Zhou dynasty; introduction of a standard spoken language 551–478 Life of Confucius	c. 500 Laozi and Daoism c. 500 Editing of the Five Classics c. 450 Development of Chinese calendar 402–201 Era of the Warring States	221–202 Qin dynasty: the First Emperor, the Great Wall begun, a single basic language 202 B.C.E.–220 C.E. Han dynasty c. 200 Introduction of ox-drawn plow, horse collar, water mill 141–87 Reign of Han Wu Ti, increased bureaucracy; examinations, spread of Confucianism

Shi Huangdi [shiuh-hwahng-dee] Founder of the brief Qin dynasty in 221 B.C.E.

Qin dynasty [chin] Established in 221 B.C.E. at the end of the Warring States period following the decline of the Zhou dynasty; fell in 207 B.C.E.

Han dynasty Chinese dynasty that succeeded the Qin in 202 B.C.E.; ruled for next 400 years.

The yearning for unity and an end to civil strife appeared to be answered in the 3rd century B.C.E. by the emergence of the warrior strongman **Shi Huangdi** (shiuh-hwahng-dee). By 221 B.C.E., Shi Huangdi's state of **Qin** (chin) had vanquished all its rivals, and he founded a new imperial dynasty that promised to bring an end to the centuries of strife. But Shi Huangdi proved to be a tyrant. His death in 210 B.C.E. was the signal for resistance throughout the empire to the rule of his less despotic and less capable son and his inner circle of advisors. A rapidly spreading revolt, led by two peasants, toppled the Qin dynasty in 207 B.C.E. and gave rise to its much longer-lived successor, the **Han.**

The Han era, which lasted, with a brief interruption, for more than 400 years, saw the consolidation of Chinese civilization. Unity was established in the old core regions, and Chinese political control was greatly extended in all directions. Perhaps more critically, the Han rulers founded the largest, most effective, and most enduring bureaucracy in the preindustrial world. They oversaw the development of the first civil service examinations and the professionalization of Chinese administration. These institutions helped build a sense of Chinese distinctiveness and identity that was reflected in later centuries by Chinese references to themselves as the "sons of Han." This identity proved critical to the survival of Chinese civilization in the centuries of war, foreign invasion, and internal division that returned when the Han dynasty collapsed in the early 3rd century C.E.

Cultural Traditions

China generated the first of the great classical societies. The region's isolation limited its ability to learn from other cultures but also spared it frequent invasion and encouraged an intense, and distinctive, Chinese identity. The decline of the Shang dynasty did not result in as much internal chaos as did invasions of parts of the Middle East and particularly India. Hence, the Chinese could build more strongly on Huang he precedents, including technological advancements. Particularly important was a general, if somewhat vague, worldview developed by thinkers in the Shang and Zhou dynasties and accepted as a standard approach in later Chinese thinking. This intellectual heritage stressed the basic harmony of nature: every feature is balanced by an opposite, every *yin* by a *yang*. Thus for hot there is cold, for male, female. According to this philosophy, an individual should seek a way to relate to this harmony, avoiding excess and appreciating the balance of opposites. Individuals and human institutions existed within this world of balanced nature not, as in later Mediterranean philosophy, on the outside. Chinese traditions about balance, Dao, and yin/yang were intrinsic to diverse philosophies and religions established in the classical period, and they provided some unity among various schools of thought in China.

Despite important cultural continuity, classical China did not simply maintain earlier traditions. The formative centuries of classical Chinese history were witness to a great many changes. The religious and particularly the political habits of the Shang kingdom were substantially modified as China built the world's largest classical empire. These new developments led to much diversity, but also to often painful conflict. From them, the Chinese emerged with an unusually well integrated system in which government, philosophy, economic incentives, the family, and the individual were intended to blend into a harmonious whole.

Patterns in Classical China

The Zhou dynasty featured decentralized politics but important cultural innovations, while later dynasties emphasized order and centralization.

Of all the societies in the world today, it is China that has maintained the clearest links to its classical past—a past that has been a source of pride but also the cause of some problems of adaptation. Already in the period of classical Chinese history, a pattern was set in motion that lasted until the

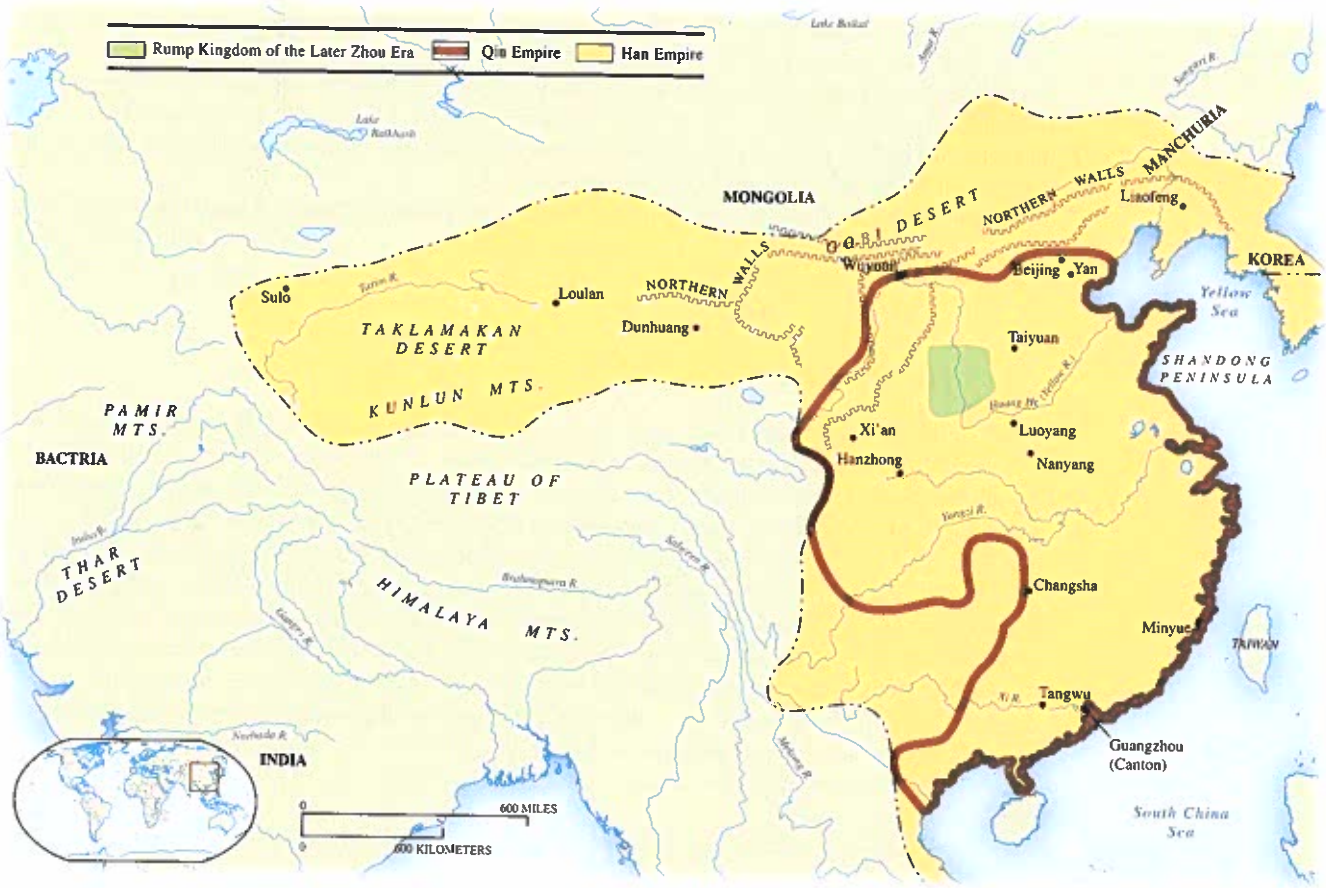
early part of the 20th century. A family of kings, called a *dynasty,* would start its rule of China with great vigor, developing strong political institutions and encouraging an active economy. Subsequently, the dynasty grew weaker and tax revenues declined, while social divisions increased in the larger society. Internal rebellions and sometimes invasions from the outside hastened the dynasty's decline. As the ruling dynasty declined, another dynasty emerged, usually from the family of a successful general, invader, or peasant rebel, and the pattern would start anew. Small wonder that many Chinese conceive of history in terms of cycles, in contrast to the Western tendency to think of steady progress from past to present.

The Zhou Dynasty

Three dynastic cycles cover the many centuries of classical China: the Zhou, the Qin, and the Han (Map 2.1). The **Zhou** (joh) dynasty lasted from 1029 to 258 B.C.E. Although lengthy, this dynasty flourished only until about 700 B.C.E.; it was then beset by a decline in the political infrastructure and frequent invasions by nomadic peoples from border regions. Even during its strong centuries, the Zhou did not establish a powerful government, ruling instead through alliances with regional princes and noble families. The dynasty initially came into China from the north, displacing its predecessor, the Shang rulers. The alliance systems the Zhou used as the basis for their rule were standard in agricultural kingdoms. (We will see similar forms later emerge in Japan, India, Europe, and Africa.) Rulers lacked the means to control their territories directly and so gave large regional estates to members of their families and other supporters, hoping that their loyalties would remain intact. The supporters, in exchange for land, were supposed to provide the central government with troops and tax revenues. This was China's feudal period, with rulers depending on a network of loyalties and obligations to and from their landlord-vassals. Such a

MAP China in the Shang and Zhou Eras

Zhou [joh] Originally a vassal family of Shang China; possibly Turkic in origin; overthrew the Shang and established second historical Chinese dynasty that flourished 1122 to 256 B.C.E.



Map 2.1 China from the Later Zhou Era to the Han Era As this map showing the boundaries of successive Chinese dynasties illustrates the extent of the early Han empire greatly exceeded even that of the Qin dynasty, which was the first to effectively unify the core regions of Chinese civilization.

system was, of course, vulnerable to regional disloyalties, and the ultimate decline of the Zhou dynasty occurred when regional land-owning aristocrats solidified their own power base and disregarded the central government.

The Zhou did, however, contribute in several ways to the development of Chinese politics and culture in their active early centuries. First, they extended the territory of China by encouraging settlers to move into the Yangzi River valley. While the Zhou were too weak to take this territory over directly, the expanded settlement, from the Huang he to the Yangzi, became China's core—often called the "Middle Kingdom." It provided rich agricultural lands plus the benefits of two different agricultures—wheat-growing in the north, rice-growing in the south—a diversity that encouraged population growth. The territorial expansion obviously complicated the problems of central rule, for communication and transport from the capital to the outlying regions were difficult.

Despite limited control over key regions, the Zhou did actually heighten the focus on the central government. Zhou rulers claimed direct links to the Shang rulers. They also asserted that heaven had transferred its mandate to rule China to the Zhou emperors. This political concept of a Mandate of Heaven remained a key justification for Chinese imperial rule from the Zhou onward. Known as Sons of Heaven, the emperors lived in a world of awe-inspiring pomp and ceremony.

The Zhou worked to provide greater cultural unity in their empire. They discouraged some of the primitive religious practices of the Huang he civilization, banning human sacrifice and urging more restrained ceremonies to worship the gods. They also promoted linguistic unity, beginning the process by which a standard spoken language, ultimately called Mandarin Chinese, would prevail over the entire Middle Kingdom. This resulted in the largest single group of people speaking the same language in the world at this time. Regional dialects and languages remained, but educated officials began to rely on the single Mandarin form. Oral epics and stories in Chinese, many gradually recorded in written form, aided in the development of a common cultural currency.

Confucius Also known as Kung Fuzi; major Chinese philosopher born in 6th century B.C.E.; author of *Analects*; philosophy based on need for restoration of order through advice of superior men to be found among the shi.

Increasing cultural unity helps explain why, when the Zhou empire began to fail, scholars were able to use philosophical ideas to lessen the impact of growing political confusion. Indeed, the political crisis spurred efforts to define and articulate Chinese culture. During the late 6th and early 5th centuries B.C.E., the philosopher known in the West as **Confucius** wrote an elaborate statement on political ethics, providing the core of China's distinctive philosophical heritage. Other writers and religious leaders participated in this great period of cultural creativity, which later reemerged as a set of central beliefs throughout the Middle Kingdom.

Cultural innovation did not, however, reverse the prolonged and painful Zhou downfall. Regional rulers formed independent armies, ultimately reducing the emperors to little more than figureheads. Between 402 and 201 B.C.E., a period known aptly enough as the Era of the Warring States, the Zhou system disintegrated.

The Qin Dynasty

At this point, China might have gone the way of civilizations such as India, where centralized government was more the exception than the rule. But a new dynasty arose to reverse the process of political decay. One regional ruler deposed the last Zhou emperor and within 35 years made himself sole ruler of China. The young warrior took the imperial title Qin Shi Huangdi, or "the tiger." The dynastic name, Qin, conferred on the whole country its name of China. Shi Huangdi was a brutal ruler, but effective given the circumstances of internal disorder. He understood that China's problem lay in the regional power of the aristocrats, and like many later centralizers in world history, he worked vigorously to undo this force. He ordered nobles to leave their regions and appear at his court, assuming control of their feudal estates. China was organized into large provinces ruled by bureaucrats appointed by the emperor. Shi Huangdi was careful to select his officials from nonaristocratic groups, so that they would owe their power to him and not dare to develop their own independent bases. Under Shi Huangdi's rule, powerful armies crushed regional resistance.

Great Wall Chinese defensive fortification intended to keep out the nomadic invaders from the north; initiated during Qin dynasty and reign of Shi Huangdi.

The Great Wall



The First Emperor followed up on centralization by extending Chinese territory and political control to the south, reaching present-day Hong Kong on the South China Sea and even influencing northern Vietnam. In the north, to guard against outside invasions and to protect his own expansionist drives. Shi Huangdi built the **Great Wall,** extending over 3000 miles, wide enough for chari-

ots to move along its crest. This wall, probably the largest construction project in human history, was built by forced labor, conscripted by the central bureaucracy from among the peasantry.

The Qin dynasty was responsible for a number of innovations in Chinese politics and culture. To determine the empire's resources, Shi Huangdi ordered a national census, which provided data for the calculation of tax revenues and labor service. The government standardized coinage, weights, and measures through the entire realm. Even the length of axles on carts was regulated to promote coherent road planning. The government also made Chinese written script uniform, completing the process of creating a single basic language in which all educated Chinese could communicate. The government furthered agriculture, sponsoring new irrigation projects, and promoted manufacturing, particularly that of silk cloth. The activist government also attacked formal culture, burning many books. Thinking, according to Shi Huangdi, was likely to be subversive to his autocratic rule.

Although it created many durable features of Chinese government, the Qin dynasty was short-lived. Shi Huangdi's attacks on intellectuals and particularly the high taxes needed to support military expansion and the construction of the Great Wall made him fiercely unpopular. One opponent described the First Emperor as a monster who "had the heart of a tiger and a wolf. He killed men as though he thought he could never finish, he punished men as though he were afraid he would never get around to them all." On the emperor's death, in 210 B.C.E., massive revolts organized by aggrieved peasants broke out. One peasant leader defeated other opponents and in 202 B.C.E. established the third dynasty of classical China, the Han.

The Han Dynasty

The Han dynasty, which lasted over 400 years, to 220 C.E., rounded out China's basic political and intellectual structure. Han rulers retained the centralized administration of the Qin but sought to reduce the brutal repression of that period. Like many dynasties during the first flush of power, early Han rulers expanded Chinese territory, pushing into Korea, Indochina, and central Asia. This expansion gave rise to direct contact with India and also allowed the Chinese to develop contact with the Parthian Empire in the Middle East, through which trade with the Roman Empire around the Mediterranean was conducted. The most famous Han ruler, Wu Ti (140–87 B.C.E.), enforced peace throughout much of the continent of Asia, rather like the peace the Roman Empire would bring to the Mediterranean region a hundred years later, but embracing even more territory and a far larger population. Peace brought great prosperity to China itself. A Han historian conveys the self-satisfied, confident tone of the dynasty:

> The nation had met with no major disturbances so that, except in times of flood or drought, every person was well supplied and every family had enough to get along on. The granaries in the cities and the countryside were full and the government treasures were running over with wealth. In the capital the strings of cash had stacked up by the hundreds of millions until they could no longer be counted. In the central granary of the government, new grain was heaped on top of the old until the building was full and the grain overflowed and piled up outside, where it spoiled and became unfit to eat. Even the keepers of the community gates ate fine grain and meat.

Under the Han dynasty, the workings of the state bureaucracy also improved and the government was linked to formal training that emphasized the values of Confucian philosophy. Reversing the Qin dynasty's policies, Wu Ti urged support for Confucianism, seeing it as a vital supplement to formal measures on the government's part. Shrines were established to promote the worship of the ancient philosopher as a god.

The quality of Han rule declined after about two centuries. Central control weakened, and invasions from central Asia, spearheaded by a nomadic people called the Huns, who had long threatened China's northern borders, overturned the dynasty entirely. Between 220 and 589 C.E., China was in a state of chaos. Order and stability were finally restored, but by then the classical or formative period of Chinese civilization had ended. Well before the Han collapse, however, China had established distinctive political structures and cultural values of unusual clarity, capable, as it turned out, of surviving even three centuries of renewed confusion.

Political Institutions

The power of the emperor, the development of a bureaucracy, and the expansion of state functions became the hallmarks of classical Chinese politics.

The Qin and Han dynasties of classical China established a distinctive, and remarkably successful, kind of government. The Qin stressed central authority, whereas the Han expanded the powers of the bureaucracy. More than any other factor, it was the structure of this government that explained how such a vast territory could be effectively ruled—for the Chinese empire was indeed the largest political system in the classical world. This structure would change after the classical period, particularly in terms of streamlining and expanding bureaucratic systems and procedures, but it never required fundamental overhaul.

The political framework that emerged as a result of the long centuries of China's classical period had several key elements. Strong local units never disappeared. Like most successful agricultural societies, China relied heavily on tightly knit patriarchal families. Individual families were linked to other relatives in extended family networks that included brothers, uncles, and any living grandparents. Among the wealthy land-owning groups, family authority was enhanced by the practice of ancestor worship, which joined family members through rituals devoted to important forebears who had passed into the spirit world. For ordinary people, among whom ancestor worship was less common, village authority surmounted family rule. Village leaders helped farming families regulate property and coordinate planting and harvest work. During the Zhou dynasty, and also in later periods when dynasties weakened, the regional power of great landlords also played an important role at the village level. Landed nobles provided courts of justice and organized military troops.

Strong local rule was not the most significant or distinctive feature of Chinese government under the Qin and Han dynasties, however. Shi Huangdi not only attacked local rulers but also provided a single law code for the whole empire and established a uniform tax system. He appointed governors to each district of his domain, who exercised military and legal powers in the name of the emperor. They, in turn, named officials responsible for smaller regions. Here indeed was a classic model of centralized government that other societies would replicate in later times: the establishment of centralized codes and appointment of officials directly by a central authority, rather than reliance on arrangements with numerous existing local governments. The effectiveness of a central government was further enhanced by the delegation of special areas and decisions to the emperor's ministers. Some dealt with matters of finance, others with justice, others with military affairs, and so on.

Strong Bureaucracy

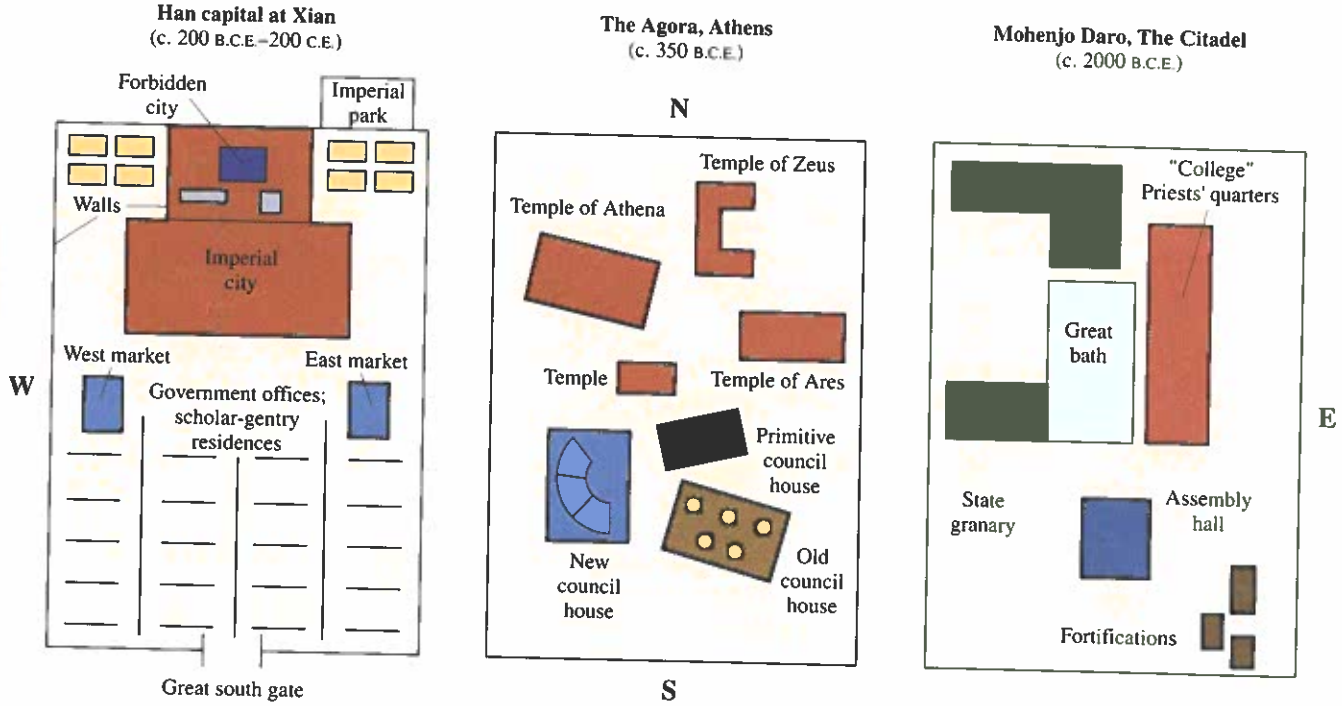
Able rulers of the Han dynasty resumed the attack on local warrior-landlords. In addition, they realized the importance of creating a large, highly skilled bureaucracy, one capable of carrying out the duties of a complex state. By the end of the Han period, China had about 130,000 bureaucrats, representing 0.2 percent of the population. The emperor Wu Ti established examinations for his bureaucrats—the first example of civil service tests of the sort that many governments have instituted in modern times. These examinations covered classics of Chinese literature as well as law, suggesting a model of the scholar-bureaucrat that would later become an important element of China's political tradition. Wu Ti also established a school to train men of exceptional talent and ability for the national examinations. Although most bureaucrats were drawn from the landed upper classes, who alone had the time to learn the complex system of Chinese characters, individuals from lower ranks of society were occasionally recruited under this system. China's bureaucracy thus provided a slight check on complete upper-class rule. It also tended to limit the exercise of arbitrary power by the emperor himself. Trained and experienced bureaucrats, confident in their own traditions, could often control the whims of a single ruler, even one who, in the Chinese tradition, regarded himself as divinely appointed—the "Son of Heaven." It was no accident then that the Chinese bureaucracy lasted from the Han period until the 20th century, outliving the empire itself.

Small wonder that from the classical period at least until modern times, and possibly still today, the Chinese were the most tightly governed people in any large society in the world. When it worked well—and it is important to recall that the system periodically broke down—Chinese politics represented a remarkable integration of all levels of authority. The edicts of an all-powerful emperor were administered by trained scholar-bureaucrats, widely respected for their learning and,

Capital Designs and Patterns of Political Power

The design and physical layout of the capital cities of early civilizations can tell us a great deal about the distribution of political power and social status in different centers of the ancient world. In addition, the configurations of these pivotal cities usually manifest religious beliefs and conceptions of the cosmic order in the ways they are oriented and physically constructed. Therefore, plans of the capital centers of ancient civilizations can be read like written texts to help us understand the early history of some of humankind's greatest civilizations. Reproduced here are schematic diagrams of some of the key features of the capital cities of three of the great early civilizations of Eurasia: from Xi'an in Han China, Athens in Greece, and Harappa in India. Study and compare these diagrams for what they tell us about the kinds of elite groups that exercised political power, social stratification, and thinking about the relationship between the supernatural and human rulers in each civilization for which they served as capitals. In thinking about these issues, you may want to refer to relevant sections in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

QUESTIONS Which social groups were the most powerful politically in each society? How prominent was military force in the exercise of power by the elites in each civilization? To what extent was political power legitimized by religious figures, ideas, and conceptions of the workings of the cosmos? To what degree did the rulers and political elites seek to separate themselves from the subject population, and what evidence could you use to determine this?



Map 2.2 Ancient Capitals

often, their noble birth. Individual families also emphasized this strong principle of authority, with the father in charge, presumably carrying on the wishes of a long line of ancestors to which the family paid reverence. The Chinese were capable of periodic rebellions, and gangs of criminals regularly came to disrupt the social scene—indeed, frequently harsh punishments reflected the need of the government to eradicate such deviant forces. Nevertheless, whether within the family or the central state, most Chinese in ordinary times believed in the importance of respect for those in power.

Roles of the State

Government traditions established during the classical period included an impressive list of state functions. Like all organized states, the Chinese government operated military and judicial systems. Military activity fluctuated, as China did not depend on steady expansion. Although classical China produced some enduring examples of the art of war, the state was not highly militaristic by the Han

period. Judicial matters—crime and legal disputes—commanded more attention by local government authorities.

The government also sponsored much intellectual life, organizing research in astronomy and the maintenance of historical records. Under the Han rulers, the government played a major role in promoting Confucian philosophy as an official statement of Chinese values and in encouraging the worship of Confucius himself. The government developed a durable sense of mission as the primary keeper of Chinese beliefs.

The imperial government was also active in the economy. It directly organized the production of iron and salt. Its standardization of currency, weights, and measures facilitated trade throughout the vast empire. The government additionally sponsored public works, including complex irrigation and canal systems. Han rulers even tried to regulate agricultural supplies by storing grain and rice in good times to control price increases—and potential popular unrest—when harvests were bad.

China's ambitious rulers in no sense directed the daily lives of their subjects; the technology of an agricultural society did not permit this. Even under the Han, it took over a month for a directive from the capital city to reach the outlying districts of the empire—an obvious limit on imperial authority. A revealing Chinese proverb held that "heaven is high, and the emperor is far away." However, the power of the Chinese state did extend considerably. Its system of courts was backed by a strict code of law; torture and execution were widely employed to supplement the preaching of obedience and civic virtue. The central government taxed its subjects and also required some annual labor on the part of every male peasant—this was the source of the incredible physical work involved in building canals, roads, and palaces. No other government had the organization and staff to reach ordinary people so directly until virtually modern times, except in much smaller political units such as city-states. The power of the government and the authority it commanded in the eyes of most ordinary Chinese people help explain why its structure survived decline, invasion, and even rebellion for so many centuries. Invaders like the Huns might topple a dynasty, but they could not devise a better system to run the country, and so the system and its bureaucratic administrators normally endured.

Religion and Culture

Chinese culture featured the development of the Confucian system, but Daoism and distinctive scientific and artistic traditions complemented Confucianism.

The Chinese way of viewing the world, as this belief system developed during the classical period, was closely linked to a distinct political structure. Upper-class cultural values emphasized a good life on earth and the virtues of obedience to the state, more than speculations about God and the mysteries of heaven. At the same time, the Chinese tolerated and often combined various specific beliefs, so long as they did not contradict basic political loyalties.

Rulers in the Zhou dynasty maintained belief in a god or gods, but little attention was given to the nature of a deity. Rather, Chinese leaders stressed the importance of a harmonious earthly life, which would maintain proper balance between earth and heaven. Harmony included carefully constructed rituals to unify society and prevent individual excess. Among the upper classes, people were trained in elaborate exercises and military skills such as archery. Commonly, ceremonies venerating ancestors and even marking special meals were conducted. The use of chopsticks began at the end of the Zhou dynasty; it encouraged a code of politeness at meals. Soon after this, tea was introduced, although the most elaborate tea-drinking rituals developed later on.

Even before these specific ceremonies arose, however, the basic definition of a carefully ordered existence was given more formal philosophical backing. Amid the long collapse of the Zhou dynasty, many thinkers and religious prophets began to challenge Chinese traditions. From this ferment came a restatement of the traditions that ultimately reduced intellectual conflict and established a long-lasting tone for Chinese cultural and social life.

Confucianism

Confucius, or Kong Fuzi (which means Kung the philosopher), lived from roughly 551 to 478 B.C.E. His life was devoted to teaching, and he traveled through many parts of China preaching his ideas of political virtue and good government. Confucius was not a religious leader; he believed in a divine order but refused to speculate about it. Chinese civilization was unusual, in the classical period and well beyond, in that its dominant values were secular rather than religious.

Confucius saw himself as a spokesman for Chinese tradition and for what he believed were the great days of the Chinese state before the Zhou declined. He maintained that if people could be taught to emphasize personal virtue, which included a reverence for tradition, a solid political life would naturally result. The Confucian list of virtues stressed respect for one's social superiors—including fathers and husbands as leaders of the family. However, this emphasis on a proper hierarchy was balanced by an insistence that society's leaders behave modestly and without excess, shunning abusive power and treating courteously those people who were in their charge. According to Confucius, moderation in behavior, veneration of custom and ritual, and a love of wisdom should characterize the leaders of society at all levels. With virtuous leaders, a sound political life would inevitably follow: "In an age of good government, men in high stations give preference to men of ability and give opportunity to those who are below them, and lesser people labor vigorously at their husbandry to serve their superiors."

Confucianism was primarily a system of ethics—do unto others as your status and theirs dictate—and a plea for loyalty to the community. It confirmed the distaste that many educated Chinese had developed for religious mysteries, as well as their delight in learning and good manners. Confucian doctrine, carefully recorded in a book called the *Analects,* was revived under the Han emperors, who saw the usefulness of Confucian emphasis on political virtue and social order. Confucian learning was also incorporated, along with traditional literary works, into the training of aspiring bureaucrats.

The problems Confucius set out to rectify, notably political disorder, were approached through an emphasis on individual virtuous behavior, both by the ruler and the ruled. "When the ruler does right, all men will imitate his self-control. What the ruler does, the people will follow." According to Confucius, only a man who demonstrated proper family virtues, including respect for parents and compassion for children and other inferiors, should be considered for political service. "When the ruler excels as a father, a son, and a brother, then the people imitate him." Confucius thus built into his own system the links among many levels of authority that came to characterize larger Chinese politics at its best. His system also emphasized personal restraint and the careful socialization of children.

For subordinates, Confucius largely recommended obedience and respect; people should know their place, even under bad rulers. However, he urged a political system that would not base rank simply on birth but would make education accessible to all talented and intelligent members of society. The primary emphasis still rested nonetheless on the obligations and desirable characteristics of the ruling class. According to Confucius, force alone cannot permanently conquer unrest, but kindness toward the people and protection of their vital interests will. Rulers should also be humble and sincere, for people will grow rebellious under hypocrisy or arrogance. Nor should rulers be greedy; Confucius warned against a profit motive in leadership, stressing that true happiness rested in doing good for all, not individual gain. Confucius projected the ideal of a gentleman, best described by his benevolence and self-control, a man always courteous and eager for service and anxious to learn.

Legalism

During the Qin and early Han periods, an alternate system of political thought, called "Legalism," sprang up in China. Legalist writers prided themselves on their pragmatism. They disdained Confucian virtues in favor of an authoritarian state that ruled by force. Human nature for the Legalists was evil and required restraint and discipline. In a proper state, the army would control and the people would labor; the idea of pleasures in educated discourse or courtesy was dismissed as frivolity. Although Legalism never captured the widespread approval that Confucianism did, it too entered the political traditions of China, where a Confucian veneer was often combined with strong-arm tactics.



Legalism: The Way of the State

Confucianists did not explicitly seek popular loyalty. Like many early civilizations, China did not produce a single system of beliefs, as different groups embraced different values, with the same individual even turning to contrasting systems depending on his or her mood. Confucianism had some obvious limits in its appeal to the masses and indeed to many educated Chinese. Its reluctance to explore the mysteries of life or nature deprived it of a spiritual side. The creed was most easily accepted by the upper classes, who had the time and resources to pursue an education and participate in ceremony. However, elements of Confucianism, including a taste for ritual, self-control, and polite manners, did spread beyond the upper classes. But most peasants needed more than civic virtue

DOCUMENT

Teachings of the Rival Chinese Schools

The brief passages quoted here are taken from the writings of Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, and Laozi. Identify whether each passage is Confucian or Daoist and explain why you made each choice.

I take no action and the people are reformed.
I enjoy peace and people become honest.
I do nothing and people become rich.
I have no desires and people return to the good and simple life.

The gentleman cherishes virtue; the inferior man cherishes possessions.

The gentleman thinks of sanctions; the inferior man thinks of personal favors.

The nature of man is evil; his goodness is acquired.

His nature being what it is, man is born, first, with a desire for gain.

If this desire is followed, strife will result and courtesy will disappear.

Keep your mouth closed.
Guard your senses.
Temper your sharpness.
Simplify your problems.
Mask your brightness.
Be at one with the dust of the earth.
This is primal union.

Personal cultivation begins with poetry, is made firm with rules of decorum, and is perfected by music.

When it is left to follow its natural feelings, human nature will do good. That's why I say it is good. If it becomes evil, it is not the fault of man's original capability.

QUESTIONS Which of these ideas are most compatible with each other? Which of them could be called religious? Which are secular? Which philosophers propose ideas that are best suited to people who want to build a strong and unified political order?

to understand and survive their harsh life, where in constant toil they eked out only a precarious and meager existence. During most of the classical period, polytheistic beliefs, focusing on the spirits of nature, persisted among much of the peasant class. Many peasants strove to attract the blessing of conciliatory spirits by creating statues, emblems, and household decorations honoring the spirits, and by holding parades and family ceremonies for the same purpose. A belief in the symbolic power of dragons stemmed from one such popular religion, which combined fear of these creatures with a more playful sense of their activities in its courtship of the divine forces of nature. Gradually, ongoing rites among the ordinary masses integrated the Confucian values urged by the upper classes.

Daoism

Daoism: The Classic of the Way and Virtue

Classical China also produced a more religious philosophy—Daoism—which arose at roughly the same time as Confucianism, during the waning centuries of the Zhou dynasty. Daoism first appealed to many in the upper classes, who had an interest in a more elaborate spirituality. Daoism embraced traditional Chinese beliefs in nature's harmony and added a sense of nature's mystery. As a spiritual alternative to Confucianism, Daoism produced a durable division in China's religious and philosophical culture. This new religion, vital for Chinese civilization although never widely exported, was furthered by Laozi (low-dzuh), who probably lived during the 5th century B.C.E. Laozi stressed that nature contains a divine impulse that directs all life. True human understanding comes in withdrawing from the world and contemplating this life force. Dao, which means "the way of nature," refers to this same basic, indescribable force:

There is a thing confusedly formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
Silent and void
It stands alone and does not change,
Goes round and does not weary.
It is capable of being the mother of the world.
I know not its name,
So I style it "the way."

Along with secret rituals, Daoism promoted its own set of ethics. Daoist harmony with nature best resulted through humility and frugal living. According to this movement, political activity and learning were irrelevant to a good life, and general conditions in the world were of little importance.

Daoism, which would join with a strong Buddhist influence from India during the chaos that followed the collapse of the Han dynasty, guaranteed that China's people would not be united by a single religious or philosophical system. Individuals did come to embrace some elements from both Daoism and Confucianism, and indeed many emperors favored Daoism. They accepted its spread with little anxiety, partly because some of them found solace in Daoist belief but also because the religion, with its otherworldly emphasis, posed no real political threat. Confucian scholars disagreed vigorously with Daoist thinking, particularly its emphasis on mysteries and magic, but they saw little reason to challenge its influence. As Daoism became an increasingly formal religion, from the later Han dynasty onward, it provided many Chinese with a host of ceremonies designed to promote harmony with the mysterious life force. Finally, the Chinese government from the Han dynasty onward was able to persuade Daoist priests to include expressions of loyalty to the emperor in their temple services. This heightened Daoism's political compatibility with Confucianism.

Literature, Art, and Science

Confucianism and Daoism were not the only intellectual products of China's classical period, but they were the most important. Confucianism blended easily with the high value of literature and art among the upper classes. In literature, a set of Five Classics, written during the early part of the Zhou dynasty and then edited during the time of Confucius, provided an important tradition. They were used, among other things, as a basis for civil service examinations. The works provided in the Five Classics included some historical treatises, speeches, and other political materials; a discussion of etiquette and ceremonies; and in the Classic of Songs, over 300 poems dealing with love, joy, politics, and family life. The Chinese literary tradition developed on the basis of mastering these early works, plus Confucian writing; each generation of writers found new meanings in the classical literature, which allowed them to express new ideas within a familiar framework. Several thinkers during the Han dynasty elaborated Confucian philosophy. In literature, poetry commanded particular attention because the Chinese language featured melodic speech and variant pronunciations of the same basic sound, a characteristic that promoted an outpouring of poetry. From the classical period onward, the ability to learn and recite poetry became the mark of an educated Chinese. Finally, the literary tradition established in classical China reinforced the Confucian emphasis on human life, although the subjects included romance and sorrow as well as political values.

Chinese art during the classical period was largely decorative, stressing careful detail and craftsmanship (Figure 2.2). Artistic styles often reflected the precision and geometric qualities of the many symbols of Chinese writing. Calligraphy itself became an important art form. In addition, Chinese artists painted, worked in bronze and pottery, carved jade and ivory, and wove silk screens. Classical China did not produce monumental buildings, aside from the awe-inspiring Great Wall and some imperial palaces and tombs, in part



Figure 2.2 A Han relief on a funeral tile found in the Chengdu region in Sichuan (eastern Han dynasty, 25 C.E.–221 C.E.). The hunting scene in a luxuriant landscape (upper panel) is linked with a scene (lower panel) of peasants working in the fields. Such illustrations enable historians to track the development of toolmaking and weaponmaking in ancient civilizations such as China. They also make it possible to study patterns of organization in agrarian and artisan production (for which direct evidence is sparse) as well as the leisure activities of officials and the landed elites.

Women in Patriarchal Societies

Most agricultural civilizations, including China, downgraded the status and potential of women, at least according to modern Western standards and to the implicit standards of hunting-and-gathering societies. Agricultural civilizations were characteristically patriarchal; that is, they were run by men and based on the assumption that men directed political, economic, and cultural life. Furthermore, as agricultural civilizations developed over time and became more prosperous and more elaborately organized, the status of women deteriorated from its initial level. Individual families were normally set up on a patriarchal basis. The husband and father determined fundamental conditions and made the key decisions, and the woman gave humble obedience to this male authority at least in principle. Patriarchal family structure rested on men's control of most or all property, starting with land itself. Marriage was based on property relationships, and it was assumed that marriage, and therefore subordination to men, was the normal condition for the vast majority of women. A revealing symptom of patriarchy in family life was the fact that after marrying, a woman usually moved to the orbit (and often the residence) of her husband's family.

> A good portion of Mesopotamian law (such as the Hammurabic code) was devoted to prescriptions for women, ensuring certain basic protections but clearly emphasizing limits and inferiority.

Characteristic patriarchal conditions had developed in Mesopotamian civilization. Marriages were arranged for women by their parents, and a formal contract was drawn up. The husband served as authority over his wife and children just as he did over his slaves. Early Sumerian society may have given women greater latitude than they enjoyed later on. The Sumerian religion attributed considerable power to female sexuality, and their law gave women important rights, so that they could not be treated as outright property. Still, even in Sumerian law, the adultery of a wife was punishable by death, while a husband's adultery was treated far more lightly—a double standard characteristic of patriarchalism. Mesopotamian societies after Sumerian times began to emphasize the importance of a woman's virginity at marriage and to impose the veil on respectable women when they were in public to emphasize their modesty. These changes showed a progressive cramping of women's social position and daily freedom. At all points a good portion of Mesopotamian law (such as the Hammurabic code) was given over to prescriptions for women, assuring certain basic protections but clearly emphasizing limits and inferiority.

Specific patriarchal conditions varied from one agricultural civilization to another. This means that comparisons are important, and sometimes subtle. Egyptian civilization gave upper-class women more credit than Mesopotamia did, and there were several powerful queens. Jewish law traced descent from mothers rather than fathers, though it held women to be separate and inferior even in worship. Confucianism, in China, had important implications for women, recommending their good treatment, but in the context because of the absence of a single religion; indeed, the entire tone of upper-class Confucianism was such that it discouraged the notion of temples soaring to the heavens.

In science, important practical work was encouraged, rather than imaginative theorizing. Chinese astronomers had developed an accurate calendar by 444 B.C.E., based on a year of 365.5 days. Later astronomers calculated the movement of the planets Saturn and Jupiter and observed sunspots—more than 1500 years before comparable knowledge developed in Europe. The purpose of Chinese astronomy was to make celestial phenomena predictable, as part of the wider interest in ensuring harmony between heaven and earth. Chinese scientists steadily improved their instrumentation, inventing a kind of seismograph to register earthquakes during the Han dynasty. The Chinese were also active in medical research, developing precise anatomical knowledge and studying principles of hygiene that could promote longer life.

Chinese mathematics also stressed the practical. Daoism encouraged some exploration of the orderly processes of nature, but far more research focused on how things actually worked. For example, Chinese scholars studied the mathematics of music in ways that led to advances in acoustics. This focus for science and mathematics contrasted notably with the more abstract definition of science developed in classical Greece.

China's economy featured extensive internal trade and important technological innovations.

China's family system stressed a rigid patriarchy.

Economy and Society

Although the most distinctive features of classical China centered on politics and culture, developments in the economy, social structure, and family life also shaped Chinese civilization and continued to have an impact on the empire's history for a significant period of time.

of their deference and subservience to men. Variety, in other words, operated within a clearly patriarchal framework.

Why was patriarchalism so pervasive? As agriculture improved with the use of better techniques, women's labor, though still absolutely vital, became less important than it had been in hunting-and-gathering societies. This was particularly true in the upper classes and in cities where men frequently took over the most productive work—craft production, for example—and political leadership. The inferior position of women was less marked in peasant families, where their work was essential. More generally, agricultural societies were based on concepts of property. It seemed essential for men to know who their heirs were, in order to pass along land; this meant attention to regulating women's sexuality, to try to assure faithfulness. All this helps explain why women became seen as both inferior and ornamental, really as part of men's property. Patriarchalism, in sum, responded to economic and legal conditions in agricultural civilizations and often deepened over time.

Patriarchalism raises important questions about women themselves. Many women internalized patriarchal culture, believing that they should obey and please men and agreeing that they were inferior. But patriarchalism did not preclude some important options for women. In many societies a minority of women could gain some relief through religious functions, which could provide them a chance to operate independently of family structures. Patriarchal laws defined some rights for women even within marriage, protecting them at least in theory from the worst abuses. Confucian theorists argued that women must obey men but urged men to treat them decently in return. Women could also wield informal power in patriarchal societies by their emotional hold over husbands or sons. Such power was indirect, behind the scenes, but a forceful woman might use these means to figure prominently in a society's history. Women could also form networks within a large household. Older women, who commanded the obedience of many daughters-in-law as well as unmarried daughters and servant women, could powerfully shape the activities of a family.

The fact remains that patriarchalism was a commanding theme in most agricultural civilizations. Enforcement of patriarchalism, through law and culture, provided one means by which these societies regulated their members and tried to achieve order. While women were not reduced to literal servitude by most patriarchal systems, they might have come close. Their options were severely constrained. Girls were reared to accept patriarchal conditions, and boys were fully conscious of their own superiority. In many agricultural civilizations, patriarchalism dictated that boys, because of their importance in carrying on the family name and chief economic activities, were more likely to survive. When population excess threatened a family's well-being, patriarchal assumptions often determined that female infants be killed as a means of population control.

QUESTIONS How do you think most women reared in a patriarchal society would react to their conditions? What might cause differences in women's conditions in patriarchal societies, or from one society to another? Why were upper-class women often considered more inferior to men than lower-class women were?

As in many agricultural societies, considerable gaps developed between China's upper class, which controlled large landed estates, and the masses, farmer-peasants who produced little more than what was needed for their own subsistence. The difficulty of becoming literate symbolized these gaps, for landlords enjoyed not only wealth but also a culture denied to most common people. Prior to the Zhou dynasty, slaveholding may have been common in China, but by the time of the Zhou the main social division existed between the land-owning gentry—about 2 percent of the total population—and peasants, who provided dues and service to these lords while also controlling some of their own land. The Chinese peasantry depended on intensive cooperation, particularly in the southern rice region; in this group, property was characteristically owned and regulated by the village or the extended family, rather than by individuals. Beneath the peasantry, Chinese social structure included a group of "mean" people who performed rough transport and other unskilled jobs and suffered from the lowest possible status. In general, social status was passed from one generation to the next through inheritance, although unusually talented individuals from a peasant background might be given access to an education and rise within the bureaucracy.

The Confucian Social System

Officially then, and to a large extent in fact, classical China consisted of three main social groups. The landowning aristocracy plus the educated bureaucrats, or mandarins, formed the top group. Next came the laboring masses: peasants and also urban artisans who manufactured goods. These people, far poorer than the top group and also condemned to a life of hard manual labor, sometimes

worked directly on large estates but in other cases had some economic independence. Finally, came the mean people, the general category we already identified as applying to those without meaningful skills. Interestingly, performing artists were ranked in this group, despite the fact that the upper classes enjoyed plays and other entertainments provided by this group. Mean people were punished for crime more harshly than other groups and were required to wear identifying green scarves. Household slaves also existed within this class structure, but their number was relatively few, and China did not depend on slaves for actual production.

Trade and Technology

Trade became increasingly important during the Zhou and particularly the Han dynasties. Much trade focused on luxury items for the upper class, produced by skilled artisans in the cities—silks, jewelry, leather goods, and furniture. There was also food exchange between the wheat- and rice-growing regions. Copper coins began to circulate, which facilitated trade, with merchants even sponsoring commercial visits to India. Although significant, trade and its attendant merchant class did not become the focal points of Chinese society, and the Confucian emphasis on learning and political service led to considerable scorn for lives devoted to moneymaking. The gap between the real importance and wealth of merchants and their officially low prestige was an enduring legacy in Confucian China.

If trade fit somewhat uncomfortably into the dominant view of society, there was no question about the importance of technological advance; here, the Chinese excelled. Agricultural implements improved steadily. Ox-drawn plows were introduced around 300 B.C.E., which greatly increased productivity. Under the Han, a new collar was invented for draft animals, allowing them to pull plows or wagons without choking—this was a major improvement that became available to other parts of the world only many centuries later. Chinese iron mining was also well advanced, as pulleys and winding gear were devised to bring material to the surface. Iron tools and other implements such as lamps were widely used. Production methods in textiles and pottery were also highly developed by world standards. Under the Han, the first water-powered mills were introduced, allowing further gains in manufacturing. Finally, during the Han, paper was invented, which was a major boon to a system of government that emphasized the bureaucracy. In sum, classical China reached far higher levels of technical expertise than Europe or western Asia in the same period, a lead that it would long maintain.

The relatively advanced technology of classical China did not, however, steer Chinese society away from its primary reliance on agriculture. Farming technology helped increase the size of the population in the countryside; with better tools and seeds, smaller amounts of land could support more families. But China's solid agricultural base, backed by some trade in foodstuffs among key regions, did permit the expansion of cities and of manufacturing. Nonagricultural goods were mainly produced by artisans, working in small shops or in their homes. Even though only a minority of the workforce was involved in such tasks that used manual methods for the most part, the output of tools, porcelain, and textiles increased considerably, aided in this case as well by the interest in improving techniques.

Gender and Family Life

In all major social groups, tight family organization helped solidify economic and social views as well as political life. The structure of the Chinese family resembled that of families in other agricultural civilizations in emphasizing the importance of unity and the power of husbands and fathers. Within this context, however, the Chinese stressed authority to unusual extremes. Confucius said, "There are no wrongdoing parents"—and in practice, parents could punish disobedient children freely. Law courts did not prosecute parents who injured or even killed a disobedient son, but they would severely punish a child who scolded or attacked a parent. In most families, the emphasis on obedience to parents, and a corresponding emphasis on wives' obedience to husbands, did not produce great friction. Chinese popular culture stressed strict control of one's emotions, and the family was seen as the center of such an orderly, serene hierarchy. Indeed, the family served as a great training ground for the principles of authority and restraint that applied to the larger social and political world.

Women, although subordinate, had their own clearly defined roles and could sometimes gain power through their sons and as mothers-in-law of younger women brought into the household. The mother of a famous Confucian philosopher, Mencius, continually claimed how humble she was, but during the course of his life she managed to exert considerable influence over him. There was even a clear hierarchical order for children, with boys superior to girls and the oldest son having the most enviable position of all. Chinese rules of inheritance, from the humblest peasant to the emperor himself, followed strict primogeniture, which meant that the oldest male child would inherit property and position alike.

How Chinese Civilization Fits Together

China's politics and culture meshed readily, especially around the emergence of a Confucian bureaucracy. Economic innovation did not disrupt the emphasis on order and stability, and family structures were closely linked to political and cultural goals.

Chinese civilization coordinated many aspects of politics, culture, and even family life, a key reason that emperors ultimately encouraged Confucianism.

Classical Chinese technology, religion, philosophy, and political structure evolved with very little outside contact. Although important trade routes led to India and the Middle East, most Chinese saw the world in terms of a large island of civilization surrounded by barbarian peoples with nothing to offer save the periodic threat of invasion. Proud of their culture and of its durability, the Chinese had neither the need nor the desire to learn from other societies. Nor, except to protect their central territory by exercising some control over the mountainous or desert regions that surrounded the Middle Kingdom, did Chinese leaders have any particular desire to teach the rest of the world. A missionary spirit was foreign to Chinese culture and politics. China displayed some patterns that were similar to those of the other agricultural civilizations, and it occasionally embraced the concepts of these cultures. Indeed, the spread of Buddhism from India, during and after the Han decline, was a notable instance of a cultural diffusion that altered China's religious map and also its artistic styles. Nevertheless, the theme of unusual isolation, developed during the formative period of Chinese civilization, was to prove persistent in later world history—in fact, it has not entirely disappeared to this day.

Social and Cultural Links to Politics

Chinese civilization was also noteworthy for the relative harmony among its various major features. We have, in this chapter, examined the pattern of leading historical events in classical China and then the systems of government, belief, economy, and social structure. All these facets were closely meshed. Although the centralized government, with its elaborate functions and far-reaching bureaucracy, gave the clearest unity and focus to Chinese society, it did not do so alone. Confucianism provided a vital supplement, making the bureaucracy more than a collection of people with similar political objectives, but rather a trained corps with some common ideals. An appreciation of distinctive artistic styles, poetry, and the literary tradition added to this common culture. Cohesive government and related beliefs about human ideals and aesthetics were linked, in turn, to the economy. Political stability over a large and fertile land aided economic growth, and the government took a direct role in encouraging both agriculture and industry. A strong economy, in turn, provided the government with vital tax revenues. Economic interests were also related to the pragmatic Chinese view of science, whose aim was to determine how nature worked. Finally, social relationships reinforced all these systems. The vision of a stable hierarchy and tight family structures meshed with the strong impulse toward orderly politics and helped instill the virtues of obedience and respect that were important to the larger political system.

Not surprisingly, given the close links among the various facets of their civilization, the Chinese tended to think of their society as a whole. They did not distinguish clearly between private and public sectors of activity. They did not see government and society as two separate entities. In other words, these Western concepts that we have used to define classical China and to facilitate comparisons with other societies do not really fit the Chinese view of their own world. Confucius himself, in seeing government as basically a vast extension of family relationships, similarly suggested that the pieces of the Chinese puzzle were intimately joined.

Complexities in Classical China

A grasp of Chinese civilization as a whole, however, should not distract us from recognizing some endemic tensions and disparities. The division in belief systems, between Confucianism and Daoism, modifies the perception of an ultimately tidy classical China. Confucianists and Daoists tolerated each other. Sometimes, their beliefs coincided in such a way that a single individual who behaved politically as a Confucianist might explore deeper mysteries through Daoist rituals. However, between both groups there was considerable hostility and mutual disdain, as many Confucianists found Daoists superstitious and overexcited. Daoism did not inherently disrupt the political unity of Chinese culture, but at times the religion inspired attacks on established politics in the name of a mysterious divine will.

Tension in Chinese society showed in the way Confucian beliefs were combined with strict policing. Chinese officials did believe in fundamental human goodness and the importance of ceremony and mutual respect. However, they also believed in stern punishment, not only against criminals but also as warnings to the larger, potentially restless population. People arrested were presumed guilty and often subjected to torture before trial. The Chinese, in fact, early discovered the usefulness of alternating torture with benevolence, to make accused individuals confess. In the late Han period, a thief who refused to confess even under severe torture was then freed from chains, bathed, and fed, "so as to bring him in a happy mood"—whereupon he usually confessed and named his whole gang. In sum, both Confucianism and the Chinese penal system supported tight control, and the combination of the two was typically effective; however, they involved quite different approaches and quite different moral assumptions.

All of this suggests that classical China, like any vigorous, successful society, embraced a diversity of features that could not be fully united by any single formula. Elites and masses were divided by both economic interests and culture. Some shared the same values, particularly as Confucianism spread, and upper-class concern for careful etiquette and the general welfare of the population mitigated the tension. But such calm was a precarious balance, and when overpopulation or some other factor tipped the scale, recurrent and often violent protest could be the result.

Despite any divisions, the symbiosis among the various institutions and activities of many people in classical China does deserve strong emphasis. It helps account for the durability of Chinese values. Even in times of political turmoil, families would transfer beliefs and political ideals by the ways in which they instructed their children. The overall wholeness of Chinese society also helps account for its relative immunity to outside influence and for its creativity despite considerable isolation.

Chinese wholeness, finally, provides an interesting contrast to the other great Asian civilization that developed in the classical period. India, as fully dynamic as China in many ways, produced different emphases, but also a more disparate society in which links among politics and beliefs and economic life were less well defined. Many would argue that this contrast between the two Asian giants persists to our own time.

Global Connections

Classical China and the World

The short-lived Qin dynasty and four centuries of Han rule established the basic components of a civilization that would last for thousands of years, making it the longest-lived in world history. As the achievements of the classical age demonstrate, China had also become one of the most creative and influential civilizations of all human history. The strength of its agrarian base has allowed China to carry about one-fifth of the total human population from the last centuries B.C.E. to the present day. The productivity of its peasants has made it possible for some of the world's largest cities to flourish in China, and nurtured one of history's largest and most creative elites. In China's classical age, the world's largest and for much of history its best-run bureaucracy was established, and civil service exams were invented. The Chinese also pioneered in the development of a whole range of basic technologies that were later disseminated over much of Eurasia and northern Africa. These ranged from paper and compasses, which created new possibilities for human communication and cross-cultural interaction, and water mills, which provided new sources of power and food processing, to porcelain, which elevated dining to unparalleled levels of elegance and opened up exciting possibilities for artistic expression. Over the centuries, beginning in this classical period itself, Chinese merchants and central Asian nomads disseminated these inventions over much of the globe. Chinese innovations consequently contributed to technological transformations in societies as diverse as those found in Japan, Rome, the Middle East, and England.

Chinese influence was directly involved in the patterns of world trade that began to emerge during the classical centuries. China's silk was unusually high quality, and the product began to be valued elsewhere, in India, the Middle East, and even the distant Mediterranean during the Roman Empire. Trade in silk and other luxury products generated a network of roads through central Asia known collectively as the **Silk Road.** Under the Han, the Chinese government actively encouraged this trade with regions to the west. Improved roads, both in China and in the Middle East, encouraged trade as well. One Chinese emissary, Zhang Qian, actually traveled to western India. Most trade along the Silk Road was carried by nomadic merchants, and until well after the classical period no one seems to have traveled all the way from China to the Mediterranean or vice versa. But the trade was lively, spurring attention also to sea routes in the Indian Ocean. While we do not know the volume of goods involved, Silk Road trade was important enough to win considerable attention in upper-class and government circles, and it provided an initial framework on which global trading patterns would later elaborate. China's role was greater still in the huge swath of territory from central Asia to the Pacific.

Over much of central and east Asia, Chinese influence in political thought and organization, approaches to warfare, art and architecture, religion, and social norms was pervasive. For nearly 2000 years, China would serve as the "Middle Kingdom" for the diverse peoples of this vast area—the focus of their trade and the model for their often successful efforts to fashion their own variants of empire, prosperity, and sophisticated lifestyles.

Further Readings

Several sources offer original materials on classical Chinese thought and politics: John Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (1973); Wing-stit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1963); and P. Ebrey, *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook* (1981). An excellent general survey for this period and later ones is J.K. Fairbank, et. al., *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* (1989); see also Arthur Cotterell, *The First Emperor of China* (1981). Briefer but useful are M. J. Coye and J. Livingston, eds., *China, Yesterday and Today* (1975); Wolfram Eberhard, *A History of China* (1977); and X. Z. Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China* (1988). See also D. Twitchett and M. Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China,* Vol. 1 (1986). On more specialized topics, see E. Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy* (1964); J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China,* 4 vols. (1970); Richard J. Smith, *Traditional Chinese Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (1978); Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (1983); Michael Loewe, *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China* (1968); Cho-yun Hsu and K. M. Linduff, *Western Chou Civilization* (1988); Michele Pirazzoli-t'Sersteven, *The Han Civilization of China* (1982); R. Wilke and M. Wolf, *Women in Chinese Society* (1975); and Bella Vivante, ed., *Women's Roles in Ancient Civilizations: A Reference Guide* (1999).

On the Web

The Yellow River as the cradle of Chinese civilization is analyzed at http://www.cis.umassd.edu/~gleung/. Early Chinese oracle bones and their place in the evolution of writing are explored at http://acc6.its.brooklyn.cuny.edu/~phalsall/images/shnagbon.jpg. Images drawn from early Chinese history and culture can be viewed at http://www.chaos.umd.edu/history/ancient1.html and http://www.chinapage.com/chinese.html. Early Chinese ethical systems are discussed at http://www.san.beck.org/EC13-Chou.html. An introduction to Chinese history prior to the Chin dynasty (221 B.C.E.) is provided at http://asterius.com/china/ and http://www.chaos.umd.edu/history/ancient1.html.

AP* Test Prep

1. Confucianism and Daoism
   (A) were officially sanctioned doctrines of the Qin and Han emperors.
   (B) emphasized the needs of the individual over the welfare of the state.
   (C) had little influence upon China and Chinese society until the late 900s C.E.
   (D) offered answers to societal problems during times of disruption.

2. Confucian social relationships
   (A) established a hierarchy and insisted upon reciprocal duties between people.
   (B) taught its practitioners to seek inner harmony with the natural way.
   (C) promoted the use of material rewards for correct behavior and punishments for transgressions.
   (D) were based on universal love and forgiveness.

3. The policy sponsored by the Qin Dynasty to support its state
   (A) encouraged education, new ideas, and tolerated criticism of the state.
   (B) broke the power of vassals in order to enhance the power of the emperor.
   (C) paid the northern nomadic groups tribute to prevent invasions.
   (D) tolerated local lords performing functions for the central government.

4. During the Han Dynasty, scholar officials
   (A) came increasingly from the merchant and peasant classes.
   (B) utilized Legalism as a ruling doctrine.
   (C) insisted on harsh law codes to maintain control.
   (D) instituted a system of examinations to prepare professional civil servants.

5. Although they varied greatly in wealth and social status in China,
   (A) the commoners, especially the peasants, remained the largest group.
   (B) the scholar bureaucrats cooperated to limit the influence of the ruler.
   (C) aristocrats owned all of the land.
   (D) women had many legal rights and protections.

6. Chinese women in the Classical Age
   (A) were free to choose the men they would marry.
   (B) could become scholar-gentry provided they passed the state exams.
   (C) were legally subordinated to fathers and husbands at all class levels.
   (D) dominated the intellectual and artistic activities of China.

7. Despite their material success and increased wealth,
   (A) foreigners were prohibited from settling in China.
   (B) Chinese rulers were isolated from the masses and did not intervene in government.
   (C) Chinese aristocrats had no influence within the government.
   (D) merchants in China ranked below peasants and had little political influence.

Free-Response Question

In what ways did the three philosophical movements of classical China shape its civilization?

3 Classical Civilization: India

The Framework for Indian History: Geography and a Formative Period
Patterns in Classical India
Political Institutions
Religion and Culture
DOCUMENT: A Guardian's Farewell Speech to a Young Woman About to Be Married
Economy and Society
Indian Influence and Comparative Features
THINKING HISTORICALLY: Inequality as the Social Norm
VISUALIZING THE PAST: The Pattern of Trade in the Ancient Eurasian World
GLOBAL CONNECTIONS: India and the Wider World

Of the many enduring expressions of religious devotion in human history, few can match the splendid complexes of temples and monasteries carved from stone into the cliffs at Ajanta and Ellora in the western reaches of the Deccan plateau, which stretches across central India. More than sixty religious structures were carved into or out of solid rock at the two sites, which are approximately thirty miles apart. These monumental religious edifices were constructed in successive stages from the last centuries B.C.E. through the 8th century C.E. This millennium of history spans an era of momentous change and creativity that in many ways culminated in the Gupta Empire, which ruled most of north India from early in the 4th until the mid-6th century C.E.

The art and architecture of Ajanta and Ellora provide dramatic evidence of the intensity of the religious ferment that shaped all aspects of Indian life as a result of the challenges to the existing brahmanical order posed by the emergence of Buddhism and other popular religious alternatives in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E. But these monumental buildings, and particularly the exquisite sculptures and paintings they contain, also tell us a great deal about the nature of society, everyday life, and popular culture, as well as the worldview and aspirations of those who lived in what many historians consider India's golden age. The mixture, for example, of Buddhist shrines and monastic quarters and Hindu and Jain cave temples exemplifies the overwhelmingly nonviolent nature of the rivalry between these major religious systems. The blend of religions at Ajanta and Ellora also mirrored the common adoption of rituals, objects of worship, and basic beliefs by the adherents of different Indian religions in this era.

Beyond religious thought and practice, the wall paintings and stone-carved sculptures provide some of the best illustrations we have of everything from Indian ships and styles of dress at different social levels to musical instruments, weapons, and tools for farming and construction. Stone friezes decorating the walls of the shrines and temples illustrate in remarkable detail popular legends of the Buddha's life and path to enlightenment and the rich mythology that developed around the gods and goddesses propitiated by the brahman priests. One of the most celebrated temples, carved out of solid rock to be a free-standing structure, relates in stone carvings numerous episodes from the *Ramayana*, which had become one of the two great epics of Indian civilization by the last centuries B.C.E.

The kings and their consorts, brahman priests and Buddhist monks, workers and temple dancers portrayed in the Ajanta and Ellora cave temples help us to visualize more than a millennium of history that is covered in this chapter. Lasting from roughly 700 B.C.E. to 650 C.E., this era saw the rise and fall of some of India's most powerful dynasties. The brahman-dominated society which emerged in the kingdoms Aryan migrants established in the Gangetic plains, was challenged in fundamental ways by the rise of Buddhism in the 6th century B.C.E. Buddhism also played a major role in the rise of the powerful Maurya dynasty and was in turn weakened by the decline of their empire. The political fragmentation in the centuries after the demise of the Mauryas was mirrored in the intense, though largely peaceful, competition among different schools of Buddhism, Brahmanism, and a wide variety of other religious sects. The patronage of the rulers of the Gupta empire that controlled much of north India from the 4th to the mid-6th centuries C.E. sparked a revival of Brahmanism, which made for an age of remarkable religious effervescence, artistic creativity, and scientific breakthroughs that secured India's enduring stature as one of the core civilizations of the preindustrial world. ■

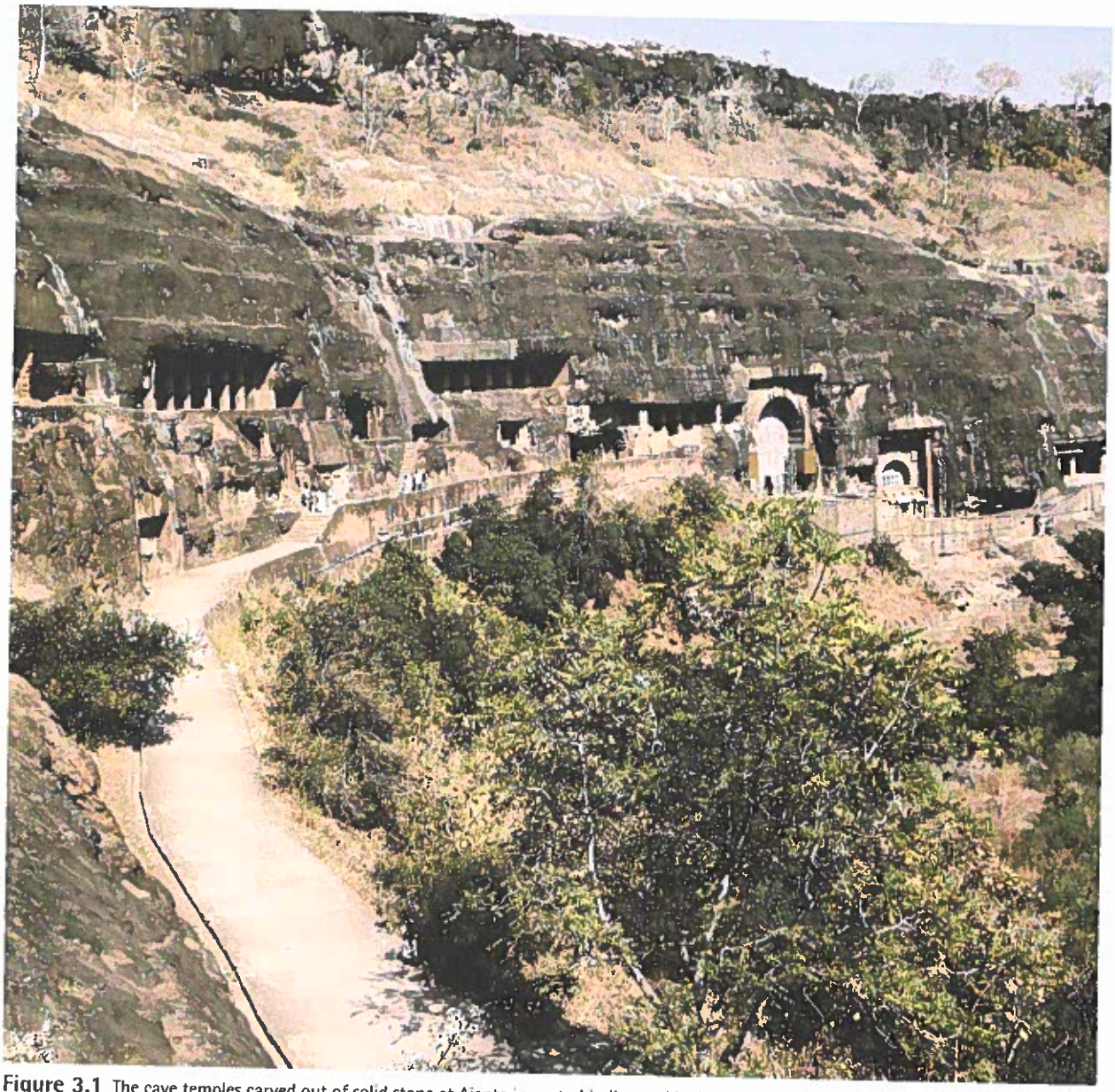


Figure 3.1 The cave temples carved out of solid stone at Ajanta in central India provide dramatic evidence of the religious fervor that swept through south Asia in the age of the Buddha and the Hindu revival.
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After the long period of disruption following Harappa's fall—around 1500 B.C.E.—a new civilization arose in India. India became the third great center of classical civilization, along with the Mediterranean and Middle East (Greece, Persia, and Rome) and China. India also served as a key hub of the trans-regional trading patterns that emerged in the classical period. The new foundations for Indian civilization were laid between 1500 and 500 B.C.E. by nomadic Aryans who moved into India during the centuries after Harappa's collapse. By the end of this period, fairly large states, ruled by kings who claimed divine descent, controlled much of the fertile farmland of the Ganges River plains. The settlement of this vast area came at the cost of clearing the great forests that once covered it. As in northwest India and the Mediterranean, cultivation and forest-clearing on the Ganges plains contributed to significant climate change.

Ritual divisions and restrictions on intermarriage between different social groups grew more rigid as an increasingly complex social hierarchy became a pervasive force in Indian life. Vedic priests, or brahmans, emerged as the dominant force in Indian society and culture. As the brahmans' power peaked, however, forces were building in Indian society that threatened to alter the

1600 B.C.E.	1200 B.C.E.	750 B.C.E.	500 B.C.E.	250 B.C.E.	1 C.E.
1600–1000 Aryan invasions of India 1500–1000 Vedic Age	1200–700 Sacred Vedas composed 1000–600 Epic Age: *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and *Upanishads* composed	700–c. 550 Era of unrivaled brahman dominance 563–483 Life of the Buddha	327–325 Alexander the Great invades India 322–298 Chandragupta Maurya rules 269–232 Reign of Ashoka	200 B.C.E.–200 C.E. Period of greatest Buddhist influence	319 Gupta Empire founded; one of the world's first universities established 535 Gupta Empire overturned by the Huns

Buddha Creator of a major Indian and Asian religion; born in 6th century B.C.E. as son of local ruler among Aryan tribes located near Himalayas; became an ascetic; found enlightenment under bo tree; taught that enlightenment could be achieved only by abandoning desires for all earthly things.

course of civilized development in south Asia. By the 6th century B.C.E., many religious seers and dissenting philosophers wanted to move beyond the rituals associated with sacrifices to the gods and were weary of the power seeking and materialism of the priestly class. One of these thinkers, now known as the **Buddha,** founded one of the great world religions—a religion that provided a powerful challenge to the brahmans and many of the ancient Vedic beliefs and practices.

The Framework for Indian History: Geography and a Formative Period

Indian civilization was deeply influenced by geography and climate.

Centuries of Aryan invasion and consolidation laid the foundation of classical Indian civilization.

In the centuries that followed the Aryan incursions, the rivalry between Buddhists and brahmans played a major role in shaping gender relationships and the nature of social hierarchies as a whole in south Asia. The Buddha's teachings also contributed to the establishment of India's first genuine empire. Beginning in the late 4th century B.C.E., the rulers of a local dynasty in eastern India, the Mauryas, built what would become the largest empire in premodern India, but the Mauryan Empire was short-lived. When it collapsed, it was followed by another round of nomadic invasions through the Himalayan passes in the northwest, and the subcontinent was again fragmented politically. But in the early 4th century C.E., there arose in north India a powerful new dynasty, the Gupta, that was committed to reasserting brahmans' dominance. The Gupta rulers' patronage of the religion we now know as Hinduism reaffirmed the position of the brahmans as high priests and political advisors. It also led to an age of splendid achievement in architecture, painting, sculpture, philosophy, literature, and the sciences.

The classical period of Indian history includes a number of contrasts to that of China—and many of these contrasts have proved enduring. Whereas the focus in classical China was on politics and on social structures that would support the Confucian order, the focus in classical India was on religion and social structures that would support a Hindu way of life. A political culture existed in India, of course, but it was less cohesive and less important to the larger culture than its Chinese counterpart. In religion, science, economics, and family life, the classical period generated a culture that continues to make India unique among the world's major civilizations.

While India's distinctiveness was considerable, the fact that it was an agricultural society dictated that it would be similar in many ways to China. Most people were peasant farmers, whose lives were shaped around the production of food for their family's survival. In both India and China, peasant families clustered together in villages for mutual aid and protection. This village structure gave a strong localist flavor to many aspects of life in both cultures. In addition, agriculture influenced family life. Patriarchy dictated that women seldom owned property other than their personal possessions. Although they were primarily agricultural, both China and India built great cities and engaged in extensive trade. These added to social and economic complexity and created the basis for most formal intellectual life, including schools and academies.

Formative Influences

India's distinctive culture was born of its geography and early historical experience. India was much closer to the orbit of other civilizations than China. Trading contacts with China developed late in the classical period and had little impact—China was more affected. But India was fre-

quently open to influences from the Middle East and even the Mediterranean world. Persian empires spilled over into India at several points, bringing new artistic styles and political concepts. **Alexander the Great** invaded India, and while he did not establish a durable empire, he made possible important Indian contacts with Hellenistic culture. Periodic influences from the Middle East continued after the classical age, forcing India to react and adapt in ways that China largely avoided because it was more isolated.

Alexander the Great Successor of Philip II; successfully conquered Persian Empire prior to his death in 323 B.C.E.; attempted to combine Greek and Persian cultures.

In addition to links with other cultures, India's topography shaped a number of vital features of its civilization. The vast Indian subcontinent is partially separated from the rest of Asia, and particularly from east Asia, by northern mountain ranges, notably the **Himalayas.** However, important passes through the mountains, especially in the northwest, linked India to other civilizations in the Middle East. At the same time, divisions within the subcontinent made full political unity difficult. India was thus marked by greater diversity than China's Middle Kingdom. The most important agricultural regions are those along the two great rivers, the Indus and the Ganges. However, India also has mountainous northern regions, where a herding economy took root, and a southern coastal rim, separated by mountains and the Deccan plateau, where an active trading and seafaring economy arose. India's separate regions help explain not only economic diversity but also the racial and language differences that, from early times, have marked the subcontinent's populations.

Himalayas Mountain region marking the northern border of the Indian subcontinent; site of the Aryan settlements that formed small kingdoms or warrior republics.

Much of India is semitropical in climate. In the river valley plains, heat can rise to 120° F during the early summer. Summer also brings torrential **monsoon** rains, crucial for farming. But the monsoons vary from year to year, sometimes bringing too little rain or coming too late and causing famine-producing drought, or sometimes bringing catastrophic floods. Certain features of Indian civilization may have resulted from a need to come to terms with a climate that could produce abundance one year and grim starvation the next. In a year with favorable monsoons, Indian farmers could plant and harvest two crops and thus support a sizeable population.

monsoons Seasonal winds crossing Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia; during summer bring rains.

The Great Epics

Indian civilization was shaped not only by its physical environment but also by a formative period, lasting several centuries, between the destruction of the Indus River civilization and the revival of full civilization elsewhere on the subcontinent. During this formative period, called the Vedic and Epic ages, the **Aryan** (Indo-European) migrants—hunting and herding peoples originally from central Asia—gradually came to terms with agriculture but had their own impact on the culture and social structure of their new home. During the Vedic Age, from about 1500 to 1000 B.C.E., Indian agriculture extended from the Indus River valley to the more fertile Ganges valley, as the Aryans used iron tools to clear away the dense vegetation.



Excerpts from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*

Aryans Indo-European nomadic pastoralists who replaced Harappan civilization; militarized society.

Most of what we know about this preclassical period in Indian history comes from literary epics developed by the Aryans, initially passed on orally. They were later written down in **Sanskrit,** which became the first literary language of the new culture. These sacred books were called the **Vedas.** The initial part of this formative period, the Vedic Age, takes its name from the Sanskrit word *Veda,* or "knowledge." The first epic, the *Rig-Veda,* consists of 1028 hymns dedicated to the Aryan gods and composed by various priests. New stories, developed during the Epic Age between 1000 and 600 B.C.E., include the ***Mahabharata*** (muh-hah-BUH-uh-tuh), India's greatest epic poem, and the ***Ramayana*** (ruh-MEYE-ehn), both of which deal with real and mythical battles; these epics reflect a more settled agricultural society and better-organized political units than the *Rig-Veda.* The Epic Age also saw the creation of the ***Upanishads*** (oo-PAHN-uh-shadz), epic poems with a more mystical religious flavor.

Sanskrit The sacred and classical Indian language.

Vedas Aryan hymns originally transmitted orally but written down in sacred books from the 6th century B.C.E.

Mahabharata [muh-hah-BUH-uh-tuh] Indian epic of war, princely honor, love, and social duty; written down in the last centuries B.C.E.; previously handed down in oral form.

Ramayana [ruh-MEYE-ehn] One of the great epic tales from classical India; traces adventures of King Rama and his wife, Sita; written 4th to 2nd centuries B.C.E.

Upanishads [oo-PAHN-uh-shadz] Later books of the Vedas; contained sophisticated and sublime philosophical ideas; utilized by Brahmans to restore religious authority.

Aryan ideas and social and family forms also became increasingly influential. As the Aryans settled down to agriculture, they encouraged tight levels of village organization that came to be characteristic of Indian society and politics. Village chiefs, initially drawn from the leadership of one of the Aryan tribes, helped organize village defenses and regulate property relationships among families. Family structure emphasized patriarchal controls, and extended family relationships among grandparents, parents, and children were close.

The characteristic Indian caste system also began to take shape during the Vedic and Epic ages, perhaps initially as a means of establishing relationships between the Aryan invaders and the indigenous people, whom the Aryans regarded as inferior. Aryan social classes (**varnas**) partly

varnas Clusters of caste groups in Aryan society; four social castes- Brahmans (priests), warriors, merchants, and peasants; beneath four Aryan castes was group of socially untouchable Dasas.

enforced divisions familiar in agricultural societies. Thus, a warrior or governing class, the Kshatriyas (kuh-shuh-TREE-uhs), and the priestly class, or brahmans, stood at the top of the social pyramid, followed by Vaisyas, the traders and farmers, and Sudras, or common laborers. Many of the Sudras worked on the estates of large landowners. A fifth group gradually evolved, later called the **untouchables,** who were confined to a few jobs, such as transporting the bodies of the dead or hauling refuse. It was widely believed that touching these people would defile anyone from a superior class. Initially, the warrior group ranked highest, but during the Epic Age the brahmans replaced them, signaling the importance of religious links in Indian life. Thus, a law book stated, "When a brahman springs to light he is born above the world, the chief of all creatures, assigned to guard the treasury of duties, religious and civil." Gradually, the five social groups became hereditary, with marriage between castes forbidden and punishable by death; the basic castes divided into smaller subgroups, called *jati,* each with distinctive occupations and each tied to its social station by birth.

untouchables Low social caste in Hindu culture; performed tasks that were considered polluting—street sweeping, removal of human waste, and tanning.

The *Rig-Veda,* the first Aryan epic, attributed the rise of the caste system to the gods:

> When they divided the original Man
> into how many parts did they divide him?
> What was his mouth, what were his arms,
> what were his thighs and his feet called?
> The brahman was his mouth, of his
> arms was made the warrior.
> His thighs became the vaisya, of
> his feet the sudra was born.

The Aryans brought to India a religion of many gods and goddesses, who regulated natural forces and possessed human qualities. Thus, **Indra,** the god of thunder, was also the god of strength. Gods presided over fire, the sun, death, and so on. This system bore some resemblances to the gods and goddesses of Greek myth or Scandinavian mythology, for the very good reason that they were derived from a common Indo-European oral heritage. However, India was to give this common tradition an important twist, ultimately constructing a vigorous, complex religion that, in contrast to the Indo-European polytheistic faiths, endures to this day.

Indra Chief deity of the Aryans; depicted as a colossal, hard-drinking warrior.

During the epic periods, the Aryans offered hymns and sacrifices to the gods. Certain animals were regarded as particularly sacred, embodying the divine spirit. Gradually, this religion became more elaborate. The epic poems reflect an idea of life after death and a religious approach to the world of nature. Nature was seen as informed not only by specific gods but also by a more basic divine force. These ideas, expressed in the mystical *Upanishads,* added greatly to the spiritual power of this early religion and served as the basis for later Hindu beliefs. By the end of the Epic Age, the dominant Indian belief system included a variety of convictions. Many people continued to emphasize rituals and sacrifices to the gods of nature; specific beliefs, as in the sacredness of monkeys and cattle, illustrated this ritualistic approach. The brahman priestly class specified and enforced prayers, ceremonies, and rituals. However, the religion also produced a more mystical strand through its belief in a unifying divine force and the desirability of seeking union with this force. Toward the end of the Epic period one religious leader, Gautama Buddha, built on this mysticism to create what became Buddhism, another major world religion.

Patterns in Classical India

Two major empires united large parts of India at crucial periods in classical Indian history.

By 600 B.C.E., India had passed through its formative phase. Regional political units grew in size, cities and trade expanded, and the development of the Sanskrit language, although dominated by the priestly brahman class, furthered an elaborate literary culture. A full, classical civilization could now build on the social and cultural themes first launched during the Vedic and Epic ages.

Indian development during the classical era and beyond did not take on the convenient structure of rising and falling dynasties characteristic of Chinese history. Political eras were even less clear than in classical Greece. The rhythm of Indian history was irregular and often consisted of landmark invasions that poured in through the mountain passes of the subcontinent's northwestern border.

Toward the end of the Epic Age and until the 4th century B.C.E., the Indian plains were divided among powerful regional states. Sixteen major states existed by 600 B.C.E. in the plains of northern

India, some of them monarchies, others republics dominated by assemblies of priests and warriors. Warfare was not uncommon. One regional state, Magadha, established dominance over a considerable empire. In 327 B.C.E., Alexander the Great, having conquered Greece and much of the Middle East, pushed into northwestern India, establishing a small border state called Bactria.

Chandragupta Maurya [chuhn-druh-GOOP-duh MAHR-yeh] (r. 322–298 B.C.E.) Founder of Maurya dynasty; established first empire in Indian subcontinent; first centralized government since Harappan civilization.

The Mauryan Dynasty

Political reactions to this incursion produced the next major step in Indian political history, in 322 B.C.E., when a young soldier named **Chandragupta Maurya** (chuhn-druh-GOOP-duh MAHR-yeh) seized power along the Ganges River. He became the first of the **Mauryan** (MAHR-yuhn) dynasty of Indian rulers, who in turn were the first rulers to unify much of the entire subcontinent. While it is difficult to know what, if anything, the Mauryan dynasty borrowed directly from Persian political models or the example of Alexander the Great, Chandragupta and his successors maintained large armies, with thousands of chariots and elephant-borne troops. The Mauryan rulers also developed a substantial bureaucracy, even sponsoring a postal service.



Classical India

Mauryan [MAHR-yuhn] Dynasty established in Indian subcontinent in 4th century B.C.E. following invasion by Alexander the Great.

Chandragupta's style of government was highly autocratic, relying on the ruler's personal and military power. This style would surface periodically in Indian history, just as it did in the Middle East, a region with which India had important contacts. A Greek ambassador from one of the Hellenistic kingdoms described Chandragupta's life:

> Attendance on the king's person is the duty of women, who indeed are bought from their fathers. Outside the gates [of the palace] stand the bodyguards and the rest of the soldiers. . . . Nor does the king sleep during the day, and at night he is forced at various hours to change his bed because of those plotting against him. Of his nonmilitary departures [from the palace] one is to the courts, in which he passed the day hearing cases to the end . . . [When he leaves to hunt,] he is thickly surrounded by a circle of women, and on the outside by spear-carrying bodyguards. The road is fenced off with ropes, and to anyone who passes within the ropes as far as the women, death is the penalty.

Ashoka (r. 273–232 B.C.E.) Grandson of Chandragupta Maurya; completed conquests of Indian subcontinent; converted to Buddhism and sponsored spread of new religion throughout his empire.

dharma The caste position and career determined by a person's birth; Hindu culture required that one accept one's social position and perform occupation to the best of one's ability in order to have a better situation in the next life.

Kushans See Kush, p. 21.

Such drastic precautions paid off. Chandragupta finally designated his rule to a son and became a religious ascetic (a person who renounces the pleasures of the material world), dying peacefully at an advanced age.

Chandragupta's grandson, **Ashoka** (269–232 B.C.E.), was an even greater figure in India's history. First serving as a governor of two provinces, Ashoka enjoyed a lavish lifestyle, with frequent horseback riding and feasting. However, he also engaged in a study of nature and was strongly influenced by the intense spiritualism not only of the brahman religion but also of Buddhism. Ashoka extended Mauryan conquests, gaining control of all but the southern tip of India through fierce fighting (Map 3.1). His methods were bloodthirsty; in taking over one coastal area, Ashoka admitted that "one hundred and fifty thousand were killed (or maimed) and many times that number later died." But Ashoka could also be compassionate. He ultimately converted to Buddhism, seeing in the belief in **dharma,** or the law of moral consequences, a kind of ethical guide that might unite and discipline the diverse people under his rule. Ashoka vigorously propagated Buddhism throughout India while also honoring Hinduism, sponsoring shrines for its worshippers. Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries to the Hellenistic kingdoms in the Middle East, and also to Sri Lanka to the south. The "new" Ashoka urged humane behavior on the part of his officials and insisted that they oversee the moral welfare of his empire. Like Chandragupta, Ashoka also worked to improve trade and communication, sponsoring an extensive road network dotted with wells and rest stops for travelers. Stability and the sheer expansion of the empire's territory encouraged growing commerce.

The Mauryan dynasty did not, however, succeed in establishing durable roots, and Ashoka's particular style of government did not have much later impact, although a strong Buddhist current persisted in India for some time. After Ashoka, the empire began to fall apart, and regional kingdoms surfaced once again. New invaders, the **Kushans,** pushed into central India from the northwest. The greatest Kushan king, Kanishka, converted to Buddhism but actually hurt this religion's popularity in India by associating it with foreign rule.



Map 3.1 India at the Time of Ashoka. Though, as the map shows, the Mauryan monarchs claimed to rule most of present-day South Asia, much of the subcontinent was only loosely controlled.



Map 3.2 The Gupta Empire. Not only was the territory claimed by the Gupta dynasty a good deal smaller than the empire of their Mauryan predecessors, even the area controlled was ruled to a far greater extent by local lords than the Gupta emperors.

The Guptas

The collapse of the Kushan state, by 220 C.E., ushered in another hundred years of political instability. Then a new line of kings, the **Guptas,** established a large empire, beginning in 320 C.E. (Map 3.2). The Guptas produced no individual rulers as influential as the two great Mauryan rulers, but they had perhaps greater impact. One Gupta emperor proclaimed his virtues in an inscription on a ceremonial stone pillar:

> His far-reaching fame, deep-rooted in peace, emanated from the restoration of the sovereignty of many fallen royal families. . . . He, who had no equal in power in the world, eclipsed the fame of the other kings by the radiance of his versatile virtues, adorned by innumerable good actions.

Bombast aside, Gupta rulers often preferred to negotiate with local princes and intermarry with their families, which expanded influence without constant fighting. Two centuries of Gupta rule gave classical India its greatest period of political stability, although the Guptas did not administer as large a territory as the Mauryan kings had. The Gupta empire was overturned in 535 C.E. by a new invasion of nomadic warriors, the Huns.

Classical India thus alternated between widespread empires and a network of smaller kingdoms. Periods of regional rule did not necessarily suggest great instability, and both economic and cultural life advanced in these periods as well as under the Mauryas and Guptas.

Political Institutions

Classical India did not develop the solid political traditions and institutions of Chinese civilization, or the high level of political interest that would characterize classical Greece and Rome. The most persistent political features of India, in the classical period and beyond, involved regionalism, plus considerable diversity in political forms. Autocratic kings and emperors dotted the history of classical India, but there were also aristocratic assemblies in some regional states with the power to consult and decide on major issues.

Local and regional governments dominated in India, which placed less emphasis on politics than other early civilizations.

Guptas Dynasty that succeeded the Kushans in the 3rd century C.E.; built empire that extended to all but the southern regions of Indian sub-continent; less centralized than Mauryan Empire.

As a result of India's diversity and regionalism, even some of the great empires had a rather shaky base. Early Mauryan rulers depended heavily on the power of their large armies, and, as we have seen, often feared betrayal and attack. Early rulers in the Gupta dynasty used various devices to consolidate support. They claimed that they had been appointed by the gods to rule, and they favored the Hindu religion over Buddhism because the Hindus believed in such gods. The Guptas managed to create a demanding taxation system, seeking up to a sixth of all agricultural produce. However, they did not create an extensive bureaucracy, rather allowing local rulers whom they had defeated to maintain regional control so long as they deferred to Gupta dominance. The Guptas stationed a personal representative at each ruler's court to ensure loyalty. A final sign of the great empire's loose structure was the fact that no single language was imposed. The Guptas promoted Sanskrit, which became the language of educated people, but this made no dent in the diversity of popular, regional languages.

The Guptas did spread uniform law codes. Like the Mauryan rulers, they sponsored some general services, such as road building. They also served as patrons of much cultural activity, including university life as well as art and literature. These achievements were more than enough to qualify the Gupta period as a golden age in Indian history.

The fact remains, however, that the political culture of India was not very elaborate. There was little formal political theory and few institutions or values other than regionalism that carried through from one period to the next. Chandragupta's chief minister, **Kautilya** (kah-TIHL-yeh), wrote an important treatise on politics, but it was devoted to telling rulers what methods would work to maintain power—somewhat like the Legalists in China. Thinking of this sort encouraged

Kautilya [kah-TIHL-yeh] (350–275 B.C.E.) Political advisor to Chandragupta Maurya; one of the authors of *Arthashastra*; believed in scientific application of warfare.

efficient authority, but it did not spread political values or a sense of the importance of political service very widely, in contrast to Confucianism in China and also to the intense interest in political ethics in Greece and Rome. Ashoka saw in Buddhism a kind of ethic for good behavior, as well as a spiritual beacon, but Buddhist leaders in the long run were not greatly interested in affairs of state. Indeed, Indian religion generally did not stress the importance of politics, even for religious purposes, but rather the preeminence of priests as sources of authority.

The limitations on the political traditions developed during this period of Indian history can be explained partly by the importance of local units of government—the tightly organized villages—and particularly by the essentially political qualities of social relationships under the caste system. Caste rules, interpreted by priests, regulated many social relationships and work roles. To a great extent, the caste system and religious encouragement in the faithful performance of caste duties did for Indian life what more conventional government structures did in many other cultures, in promoting public order.

India's caste system became steadily more complex after the Epic Age, as the five initial classes subdivided into ultimately almost 300 jati (or livings), which became further divided into a multitude of subcastes—the true basis of the caste system—which defined the groups that a person could eat with or marry within. Hereditary principles grew ever stronger, so that it became virtually impossible to rise above the caste in which a person was born or to marry someone from a higher caste. It was possible to fall to a lower caste by marrying outside one's caste or by taking on work deemed inappropriate for one's caste. Upward mobility could occur within castes, as individuals might gain greater wealth through success in the economic activities appropriate to the caste. Rulers, like the Mauryans, might spring from the merchant castes, although most princes were warrior-born. It is important not to characterize the caste system in an oversimplified way, for it did offer some flexibility. Nevertheless, the system gave India the most rigid overall framework for a social structure of any of the classical civilizations.

In its origins, the caste system provided a way for India's various races, the conquerors and the conquered, to live together without perpetual conflict and without full integration of cultures and values. Quite different kinds of people could live side by side in village or city, separated by caste. In an odd way, castes promoted tolerance, and this was useful, given India's varied peoples and beliefs. The caste system also meant that extensive outright slavery was avoided. The lowest, untouchable castes were scorned, confined to poverty and degrading work, but their members were not directly owned by others.

The political consequences of the caste system derived from the detailed rules for each caste. These rules governed marriages and permissible jobs, but also social habits such as eating and drinking. For example, a person could not eat or drink with a lower-caste individual or perform any service for that person. This kind of regulation of behavior made detailed political administration less necessary. Indeed, no state could command full loyalty from subjects, for their first loyalty was to caste.

Religion and Culture

More of the qualities of Indian civilization rested on widely shared cultural values than was the case in China. Religion, and particularly the evolving Hindu religion as it gained ground on Buddhism under the Guptas, was the clearest cultural cement of this society, cutting across political and language barriers and across the castes. Hinduism itself embraced considerable variety, and it gave rise to important religious dissent. Nor did it ever displace important minority religions. However, Hinduism has shown a remarkable capacity to survive and is the major system of belief in India even today. It also promotes other features in Indian culture. Thus, contemporary Indian children are encouraged to indulge their imaginations longer than Western children, with less urging to test flights of fancy against external reality. It is this kind of tradition that illustrates how classical India, although not the source of enduring political institutions beyond the local level, produced a civilization that would retain clear continuity and cultural cohesiveness from this point onward—even though the subcontinent was rarely politically united, at least under indigenous rulers.

Hinduism and Buddhism were the religions of classical India, helping also to shape distinctively Indian arts and sciences.

The culture of classic India was not just religious, however. Along with religion, an important tradition of rational scientific inquiry emerged. This helped sustain major initiative in higher

education. It is also important to note that the Indian religions themselves were tolerant—both of other religious and of other aspects of culture. Indian governments might support religious missionaries, but they also established an openness to religious diversity. This, too, was a legacy to Indian cultures in later periods.

The Formation of Hinduism

Hinduism, the religion of India's majority, developed gradually over a period of many centuries. Its origins lie in the Vedic and Epic ages, as the Aryan religion gained greater sophistication, with concerns about an overarching divinity supplementing the rituals and polytheistic beliefs supervised by the brahman caste of priests. The *Rig-Veda* expressed the growing interest in a higher divine principle in its Creation Hymn:

> Then even nothingness was not, nor existence. There was no air then, nor the heavens beyond it. Who covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping . . . ? The gods themselves are later than creation, so who knows truly whence it has arisen?

Unlike all other world religions, Hinduism had no single founder, no central holy figure from whom the basic religious beliefs stemmed. This fact helps explain why the religion unfolded so gradually, sometimes in reaction to competing religions such as Buddhism or Islam. Moreover, Hinduism pursued a number of religious approaches, from the strictly ritualistic and ceremonial approach many brahmans preferred, to the high-soaring mysticism that sought to unite individual humans with an all-embracing divine principle. Unlike Western religions or Daoism (which it resembled in part), Hinduism could also encourage political and economic goals (called artha) and worldly pleasures (called karma)—and important textbooks of the time spelled out these pursuits. Part of Hinduism's success, indeed, was the result of its fluidity, its ability to adapt to the different needs of various groups and to change with circumstance. With a belief that there are many suitable paths of worship, Hinduism was also characteristically tolerant, coexisting with several offshoot religions that garnered minority acceptance in India.

Under brahman leadership, Indian ideas about the gods gradually became more elaborate (scholars call early Hinduism *brahmanism* for this reason, though Hindus always called their religion *dharma*, or moral path). Original gods of nature were altered to represent more abstract concepts. Thus, Varuna changed from a god of the sky to the guardian of ideas of right and wrong. The great poems of the Epic Age increasingly emphasized the importance of gentle and generous behavior, and the validity of a life devoted to concentration on the Supreme Spirit. The *Upanishads* particularly stressed the shallowness of worldly concerns—riches and even health were not the main point of human existence—in favor of contemplation of the divine spirit. It was in the *Upanishads* that the Hindu idea of a divine force informing the whole universe, of which each individual creature's soul is thought to be part, first surfaced clearly, in passages such as the following:

> "Fetch me a fruit of the banyan tree."
> "Here is one, sir."
> "Break it."
> "I have broken it, sir."
> "What do you see?"
> "Very tiny seeds, sir."
> "Break one."
> "I have broken it, sir."
> "What do you see now?"
> "Nothing, sir."
> "My son, . . . what you do not perceive is the essence, and in that essence the mighty banyan tree exists. Believe me, my son, in that essence is the self of all that is. That is the True, that is the Self."

gurus Originally referred to as Brahmans who served as teachers for the princes of the imperial court of the Guptas.

Vishnu The Brahman, later Hindu, god of sacrifice; widely worshipped.

Shiva Hindu, god of destruction and reproduction; worshipped as the personification of cosmic forces of change.

Transmigration of Souls in the *Upanishads*



However, the *Upanishads* did more than advance the idea of a mystical contact with a divine essence. They also attacked the conventional brahman view of what religion should be, a set of proper ceremonies that would lead to good things in this life or rewards after death. From the Epic Age onward, Hinduism embraced this clear tension between a religion of rituals, with fixed ceremonies and rules of conduct, and the religion of mystical holy men, seeking communion with the divine soul.

A Guardian's Farewell Speech to a Young Woman About to Be Married

One of the great plays written during the Hindu revival of the early centuries C.E. was *Shakuntala,* by Kalidasa. The play is a Cinderella-style tale about a beautiful young woman, Shakuntala, who is loved by a king, and the travails she must endure before they are happily united. In the following exchange, as Shakuntala sets out to join her husband at his palace, she is instructed by her guardians (the hermits Kashyapa and Gautami) on the proper behavior for a young wife, in a manner that recalls the famous speech by Polonius to his son, Laertes, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

Kashyapa: Now you Shakuntala. Respect your superiors,
Be friendly toward the ladies of the palace.
Never be angry with your husband, no matter what happens.
Be polite with the maids;
In everything be humble.
These qualities make a woman; those without them are black sheep in their families.
What is your opinion, Gautami?
Gautami: A bride needs nothing more. Remember his advice, Shakuntala.
Shakuntala: How will I ever manage in the palace? I feel so lost. I belong here, Father.
Kashyapa: Don't worry, my child; you are privileged.
You will be his great wife;
He is noble and great.
You will give him a son, as the East gives us light.
The pain of separation will then pass.

QUESTIONS What does this conversation tell you about gender relationships and marriage in classical India? What does it say about attitudes toward women? How do these relationships and attitudes compare with those found in China and Greece in this era? How do they compare with those in our own society?

The mystics, often called **gurus** as they gathered disciples around them, and the brahman priests agreed on certain doctrines, as Hinduism became an increasingly formal religion by the first centuries of the common era. The basic holy essence, called *brahma,* formed part of everything in this world. Every living creature participates in this divine principle. The divine aspects of brahma are manifested in the forms of several gods, including **Vishnu,** the preserver, and **Shiva,** the destroyer, who could be worshipped or placated as expressions of the holy essence. The world of our senses is far less important than the world of the divine soul, and a proper life is one devoted to seeking union with this soul. However, this quest may take many lifetimes, and Hindus stressed the principle of **reincarnation,** in which souls do not die when bodies do but pass into other beings, either human or animal. Where the soul goes, whether it rises to a higher-caste person or falls perhaps to an animal, depends on how good a life the person has led. Ultimately, after many good lives, the soul reaches full union with the soul of brahma, and worldly suffering ceases.

reincarnation The successive attachment of the soul to some animate form according to merits earned in previous lives.



Figure 3.2 Perhaps the most frequently depicted Indian religious image is of god in the form of Shiva as the celestial dancer, here portrayed in a South Indian bronze. His dance represents the patterns of creation and destruction that are inescapable elements of the cosmos. The drum in his far left hand keeps the time between cycles of birth and death. The left hand below the drum is open as a gesture of reassurance to the righteous of their ultimate salvation. His foot crushes the demon of ignorance, shown as small compared with divine truth and welcoming of its own inevitable conquest by divine knowledge.
("Nataraja: Shiva as King of Dance." © The Cleveland Museum of Art, 2001, Purchase from the J.H. Wade Fund 1930.331.)

Hinduism provided several channels for the good life. For people who renounced this world in search of salvation, there was the meditation and self-discipline of *yoga,* which means "union," allowing the mind to be freed to concentrate on the divine spirit. For others, there were the rituals and rules of the brahmans. These included proper ceremonies in the cremation of bodies at death, appropriate prayers, and obedience to injunctions such as treating cows as sacred animals and refraining from the consumption of beef. Many Hindus also continued the idea of lesser gods represented in the spirits of nature, or purely local divinities, which could be seen as expressions of Shiva or Vishnu (Figure 3.2). Personal devotion to these divinities through prayer could aid the process of reincarnation to a higher state. Thus, many ordinary Hindus placed a lot of importance on prayers. Symbolic sacrifices or gifts to the gods might also bring them salvation or entry, through reincarnation, into a higher caste.

Hinduism also provided a basic, if complex, ethic that helped supply some unity amid the various forms of worship. The epic poems, richly symbolic, formed the key texts. They illustrated a central emphasis on the moral law of dharma as a guide to living in this world and simultaneously pursuing higher, spiritual goals. The concept of dharma directed attention to the moral consequences of action and at the same time the need to act. Each person must meet the obligations of life, serving the family, producing a livelihood

The Song of Songs, from *Bhagavad Gita*

and even earning money, and serving in the army when the need arises. These actions cannot damage, certainly cannot destroy, the eternal divine essence that underlies all creation. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, a classic sacred hymn, a warrior is sent to do battle against his own relatives. Fearful of killing them, he is advised by an incarnation of Brahma (Krishna) that he must carry out his duties. He will not really be killing his victims because their divine spirit will live on. This ethic urged that honorable behavior, even pleasure seeking, is compatible with spirituality and can lead to a final release from the life cycle and to unity with the divine essence. The Hindu ethic explains how devout Hindus could also be aggressive merchants or eager warriors. In encouraging honorable action, it could legitimize government and the caste system as providing the frameworks in which the duties of the world might be carried out, without distracting from the ultimate spiritual goals common to all people.

The ethical concept of dharma was far less detailed and prescriptive than the ethical codes associated with most other world religions, including Christianity and Islam. Dharma stresses inner study and meditation, building from the divine essence within each creature, rather than adherence to a fixed set of moral rules.

The spread of Hinduism through India, and at least briefly to some other parts of Asia, had many sources. The religion accommodated extreme spirituality. It also provided satisfying rules of conduct for ordinary life, including rituals and a firm emphasis on the distinction between good and evil behavior. The religion allowed many people to retain older beliefs and ceremonies, which they may have derived from a more purely polytheistic religion. It reinforced the caste system, giving people in lower castes hope for a better time in lives to come and giving upper-caste people, including the brahmans, the satisfaction that if they behaved well, they might be rewarded by communion with the divine soul. Even though Hindu beliefs took shape only gradually and contained many ambiguities, the religion was sustained by a strong cadre of priests and through the efforts of individual gurus and mystics.



Figure 3.3 This beautifully detailed sandstone statue of the Buddha meditating in a standing position was carved in the 5th century C.E. Note the nimbus, or halo, which was common in later Buddhist iconography. The calm radiated by the Buddha's facial expression suggests that he has already achieved Enlightenment. As Buddhism spread throughout India and overseas, a wide variety of artistic styles developed to depict the Buddha himself and key incidents of his legendary life. The realism and stylized robes of the sculpture shown here indicate that it was carved by artists following the conventions of the Indo-Greek school of northwestern India.

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Buddhism

At times, however, the tensions within Hinduism broke down for some individuals, producing rebellions against the dominant religion. One such rebellion, which occurred right after the Epic Age, led to a new religion closely related to Hinduism. Around 563 B.C.E. an Indian prince, Siddhartha Gautama, was born who came to question the fairness of earthly life in which so much poverty and misery abounded. Gautama, later called **Buddha** or "enlightened one," lived as a Hindu mystic, fasting and torturing his body. After six years, he felt that he had found truth, then spent his life traveling and gathering disciples to spread his ideas. Buddha accepted the spiritual truth behind many Hindu beliefs, such as reincarnation, but he denied the validity of others, such as caste. He held the material world to be a snare that warped human relations and caused pain via the frustrations inherent in it: all worldly things decay, but men and women suffer and harm others as they struggle to hold onto youth, health, and life itself, though all are destined to pass away.

Buddha did not reject the possibility of rewards after life, but he saw salvation as arising from the destruction of the self, whose annihilation opens the door to a realm where suffering and decay are no more, literally a world beyond existence itself: **nirvana.** Individuals could regulate their lives and aspirations toward this goal without elaborate ceremonies. Great stress was placed on self-control: "Let a man overcome anger by love, let him overcome evil by good, let him overcome the greedy by liberalness, the liar with the truth." By arguing that a holy life could be achieved through individual effort by people at every level of society, Buddhism denied the spiritual value not only of caste and the performance of rituals, but also of priests. This was another sign of the complexity of Indian social life in practice.

Buddhism spread and retained coherence through the example and teachings of groups of monks, organized in monasteries but preaching throughout the world (Figure 3.3). Buddhism attracted many followers in India itself, and its growth was greatly spurred by the conversion of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka. Increasingly, Buddha himself was seen as divine. Prayer and contemplation at Buddhist holy places and works of charity and piety

gave substance to the idea of a holy life on earth. Ironically, however, Buddhism did not witness a permanent following in India. Brahman opposition was strong, and it was ultimately aided by the influence of the Gupta emperors. Furthermore, Hinduism showed its adaptability by emphasizing its mystical side, thus retaining the loyalties of many Indians. Buddhism's greatest successes, aided by the missionary encouragement of Ashoka and later the Kushan emperors, came in other parts of southeast Asia, including the island of Sri Lanka, off the south coast of India, and in China, Korea, and Japan. Still, pockets of Buddhists remained in India, particularly in the northeast. They were joined by other dissident groups who rejected aspects of Hinduism. Thus, Hinduism, although dominant, had to come to terms with the existence of other religions early on.

If Hinduism, along with the caste system, formed the most distinctive and durable products of the classical period of Indian history, they were certainly not the only ones. Even aside from dissident religions, Indian culture during this period was vibrant and diverse, and religion encompassed only part of its interests. Hinduism itself encouraged many wider pursuits.

Indian thinkers wrote actively about various aspects of human life. Although political theory was sparse, a great deal of legal writing occurred. The theme of love was important also. A manual of the "laws of love," the ***Kamasutra*** (kah-muh-SOO-truh), written in the 4th century C.E., discusses relationships between men and women.



Buddha's Sermon at Benares and the Edicts of Ashoka

Buddha Creator of a major Indian and Asian religion; born in 6th century B.C.E. as son of local ruler among Aryan tribes located near Himalayas; became an ascetic; found enlightenment under bo tree; taught that enlightenment could be achieved only by abandoning desires for all earthly things.

nirvana The Buddhist state of enlightenment, a state of tranquility.

Kamasutra [kah-muh-SOO-truh] Written by Vatsayana during Gupta era; offered instructions on all aspects of life for higher-caste males, including grooming, hygiene, etiquette, selection of wives, and lovemaking.

Arts and Sciences

Indian literature, taking many themes from the great epic poems and their tales of military adventure, stressed lively story lines. The epics were recorded in final written form during the Gupta period, and other story collections, like the *Panchatantra,* which includes Sinbad the Sailor, Jack the Giant Killer, and the Seven League Boots, produced adventurous yarns now known all over the world. Classical stories were often secular, but they sometimes included the gods and also shared with Hinduism an emphasis on imagination and excitement. Indian drama flourished also, again particularly under the Guptas, and stressed themes of romantic adventure in which lovers separated and then reunited after many perils. This literary tradition created a cultural framework that still survives in India. Even contemporary Indian movies reflect the tradition of swashbuckling romance and heroic action.

Classical India also produced important work in science and mathematics. The Guptas supported a vast university center—one of the world's first—in the town of Nalanda that attracted students from other parts of Asia as well as Indian brahmans. Nalanda had over a hundred lecture halls, three large libraries, an astronomical observatory, and even a model dairy. Its curriculum included religion, philosophy, medicine, architecture, and agriculture.

At the research level, Indian scientists, borrowing a bit from Greek learning after the conquests of Alexander the Great, made important strides in astronomy and medicine. The great astronomer Aryabhatta calculated the length of the solar year and improved mathematical measurements. He also calculated the circumference of the earth with remarkable accuracy—which also indicates that he believed it to be round. Indian astronomers understood and calculated the daily rotation of the earth on its axis, predicted and explained eclipses, and developed a theory of gravity, and through telescopic observation they identified seven planets. Medical research was hampered by religious prohibitions on dissection, but Indian surgeons nevertheless made advances in bone setting and plastic surgery. Inoculation against smallpox was introduced, using cowpox serum. Indian hospitals stressed cleanliness, including sterilization of wounds, while leading doctors promoted high ethical standards. As was the case with Indian discoveries in astronomy, many medical findings reached the Western world only in modern times.

Indian mathematics produced still more important discoveries. The Indian numbering system is the one we use today, although we call it Arabic because Europeans imported it secondhand from the Arabs. Indians invented the concept of zero, and through it they were able to develop the decimal system. Indian advances in numbering rank with writing itself as key human inventions. Indian mathematicians also developed the concept of negative numbers, calculated square roots and a table of sines, and computed the value of pi more accurately than the Greeks did.

Finally, classical India produced lively art, although much of it perished under later invasions. Ashoka sponsored many spherical shrines to Buddha, called **stupas,** and statues honoring Buddha were also common. Under the Guptas, sculpture and painting moved away from realistic portrayals

stupas Stone shrines built to house pieces of bone or hair and personal possessions said to be relics of the Buddha; preserved Buddhist architectural forms.



Buddhist Religious Site

of the human form toward more stylized representation. Indian painters, working on the walls of buildings and caves, filled their work with forms of people and animals, captured in lively color. Indian art showed a keen appreciation of nature. It could pay homage to religious values, particularly during the period in which Buddhism briefly spread, but could also celebrate the joys of life.

There was, clearly, no full unity to this cultural outpouring. Religion, legalism, abstract mathematics, and art and literature coexisted. The result, however, was a somewhat distinctive overall tone, different from the more rational approaches of the West or the Chinese concentration on political ethics. In various cultural expressions, Indians developed an interest in spontaneity and imagination, whether in fleshly pleasures or a mystical union with the divine essence.

Economy and Society

The caste system structured India's social framework, but a strong emphasis on trade was also important.

Family life combined patriarchy with an emphasis on affection.

Cast(e)aways? Women in Classical India



The caste system described many key features of Indian social and economic life, as it assigned people to occupations and regulated marriages. Low-caste individuals had few legal rights, and servants were often abused by their masters, who were restrained only by the ethical promptings of religion toward kindly treatment. A brahman who killed a servant for misbehavior faced a penalty no more severe than if he had killed an animal. This extreme level of abuse was uncommon, but the caste system did unquestionably make its mark on daily life as well as on the formal structure of society. The majority of Indians living in peasant villages had less frequent contact with people of higher social castes, and village leaders were charged with trying to protect peasants from too much interference by landlords and rulers.

Family life also emphasized the theme of hierarchy and tight organization, as it evolved from the Vedic and Epic ages. The dominance of husbands and fathers remained strong. One Indian code of law recommended that a wife worship her husband as a god. Indeed, the rights of women became increasingly limited as Indian civilization took clearer shape. Although the great epics stressed the control of husband and father, they also recognized women's independent contributions. As agriculture became better organized and improved technology reduced (without eliminating) women's economic contributions, the stress on male authority expanded. Here India followed a common pattern in agricultural societies, as women's sphere of action was gradually circumscribed. Hindu thinkers debated whether a woman could advance spiritually without first being reincarnated as a man, and there was no consensus. The limits imposed on women were reflected in laws and literary references. A system of arranged marriage evolved in which parents contracted unions for children, particularly daughters, at quite early ages, to spouses they had never even met. The goal of these arrangements was to ensure solid economic links, with child brides contributing dowries of land or domestic animals to the ultimate family estates, but the result of such arrangements was that young people, especially girls, were drawn into a new family structure in which they had no voice.

However, the rigidities of family life and male dominance over women were often greater in theory than they usually turned out to be in practice. The emphasis on loving relations and sexual pleasure in Indian culture modified family life, since husband and wife were supposed to provide mutual emotional support as a marriage developed. The *Mahabharata* epic called a man's wife his truest friend: "Even a man in the grip of rage will not be harsh to a woman, remembering that on her depend the joys of love, happiness, and virtue." Small children were often pampered. "With their teeth half shown in causeless laughter, their efforts at talking so sweetly uncertain, when children ask to sit on his lap, a man is blessed." Families thus served an important and explicit emotional function as well as a role in supporting the structure of society and its institutions. They also, as in all agricultural societies, formed economic units. Children, after early years of indulgence, were expected to work hard. Adults were obligated to assist older relatives. The purpose of arranged marriages was to promote a family's economic well-being, and almost everyone lived in a family setting.

The Indian version of the patriarchal family was thus subtly different from that in China, although women were officially just as subordinate and later trends—as in many patriarchal societies over time—would bring new burdens. But Indian culture often featured clever and strong-willed women and goddesses, and this contributed to women's status as wives and mothers. Stories also celebrated women's emotions and beauty.

The economy of India in the classical period became extremely vigorous, certainly rivaling China in technological sophistication and probably briefly surpassing China in the prosperity of its upper classes. In manufacturing, Indians invented new uses for chemistry, and their steel was the best in the world. Indian capacity in ironmaking outdistanced European levels until a few centuries ago. Indian techniques in textiles were also advanced, as the subcontinent became the first to manufacture cotton cloth, calico, and cashmere. Most manufacturing was done by artisans who formed guilds and sold their goods from shops.

Indian emphasis on trade and merchant activity was far greater than in China, and indeed greater than that of the classical Mediterranean world. Indian merchants enjoyed relatively high caste status and the flexibility of the Hindu ethic. They also traveled widely, not only over the subcontinent but by sea to the Middle East and east Asia. The seafaring peoples along the southern coast, usually outside the large empires of northern India, were particularly active. These southern Indians, the Tamils, traded cotton and silks, dyes, drugs, gold, and ivory, often earning great fortunes. From the Middle East and the Roman Empire, they brought back pottery, wine, metals, some slaves, and above all gold. Their trade with southeast Asia was even more active, as Indian merchants transported not only sophisticated manufactured goods but also the trappings of India's active culture to places like Malaysia and the larger islands of Indonesia. In addition, caravan trade developed with China.

The Indian economy remained firmly agricultural at its base. The wealth of the upper classes and the splendor of cities like Nalanda were confined to a small group, as most people lived near the margins of subsistence. But India was justly known by the time of the Guptas for its wealth as well as for its religion and intellectual life—always understanding that wealth was relative in the classical world and very unevenly divided. A Chinese Buddhist on a pilgrimage to India wrote:

> The people are many and happy. They do not have to register their households with the police. There is no death penalty. Religious sects have houses of charity where rooms, couches, beds, food, and drink are supplied to travelers.

Indian Influence and Comparative Features

Because of its extensive trade, India's artistic and cultural influence reached many parts of the ancient world, even as India shaped a distinctive version of classical civilization.

Classical India, from the Mauryan period onward, had a considerable influence on other parts of the world. In many ways, the Indian Ocean, dominated at this point by Indian merchants and missionaries, was the most active linkage point among cultures, although admittedly, the Mediterranean, which channeled contact from the Middle East to north Africa and Europe, was a close second. Indian dominance of the waters of southern Asia, and the impressive creativity of Indian civilization itself, resulted in goods and influence traveling well beyond the subcontinent's borders. No previous civilization had developed in southeast Asia to compete with Indian influence. And while India did not attempt political domination, dealing instead with the regional kingdoms of Burma, Thailand, parts of Indonesia, and Vietnam, Indian travelers or settlers did bring to these locales a persuasive way of life. Many Indian merchants married into local royal families. Indian-style temples were constructed and other forms of Indian art traveled widely. Buddhism spread from India to many parts of southeast Asia, and Hinduism converted many upper-class people, particularly in several of the Indonesian kingdoms. India thus serves as an early example of a major civilization expanding its influence well beyond its own regions.

Indian influence had affected China, through Buddhism and art, by the end of the classical period. Earlier, Buddhist emissaries to the Middle East stimulated new ethical thinking that informed Greek and Roman groups like the Stoics and through them aspects of Christianity later on.

Within India itself, the classical period, starting a bit late after the Aryan invasions, lasted somewhat longer than that of China or Rome. Even when the period ended with the fall of the Guptas, an identifiable civilization remained in India, building on several key factors first established in the classical period: the religion, to be sure, but also the artistic and literary tradition and the complex social and family network. The ability of this civilization to survive, even under long periods of foreign domination, was testimony to the meaning and variety it offered to many Indians themselves.

Inequality as the Social Norm

The Indian caste system is perhaps the most extreme expression of a type of social organization that violates the most revered principles on which modern Western societies are based. Like the Egyptian division between a noble and a commoner and the Greek division between a freeperson and a slave, the caste system rests on the assumption that humans are inherently unequal and that their lot in life is determined by the families and social strata into which they are born. The caste system, like the social systems of all other classical civilizations, presumed that social divisions were fixed and stable and that people ought to be content with the station they had been allotted at birth.

> In nearly all societies . . . fixed social hierarchies were upheld by creation myths and religious beliefs that proclaimed their divine origins and the danger of punishment if they were challenged.

Furthermore, all classical social systems (with the partial exception of the Greeks, at least in Athens) played down the importance of the individual and stressed collective obligations and loyalties that were centered in the family, extended kin groups, or broader occupational or social groups. Family or caste affiliation, not individual ambition, determined a person's career goals and activities.

All of these assumptions directly contradict some of the West's most cherished current beliefs. They run counter to one of the most basic organizing principles of modern Western culture, rooted in a commitment to equality of opportunity. This principle is enshrined in European and American constitutions and legal systems, taught in Western schools and churches, and proclaimed in Western media. The belief in human equality, or at least equality of opportunity, is one of the most important ideas that modern Western civilization has exported to the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The modern concept of equality rests on two assumptions. The first is that a person's place in society should be determined not by the class or family into which he or she is born but by personal actions and qualities. The second is that the opportunity to rise—or fall—in social status should be open to everyone and protected by law. Some of our most cherished myths reflect these assumptions: that anyone can aspire to be president of the United States, for example, or that an ordinary person has the right to challenge the actions of the politically and economically powerful.

Of course, equality is a social ideal rather than something any human society has achieved. No one pretends that all humans are equal in intelligence or talent, and there are important barriers to equality of opportunity. But the belief persists that all humans should have an equal chance to better themselves by using the brains and skills they have. In the real world, race, class, and gender differences often favor some individuals over others, and laws and government agencies often do not correct these inequities. But the citizens of modern Western societies, and increasingly the rest of the world, champion the principles of equality of opportunity and the potential for social mobility as the just and natural bases for social organization and interaction.

China and India Compared

The thrusts of classical civilization in China and India reveal the diversity generated during the classical age. The restraint of Chinese art and poetry contrasted with the more dynamic sensual styles of India. India ultimately settled on a primary religion, though with important minority expressions, that embodied diverse impulses within it. China opted for separate religious and philosophical systems that would serve different needs. China's political structures and values found little echo in India, whereas the Indian caste system involved a social rigidity considerably greater than that of China. India's cultural emphasis was, on balance, considerably more otherworldly than that of China, despite the impact of Daoism. Quite obviously, classical India and classical China created vastly different cultures. Even in science, where there was similar interest in pragmatic discoveries about how the world works, the Chinese placed greater stress on purely practical findings, whereas the Indians ventured further into the mathematical arena.

Beyond the realm of formal culture and the institutions of government, India and China may seem more similar. As agricultural societies, both civilizations relied on a large peasant class, organized in close-knit villages with much mutual cooperation. Cities and merchant activity, although vital, played a secondary role. Political power rested primarily with those who controlled the land, through ownership of large estates and the ability to tax the peasant class. On a more personal level, the power of husbands and fathers in the family—the basic fact of patriarchy—encompassed Indian and Chinese families alike.

However, what is just and natural for modern societies would have been incomprehensible in the classical age. In fact, most human societies through most of human history have been organized on assumptions that are much closer to those underlying the Indian caste system than to those underlying modern Western norms. Ancient Egyptians and Greeks, medieval Europeans, and early modern Chinese believed that career possibilities, political power, and social privileges should be set by law according to the position of one's family in the social hierarchy. The Indian caste structure was the most rigid and complex of the systems by which occupations, resources, and status were allotted. But all classical civilizations had similar social mechanisms that determined the obligations and privileges of members of each social stratum.

In some ways, classical Chinese and Greek societies provided exceptions to these general patterns. In China, people from lowly social origins could rise to positions of great status and power, and well placed families could fall on hard times and lose their gentry status. But "rags to riches" success stories were the exception rather than the rule, and mobility between social strata was limited. In fact, Chinese thinkers made much of the distinctions between the **scholar-gentry** elite and the common people.

Although some of the Greeks, particularly the Athenians, developed the idea of equality for all citizens in a particular city-state, most of the people of these societies were not citizens, and many were slaves. By virtue of their birth the latter were assigned lives of servitude and often drudgery. Democratic participation and the chance to make full use of their talents were limited to the free males of the city-states.

In nearly all societies, these fixed social hierarchies were upheld by creation myths and religious beliefs that proclaimed their divine origins and the danger of punishment if they were challenged. Elite thinkers stressed the importance of the established social order to human peace and well-being; rulers were duty bound to defend it. Few challenged the naturalness of the hierarchy itself; fewer still proposed alternatives to it. Each person was expected to accept his or her place and to concentrate on the duties and obligations of that place rather than worry about rights or personal desires. Males and females alike were required to subordinate their individual yearnings and talents to the needs of their families, clans, communities, or social superiors. In return for a person's acceptance of his or her allotted place in the hierarchy, he or she received material sustenance and a social slot. Of course, these benefits were denied to people who fought the system. They might be outcast or exiled, physically punished, or even killed.

QUESTIONS What arguments did the thinkers of the classical civilizations of Greece, China, and India use to explain and justify the great differences in social status and material wealth? How did those who belonged to elite groups justify their much greater status, wealth, and power compared to the peasants, artisans, and servants who made up most of the population? Comparing these modes of social organization with the ideals of your own society, what do you see as the advantages and drawbacks of each?

However, Indian and Chinese societies differed in more than their religion, philosophy, art, and politics. Ordinary people had cultures along with elites. Hindu peasants saw their world differently from their Chinese counterparts. They placed less emphasis on personal emotional restraint and detailed etiquette; they expected different emotional interactions with family members. Indian peasants were less constrained than were the Chinese by recurrent efforts by large landlords to gain control of their land. Although there were wealthy landlords in India, the system of village control of most land was more firmly entrenched than in China. Indian merchants played a greater role than their Chinese counterparts. There was more sea trade, more commercial vitality. Revealingly, India's expanding cultural influence was due to merchant activity above all else, whereas Chinese expansion involved government initiatives in gaining new territory and sending proud emissaries to satellite states. These differences were less dramatic, certainly less easy to document, than those generated by elite thinkers and politicians, but they contributed to the shape of a civilization and to its particular vitality, its areas of stability and instability.

Because each classical civilization developed its own unique style, in social relationships as well as in formal politics and intellectual life, exchanges between two societies like China and India involved specific borrowings, not wholesale imitation. India and China, the two giants of classical Asia, remain subjects of comparison to our own time, because they have continued to build distinctively on their particular traditions, established before 500 C.E. These characteristics, in turn, differed from those of yet another center of civilization, the societies that sprang up on the shores of the Mediterranean during this same classical age.

scholar-gentry Chinese class created by the marital linkage of the local land-holding aristocracy with the office-holding shi; superseded shi as governors of China.

The Pattern of Trade in the Ancient Eurasian World

The period of Maurya rule in India coincided with a great expansion in trade between the main centers of civilization in Eurasia and Africa. In the centuries that followed, a permanent system of exchange developed that extended from Rome and the Mediterranean Sea to China and Japan. The trading networks that made up this system included both those established between ports connected by ships and sea routes and those consisting of overland exchanges transmitted along the chain of trading centers that crossed central Asia and the Sudanic region of Africa. By the last centuries B.C.E., this far-flung trading system included much of the world as it was known to the peoples of the Eastern Hemisphere.

Some products produced at one end of the system, such as Chinese silks and porcelains, were carried the entire length of the network to be sold in markets at the other edge—in Rome, for example. As a general rule, products carried over these great distances tended to be high-priced luxury goods such as spices and precious jewels. But most of the exchanges, particularly in bulk goods such as metal ores or foodstuffs, were between adjoining regions. The ports of western India, for example, carried on a brisk trade with those in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, while trading centers in southeast Asia supplied China with forest products and other raw materials in exchange for the many items manufactured by China's highly skilled artisans. Although some merchants and sailors, particularly the Chinese and Arabs, could be found in ports far from their homelands, most confined their activities within regional orbits, such as the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, or the South China Sea.

Map 3.3 provides an overview of this great trading network in the age of the classical civilizations, roughly the 3rd century B.C.E. to the 3rd century C.E. It shows the main centers of production, the goods exported overland and overseas, and the main directions of trade in these products. Key ports, inland trading centers, and products are shown for each of the main sectors participating in the system.

QUESTIONS Which civilizations or areas in the global trading network were the main centers for the production of finished products, such as cloth and pottery? What major centers supplied raw materials, such as forest products or foods? Why were luxury goods likely to be transported the greatest distances? Why were bulk goods, especially foods, usually shipped only short distances, if at all? Besides trade goods, what other things might be transmitted through the trading networks?

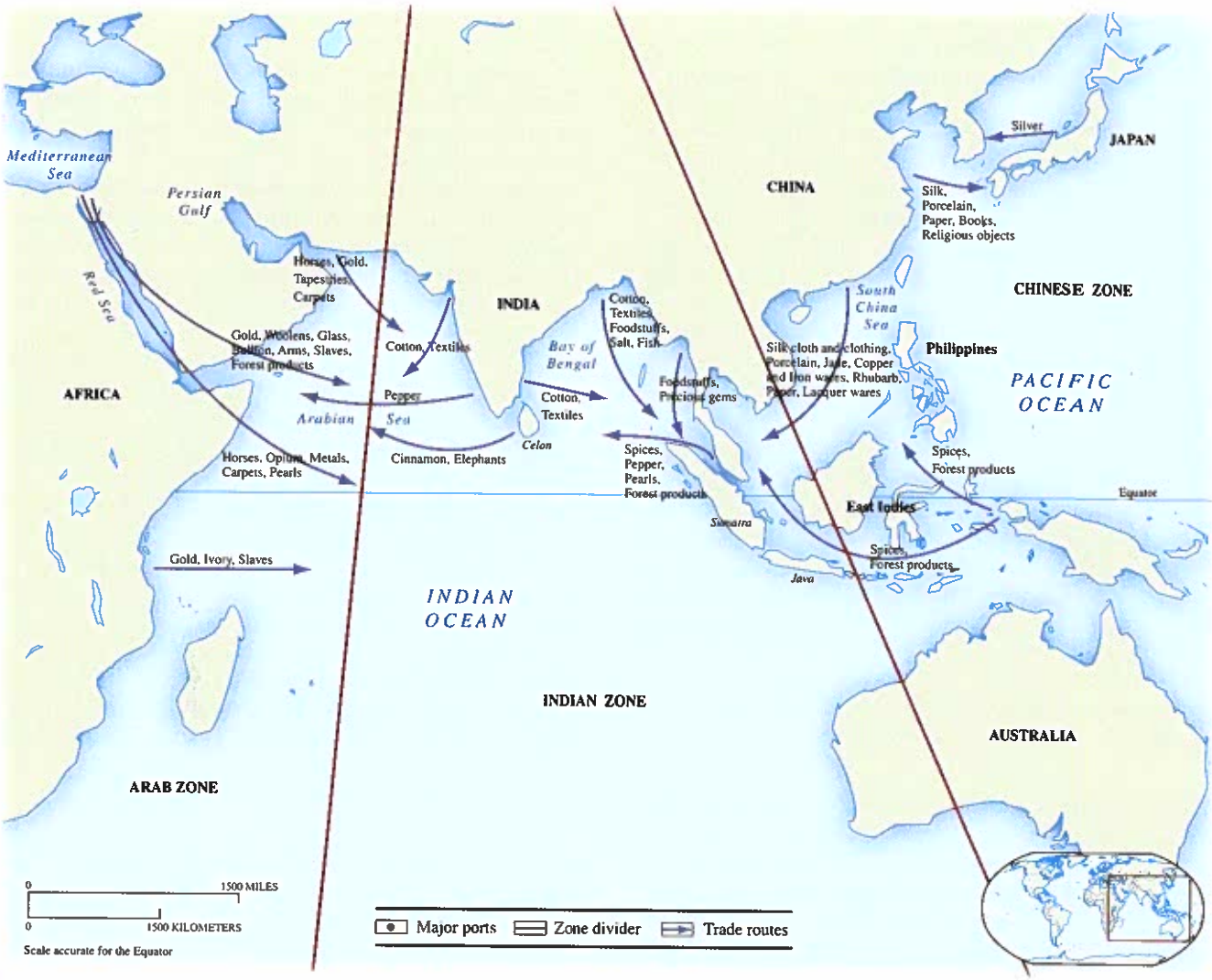
Global Connections

India and the Wider World

No classical civilization was more open to outside influences than those of the Indian subcontinent. None were more central to cross-cultural exchanges in the centuries that ushered what we have come to label the common era (C.E.) of world history. The brahman-dominated, caste-ordered civilization that flourished at the end of the Vedic era and later under the Guptas produced some of humanity's most sublime art and philosophy; important breakthroughs in mathematics, the sciences, and technology; prosperous urban centers; and a population that has been second only to that of China through much of human history.

The period dominated by the Mauryas in between saw the rise of Buddhism, one of a handful of truly world religions. In this era and the age of the Guptas that followed, Buddhism was but one of numerous components of Indian civilization that were exported to China and east Asia, across the steppes of central Asia, throughout most of southeast Asia, and as far west as the Mediterranean.

In mainland and island southeast Asia, the impact of Indian civilization was especially critical. Indian merchants played a key role in trade with these regions, and other influences followed. Indian religions and epics, art and architecture, and concepts of kingship sparked the rise of centralized states and complex societies that culminated in great civilizations, such as those centered at Angkor Wat in Cambodia and the kingdom of Majapahit in central Java. In the Mediterranean, Indian influences were felt in areas as diverse as artistic techniques, philosophies such as Stoicism, and religious ideas that significantly affected Christianity. Central to all of these developments was the fact that in the centuries that witnessed the flowering of Indian civilization under the Mauryas and Guptas, the coastal areas of the Indian subcontinent became, and would remain for millennia, one of the core areas of an ever expanding trading network that would eventually encompass most of the Eastern Hemisphere. Indian manufactured goods, such as cotton textiles and bronze statuary, soon became some of the most coveted commodities in this system of exchange. Indian merchants and sailors would carry them throughout the Indian Ocean and to the emporiums of the Silk Road that dominated overland trade beyond the Himalaya Mountains. Indian religions, artwork, scientific discoveries, and epic literature came to enrich, and at times spur major transformations in, civilizations over much of the known world.



Map 3.3 Eurasian and African Trading Goods Routes, c. 300 B.C.E. to 300 C.E. As the map above illustrates, a vibrant oceanic trading system was in place across the AfroEurasian continents by the last centuries B.C.E., and the Indian subcontinent was central as a producer and consumer in this vast network of contact and exchange.

Further Readings

Perhaps the most readable introductions to life and society in India's classical age can be found in A. L. Basham's *The Wonder That Was India* (1963) and Jeannine Auboyer's *Daily Life in Ancient India* (2002 reprint ed.). The works of Romilla Thapar, especially *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1997) and *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (2003), are the best on the political history of the era. Her more general *A History of India*, Vol. 1 (1991 reprint), and more recent *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History* (2000) are very detailed and quite technical—certainly a challenge for the beginner. On the Guptas the most comprehensive recent work is Ashvini Agrawal's *Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas* (1989). Fine narrative histories of all aspects of Indian civilization in this period can be found in the appropriate chapters of *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (1964), edited by R. C. Majumdar, A. K. Majumdar, and D. K. Ghose. Some of the best works on the position of women and social life more generally include Pandharinath Prabhu's *Hindu Social Organization* (1940), L.K. Tripathi, *Position and Status of Women in Ancient India* (1988), and S. Tharu & K. Lalita, eds., Women Writing in India 600 to the Present (1991). On the development of the caste system, see B. R. Kamble, *Caste and Philosophy in Pre-Buddhist India* (1979). A wide range of other aspects of ancient Indian culture is covered in the fine essays in A. L. Basham's *A Cultural History of India* (1975).

Superb introductions to various branches of Indian religious and philosophical thinking, with well selected portions of the appropriate texts, can be found in S. Radhakrishnan and Charles Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (1967); and Ainslee Embree, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Vol. 1, *From*

AP* Test Prep

1. The highest Hindu social class members in India after the Epic Age were usually the
   (A) Shudras (workers).
   (B) Vaisayas (merchants, herders).
   (C) Kshatriya (warriors, rulers).
   (D) Brahmans (priests, scholars).
   (E) Dasas or the Dravidian peoples.

2. A central message of the Bhagavad Gita is that
   (A) the only pathway to salvation is meditation.
   (B) a soul can be destroyed by human action.
   (C) upward mobility into higher castes was a vital social goal.
   (D) one must carry out the duties that come with one's caste.

3. A major difference between Buddhism and Hinduism was that
   (A) Buddhism denied the need for caste, rites, and sacrifice to achieve nirvana.
   (B) Buddhism monks married in splendor, most Hindu priests remained unmarried.
   (C) Buddhism denied the possibility of human rebirth or reincarnation.
   (D) Hinduism taught respect for all living things to the point of rejecting the killing of all animals.

4. Buddhism spread primarily as a result of
   (A) the appeal of its flawless performance of intricate rites.
   (B) its monastic community and related missionary activity.
   (C) the support of Gupta rulers.
   (D) successful wars against Brahman-backed political opponents.

5. Buddhism lost its appeal and influence in Guptan India in part because
   (A) Hinduism showed its adaptability by emphasizing its mystical side, thus retaining the loyalties of many Indians.
   (B) unpopular Guptas supported Buddhism, which led to Buddhism's decline.
   (C) Islam was introduced and replaced both Hinduism and Buddhism.
   (D) Hindus abandoned the caste system, making Hinduism more attractive.

6. During the classical era in India, all of the following occurred EXCEPT
   (A) the invasion of Alexander the Great prevented contacts with the Mediterranean world.
   (B) spherical shrines to Buddha, called *stupas*, were erected.
   (C) the concept of zero was invented.
   (D) sculpture and painting emphasized religious themes.

7. Over time in classical India, the caste system
   (A) died out as Buddhism spread throughout India.
   (B) intensified in complexity and began to differ from region to region.
   (C) lost its religious significance.
   (D) removed restrictions on gender

Free-Response Question

Compare and contrast the classical civilizations of India and China.

4 Classical Civilizations in the Mediterranean and Middle East

The Persian Empire: A New Perspective in the Middle East
Patterns of Greek and Roman History
Greek and Roman Political Institutions
THINKING HISTORICALLY: The Classical Mediterranean in Comparative Perspective
Religion and Culture
VISUALIZING THE PAST: Political Rituals in Persia
Economy and Society in the Mediterranean
DOCUMENT: Rome and a Values Crisis
Toward the Fall of Rome
GLOBAL CONNECTIONS: Persia, Greece, Rome, and the World

It is one of the most famous stories in history: In 490 B.C.E., the Greeks, under Athenian leaders, defeated a huge Persian army at Marathon. Fear of the Persians had run strong, and news of victory was accordingly sweet. According to legend, a Greek soldier named Pheidippides ran 26 miles to bring the word to Athens and, having delivered the message, collapsed and died. The first modern Olympic Games, in 1896, featured a long-distance endurance race called the "marathon" in memory of that great feat. Pheidippides' run reminds us not only of a great military victory and strong emotion, but of the Greeks' powerful devotion to the public good of the cities they loved.

The Persian invasion of Greece began as a punishment for the revolt of several Greek city-states against Persian rule—a revolt the Persians easily put down. Immediately following the Greek victory at the Battle of Marathon, the Persians tried to attack Athens by sea, but the Athenian soldiers had hurried back to defend their city. Vowing revenge, the Persians returned to Asia.

A new Persian king, Xerxes, took personal charge of the plan to conquer the Greeks. By 480 B.C.E. he had amassed an army and fleet that outnumbered Greek forces by two to one. Many Greek states held back, assuming the Persians would win this time. Even the Greek priests, trying to foretell the future, urged surrender. To make matters worse, a Greek traitor showed the Persians a pass that would lead them to Athens, which was indefensible. Most Athenians were evacuated to an island, where they watched the Persians set fire to their temples on the hill of the Acropolis. But Themistocles, the Athenian leader, realized that the huge Persian navy could not move fast. If it could be led into a narrow strait, where its numbers did not count, it could be defeated. Themistocles sent a slave to trick Xerxes, telling him that the Greeks were quarreling among themselves. Thinking that this was their chance to finish off the Greeks, the Persians rowed into the narrow strait of Thermopylae. There, instead of the divided and weakened opponent they were expecting, they found a united force ready to fight them. Xerxes watched the battle from a hill overlooking the strait, where he had thought he would be able to see and reward the bravest of his warriors. Instead he saw his navy virtually destroyed, and he fled.

History is full of might-have-beens. It is important to consider what would have happened if the normal advantage in military strength had prevailed and the Persians had won; and what difference this would have made to world history.

One point is sure. The battle highlighted the developments of not one but two major civilizations in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. A massive Persian empire developed, spurred initially by the kind of outside invasion that had earlier produced various Mesopotamian empires. But the Persian Empire grew far larger, illustrating the new capacities of the classical period. Durable political and cultural traditions were established that persisted in and around present-day Iran well beyond the classical period.

At the same time, Greek city-states established a presence along the eastern Mediterranean and into parts of southern Europe. Like China and Persia, the Greeks built on earlier civilizations, but they established a strong and independent culture of their own. Greeks thought foreigners' speech sounded like "bar, bar, bar"—so they called them barbarians, establishing Greek identity by contrast. Greek society generated less tidy political structures than China or Persia, but their expansion and outreach affected a large portion of western Asia and the eastern half of the Mediterranean basin. As Greek states faded, Alexander the Great—the young Macedonian king who had been tutored by the Greek philosopher Aristotle—forged a military empire that briefly embraced Persia as well. Through his military conquests, Greek cultural influence was spread so widely that the years that followed are known as the Hellenistic ("from the Greek") period of history. ■



Figure 4.1 Sarcophagus cover: Battle of Marathon.

The classical civilizations that sprang up on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea from about 800 B.C.E. until the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 C.E. rivaled their counterparts in India and China in richness and impact. Centered first in the peninsula of Greece, then in Rome, the new Mediterranean culture did not embrace all of the civilized lands of the ancient Middle East. Greece rebuffed the advance of the mighty Persian Empire and established some colonies on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, in what is now Turkey, but it only briefly conquered more than a fraction of the civilized Middle East. Rome conquered a vast empire, but even it had to contend with strong kingdoms to the east. Nevertheless, Greece and Rome do not merely constitute a westward push of civilization from its earlier bases in the Middle East and along the Nile—although this is a part of their story. They also represent the formation of new institutions and values that would reverberate in the later history of the Middle East and Europe alike.

For most Americans, and not only those who are descendants of European immigrants, classical Mediterranean culture constitutes "our own" classical past, or at least a goodly part of it. The framers of the U.S. Constitution were extremely conscious of Greek and Roman precedents. Designers of public buildings in the United States, from the early days of the American republic to the present, have dutifully copied Greek and Roman models, as in the Lincoln Memorial and most state capitols. Plato and Aristotle continue to be thought of as the founders of our philosophical tradition, and skillful teachers

2000 B.C.E.	1000 B.C.E.	500 B.C.E.	250 B.C.E.	1 C.E.	250 C.E.
1700 IndoEuropean invasions of Greek peninsula 1400 Kingdom of Mycenae; Trojan War	800–600 Rise of Greek city-states; Athens and Sparta become dominant c. 700 Homerian epics *Iliad, Odyssey;* flowering of Greek architecture 550 Cyrus the Great forms Persian Empire 509 Beginnings of Roman Republic	470–430 Athens at its height: Pericles, Phidias, Sophocles, Socrates 450 Twelve Tables of Law 431–404 Peloponnesian Wars 359–336 Philip II of Macedonia 338–323 Macedonian Empire, Alexander the Great 300–100 Hellenistic period 264–146 Punic Wars	49 Julius Caesar becomes dictator in Rome; assassinated in 44 27 Augustus Caesar seizes power; rise of Roman Empire c. 4 Birth of Jesus	c. 30 Crucifixion of Jesus 63 Forced dissolution of independent Jewish state by Romans 101–106 Greatest spread of Roman territory 180 Death of Marcus Aurelius; beginning of decline of Roman Empire	313 Constantine adopts Christianity 476 Fall of Rome

still rely on some imitation of the Socratic method. Our sense of debt to Greece and Rome may inspire us to find in their history special meaning or links to our own world; the Western educational experience has long included elaborate explorations of the Greco-Roman past as part of the standard academic education. But from the standpoint of world history, greater balance is obviously necessary. Greco-Roman history is one of the three major classical civilizations, more dynamic than its Chinese and Indian counterparts in some respects but noticeably less successful in others. The challenge is to discern the leading features of Greek and Roman civilization and to compare them with those of their counterparts elsewhere. We can then clearly recognize the connections and our own debt without adhering to the notion that the Mediterranean world somehow dominated the classical period.

Classical Mediterranean civilization is complicated by the fact that it passed through two centers during its centuries of vigor, as Greek political institutions rose and then declined and the legions of Rome assumed leadership. Roman interests were not identical to those of Greece, although the Romans carefully preserved most Greek achievements. Rome mastered engineering; Greece specialized in scientific thought. Rome created a mighty empire, whereas the Greek city-states proved rather inept at forming an empire. It is possible, certainly, to see more than a change in emphases from Greece to Rome, and to talk about separate civilizations instead of a single basic pattern. And it is true that Greek influence was always stronger than Roman in the eastern Mediterranean, whereas western Europe would encounter a fuller Greco-Roman mixture, with Roman influence predominating in language and law. However, Greek and Roman societies shared many political ideas; they had a common religion and artistic styles; they developed similar economic structures. Certainly, their classical heritage would be used by successive civilizations without fine distinctions drawn between what was Greek and what was Roman.

For several centuries, the Persian Empire far surpassed Greece in significance, certainly in the Middle East but also in the eastern Mediterranean more generally. The Empire also established significant traditions that shaped a strong Persian political and cultural presence, still visible in present day Iran. And the Empire generated one of the significant religions in the world history, in Zoroastrianism. The Greek tradition was largely separate, but Greek and Persian influences interacted not only in mutual warfare, but as a result of Alexander the Great's conquests and his efforts to merge cultural strands in the vast territory that briefly came under his control.

Cyrus the Great Established massive Persian Empire by 550 B.C.E.; successor state to Mesopotamian empires.

The Persian Empire: A New Perspective in the Middle East

The Persians worked quickly to unify their vast empire. Persia established durable political and cultural traditions.

After the fall of the great Egyptian and Hittite empires in the Middle East by 1200 B.C.E., much smaller states predominated. Then new powers stepped in, first the Assyrians and then an influx of Persians. A great conqueror, **Cyrus the Great,** emerged by 550 B.C.E. and established the massive

Persian Empire, which ran across the northern Middle East and into northwestern India. The new empire was the clearest successor to the great Mesopotamian states of the past, but it was far larger. Cyrus allowed some parts of the empire to preserve older traditions, such as the use of cuneiform writing, but he introduced important changes as well. In addition to their territorial expansion, the Persians significantly advanced iron technology in the Middle East.

MAP The Persian Empire at Its Greatest Extent

For several centuries, the Persian Empire far surpassed Greece in significance, certainly in the Middle East but also in the eastern Mediterranean more generally. The Empire also established significant traditions that shaped a strong Persian political and cultural presence, still visible in present day Iran (Map 4.1).

Political Styles and Innovations

Persian politics featured several emphases. The first was wide tolerance. The Persian Empire embraced a host of languages and cultures, and the early Persian rulers were careful to grant considerable latitude for this diversity. Second, however, was a strong authoritarian streak. Darius, successor to Cyrus, worked hard to centralize laws and tax collection. The idea of wide participation in politics was rejected. Third, and related to the centralization process, Persian rulers developed a vital infrastructure for the whole empire. A major system of roads reduced travel time, though it still took 90 days to go from one end of the empire to the other. An east–west highway, largely paved, simplified commerce and troop movement from the Indian border to the Mediterranean, and another highway reached Egypt. Regularly spaced inns provided rest stops and fresh horses for travelers. The Persians established the first regular postal service, and they built a network of inns along their roads to accommodate travelers. These achievements would help connect the Middle East to trade routes coming from central and eastern Asia, a vital step in the growth of new trans-regional commercial connections.



Map 4.1 Persia in Its Main Stages

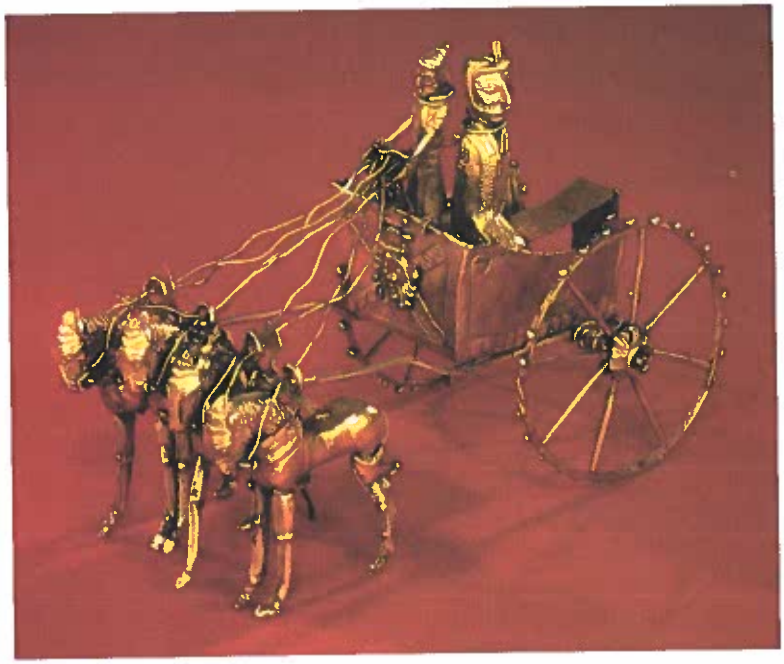


Figure 4.2 Persians established a distinct artistic tradition including fine craftwork, as shown in this chariot.

Persian emperors, particularly Darius, who worked hard not only to expand but to integrate his vast territories, developed a substantial bureaucracy. This existed alongside an earlier, military nobility. The central government introduced several measures to control the activities of officials assigned to distant provinces. Tax collection was carefully regulated, and spies were sent out to make sure regional officials remained loyal to the central government, rather than allying with local political forces.

Persia was also the center of a major new religion. A Zoroastrianian religious leader, Zoroaster (c. 630–550 B.C.E.), revised the polytheistic religious tradition of the Sumerians through the introduction of monotheism. He banned animal sacrifice and the use of intoxicants. He introduced the idea of individual salvation through the free choice of God over the spirit of evil. Zoroaster, and the growing group of Zoroastrian priests (the *Magi*) saw life as a battle between two divine forces: good and evil. **Zoroastrianism** (zohr-oh-AS-tree-uh-NIH-zuhm) emphasized the importance of personal moral choice in picking one side or the other, with a Last Judgment ultimately deciding the eternal fate of each person. The righteous would live on in a heaven, the "House of Song," while the evil would be condemned to eternal pain. Zoroastrianism influenced Persia's later emperors and spread widely in the population as a whole. A Greek traveler, Herodotus, noted that the Persian religion was much more spiritual than that of the Greeks, for they did not believe in humanlike gods.

Zoroastrianism [zohr-oh-AS-tree-uh-NIH-zuhm] Animist religion that saw material existence as battle between forces of good and evil; stressed the importance of moral choice; righteous lived on after death in "House of Song"; chief religion of Persian Empire.

Indeed, the Persian religious influence would prove far greater than that of the Greeks, through Greek culture had wide impact in other respects. Only small groups of Zoroastrians survive in the world today, in Iran and through immigration in a few other places including the United States. But the religion retained a wide hold for a considerable period of time and its ideas and beliefs strongly affected Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Religion did not consume all of Persian cultural energies. An important artistic tradition also emerged with distinctive styles of painting and architecture (See Figure 4.3).

Later kings expanded Persian holdings. They were unable to conquer Greece, but they long dominated much of the Middle East, providing an extensive period of peace and prosperity. Conquests also extended into North Africa and the Indian River valley. At its height, Persia embraced at least fourteen million people. The population of Persia proper (present-day Iran), at four million people, had doubled under imperial rule. Ultimately, the Persian Empire was toppled by Alexander the Great, a Greek-educated conqueror. Persian language and culture survived in the northeastern portion of the Middle East, periodically affecting developments in the region as a whole. After the Hellenistic period, a series of Persian empires arose in the northeastern part of the Middle East, competing with Roman holdings and later states.

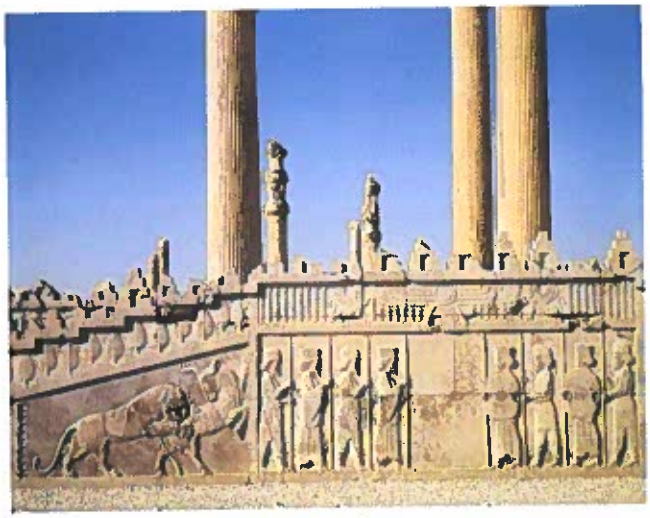


Figure 4.3 Using ceremonial styles similar to those of earlier Mesopotamia, the Persian Empire celebrated its powerful kings. This wall relief is on the great ceremonial stairway leading to the royal audience hall of Darius and Xerxes.

Persian political institutions strongly impressed Alexander and his successors. Persian art would affect not only the region, but also India and the wider Middle East. Zoroastrianism, one of the major belief systems of the classical period, would ultimately fade in its competition with Islam, but its hold and influences continued well beyond the classical centuries.

Patterns of Greek and Roman History

Even as Persia developed, a new civilization took shape to the west, building on a number of earlier precedents. The river valley civilizations of the Middle East and Africa had spread to some of the islands near the Greek peninsula, although less to the peninsula itself. The island of Crete, in particular,

showed the results of Egyptian influence by 2000 B.C.E., and from this the Greeks were later able to develop a taste for monumental architecture. The Greeks were an Indo-European people, like the Aryan conquerors of India, who took over the peninsula by 1700 B.C.E. An early kingdom in southern Greece, strongly influenced by Crete, developed by 1400 B.C.E. around the city of Mycenae. This was the kingdom later memorialized in Homer's epics about the Trojan War. Mycenae was then toppled by a subsequent wave of Indo-European invaders, whose incursions destroyed civilization on the peninsula until about 800 B.C.E.

Greek culture reached its height during the 5th century B.C.E.; its influence spread through the empire of Alexander the Great.

Rome was deeply influenced by Greek tradition as it developed its Republic and its Empire.

Greece in the Archaic and Classical Ages MAP

Stages in Greek Development

The rapid rise of civilization in Greece between 800 and 600 B.C.E. was based on the creation of strong city-states, rather than a single political unit. Each city-state had its own government, typically either a tyranny of one ruler or an aristocratic council. The city-state served Greece well, for the peninsula was so divided by mountains that a unified government would have been difficult to establish. Trade developed rapidly under city-state sponsorship, and common cultural forms, including a rich written language with letters derived from the Phoenician alphabet, spread throughout the peninsula. The Greek city-states also joined in regular celebrations such as the athletic competitions of the **Olympic Games.** Sparta and Athens came to be the two leading city-states. The first represented a strong military aristocracy dominating a slave population; the other was a more diverse commercial state, also including the extensive use of slaves, justly proud of its artistic and intellectual leadership. Between 500 and 449 B.C.E., the two states cooperated, along with smaller states, to defeat the huge Persian invasion. It was during and immediately after this period that Greek and particularly Athenian culture reached its highest point. Also during this period several city-states, and again particularly Athens, developed more colonies in the eastern Mediterranean and southern Italy, as Greek culture fanned out to create a larger zone of civilization (Map 4.2).

Olympic games One of the pan-Hellenic rituals observed by all Greek city-states; involved athletic competitions and ritual celebrations.



Map 4.2 Greece and Greek Colonies, c. 431 B.C.E. On the eve of the Peloponnesian Wars, Greek civilization had succeeded in spreading to key points around the Mediterranean world.

Pericles [PEHR-uh-kleez] Athenian political leader during 5th century B.C.E.; guided development of Athenian Empire; died during early stages of Peloponnesian War.

Peloponnesian Wars [PEL-uh-poh-nee-zhun] Wars from 431 to 404 B.C.E. between Athens and Sparta for dominance in southern Greece; resulted in Spartan victory but failure to achieve political unification of Greece.

The Peloponnesian War MAP

The Conquests of Alexander the Great MAP

Philip II Ruled Macedon from 359 to 336 B.C.E.; founder of centralized kingdom; later conquered rest of Greece, which was subjected to Macedonian authority.

Hellenistic period That culture associated with the spread of Greek influence as a result of Macedonian conquests; often seen as the combination of Greek culture with eastern political forms.

Alexandria, Egypt One of the cities founded by and named for Alexander the Great; site of ancient Mediterranean's greatest library; center of literary studies.

It was during the 5th century B.C.E. that the most famous Greek political figure, **Pericles** (PEHR-uh-kleez), dominated Athenian politics. Pericles was an aristocrat, but he was part of a democratic political structure in which each citizen could participate in city-state assemblies to select officials and pass laws. Pericles ruled not through official position but by wise influence and negotiation. He helped restrain some of the more aggressive views of the Athenian democrats, who urged even further expansion of the empire to garner more wealth and build the economy. Ultimately, however, Pericles' guidance could not prevent the tragic war between Athens and Sparta that would deplete both sides.

Political decline soon set in, as Athens and Sparta vied for control of Greece during the bitter **Peloponnesian** (PEL-uh-poh-nee-zhun) **Wars** (431–404 B.C.E.). Ambitious kings from Macedonia, in the northern part of the peninsula, soon conquered the cities. **Philip II of Macedon** won the crucial battle in 338 B.C.E., and then his son Alexander extended the Macedonian Empire through the Middle East, across Persia to the border of India, and southward through Egypt (Map 4.3). Alexander the Great's empire was short-lived, for its creator died at the age of 33 after a mere 13 years of breathtaking conquests. However, successor regional kingdoms continued to rule much of the eastern Mediterranean for several centuries. Under their aegis, Greek art and culture merged with other Middle Eastern forms during the **Hellenistic period**, the name derived because of the influence of the Hellenes, as the Greeks were known. Although there was little political activity under the autocratic Hellenistic kings, trade flourished and important scientific centers were established in such cities as **Alexandria** in Egypt. In sum, the Hellenistic period saw the consolidation of Greek civilization even after the political decline of the peninsula itself, as well as some important new cultural developments.

Rome

The rise of Rome formed the final phase of classical Mediterranean civilization, for by the first century B.C.E. Rome had subjugated Greece and the Hellenistic kingdoms alike. The Roman state began humbly enough, as a local monarchy in central Italy around 800 B.C.E. Roman aristocrats succeeded in driving



Map 4.3 Alexander's Empire, c. 323 B.C.E., and the Hellenistic World Note the movement through Persia and other parts of the northern Middle East, and into the Indian subcontinent and North Africa.

out the monarchy around 509 B.C.E. and established more elaborate political institutions for their city-state. The new **Roman republic** gradually extended its influence over the rest of the Italian peninsula, among other things conquering the Greek colonies in the south. Thus, the Romans early acquired a strong military orientation, although initially they may have been driven simply by a desire to protect their own territory from possible rivals. Roman conquest spread more widely during the three **Punic Wars,** from 264 to 146 B.C.E., during which Rome fought the armies of the Phoenician city of **Carthage,** situated on the northern coast of Africa. These wars included a bloody defeat of the invading forces of the brilliant Carthaginian general **Hannibal,** whose troops were accompanied by pack-laden elephants. The war was so bitter that the Romans in a final act of destruction spread salt around Carthage to prevent agriculture from surviving there. Following the final destruction of Carthage, the Romans proceeded to seize the entire western Mediterranean along with Greece and Egypt.

The politics of the Roman republic grew increasingly unstable, however, as victorious generals sought even greater power while the poor of the city rebelled. Civil wars between two generals led to a victory by **Julius Caesar,** in 45 B.C.E., and the effective end of the traditional institutions of the Roman state. Caesar's grandnephew, ultimately called **Augustus Caesar,** seized power in 27 B.C.E., following another period of rivalry after Julius Caesar's assassination, and established the basic structures of the Roman Empire. For 200 years, through the reign of the emperor Marcus Aurelius in 180 C.E., the empire maintained great vigor, bringing peace and prosperity to virtually the entire Mediterranean world, from Spain and north Africa in the west to the eastern shores of the great sea. The emperors also moved northward, conquering France and southern Britain and pushing into Germany. Here was a major, if somewhat tenuous, extension of the sway of Mediterranean civilization to western Europe (Map 4.4).

Then the empire suffered a slow but decisive fall that lasted over 250 years, until invading peoples from the north finally overturned the government in Rome in 476 C.E. The decline manifested itself in terms of both economic deterioration and population loss: trade levels and the birth rate both fell. Government also became generally less effective, although some strong later emperors, particularly **Diocletian** and **Constantine,** attempted to reverse the tide. It was the emperor Constantine who, in 313, adopted the then somewhat obscure religion called Christianity in an attempt to unite the empire in new ways. However, particularly in the western half of the empire, most effective government became local, as the imperial administration could no longer guarantee order or provide a system of justice. The Roman armies depended increasingly on non-Roman recruits, whose loyalty was suspect. Then, in this deepening mire, the invasion of nomadic peoples from the north marked the end of the classical period of Mediterranean civilization—a civilization that, like its counterparts in Gupta India and Han China during the same approximate period, could no longer defend itself.

Roman republic The balanced constitution of Rome from c. 510 to 47 B.C.E.; featured an aristocratic Senate, a panel of magistrates, and several popular assemblies.

Punic Wars Fought between Rome and Carthage to establish dominance in the western Mediterranean; won by Rome after three separate conflicts.

Carthage Originally a Phoenician colony in northern Africa; became a major port and commercial power in the western Mediterranean; fought the Punic Wars with Rome for dominance of the western Mediterranean.

MAP The Career of Julius Caesar

Hannibal Great Carthaginian general during Second Punic War; successfully invaded Italy but failed to conquer Rome; finally defeated at Battle of Zama.

Caesar, Julius Roman general responsible for conquest of Gaul; brought army back to Rome and overthrew republic; assassinated in 44 B.C.E. by conservative senators.

MAP The Roman Empire at Its Greatest Extent

Augustus Caesar (63 B.C.E.–14 C.E.) Name given to Octavian following his defeat of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra; first emperor of Rome.

Diocletian Roman emperor from 284 to 305 C.E.; restored later empire by improved administration and tax collection.

Constantine Roman emperor from 312 to 337 C.E.; established second capital at Constantinople; attempted to use religious force of Christianity to unify empire spiritually.



Map 4.4 The Roman Empire from Augustus to 180 C.E. The empire expanded greatly in its first centuries, but such far-flung colonies proved impossible to maintain, both militarily and economically.

In sum, the Mediterranean civilization was built on earlier cultures along the eastern Mediterranean and within the Greek islands, taking firm shape with the rise of the Greek city-states after 800 B.C.E. These states began as monarchies but then evolved into more complex and diverse political forms. They also developed a more varied commercial economy, moving away from a purely grain-growing agriculture; this spurred the formation of a number of colonial outposts around the eastern Mediterranean and in Italy. The decline of the city-states ushered in the Macedonian conquest and the formation of a wider Hellenistic culture that established deep roots in the Middle East and Egypt. Then Rome, initially a minor regional state distinguished by political virtue and stability, embarked on its great conquests, which would bring it control of the Mediterranean with important extensions into western and southeastern Europe plus the whole of north Africa. Rome's expansion ultimately overwhelmed its own republic, but the successor empire developed important political institutions of its own and resulted in two centuries of peace and glory.

Greek and Roman Political Institutions

Greece and Rome were ruled by aristocrats but also introduced some democratic elements.

The Roman Empire encompassed a huge territory and population.

Politics were very important in classical Mediterranean civilization, from the Greek city-states through the early part of the Roman Empire. Indeed, our word *politics* comes from the Greek word for city-state, **polis,** which correctly suggests that intense political interests were part of life in a city-state in both Greece and Rome. The "good life" for an upper-class Athenian or Roman included active participation in politics and frequent discussions about the affairs of state. The local character of Mediterranean politics, whereby the typical city-state governed a surrounding territory of several hundred square miles, contributed to this intense preoccupation with politics. Citizens felt that the state was theirs, that they had certain rights and obligations without which their government could not survive. In the Greek city-states and also under the Roman republic, citizens actively participated in the military, which further contributed to this sense of political interest and responsibility. Under the Roman Empire, of course, political concerns were restricted by the sheer power of the emperor and his officers. Even then, however, local city-states retained considerable autonomy in Italy, Greece, and the eastern Mediterranean—the empire did not try to administer most local regions in great detail. The minority of people throughout the empire who were Roman citizens were intensely proud of this privilege.

polis City-state form of government; typical of Greek political organization from 800 to 400 B.C.E. (pl. poleis).

Strong political ideals and interests created some similarities between Greco-Roman society and the Confucian values of classical China, although the concept of active citizenship was distinctive in the Mediterranean cultures. However, Greece and Rome did not develop a single or cohesive set of political institutions to rival China's divinely sanctioned emperor or its elaborate bureaucracy. So in addition to political intensity and localism as characteristics of Mediterranean civilization, we must note great diversity in political forms. Here the comparison extends to India, where various political forms—including participation in governing councils—ran strong. Later societies, in reflecting on classical Mediterranean civilization, selected from a number of political precedents. Monarchy was not a preferred form; the Roman republic and most Greek city-states had abolished early monarchies as part of their prehistory. Rule by individual strongmen was more common, and our word *tyranny* comes from this experience in classical Greece. Many tyrants were effective rulers, particularly in promoting public works and protecting the common people against the abuses of the aristocracy. Some of the Roman generals who seized power in the later days of the republic had similar characteristics, as did the Hellenistic kings who succeeded Alexander in ruling regions of his empire.

Greece

Democracy (the word is derived from the Greek *demos,* "the people") was another important political alternative in classical Mediterranean society. The Athenian city-state traveled furthest in this direction, before and during the Peloponnesian Wars, after earlier experiences with aristocratic rule and with several tyrants. In 5th-century Athens, the major decisions of state were made by general assemblies in which all citizens could participate—although usually only a minority attended. This was **direct democracy,** not rule through elected representatives. The assembly met every 10 days. Executive officers, including judges, were chosen for brief terms to control their power, and they

direct democracy Where people participate directly in assemblies that make laws and select leaders, rather than electing representatives.

The Classical Mediterranean in Comparative Perspective

The three great classical civilizations lend themselves to a variety of comparisons. The general tone of each differed from the others, ranging from India's otherworldly strain to China's emphasis on government centralization, although it is important to note the varieties of activities and interests and the changes that occurred in each of the three societies. Basic comparisons include several striking similarities. Each classical society developed empires. Each relied primarily on an agricultural economy. Greco-Roman interest in secular culture bears some resemblance to Confucian emphasis in China, although in each case religious currents remained as well. But Greco-Roman political values and institutions differed from the Confucian emphasis on deference and bureaucratic training. Greek definitions of science contrasted with those of India and China, particularly in the emphasis on theory. Several focal points can be used for comparison.

Each classical civilization emphasized a clear social hierarchy, with substantial distance between elites and the majority of people who did the manual and menial work.

Each classical civilization emphasized a clear social hierarchy, with substantial distance between elites and the majority of people who did the manual and menial work. This vital similarity between the civilizations reflected common tensions between complex leadership demands and lifestyles and the limited economic resources of the agricultural economy. Groups at the top of the social hierarchy judged that they had to control lower groups carefully to ensure their own prosperity. Each classical society generated ideologies that explained and justified the great social divisions. Philosophers and religious leaders devoted great attention to this subject.

Within this common framework, however, there were obvious differences. Groups at the top of the social pyramid reflected different value systems. The priests in India, the bureaucrats in China, and the aristocrats in Greece and the Roman republic predominated. The status of merchants varied despite the vital role commerce played in all three civilizations.

Opportunities for mobility varied also. India's caste system allowed movement within castes, if wealth was acquired, but little overall mobility. This was the most rigid classical social structure because it tied people to their basic social and occupational position by birth. China's bureaucratic system allowed a very small number of talented people from below to rise on the basis of education, but most bureaucrats continued to come from the landed aristocracy. Mediterranean society, with its aristocratic emphasis, limited opportunities to rise to the top, but the importance of acquired wealth (particularly in Rome) gave some nonaristocrats important economic and political opportunities. Cicero, for example, came from a merchant family. Various classes also shared some political power in city-state assemblies; the idea of citizens holding basic political rights across class lines was unusual in classical civilizations.

Each classical civilization distinctively defined the position of the lowest orders. India's untouchables performed duties culturally evaluated as demeaning but often vital. So did China's "mean people," who included actors. As Greece and then Rome expanded, they relied heavily on the legal and physical compulsions of slavery to provide menial service and demanding labor. Greece and Rome gave unusual voice to farmers when they maintained their own property but tended to scorn manual labor itself, a view that helped justify and was perpetuated by slavery. Confucianism urged deference but offered praise for peasant work.

Finally, each classical civilization developed a different cultural glue to help hold its social hierarchy together. Greece and Rome left much of the task of managing the social hierarchy to local authorities; community bonds, as in the city-states, were meant to pull different groups into a sense of common purpose. They also relied on military force and clear legal statements that defined rights according to station. Force and legal inequalities played important roles in China and India as well, but there were additional inducements. India's Hinduism helped justify and sustain the hierarchy by promising rewards through reincarnation for those who submitted to their place in any given existence. Chinese Confucianism urged general cultural values of obedience and self-restraint, creating some agreement—despite varied religions and philosophies—on the legitimacy of social ranks by defining how gentlemen and commoners should behave.

In no case did the social cement work perfectly; social unrest surfaced in all the classical civilizations, as in major slave rebellions in the Roman countryside or peasant uprisings in China. At the same time, the rigidity of classical social structures gave many common people some leeway. Elites viewed the masses as being so different from themselves that they did not try to revamp all their beliefs or community institutions.

Differences in approach to social inequality nevertheless had important results. China and particularly India generated value systems that might convince people in the lower classes and the upper ranks that there was some legitimacy in the social hierarchy. Greece and Rome attempted a more difficult task in emphasizing the importance of aristocracy while offering some other elements a share in the political system. This combination could work well, although some groups, including slaves and women, were always excluded. It tended to deteriorate, however, when poorer citizens lost property. Yet no sweeping new social theory emerged to offer a different kind of solace to the masses until Christianity began to spread. It is no accident, then, that Indian and Chinese social structures survived better than Mediterranean structures did, lasting well beyond the classical period into the modern era.

QUESTIONS Why did the classical civilizations seem to need radical social inequalities? What was the relationship between wealth and social position in each classical civilization? If India used religion to compensate for social inequalities, what did China and the Mediterranean cultures use?

were subject to review by the assembly. Furthermore, they were chosen by lot, not elected—on the principle that any citizen could and should be able to serve. To be sure, only a minority of the Athenian population were active citizens. Women had no rights of political participation. And half of all adult males were not citizens at all, being slaves or foreigners. This, then, was not exactly the kind of democracy we envision today. But it did elicit widespread popular participation and devotion, and certainly embodied principles that we would recognize as truly democratic. Pericles, who led Athens during its decades of greatest glory between the final defeat of the Persians and the agony of war with Sparta, described the system this way:

> The administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. But while the law secures equal justice to all alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished he is preferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege but as the reward of merit. Neither is poverty a bar, but a man may benefit his country whatever be the obscurity of his condition.

During the Peloponnesian Wars, Athens even demonstrated some of the potential drawbacks of democracy. Lower-class citizens, eager for government jobs and the spoils of war, often encouraged reckless military actions that weakened the state in its central dispute with Sparta.

Comparing Athens and Sparta

Neither tyranny nor democracy, however, was the most characteristic political form in the classical Mediterranean world. The most widely preferred political framework centered on the existence of aristocratic assemblies, whose deliberations established guidelines for state policy and served as a check on executive power. Thus, Sparta was governed by a singularly militaristic aristocracy, intent on retaining power over a large slave population. Other Greek city-states, although less bent on disciplining their elites for rigorous military service, also featured aristocratic assemblies. Even Athens during much of its democratic phase found leadership in many aristocrats, including Pericles himself. The word *aristocracy,* which comes from Greek terms meaning "rule of the best," suggests where many Greeks—particularly, of course, aristocrats themselves—thought real political virtue lay.

Rome

The constitution of the Roman republic tried to reconcile the various elements suggested by the Greek political experience, with primary reliance on the principle of aristocracy. All Roman citizens in the republic could gather in periodic assemblies, the function of which was not to pass basic laws but rather to elect various magistrates, some of whom were specifically entrusted with the task of representing the interests of the common people. The most important legislative body was the **Senate,** composed mainly of aristocrats, whose members held virtually all executive offices in the Roman state. Two **consuls** shared primary executive power, but in times of crisis the Senate could choose a dictator to hold emergency authority until the crisis had passed. In the Roman Senate, as in the aristocratic assemblies of the Greek city-states, the ideal of public service, featuring eloquent public speaking and arguments that sought to identify the general good, came closest to realization.

Senate Assembly of Roman aristocrats; advised on policy within the republic; one of the early elements of the Roman constitution.

consuls Two chief executives or magistrates of the Roman republic; elected by an annual assembly dominated by aristocracy.

The diversity of Greek and Roman political forms, as well as the importance ascribed to political participation, helped generate a significant body of political theory in classical Mediterranean civilization. True to the aristocratic tradition, much of this theory dealt with appropriate political ethics, the duties of citizens, the importance of incorruptible service, and key political skills such as oratory. Roman writers like **Cicero,** himself an active senator, expounded eloquently on these subjects. Some of this political writing resembled Confucianism, although there was less emphasis on hierarchy and obedience or bureaucratic virtues, and more on participation in deliberative bodies that would make laws and judge the actions of executive officers. Classical Mediterranean writers also paid great attention to the structure of the state itself, debating the virtues and vices of the various political forms. This kind of theory both expressed the political interests and diversity of the Mediterranean world and served as a key heritage to later societies.

Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.) Conservative Roman senator; Stoic philosopher; one of great orators of his day; killed in reaction to assassination of Julius Caesar.

The Roman Empire was a different sort of political system from the earlier city-states, although it preserved some older institutions, such as the Senate, which became a rather meaningless forum for debates. Of necessity, the empire developed organizational capacities on a far larger scale than the city-states; it is important to remember, however, that considerable local autonomy prevailed in many regions. Only in rare cases, such as the forced dissolution of the independent Jewish

state in 63 C.E. after a major local rebellion, did the Romans take over distant areas completely. Careful organization was particularly evident in the vast hierarchy of the Roman army, whose officers wielded great political power even over the emperors themselves.

In addition to considerable tolerance for local customs and religions, plus strong military organization, the Romans emphasized carefully crafted laws as the one factor that would hold their vast territories together. Greek and Roman republican leaders had already developed an understanding of the importance of codified, equitable law. Aristocratic leaders in 8th-century Athens, for example, sponsored clear legal codes designed to balance the defense of private property with the protection of poor citizens, including access to courts of law administered by fellow citizens. The early Roman republic introduced its first code of law, the Twelve Tables, by 450 B.C.E. These early Roman laws were intended, among other things, to restrain the upper classes from arbitrary action and to subject them, as well as ordinary people, to some common legal principles. The Roman Empire carried these legal interests still further, in the belief that law should evolve to meet changing conditions without, however, fluctuating wildly.



Slaves in Roman Law

The idea of Roman law was that rules, objectively judged, rather than personal whim should govern social relationships; thus, the law steadily took over matters of judgment earlier reserved for fathers of families or for landlords. Roman law also promoted the importance of common-sense fairness. In one case cited in the law texts of the empire, a slave was being shaved by a barber in a public square; two men were playing ball nearby, and one accidentally hit the barber with the ball, causing him to cut the slave's throat. Who was responsible for the tragedy: the barber, catcher, or pitcher? According to Roman law, the slave—for anyone so foolish as to be shaved in a public place was asking for trouble and bore the responsibility himself.

Roman law codes spread widely through the empire, and with them came the notion of law as the regulator of social life. Many non-Romans were given the right of citizenship—although most ordinary people outside Rome preferred to maintain their local allegiances. With citizenship, however, came full access to Rome-appointed judges and uniform laws. Imperial law codes also regulated property rights and commerce, thus creating some economic unity in the vast empire. The idea of fair and reasoned law, to which officers of the state should themselves be subject, was a key political achievement of the Roman Empire, comparable in importance, although quite different in nature, to the Chinese elaboration of a complex bureaucratic structure.

The Greeks and Romans were less innovative in the functions they ascribed to government than in the political forms and theories they developed. Most governments concentrated on maintaining systems of law courts and military forces. Athens and, more durably and successfully, Rome placed great premium on the importance of military conquest. Mediterranean governments regulated some branches of commerce, particularly in the interest of securing vital supplies of grain. Rome, indeed, undertook vast public works in the form of roads and harbors to facilitate military transport as well as commerce. And the Roman state, especially under the empire, built countless stadiums and public baths to entertain and distract its subjects. The city of Rome, which at its peak contained over a million inhabitants, provided cheap food as well as gladiator contests and other entertainment for the masses—the famous "bread and circuses" that were designed to prevent popular disorder. Colonies of Romans elsewhere were also given theaters and stadiums. This provided solace in otherwise strange lands like England or Palestine.

Governments also supported an official religion, sponsoring public ceremonies to honor the gods and goddesses; civic religious festivals were important events that both expressed and encouraged widespread loyalty to the state. However, there was little attempt to impose this religion on everyone, and other religious practices were tolerated so long as they did not conflict with loyalty to the state. Even the later Roman emperors, who advanced the idea that the emperor was a god as a means of strengthening authority, were normally tolerant of other religions. They only attacked Christianity, and then irregularly, because of the Christians' refusal to place the state first in their devotion.

Localism and fervent political interests, including a sense of intense loyalty to the state; a diversity of political systems together with the preference for aristocratic rule; the importance of law and the development of an unusually elaborate and uniform set of legal principles—these were the chief political legacies of the classical Mediterranean world. The sheer accomplishment of the Roman Empire, which united a region never before or since brought together, still stands as one of the great political monuments of world history. This was a distinctive political mix. Although there

was attention to careful legal procedures, no clear definition of individuals' rights existed. Indeed, the emphasis on duties to the state could lead, as in Sparta, to an essentially totalitarian framework in which the state controlled even the raising of children. Nor, until the peaceful centuries of the early Roman Empire, was it an entirely successful political structure, as wars and instability were common. Nonetheless, there can be no question of the richness of this political culture or of its central importance to the Greeks and Romans themselves.

Religion and Culture

Greece and Rome did not generate a major religion.

Philosophy, science, and art were the most durable elements of classical Mediterranean culture.

The Greeks and Romans did not create a significant, world-class religion; in this they differed from India and Persia and to some extent from China. Christianity, which was to become one of the major world religions, did of course arise during the Roman Empire. It owed some of its rapid geographical spread to the ease of movement within the huge Roman Empire. However, Christianity was not really a product of Greek or Roman culture, although it would ultimately be influenced by this culture. It took on serious historical importance only as the Roman Empire began its decline. The characteristic Greco-Roman religion was a much more primitive affair, derived from a belief in the spirits of nature elevated into a complex set of gods and goddesses who were seen as regulating human life. Greeks and Romans had different names for their pantheon, but the objects of worship were essentially the same: a creator or father god, Zeus or Jupiter, presided over an unruly assemblage of gods and goddesses whose functions ranged from regulating the daily passage of the sun (Apollo) or the oceans (Neptune) to inspiring war (Mars) or human love and beauty (Venus). Specific gods were the patrons of other human activities such as metalworking, the hunt, even literature and history. Regular ceremonies to the gods had real political importance, and many individuals sought the gods' aid in foretelling the future or in ensuring a good harvest or good health.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) Greek philosopher; teacher of Alexander the Great; knowledge based on observation of phenomena in material world.

Stoics Hellenistic group of philosophers; emphasized inner moral independence cultivated by strict discipline of the body and personal bravery.

Religious Values

In addition to its political functions, Greco-Roman religion had certain other features. It tended to be rather human, of-this-world in its approach. The doings of the gods made for good storytelling; they read like soap operas on a superhuman scale. Thus, the classical Mediterranean religion early engendered an important literary tradition, as was also the case in India. (Indeed, Greco-Roman and Indian religious lore reflected the common heritage of Indo-European invaders.) The gods were often used to illustrate human passions and foibles, thus serving as symbols of a serious inquiry into human nature. Unlike the Indians, however, the Greeks and Romans became interested in their gods more in terms of what they could do for and reveal about humankind on this earth than the principles that could elevate people toward higher planes of spirituality (Figure 4.4).

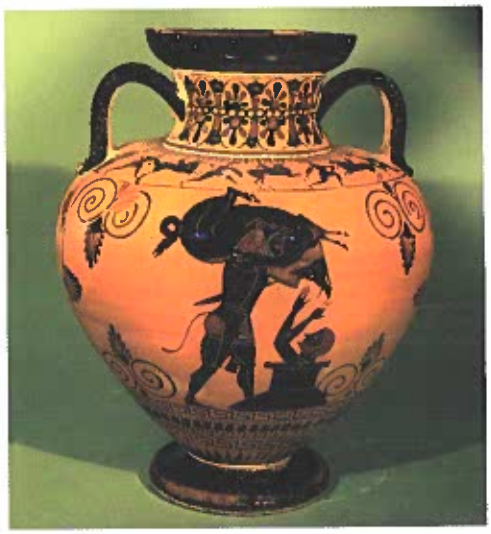


Figure 4.4 After murdering his wife and children Hercules, who became the Greeks' greatest mythical hero, was sentenced to perform 12 tasks that would have been impossible for most mortals. This vase depicts the fourth labor of Hercules, in which he was ordered to capture the Erymanthian boar and bring it to his master, Eurystheus. The frightened Eurystheus has hidden in a wine jar.
(Copyright The British Museum)

This dominant religion also had a number of limitations. Its lack of spiritual passion failed to satisfy many ordinary workers and peasants, particularly in times of political chaos or economic distress. "Mystery" religions, often imported from the Middle East, periodically swept through Greece and Rome, providing secret rituals and fellowship and a greater sense of contact with unfathomable divine powers. Even more than in China, a considerable division arose between upper-class and popular belief.

The gods and goddesses of Greco-Roman religion left many upper-class people dissatisfied also. They provided stories about how the world came to be, but little basis for a systematic inquiry into nature or human society. And while the dominant religion promoted political loyalty, it did not provide a basis for ethical thought. Hence, many thinkers, both in Greece and Rome, sought a separate model for ethical behavior. Greek and Roman moral philosophy, as issued by philosophers like **Aristotle** and Cicero, typically stressed the importance of moderation and balance in human behavior as opposed to the instability of much political life and the excesses of the gods themselves. Other ethical systems were devised, particularly during the Hellenistic period. Thus, **Stoics** emphasized an inner moral independence, to be cultivated by strict discipline of the body and by personal bravery. These ethical systems, established largely apart from religious considerations, were major contributions in their own right; they would also be blended with later religious thought, under Christianity.

Philosophy and Science

The need for a philosophy separate from the official religion helped generate classical Mediterranean political theory, which made little reference to religious principles. Mediterranean philosophy also considerably emphasized the powers of human thought. In Athens, **Socrates** (born in 469 B.C.E.) encouraged his pupils to question conventional wisdom, on the grounds that the chief human duty was "the improvement of the soul." Socrates ran afoul of the Athenian government, which thought that he was undermining political loyalty; given the choice of suicide or exile, Socrates chose the former. However, the Socratic principle of rational inquiry by means of skeptical questioning became a recurrent strand in classical Greek thinking and in its heritage to later societies. Thus, a philosophical tradition arose in Greece, although in very diverse individual expressions, which tended to deemphasize the importance of human spirituality in favor of a celebration of the human ability to think. The result bore some similarities to Chinese Confucianism, although with greater emphasis on skeptical questioning and abstract speculations about the basic nature of humanity and the universe.

Socrates Athenian philosopher of later 5th century B.C.E.; tutor of Plato; urged rational reflection of moral decisions; condemned to death for corrupting minds of Athenian young.

Greek interest in rationality carried over to an inquiry into the underlying order of physical nature. The Greeks were not outstanding empirical scientists. Relatively few new scientific findings emanated from Athens, or later from Rome, although philosophers like Aristotle did collect large amounts of biological data. The Greek interest lay in speculations about nature's order, and many non-Westerners believe that this tradition continues to inform what they see as an excessive Western passion for seeking basic rationality in the universe. In practice, the Greek concern translated into a host of theories, some of which were wrong, about the motions of the planets and the organization of the elemental principles of earth, fire, air, and water, and into a considerable interest in mathematics as a means of rendering nature's patterns comprehensible. Greek and later Hellenistic work in geometry was particularly impressive, featuring among other achievements the basic theorems of Pythagoras. Scientists during the Hellenistic period, working mainly in Egypt or the Middle East, made some important empirical contributions, especially in studies of anatomy; medical treatises by Galen were not improved on, in the Western world, for many centuries. The mathematician Euclid produced what was long the world's most widely used compendium of geometry. Less fortunately, the Hellenistic astronomer Ptolemy produced an elaborate theory of the sun's motion around a stationary earth. This new Hellenistic theory contradicted much earlier Middle Eastern astronomy, which had recognized the earth's rotation; nonetheless, it was Ptolemy's theory that was long taken as fixed wisdom in Western thought.

Roman intellectuals, actively examining ethical and political theory, had nothing to add to Greek and Hellenistic science. They did help to preserve this tradition in the form of textbooks that were administered to upper-class schoolchildren. The Roman genius was more practical than the Greek and included engineering achievements such as the great roads and aqueducts that carried water to cities large and small. Roman ability to construct elaborate arches so that buildings could carry great structural weight was unsurpassed anywhere in the world. These feats, too, would leave their mark, as Rome's huge edifices long served as a reminder of ancient glories. But ultimately, it was the Greek and Hellenistic impulse to extend human reason to nature's principles that would result in the most impressive legacy.

In classical Mediterranean civilization, however, science and mathematics loomed far less large than art and literature in conveying key cultural values. The official religion inspired themes for artistic expression and the justification for temples, statues, and plays devoted to the glories of the gods. Nonetheless, the human-centered qualities of the Greeks and Romans also registered, as artists emphasized the beauty of realistic portrayals of the human form and poets and playwrights used the gods as foils for inquiries into the human condition. Early Greek poets included a woman author, Sappho (around 600 B.C.E.).



Sophocles, *Antigone*

All the arts received some attention in classical Mediterranean civilization. Performances of music and dance were vital parts of religious festivals, but their precise styles have unfortunately not been preserved. Far more durable was the Greek interest in drama, for plays, more than poetry, took a central role in this culture. Greek dramatists produced both comedy and tragedy, indeed making a formal division between the two approaches that is still part of the Western tradition, as in the labeling of current television shows as either form. On the whole, in contrast to Indian writers, the Greeks placed the greatest emphasis on tragedy. Their belief in human reason and balance

Sophocles (496–406 B.C.E.) Greek writer of tragedies; author of *Oedipus Rex*.

Homer, *The Iliad*

Iliad Greek epic poem attributed to Homer but possibly the work of many authors; defined gods and human nature that shaped Greek mythos.

Odyssey Greek epic poem attributed to Homer but possibly the work of many authors; defined gods and human nature that shaped Greek mythos.

Doric Along with Ionian and Corinthian, distinct style of Hellenistic architecture; the least ornate of the three styles.

Ionic Along with Doric and Corinthian, distinct style of Hellenistic architecture; more ornate than Doric but less than Corinthian.

The Athenian Acropolis

Corinthian Along with Doric and Ionian, distinct style of Hellenistic architecture; the most ornate of the three styles.

Roman Coliseum

also involved a sense that these virtues were precarious, so a person could easily become ensnared in situations of powerful emotion and uncontrollable consequences. The Athenian dramatist **Sophocles,** for example, so insightfully portrayed the psychological flaws of his hero Oedipus that modern psychology long used the term *Oedipus complex* to refer to a potentially unhealthy relationship between a man and his mother.

Greek literature contained a strong epic tradition as well, starting with the beautifully crafted tales of the ***Iliad*** and ***Odyssey,*** attributed to the poet Homer, who lived in the 8th century B.C.E. Roman authors, particularly the poet Vergil, also worked in the epic form, seeking to link Roman history and mythology with the Greek forerunner. Roman writers made significant contributions to poetry and to definitions of the poetic form that would long be used in Western literature. The overall Roman literary contribution was less impressive than the Greek, but it was substantial enough both to provide important examples of how poetry should be written and to furnish abundant illustrations of the literary richness of the Latin language.

In the visual arts, the emphasis of classical Mediterranean civilization was sculpture and architecture. Greek artists also excelled in ceramic work, whereas Roman painters produced realistic (and sometimes pornographic) decorations for the homes of the wealthy. In Athens's brilliant 5th century—the age of Pericles, Socrates, Sophocles, and so many other intensely creative figures—sculptors like Phidias developed unprecedented skill rendering simultaneously realistic yet beautiful images of the human form, from lovely goddesses to muscled warriors and athletes. Roman sculptors, less innovative, continued this heroic-realistic tradition. They molded scenes of Roman conquests on triumphal columns and captured the power but also the human qualities of Augustus Caesar and his successors on busts and full-figure statues alike.

Greek architecture, from the 8th century B.C.E. onward, emphasized monumental construction, square or rectangular in shape, with columned porticoes. The Greeks devised three embellishments for the tops of columns supporting their massive buildings, each more ornate than the next: the **Doric,** the **Ionic,** and the **Corinthian.** The Greeks, in short, invented what Westerners and others in the world today still regard as "classical" architecture, although the Greeks themselves were influenced by Egyptian models in their preferences. Greece, and later Italy, provided abundant stone for ambitious temples, markets, and other public buildings. Many of these same structures were filled with products of the sculptors' workshops. They were brightly painted, although over the centuries the paint would fade so that later imitators came to think of the classical style as involving unadorned (some might say drab) stone.

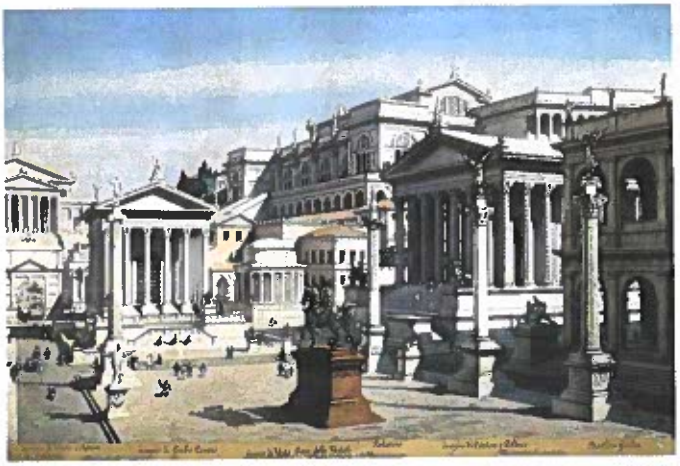


Figure 4.5 This is an artist's recreation of the Roman Forum in imperial times. The use of decorative styles that originated in classical Greece was a central feature of Roman architecture, but as the empire grew, buildings became steadily more massive. Larger columns and greater heights reflected the Roman taste for the monumental. Ultimately, Roman architects also developed the capacity to build domed structures—a feat of engineering.

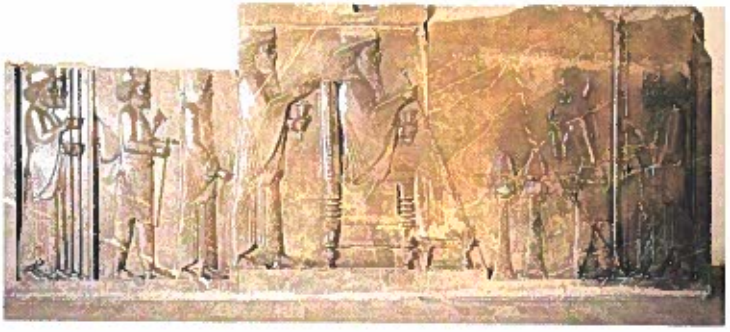
(Hypothetical reconstruction of the Roman Forum in Imperial Times. Southern part. Watercolor. Soprintendenza alle Antichita, Rome, Italy/Scala/Art Resource, NY.)

Roman architects adopted the Greek themes quite readily. Their engineering skill allowed them to construct buildings of even greater size, as well as new forms such as the free-standing stadium. Under the empire, the Romans learned how to add domes to rectangular buildings, which resulted in some welcome architectural diversity. At the same time, the empire's taste for massive, heavily adorned monuments and public buildings, while a clear demonstration of Rome's sense of power and achievement, moved increasingly away from the simple lines of the early Greek temples (Figure 4.5).

Classical Mediterranean art and architecture were intimately linked with the society that produced them. There is a temptation, because of the formal role of classical styles in later societies, including our own, to attribute a stiffness to Greek and Roman art that was not present in the original. Greek and Roman structures were built to be used. Temples and marketplaces and the public baths that so delighted the Roman upper classes were part of daily urban life. Classical art was also flexible, according to need. Villas or small palaces—built for the Roman upper classes and typically constructed around an open courtyard—had a light, even simple quality rather different from that of temple architecture. Classical dramas were not merely examples of high art, performed in front of a cultural elite. Indeed, Athens lives in the memory of many humanists today as much because of the large audiences that trooped to performances of plays by authors like Sophocles as for the creativity of

Political Rituals in Persia

This is a relief from the Audience Hall of the Persian royal Palace in Persepolis, built by Darius I (522–486 B.C.E.). The scene shows court rituals in Persia. Later, when Alexander conquered Persia, he was inclined to install the same rituals, but many of his soldiers objected vigorously, and the whole issue caused great furor in the ranks. It has been speculated, however, that some of these rituals later passed to Europe, where they helped define appropriate behavior in the presence of kings.



QUESTIONS: What kinds of rituals does this scene suggest, and what kinds of relationships between subjects and the emperor? Why, and on what basis, might Greeks object to this kind of behavior toward a ruler? Why was Alexander tempted to transfer these rituals to his own court?

the writers and philosophers themselves. Literally thousands of people gathered in the large hillside theaters of Athens and other cities for the performance of new plays and for associated music and poetry competitions. Popular taste in Rome, to be sure, seemed less elevated. Republican Rome was not an important cultural center, and many Roman leaders feared the more emotional qualities of Greek art. The Roman Empire is known more for monumental athletic performances—chariot races and gladiators—than for high-quality popular theater. However, elements of classical art—the great monuments if nothing more—were part of daily urban life and the pursuit of pleasure. Roman styles were also blended with Christianity during the later empire (Figure 4.6) providing another lasting expression.

Economy and Society in the Mediterranean

Politics and formal culture in Greece and Rome were mainly affairs of the cities—meaning that they were of intense concern only to a minority of the population. Most Greeks and Romans were farmers, tied to the soil and often to local rituals and festivals that were different from urban forms. Many Greek farmers, for example, annually gathered for a spring passion play to celebrate the recovery of the goddess of fertility from the lower world, an event that was seen as a vital preparation for planting and that also suggested the possibility of an afterlife—a prospect important to many people who endured a life of hard labor and poverty. A substantial population of free farmers, who owned their own land, flourished in the early days of the Greek city-states and later around Rome. However, there was a constant tendency, most pronounced in Rome, for large landlords to squeeze these farmers, forcing them to become tenants or laborers or to join the swelling crowds of the urban lower class. Tensions between tyrants and aristocrats or democrats and aristocrats in Athens often revolved around free farmers'



Figure 4.6 This mosaic from the city of Ravenna, Italy, depicts the Last Supper, which took place on the night before Jesus was crucified. According to Christian belief, at this supper Jesus broke bread and drank wine with his disciples, teaching them the ritual of the Eucharist, and predicted that one of them would betray him. Mosaic designs like this one were common in Roman buildings, often inlaid into floors and depicting both secular and religious scenes. The mosaic tradition continued in the Eastern Empire, mainly used there to depict Christian figures, becoming ever more elegant and richly detailed.

Greek and Roman economies were based on commercial agriculture, trade, and slavery.

attempts to preserve their independence and shake off the heavy debts they had incurred. The Roman republic declined in part because too many farmers became dependent on the protection of large landlords, even when they did not work their estates outright, and so no longer could vote freely.

Agriculture and Trade

The two societies developed somewhat different versions of the patriarchal family.

Farming in Greece and in much of Italy was complicated by the fact that soil conditions were not ideal for grain growing, and yet grain was the staple of life. First in Greece, then in central Italy, farmers were increasingly tempted to shift to the production of olives and grapes, which were used primarily for cooking and winemaking. These products were well suited to the soil conditions, but they required an unusually extensive conversion of agriculture to a market basis. That is, farmers who produced grapes and olives had to buy some of the food they needed, and they had to sell most of their own product in order to do this. Furthermore, planting olive trees or grape vines required substantial capital, for they would not bear fruit for at least five years after planting. This was one reason so many farmers went into debt. It was also one of the reasons that large landlords gained increasing advantage over independent farmers, for they could enter into market production on a much larger scale if only because of their greater access to capital.

The rise of commercial agriculture in Greece and then around Rome was one of the prime forces leading to efforts to establish an empire. Greek city-states, with Athens usually in the lead, developed colonies in the Middle East and then in Sicily mainly to gain access to grain production; for this, they traded not only olive oil and wine but also manufactured products and silver. Rome pushed south, in part to acquire the Sicilian grain fields, and later used much of north Africa as its granary. Indeed, the heavy cultivation in north Africa resulted in a soil depletion that helps account for the region's reduced agricultural fertility in later centuries.

The importance of commercial farming obviously dictated extensive concern with trade. Private merchants operated most of the ships that carried agricultural products and other goods. Greek city-states and ultimately the Roman state supervised the grain trade, promoting public works and storage facilities and carefully regulating the vital supplies. Other kinds of trade were vital also. Luxury products from the shops of urban artists or craftsworkers played a major role in the lifestyle of the upper classes. There was some trade also beyond the borders of Mediterranean civilization itself, for goods from India and China. In this trade, the Mediterranean peoples found themselves at some disadvantage, for their manufactured products were less sophisticated than those of eastern Asia; thus, they typically exported animal skins, precious metals, and even exotic African animals for Asian zoos in return for the spices and artistic products of the east.

Greek and Phoenician Colonies and Trade 

For all the importance of trade, merchants enjoyed a somewhat ambiguous status in classical Mediterranean civilization. Leading Athenian merchants were usually foreigners, mostly from the trading peoples of the Middle East—the descendants of Lydians and Phoenicians. Merchants had a somewhat higher status in Rome, clearly forming the second most prestigious social class under the landed patricians, but here, too, the aristocracy frequently disputed the merchants' rights. Overall, merchants fared better in the Mediterranean than in China in terms of official recognition, but worse than in India; classical Mediterranean society certainly did not set in motion a culture that distinctly valued capitalist moneymaking.

Slavery

Greek and Roman Slavery 

Slavery was another key ingredient of the classical economy. Philosophers such as Aristotle produced elaborate justifications for the necessity of slavery in a proper society. Athenians used slaves as household servants and also as workers in their vital silver mines; slaves provided the labor force for Athens's empire and commercial operations alike. Sparta used slaves extensively for agricultural work. Slavery spread steadily in Rome from the final centuries of the republic. Since most slaves came from conquered territories, the need for slaves was another key element in military expansion. Here was a theme visible in earlier civilizations in the eastern Mediterranean, and within later societies in this region as well. The need for slaves helps explain the greater importance of military forces and expansion in these areas than in India or China. Roman slaves performed household tasks—including the tutoring of upper-class children, for which cultured Greek slaves were highly

Rome and a Values Crisis

Rome's increasing contact with the eastern Mediterranean, particularly Greece, brought important debates about culture. Many conservatives deplored Greek learning and argued that it would corrupt Roman virtue. Cicero, a leading politician in the Senate and a major Latin writer, here defends Greek literature, using Hellenistic justifications of beauty and utility. Cicero played a major role in popularizing Greek culture during the 1st century B.C.E. His comments also reflect the concerns that Greek culture inspired a source of change.

> Do you think that I could find inspiration for my daily speeches on so manifold a variety of topics, did I not cultivate my mind with study, or that my mind could endure so great a strain, did not study provide it with relaxation? I am a votary of literature, and make the confession unashamed; shame belongs rather to the bookish recluse, who knows not how to apply his reading to the good of his fellows, or to manifest its fruits to the eyes of all. But what shame should be mine, gentlemen, who have made it a rule of my life for all these years never to allow the sweets of a cloistered ease or the seductions of pleasure or the enticements of repose to prevent me from aiding any man in the hour of his need? How then can I justly be blamed or censured, if it shall be found that I have devoted to literature a portion of my leisure hours no longer than others without blame devote to the pursuit of material gain, to the celebration of festivals or games, to pleasure and the repose of mind and body, to protracted banqueting, or perhaps to the gaming-board or to ballplaying? I have the better right to indulgence herein, because my devotion to letters strengthens my oratorical powers, and these, such as they are, have never failed my friends in their hour of peril. Yet insignificant though these powers may seem to be, I fully realize from what source I draw all that is highest in them. Had I not persuaded myself from my youth up, thanks to the moral lessons derived from a wide reading, that nothing is to be greatly sought after in this life save glory and honour, and that in their quest all bodily pains and all dangers of death or exile should be lightly accounted, I should never have borne for the safety of you all the brunt of many a bitter encounter, or bared my breast to the daily onsets of abandoned persons. All literature, all philosophy, all history, abounds with incentives to noble action, incentives which would be buried in black darkness were the light of the written word not flashed upon them. How many pictures of high endeavor the great authors of Greece and Rome have drawn for our use, and bequeathed to us, not only for our contemplation, but for our emulation! These I have held ever before my vision throughout my public career, and have guided the workings of my brain and my soul by meditating upon patterns of excellence.
>
> But let us for the moment waive these solid advantages; let us assume that entertainment is the sole end of reading; even so, I think you would hold that no mental employment is so broadening to the sympathies or so enlightening to the understanding. Other pursuits belong not to all times, all ages, all conditions; but this gives stimulus to our youth and diversion to our old age; this adds a charm to success, and offers a haven of consolation to failure. In the home it delights, in the world it hampers not. Through the night watches, on all our journeying, and in our hours of country ease, it is an unfailing companion.
>
> If anyone thinks that the glory won by the writing of Greek verse is naturally less than that accorded to the poet who writes in Latin, he is entirely in the wrong. Greek literature is read in nearly every nation under heaven, while the vogue of Latin is confined to its own boundaries, and they are, we must grant, narrow. Seeing, therefore, that the activities of our race know no barrier save the limits of the round earth, we ought to be ambitious that whithersoever our arms have penetrated there also our fame and glory should extend; for the reason that literature exalts the nation whose high deeds it sings, and at the same time there can be no doubt that those who stake their lives to fight in honour's cause find therein a lofty incentive to peril and endeavor. We read that Alexander the Great carried in his train numbers of epic poets and historians. And yet, standing before the tomb of Achilles at Sigeum, he exclaimed, "Fortunate youth, to have found in Homer an herald of thy valor!" Well might he so exclaim, for had the *Iliad* never existed, the same mound which covered Achilles' bones would also have overwhelmed his memory.

QUESTIONS What kind of objections to Greek learning is Cicero arguing against? Which of his arguments had the most lasting appeal to those who were reshaping Roman culture? Can you think of similar debates about foreign culture in other times and places in history? How would you use this document to reconstruct the debate Cicero was participating in and why it seemed important?

Source: Cicero, *Pro Archia Poeta.* Translated by N. H. Watts. Loeb Classical Library. Cicero, *Pro Archia* (Harvard University Press, 1965), 12–14, 16, 23–24.

valued. This kind of slavery was sometimes preferable to "free" life as a poor peasant. But slaves also worked the mines, for precious metals and for iron; as in Greece, slave labor in the mines was particularly brutal, and few slaves survived more than a few years of such an existence. Roman estate owners used large numbers of slaves for agricultural work, along with paid laborers and tenant farmers. This practice was another source of the steady pressure placed on free farmers who could not easily compete with unpaid forced labor.

Partly because of slavery, partly because of the overall orientation of upper-class culture, neither Greece nor Rome was especially interested in technological innovations applicable to agriculture or manufacturing. The Greeks made important advances in shipbuilding and navigation, which were vital for their trading economy. Romans, less adept on the water, developed their skill in engineering to provide greater urban amenities and good roads for the swift and easy movement of

troops. But a technology designed to improve the production of food or manufactured goods did not figure largely in this civilization, which mainly relied on the earlier achievements of previous Mediterranean societies. Abundant slave labor probably discouraged concern for more efficient production methods. So did a sense that the true goals of humankind were artistic and political. One Hellenistic scholar, for example, refused to write a handbook on engineering because "the work of an engineer and everything that ministers to the needs of life is ignoble and vulgar." As a consequence of this outlook, Mediterranean society lagged behind both India and China in production technology, which was one reason for its resulting unfavorable balance of trade with eastern Asia.

Both Greek and Roman society emphasized the importance of a tight family structure, with a husband and father firmly in control. Women had vital economic functions, particularly in farming and artisan families. In the upper classes, especially in Rome, women often commanded great influence and power within a household. In law and culture, however, women were held inferior. Families burdened with too many children sometimes put female infants to death because of their low status and their potential drain on the family economy. Pericles stated common beliefs about women when he noted, "For a woman not to show more weakness than is natural to her sex is a great glory, and not to be talked about for good or for evil among men." Early Roman law stipulated that "the husband is the judge of his wife. If she commits a fault, he punishes her; if she has drunk wine, he condemns her; if she has been guilty of adultery, he kills her." Later, however, such customs were held in check by family courts composed of members of both families. Here was a case where Roman legal ideas modified traditional family controls. If divorced because of adultery, a Roman woman lost a third of her property and had to wear a special garment that set her apart like a prostitute. On the other hand, the oppression of women was probably less severe in this civilization than in China. Many Greek and Roman women were active in business and controlled a portion, even if only the minority, of all urban property.

Because of the divisions within classical Mediterranean society, no easy generalizations about culture or achievement can be made. An 18th-century English historian called the high point of the Roman Empire, before 180 C.E., the period in human history "during which the condition of the human race was most happy or prosperous." This is doubtful, given the technological accomplishments of China and India. And certainly, many slaves, women, and ordinary farmers in the Mediterranean world might have disagreed with this viewpoint. Few farmers, for example, actively participated in the political structures or cultural opportunities that were the most obvious mark of this civilization. Many continued to work largely as their ancestors had done, with quite similar tools and in very similar poverty, untouched by the doings of the great or the bustle of the cities except when wars engulfed their lands.

We are tempted, of course, exclusively to remember the urban achievements, for they exerted the greatest influence on later ages that recalled the glories of Greece and Rome. The distinctive features of classical Mediterranean social and family structures had a less enduring impact, although ideas about slavery or women were revived in subsequent periods. However, the relatively unchanging face of ordinary life had an important influence as well, as many farmers and artisans long maintained the habits and outlook they developed during the great days of the Greek and Roman empires, and because their separation from much of the official culture posed both a challenge and opportunity for new cultural movements such as Christianity.

Toward the Fall of Rome

Rome began to decline after about 180 C.E., losing territory and suffering economic reversals. The legacy of the classical civilizations in the Mediterranean and Middle East was important even after this decline.

Classical Mediterranean society had one final impact on world history through its rather fragmentary collapse. Unlike China, classical civilization in the Mediterranean region was not simply disrupted only to revive. Unlike India, there was no central religion, derived from the civilization itself, to serve as link between the classical period and what followed. Furthermore, the fall of Rome was not uniform: Rome fell more in some parts of the Mediterranean than it did in others. The result, among other things, was that no single civilization ultimately rose to claim the mantle of Greece and Rome. At the same time, there was no across-the-board maintenance of the classical Mediterranean institutions and values in any of the civilizations that later claimed a relationship to the Greek and Roman past. Greece and Rome would live on, in more than idle memory, but

their heritage was unquestionably more complex and more selective than proved to be the case for India or China.

A Complex Legacy

Classical Greece, Persia and their Hellenistic successors lasted for about 600 years, and Rome another 600 years beyond this. Although major political and social changes took place during this span, some durable characteristics also developed.

Greece's political legacy obviously lay more in the realm of ideas than in enduring political institutions such as China's emperor and bureaucracy, although Rome copied some Greek structures. On the whole, Greek art and philosophy formed the most lasting heritage of this classical civilization. But, partly because they did not generate a major religion, Greek and Roman contributions to a durable popular culture were more limited than was true in China or India.

There are two final complexities in dealing with the classical civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The first involves the relationship of Greek and Roman achievements to contemporary North Americans. Classical Greece is often presented as the first phase of North Americans' own classical past. The framers of the Constitution of the United States were very conscious of Greek and Roman precedents. Designers of public buildings in the United States have copied classical Mediterranean models. The Western educational tradition has long invited elaborate explorations of the Greco-Roman past as part of the standard intellectual equipment for the educated person.

Yet this important legacy should not obscure the actual Greek and Roman record as a classical civilization. Classical ideas did not flow smoothly into a Western tradition (indeed, they had far more initial impact on the Middle East, which was where Greeks and even Romans tended to look when they thought of spreading their key achievements). Important revivals and modifications had to occur before the Greek approach to science had a fruitful impact on western Europe many centuries later. And democracy did not spread directly from Greece or Rome to other societies, although the Greek example was cited by later advocates whose passions had very different sources.

The second complexity involves Persia, an important civilization in its own right. Hellenistic conquests brought Greek cultural influence into Persia. Influences were mutual, however. Hellenistic kings imitated Persian centralization and bureaucracy. Cultural exchange also gave Zoroastrian influences a wider range. This furthered the influence these religious ideas would have on Mediterranean religions, including Judaism, and later, Christianity and Islam. The Jewish book of Daniel, for example, picked up the Zoroastrian idea that humans would be rewarded for good or bad behavior in a future life.

At the same time, there was no tidy homogenization. Persians continued to see themselves as partially distinct, and viewed Alexander's successors as foreigners. Later, more purely Persian kingdoms arose as the Hellenistic states declined. Parthians and then Sasanids revived Persian political institutions and culture in their realms to the east of the Roman Empire's Middle Eastern holdings. Under Hellenism and Persia alike, the Middle East enhanced its role as a point of exchange among many different merchants and cultures.

Global Connections

Persia, Greece, Rome, and the World

The Persian Empire fostered trade with both Asia and with the eastern Mediterranean. Persian roads and institutions facilitated commerce from Asia to the Mediterranean. Cultural influences spread widely as well. Greeks developed wide contacts, also, but more gradually and with some definite prejudices.

Like other classical civilizations, notably China, Greeks had a definite sense of the inferiority of other peoples. Classical Greeks indiscriminately called non-Greeks "barbarians," and some Greek city-states, like Sparta, were quite closed to outside influences. But overall, the Greeks were also a trading and expansionist people. They set up Greek colonies in various parts of the Mediterranean. They traded even more widely, and relied heavily on foreigners for part of this trade. Greek scholars went to Egypt to further their training in science and mathematics. Some

Greeks were immensely curious about other peoples and their habits. The historian and traveler Herodotus (484–425 B.C.E.) talked enthusiastically about customs very different from his own, though he was also capable of believing wild exaggerations about how some people lived.

Greek outreach was extended by Alexander the Great, who did not have such a keen belief in Greek superiority. Alexander forged important new contacts between the eastern Mediterranean, the rest of the Middle East including Persia, and western India. He even hoped to extend his system into China, but obviously this did not occur. The system did not last, but the interest in setting up stronger links between the eastern Mediterranean and Asia remained an important concern.

Rome's world connections were in some ways more varied. The empire obviously influenced Europeans beyond the actual Roman borders, acquainting various Germanic and Celtic peoples with some Roman styles. Trade with Africa, also beyond the borders, particularly involved the northeast. Roman expeditions to India constituted an important commercial outreach. Most Roman attention, in trade as well as politics, focused on creating ties within the vast territories of the empire, but significant influence extended to other parts of the world. Some of these connections would affect trading patterns and missionary religious outreach even as the empire began to decline.

Further Readings

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For war and diplomacy, see Y. Garlan, *War in the Ancient World* (1975); E. N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (1976); Susan Raven, *Rome in Africa* (1993); and Stephen Dyson, *The Creation of the Roman Frontier* (1985).

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The rise and spread of Christianity are treated in two outstanding studies: R. MacMullen's *Christianizing the Roman Empire*

AP* Test Prep

1. The major impact of Alexander the Great's conquests was the
   (A) establishment of a unified government for the eastern Mediterranean.
   (B) the elimination of foreign influences from Greek culture.
   (C) spread of Greek culture throughout the eastern Mediterranean.
   (D) destruction of regional trade and commerce.

2. Greco-Roman philosophers attempted to understand human nature through
   (A) emotion, especially the desire for love and brotherhood.
   (B) its rigid adherence to societal norms with rewards and punishments.
   (C) human sin, salvation, and redemption.
   (D) rational observation and deduction.

3. Roman culture
   (A) developed in relative isolation.
   (B) borrowed heavily, especially from the Greek and Hellenistic states.
   (C) influenced heavily the cultures of Africa and southwest Asia.
   (D) was highly innovative in the arts and sciences.

4. Rome successfully expanded for all of these reasons EXCEPT:
   (A) it possessed a disciplined, trained military.
   (B) it had a rich agricultural economy, with local and imported products, which supported a large population.
   (C) Roman leaders made citizens out of conquered elites.
   (D) it had no organized and powerful rivals to oppose expansion in the area.

5. What sentence best describes both Roman and Chinese gender relations?
   (A) Roman and Chinese women had numerous political rights.
   (B) Roman women had more nearly equal legal and property rights and were more active in commerce than their Chinese counterparts.
   (C) Both cultures were matrilocal—husbands resided with their wives' families.
   (D) Rome and China were both patriarchal societies where elite women had considerable influence.

6. With regard to merchants, classical civilizations in Rome, Greece, and China
   (A) accorded them high social status.
   (B) saw little use for their talents in otherwise largely agricultural societies.
   (C) eagerly made them state bureaucrats.
   (D) were ambivalent or negative in their views of merchants despite their vital roles in commerce.

Free-Response Question

Compare and contrast the Greek, Confucian, and Hindu ethical systems.

5 The Classical Period: Directions, Diversities, and Declines by 500 C.E.

Expansion and Integration
Beyond the Classical Civilizations
THINKING HISTORICALLY: Nomads and Cross-Civilization Contacts and Exchanges
Decline in China and India
Decline and Fall in Rome
The New Religious Map
DOCUMENT: The Popularization of Buddhism
VISUALIZING THE PAST: Religious Geography
GLOBAL CONNECTIONS: The Late Classical Period and the World

At the highpoint of the classical period, with the Han and Roman empires in full swing, the Indian Ocean provided a network of important contacts. The major civilizations did not depend on long-distance trade: Rome, China, and India were economically and culturally self-sufficient. But Roman fleets and Chinese ships regularly sailed the ocean, along with more local Persian, Arab, and Indonesian merchants. The Roman government arranged for archers on their convoys to beat back local pirates. Rome wanted spices and textiles from the region. The Chinese wanted exotic goods as well—one Han emperor sent a mission to India to acquire a rhinoceros.

All this raises two questions concerning the period in which the classical empires declined. First, how much cultural exchange occurred? How much did Greeks and Middle Eastern intermediaries pick up from Buddhism, the best-established religion in the Indian Ocean region? Buddhism had established a number of institutions, rituals, and symbols prior to the rise of Christianity. These included the halo (technically, the nimbus) used in artistic representations of saints, the very idea of saints, monasteries, holy water, the five-chained censer to burn incense, and the hand blessing. Christianity would later develop versions of these same practices. Had these elements of Buddhism become familiar to early Christians as a result of trade (and some Buddhist missions to Persia)? We simply do not know, but the similarities between Buddhist and Christian elements are striking. There was also movement in the other direction. Early Christians from the Middle East established at least one temple for their community in India, and later Christian missionaries traveled to India as well. According to legend, the apostle Thomas went to India, and there is a tomb designated for Saint Thomas in southern India.

The second question is more obvious, and answerable: what would happen when the decline of Rome and Han China opened the region to other initiatives? Trading opportunities still existed, but they now invited other participants. India was the first beneficiary. The Gupta Empire ran strong for a century or more after Rome foundered. Indian merchants fanned out from the Persian Gulf to southeast Asia, as the Guptas encouraged free enterprise. Indian elites valued gold highly, which motivated much of their trade with southeast Asia; in return, they could offer fine cotton cloth. Indian prosperity reached new levels, and many new temples were built as one result. Indian influence helped expand Hinduism and, to a greater degree, Buddhism, into southeast Asia.

The Gupta dynasty finally fell. Indian trading activity continued for a time, but there were new opportunities for Persians and Greeks (from the eastern Roman Empire) to rekindle competition for trade in the Indian Ocean. China would begin to reassert itself as well, and new competition from Arab traders proved even more important. When the dust settled from the long crisis of the classical world, the Indian Ocean was open to new claimants for trade supremacy. It would be the Arabs, previously confined to lesser commercial roles, including piracy, who would meet this postclassical challenge first. ■

This chapter continues to focus on the centers of classical civilization in Eurasia and North Africa. The end of the classical era is defined by changes in Asia, North Africa, and the Mediterranean, not the whole world. Nevertheless, the fading of the great classical empires had consequences beyond their borders, for example in spurring new missionary activities. The resulting change in civilization boundaries unleashed new forces that affected sub-Saharan Africa, northern Europe, and other parts of Asia.

Three issues predominate. First, why did these civilizations decline? Invasions were an important cause. Nomadic forces accustomed to fighting on horseback had an advantage over the armies



Figure 5.1 This twelfth-century Sicilian mosaic, Christ as Pantocrator (ruler of all), depicts him as many Christian artists have, his head surrounded by a halo, representing his holiness.

of the classical civilizations. But in their prime, the empires would have been able to turn the invaders back—so what else was going on? Second, why did different regions see different patterns of decline, with different results? And third, what was the significance of these developments—not just for the end of one period but for the beginning of another? The rapid spread of world religions, as the empires faded, provides a vital part of the answer.

The basic themes of the three great classical civilizations involved expansion and integration. From localized beginnings in northern China, the Ganges region, or the Aegean Sea, commercial, political, and cultural outreach pushed civilization through the Middle Kingdom and beyond, through the Indian subcontinent, and into the western Mediterranean. The growth set in motion deliberate but also implicit attempts to pull the new civilizations together in more than name. Correspondingly, the most telling comparisons among the three classical civilizations—identifying similarities as well as differences—involve this same process of integration and some of the problems it encountered.

1000 B.C.E.	1 C.E.	250 C.E.	500 C.E.
c. 1000 Polynesians reach Fiji, Samoa 1000 Independent kingdom of Kush 800–400 Spread of Olmec civilization: cultivation of maize (corn), potatoes; domestication of turkeys, dogs c. 300 Rise of Axum	c. 30 Crucifixion of Jesus c. 100 Root crops introduced to southern Africa through trade 100 Beginning of decline of Han dynasty 180 Rome begins to decline c. 200 Extensive agriculture practiced in Japan 227 Beginning of Sassanid Empire in Persia	284–305 Reign of Diocletian c. 300 Ethiopia adopts Christianity c. 312–337 Reign of Constantine 370–480 Nomadic invasions of western Europe c. 400 Growth of Mayan civilization c. 400 Polynesians reach Hawaii 450 Huns begin to invade India 476 Collapse of Rome	c. 500 Buddhism takes root in east and southeast Asia c. 500 Formation of Ghana c. 600 Beginning of Islam 618 Tang dynasty in China: glorious cultural period 700 Shintoism unified into single national religion in Japan

Throughout the classical world, integration and expansion faltered between 200 and 500 C.E. Decline, even collapse, began to afflict civilization—first in China, then in the Mediterranean, and finally in India. These developments signaled the end of the classical era and ushered in important new themes in world history that would define the next major period. The response of major religions to political decline shaped world history for centuries to come.

Classical civilizations (including Persia) had never embraced the majority of the territory around the globe, although they did include the majority of the world's population. Developments outside the classical orbit had rhythms of their own during the classical period, and they would gain new prominence as the great civilizations faltered. This describes the third historical theme—along with basic comparisons and the process of decline and attendant religious responses—that must be addressed in moving from the classical period to world history's next phase.

Expansion and Integration

All the classical civilizations involved territorial expansion and related efforts to integrate the new territories.

The heritage of the classical civilizations features a host of new ideas, styles, technologies, and institutions. Many of these arose as part of the broad process of adjusting to the expansion of civilization. Thus, it was not entirely accidental that in scarcely more than a century, between about 550 and 400 B.C.E., seminal thinkers arose in all three civilizations—Confucius and Laozi, Buddha, and Socrates. The thinkers had no contact with each other, and their specific ideas varied widely. However, all three were inspired by the common need to articulate central values in their respective societies, as part of a larger process of generating a shared culture on the basis of which their expanding societies might operate.

The civilizations of China, India, and the Mediterranean set about the tasks of uniting their expanding territories in different ways. China emphasized greater centralization, particularly in politics, generating a political culture to match. India and the Mediterranean remained more localized and diverse. India, however, used key religious values, and particularly the spread of Hinduism, to cement its civilization even across political boundaries. Mediterranean cultural achievements spread widely also, but involved less of the population—one reason the region proved more vulnerable to fragmentation after its political unity collapsed under Rome.

Integration involved two basic issues, the most obvious of which was territorial. China had to rein in its new southern regions, and the government devoted considerable attention to settling some northerners in the south, promoting a common language for the elite, and other techniques. The southward spread of the caste system and ultimately Hinduism in India addressed territorial issues. Rome combined considerable local autonomy and tolerance with common laws, the expansion of citizenship to elites across the empire, and a tight commercial network that created interdependencies between grain-growing regions and the olive and grape regions.

The second challenge to integration was social. All three classical civilizations fostered great inequalities between men and women and between upper and lower classes. The nature of the inequalities varied, from Mediterranean slavery to the Indian caste system to the Confucian sense of

hierarchy; these differences were significant. Nevertheless, the assumption of inequality as normal was common to all three societies. Most leading thinkers—Buddha was an exception—did not oppose inequalities, writing openly of the need for deference and even (in the case of the Mediterranean) for slavery.

All the classical civilizations made some efforts to maintain a basic social cohesion while acknowledging inequality. None took the modern, Western-inspired route of arguing for opportunities of upward mobility. Confucianism stressed mutual respect between upper and lower classes, along with special deference on the part of the lower social orders. Shared values about family and self-restraint provided some further links across the social hierarchy. Mediterranean aristocrats treated some locals as clients, offering them protection; they also supported civic rituals intended to foster loyalty. India offered a religion that was shared by all social classes and gave hope to the lower castes of future incarnation into a higher caste. None of these approaches consistently united the society. Lower-class risings, even slave rebellions, were part of the classical experience. On balance, however, some techniques may have worked better than others. And as the Roman Empire fell, many elements of the lower classes quickly turned their attention to other interests. This suggests that here, too, the integration of Mediterranean society was slightly more tenuous than that of the classical civilizations of Asia.

Beyond the Classical Civilizations

Significant civilizations developed in the Americas and Africa outside the immediate classical orbit.

Although the development of the three great civilizations is the central thread in world history during the classical period, significant changes also occurred in other parts of the world. On the borders of the major civilizations, as in northeastern Africa, Japan, and northern Europe, these changes bore some relationship to the classical world, although they were partly autonomous. Elsewhere, most notably in the Americas, new cultures evolved in an entirely independent way. In all cases, changes during the classical period set the stage for more important links in world history later on. Southeast Asia gained access to civilization during the classical period mainly through its contacts with India. Regional kingdoms had already been established, and agricultural economies were familiar on the principal islands of Indonesia as well as on the mainland. Participation in wider trade patterns developed through the efforts of Indian merchants. Hindu and particularly Buddhist religion and art also spread from India. Here was a case of the outright expansion of civilization without the creation of a fully distinctive or unified culture.

Developments in Africa's Kush and its Heritage

A similar case of expansion from an established civilization affected parts of sub-Saharan Africa; indeed, in this case the interaction had begun well before the rise of Greece and Rome. By the year 1000 B.C.E., the independent kingdom of Kush was flourishing along the upper Nile. It possessed a form of writing derived from Egyptian hieroglyphics (and which has not yet been fully deciphered) and mastered the use of iron. Briefly, around 750 B.C.E., armies from Kush conquered Egypt (Figure 5.2). Major cities were built. The Kushites seem to have established a strong monarchy, with elaborate ceremonies illustrating a belief that the king was divine. The kingdom of Kush was defeated by a rival kingdom called **Axum** by about 300 B.C.E.; Axum ultimately fell to another regional kingdom, **Ethiopia.** Axum and Ethiopia had active contacts with the eastern Mediterranean world until after the fall of Rome. They traded with this region for several centuries. The activities of Jewish merchants brought some conversions to Judaism, and a small minority of Ethiopians has remained Jewish to the present day. Greek-speaking merchants also had considerable influence, and it was through them that Christianity was brought to Ethiopia by the 4th century C.E. The Ethiopian Christian church, however, was cut off from mainstream Christianity thereafter, flourishing in isolation to modern times. And Ethiopia had the world's oldest continuous monarchy, which lasted until it was abolished in the late 20th century.

Axum Kingdom located in Ethiopian highlands; replaced Meroë in first century C.E.; received strong influence from Arabian peninsula; eventually converted to Christianity.

Ethiopia A Christian kingdom that developed in the highlands of eastern Africa under the dynasty of King Lalaibela; retained Christianity in the face of Muslim expansion elsewhere in Africa.

It is not clear how much influence, if any, the kingdoms of the upper Nile had on the later history of sub-Saharan Africa. Knowledge of ironworking certainly spread, facilitating the expansion of agriculture in other parts of the continent. Patterns of strong, ceremonial kingship—sometimes called divine kingship—would surface in other parts of Africa later, but whether this occurred

Nomads and Cross-Civilization Contacts and Exchanges

Through much of recorded human history, nomadic peoples have been key agents of contact between sedentary, farming peoples and town dwellers in centers of civilization across the globe. Nomadic peoples pioneered all the great overland routes that linked the civilized cores of Eurasia in ancient times and the Middle Ages. The most famous was the fabled **Silk Road** that ran from western China across the mountains and steppes of central Asia to the civilized centers of Mesopotamia in the last millennium B.C.E., and to Rome, the Islamic heartlands, and western Europe in the first millennium and a half C.E.

Pastoral peoples played critical roles in establishing and expanding trading links.

Chinese rulers at one end of these trading networks, and Roman emperors and later Islamic sultans at the other end, often had to send their armies to do battle with hostile nomads whose raids threatened to cut off the flow of trade. But perhaps more often, pastoral peoples played critical roles in establishing and expanding trading links. For periodic payments by merchants and imperial bureaucrats, they provided protection from bandits and raiding parties for caravans passing through their grazing lands. For further payments, nomadic peoples supplied animals to transport both the merchants' goods and the food and drink needed by those in the caravan parties. At times, pastoralists themselves took charge of transport and trading, but it was more common for the trading operations to be controlled by specialized merchants. These merchants were based either in the urban centers of the civilized cores or in the trading towns that grew up along the Silk Road in central Asia, the oases of Arabia, and the savanna zones that bordered on the north and south the vast Sahara desert in Africa.

Until they were supplanted by the railroads and steamships of the Industrial Revolution, the overland trading routes of Eurasia and the Americas, along with comparable networks established for sailing vessels, were the most important channels for contacts between civilizations. Religions such as Buddhism and Islam spread peacefully along the trading routes throughout central Asia, Persia, and Africa. Artistic motifs and styles, such as those developed in the cosmopolitan Hellenistic world created by Alexander the Great's conquests, were spread by trading contacts in northern Africa, northern India, and western China.

Inventions that were vital to the continued growth and expansion of the civilized cores were carried in war and peace by traders or nomadic peoples from one center to another. For example, central Asian steppe nomads who had converted to Islam clashed with the armies of China in the 8th century C.E. The victorious Muslims found craftspeople among their prisoners who knew the secrets of making paper, which had been invented many centuries earlier by the Chinese. The combination of nomadic mobility and established trading links resulted in the rapid diffusion of papermaking techniques to Mesopotamia and Egypt in the 8th and 9th centuries and across northern Africa to Europe in the centuries that followed.

Nomadic warriors also contributed to the spread of new military technologies and modes of warfare, particularly across the great Eurasian land mass. Sedentary peoples often adopted the nomads' reliance on heavy cavalry and hit-and-run tactics. Saddles, bits, and bow and arrow designs developed by nomadic herders were avidly imitated by farming societies. And defense against nomadic assaults inspired some of the great engineering feats of the preindustrial world, most notably the Great Wall of China (discussed in Chapter 2). It also spurred the development of gunpowder and cannons in China, where the threat of nomadic incursions persisted well into the 19th century.

In addition, nomadic peoples have served as agents for the transfer of food crops between distant civilized cores, even if they

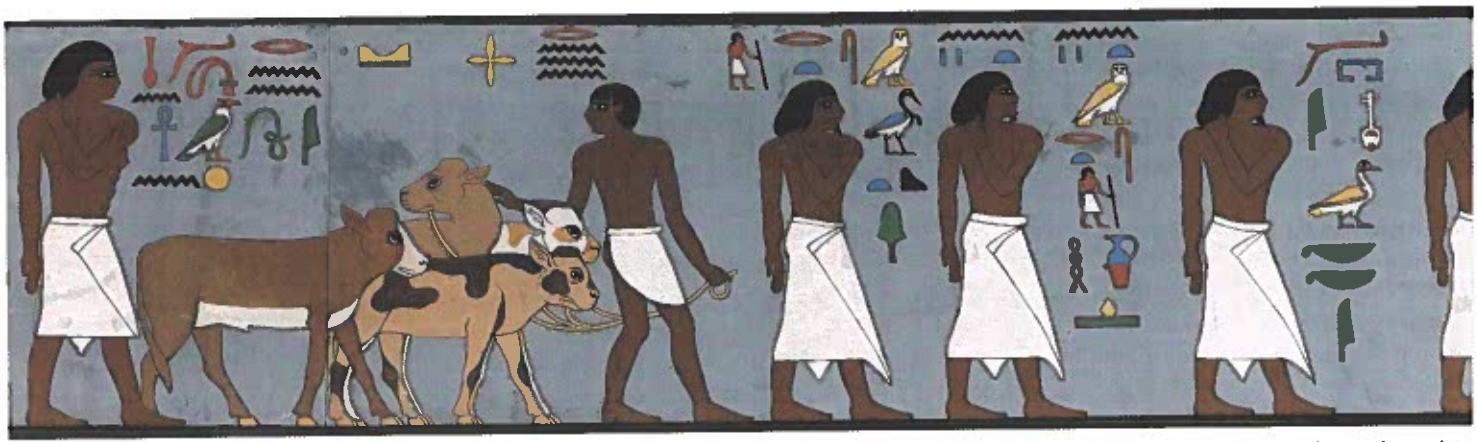


Figure 5.2 This tomb painting from about 1300 B.C.E. highlights black-skinned people from the rising kingdom of Kush, who interacted increasingly with Egyptian society and at one point controlled Egypt directly.

did not usually themselves cultivate the plants being exchanged. In a less constructive vein, nomadic warriors have played a key role in transmitting diseases. In the best-documented instance of this pattern, Mongol cavalry carried the bacterium that causes the strain of the plague that came to be known as the Black Death from central Asia to China in the 14th century. They may also have transmitted it to the West, where it devastated the port cities of the Black Sea region and was later carried by merchant ships to the Middle East and southern Europe.

QUESTIONS What other groups played roles as intermediaries between civilizations in early global history? What features of the nomads' culture and society rendered them ideal agents for transmitting technology, trade goods, crops, and diseases between different cultural zones? Why have the avenues of exchange they provided been open only for limited time spans and then blocked for years or decades at a time? What agents of transmission have taken the place of nomadic peoples in recent centuries?



Map 5.1 Trade Routes at the End of the Classical Era

through some contact with the Kushite tradition or independently is not known. Knowledge of Kushite writing did not spread, which suggests that the impact of this first case of civilization below the Sahara was somewhat limited.

For most of Africa below the Sahara but north of the great tropical jungles, the major development up to 500 C.E. was the further extension of agriculture. Well organized villages arose, often very similar in form and structure to those that still exist. Farming took earliest root on the southern fringes of the **Sahara,** which was less arid than it is today. Toward the end of the classical era, important regional kingdoms were forming in western Africa, leading to the first great state in the region: Ghana. Because of the barriers of dense vegetation and the impact of African diseases on domesticated animals, agriculture spread only slowly southward. However, the creation of a strong agricultural economy prepared the way for the next, more long-lasting and influential wave of African kingdoms, far to the west of the Nile. New crops, including root crops and plantains introduced through trade with southeast Asia about 100 C.E., helped African farmers push into new areas.

Sahara Desert running across northern Africa; separates the Mediterranean coast from southern Africa.

Japan and Northern Europe

Advances in agriculture and manufacturing also occurred in other parts of the world besides sub-Saharan Africa. In northern Europe and Japan, there was no question, as yet, of elaborate contacts with the great civilizations, no counterpart to the influences that affected parts of southeast Asia and the upper Nile valley. Japan, by the year 200 C.E., had established extensive agriculture. The population of the islands had been formed mainly by migrations from the peninsula of Korea, over a 200,000-year span. These migrations had ceased by the year 200. In Japan, a regional political organization based on tribal chiefs evolved; each tribal group had its own god, thought of as an ancestor. A Chinese visitor in 297 described the Japanese as law-abiding, fond of drink, expert at agriculture and fishing; they observed strict social differences, indicated by tattoos or other body markings. Japan had also developed considerable ironworking; the Japanese seem to have skipped the stage of using bronze and copper tools, moving directly from stone tools to iron. Finally, regional states in Japan became increasingly sophisticated, each controlling somewhat larger territories. In 400 C.E., one such state brought in scribes from Korea to keep records—this represented the introduction of writing in the islands.

Shinto Religion of early Japanese culture; devotees worshipped numerous gods and spirits associated with the natural world; offers of food and prayers made to gods and nature spirits.

Japan's religion, **Shintoism,** provided for the worship of political rulers and the spirits of nature, including the all-important god of rice. Many local shrines and rituals revolved around Shinto beliefs, which became unified into a single national religion by 700 C.E. However, this was a simple religion, rather different in ritual and doctrine from the great world religions and philosophies developing in the classical civilizations. Something like national politics arose only around 400 C.E., when one regional ruler began to win the loyalty and trust of other local leaders. This was the basis for Japan's imperial house, with the emperor worshipped as a religious figure. Such growing political sophistication and national cultural unity were just emerging by 600 C.E., however. It was at this point that Japan was ready for more elaborate contacts with China—a process that would move Japan squarely into the orbit of major civilizations.

Celtic Expansion, Fifth to Third Century BCE 

Much of northern Europe lagged behind Japan's pace. Teutonic or Celtic peoples in what today is Germany, England, and Scandinavia, as well as Slavic peoples in much of eastern Europe, were loosely organized into regional kingdoms. Some, in Germany and England, had succumbed to the advances of the distant Roman Empire, but after Rome's decline the patterns of regional politics resumed. There was no written language, except in cases where Latin had been imported. Agriculture, often still combined with hunting, was rather primitive. Scandinavians were developing increasing skill as sailors, which would lead them into wider trade and pillage in the centuries after 600 C.E. Religious beliefs featured a host of gods and rituals designed to placate the forces of nature. This region would change, particularly through the spread of the religious and intellectual influences of Christianity. However, these shifts still lay in the future, and even conversions to Christianity did not bring northern and eastern Europe into the orbit of a single civilization. Until about 1000 C.E., northern Europe remained one of the most backward areas in the world.

Central America

Yet another portion of the world was developing civilization by 600 C.E.—indeed, its progress was greater than that of much of Europe and Africa. In Central America, an Indian group called the Olmecs developed and spread an early form of civilization from about 800 until 400 B.C.E. The Olmecs seem to have lacked writing, but they produced massive, pyramid-shaped religious monuments.

A Mayan Town 

Olmec culture Cultural tradition that arose at San Lorenzo and La Venta in Mexico c. 1200 B.C.E.; featured irrigated agriculture, urbanism, elaborate religion, beginnings of calendrical and writing systems.

The first American civilization was based on many centuries of advancing agriculture, expanding from the early cultivation of corn. Initially, in the wild state, corn ears were scarcely larger than strawberries, but patient breeding gradually converted this grain into a staple food crop. In the Andes areas of South America, root crops were also grown, particularly the potato. The development of American agriculture was limited by the few domesticated animals available—turkeys, dogs, and guinea pigs in Central America. Nevertheless, **Olmec culture** displayed many impressive achievements. It explored artistic forms in precious stones such as jade. Religious statues and icons blended human images with those of animals. Scientific research produced accurate and impressive calendars. Olmec culture, in its religious and artistic emphases, powerfully influenced later Indian civilizations in Central America. The Olmecs disappeared without a clear trace around 400 B.C.E., but their successors soon developed a hieroglyphic alphabet and built the first great city—

Teotihuacan (tay-oh-tee-wah-KAHN)—in the Americas, as a center for trade and worship. This culture, in turn, suffered setbacks from migrations and regional wars, but from its base developed a still fuller American civilization, starting with the **Maya,** from about 400 C.E. onward.

In essence, the Olmecs and their successors had provided for the Central American region the equivalent of the river valley civilizations in Asia and the Middle East, although many centuries later (Map 5.2). A similar early civilization arose in the Andes region in present-day Peru and Bolivia, where careful agriculture allowed the construction of elaborate cities and religious monuments. This culture would lead, later, to the civilization of the **Inca.** The two centers of early civilization in the Americas developed in total isolation from developments elsewhere in the world. As a result, they lacked certain advantages that come from the ability to copy and react to other societies, including such basic technologies as the wheel or the capacity to work iron. However, the early American Indian cultures were considerably ahead of most of those in Europe during the same period. And they demonstrate the common, although not invariable, tendency of humans to move from the establishment of agriculture to the creation of the more elaborate trappings of a civilized society.

Teotihuacan [tay-oh-tee-wah-KAHN] Site of classic culture in central Mexico; urban center with important religious functions; supported by intensive agriculture in surrounding regions; population of as much as 200,000.

Maya Classic culture emerging in southern Mexico and Central America contemporary with Teotihuacan; extended over broad region; featured monumental architecture, written language, calendrical and mathematical systems, highly developed religion.

Inca Group of clans centered at Cuzco that were able to create empire incorporating various Andean cultures; term also used for leader of empire.



Map 5.2 Civilizations of Central and South America Three cultural "hearths" are represented: Mesoamerica, extending from north-central Mexico to Nicaragua; the Andean region in South America, and the Intermediate zone of modern-day Colombia and Panama which shared many characteristics with the other zones but did not build in stone.

Polynesia

Polynesia Islands contained in a rough triangle whose points lie in Hawaii, New Zealand, and Easter Island.

Another case of isolated development featured the migration of agricultural peoples to new island territories in the Pacific. **Polynesian** peoples had reached islands such as Fiji and Samoa by 1000 B.C.E. Further explorations in giant outrigger canoes led to the first settlement of island complexes such as Hawaii by 400 C.E., where the new settlers adapted local plants, brought in new animals (notably pigs), and imported a highly stratified caste system under powerful local kings.

Agriculture, in sum, expanded into new areas during the classical period; early civilizations, or early contacts, were also forming. These developments were not central to world history during the classical period itself, but they folded into the larger human experience thereafter.

Nomad Empires MAP

The herding peoples of central Asia also contributed to world history, particularly toward the end of the classical period. Some nomadic groups gained new contacts with established civilizations, like China, which brought changes in political organization as well as some new goals for conquest. Central Asian herders played a vital role in trade routes between east Asia and the Middle East, transporting goods like silk across long distances. Other herding groups produced important technological innovations, such as the stirrup, which allowed riders to aim weapons better. The herding groups thus enjoyed an important history of their own, and they provided important contacts among the civilizations that they bordered. Finally, perhaps because of internal population pressure as well as new appetites and opportunities, herding groups invaded the major civilizations directly, helping to bring the classical period as a whole to an end.

Decline in China and India

A combination of internal weakness and invasion led to important changes, first in China, then in India.

Between 200 and 600 C.E., all three classical civilizations collapsed entirely or in part. During this four-century span, all suffered from outside invasions, the result of growing incursions by groups from central Asia. This renewed wave of nomadic expansion was not as sweeping as the earlier Indo-European growth, which had spread over India and much of the Mediterranean region many centuries before, but it severely tested the civilized regimes. Rome, of course, fell directly to Germanic invaders, who fought on partly because they were, in turn, harassed by the fierce Asiatic Huns. The Huns swept once across Italy, invading the city of Rome amid great destruction. Another Hun group from central Asia overthrew the Guptas in India, and similar nomadic tribes had earlier toppled the Chinese Han dynasty. The central Asian nomads were certainly encouraged by a growing realization of the weakness of the classical regimes. Han China as well as the later Roman Empire suffered from serious internal problems long before the invaders dealt the final blows. And the Guptas in India had not permanently resolved that area's tendency to dissolve into political fragmentation.

The Han Collapse

Yellow Turbans Chinese Daoists who launched a revolt in 184 C.E. in China promising a golden age to be brought about by divine magic.

By about 100 C.E., the Han dynasty in China entered a serious decline, and its deteriorations operated on several levels. Confucian intellectual activity gradually became less creative. Politically, the central government's control diminished, and bureaucrats became more corrupt. Assassinations of and by bureaucrats competing for power at the top occurred on several occasions. Local landlords took up much of the slack, ruling their neighborhoods according to their own wishes. The free peasants, long heavily taxed, were burdened with new taxes and demands of service by these same landlords. Many lost their farms and became day laborers on the large estates. Some had to sell their children into service. Social unrest increased, producing a great revolutionary effort led by Daoists in 184 C.E. Daoism now gained new appeal, shifting toward a popular religion and adding healing practices and magic to earlier philosophical beliefs. The Daoist leaders, called the **Yellow Turbans,** promised a golden age that was to be brought about by divine magic. The Yellow Turbans attacked the weakness of the emperor but also the self-indulgence of the current bureaucracy. As many as 30,000 students demonstrated against the decline of government morality. However, their protests failed, and Chinese population growth and prosperity spiraled further downward. The imperial court was mired in intrigue and civil war.

This dramatic decline paralleled the slightly later collapse of Rome, as we shall see. It obviously explained China's inability to push back invasions from borderland nomads, who finally overthrew the Han dynasty outright. As in Rome, growing political ineffectiveness formed part of the decline. Another important factor was the spread of devastating new epidemics, which may have

killed up to half of the population. These combined blows not only toppled the Han but led to almost three centuries of chaos—an unusually long span of unrest in Chinese history. Regional rulers and weak dynasties rose and fell during this period. Even China's cultural unity was threatened as the wave of Buddhism spread—one of the only cases in which China imported a major idea from outside its borders, until the 20th century. Northern China, particularly, seemed near collapse.

Nonetheless, China did revive itself near the end of the 6th century. Strong native rulers in the north drove out the nomadic invaders. The **Sui** (sway) dynasty briefly ruled, and then in 618 C.E. it was followed by the **Tang,** who sponsored one of the most glorious periods in Chinese history. Confucianism and the bureaucratic system were revived, and indeed the bureaucratic tradition became more elaborate. The period of chaos left its mark somewhat in the continued presence of a Buddhist minority and new styles in art and literature. But, unlike the case of Rome, there was no permanent disruption.

Sui [sway] Dynasty that succeeded the Han in China; emerged from strong rulers in northern China; united all of northern China and reconquered southern China.

Tang Dynasty that succeeded the Sui in 618 C.E.; more stable than previous dynasty.

The structures of classical China were simply too strong to be overturned. The bureaucracy declined in scope and quality, but it did not disappear during the troubled centuries. Confucian values and styles of life remained current among the upper class. Many of the nomadic invaders, seeing that they had nothing better to offer by way of government or culture, simply tried to assimilate the Chinese traditions. China thus had to recover from a serious setback but did not have to reinvent its civilization.

The End of the Gupta Empire

The decline of classical civilization in India was less drastic than the collapse of Han China. The ability of the Gupta emperors to control local princes was declining by the 5th century. Invasions by nomadic peoples, probably Hun tribes similar to those who were pressing into Europe, affected some northern portions of India as early as 500 C.E. During the next century, the invaders penetrated much deeper, destroying the Gupta Empire in central India. Many of the invaders were integrated into the warrior caste of India, forming a new ruling group of regional princes. For several centuries, no native ruler attempted to build a large Indian state. The regional princes, collectively called **Rajput** (RAHJ-poot), controlled the small states and emphasized military prowess. Few political events of more than local significance occurred.



Political Regionalism and Cultural Unity in the Gupta-Harsha Eras

Rajput [RAHJ-poot] Regional princes in western India; emphasized military control of their regions.

Within this framework, Indian culture continued to evolve. Buddhism declined further in India proper. Hindu beliefs gained ground, among other things converting the Hun princes, who had originally worshipped gods of battle and had no sympathy for the Buddhist principles of calm and contemplation. Within Hinduism, the worship of a mother goddess, **Devi** (DAY-vee), spread widely, encouraging a new popular emotionalism in religious ritual. Indian economic prosperity also continued at high levels.

Devi [DAY-vee] Mother goddess within Hinduism; widely spread following collapse of Guptas; encouraged new emotionalism in religious ritual.

Although Indian civilization substantially maintained its position, another threat was to come, after 600 C.E., from the new Middle Eastern religion of **Islam.** Arab armies, fighting under the banners of **Allah,** reached India's porous northwestern frontier during the 7th century, and while there was initially little outright conquest on the subcontinent, Islam did win some converts in the northwest. Hindu leaders reacted to the arrival of this new faith by strengthening their emphasis on religious devotion, at the expense of some other intellectual interests. Hinduism also underwent further popularization; Hindu texts were written in vernacular languages such as Hindi, and use of the old classical language, Sanskrit, declined. These reactions were largely successful in preventing more than a minority of Indians from abandoning Hinduism, but they distracted from further achievements in science and mathematics. Islam also hit hard at India's international economic position and affected its larger impact throughout Asia. Arab traders soon wrested control of the Indian Ocean from Tamil merchants, and India, though still prosperous and productive, saw its commercial dynamism reduced. In politics, regionalism continued to prevail. Clearly, the glory days of the Guptas were long past, although classical traditions survived particularly in Hinduism and the caste system.

Islam Major world religion having its origins in 610 C.E. in the Arabian peninsula; meaning literally submission; based on prophecy of Muhammad.

Allah Supreme God in strictly monotheistic Islam.

Decline and Fall in Rome

Decline in Rome was complex, involving a mix of internal and external factors.

The Roman Empire exhibited a great many symptoms of decay after about 180 C.E. The population was declining, and the empire faced growing difficulties in recruiting effective armies. There were also political manifestations in the greater brutality and arbitrariness of many Roman emperors

The eastern and western portions of the empire developed differently after the fall of Rome.

who, according to one commentator at the time, were given to "lustful and cruel habits." Tax collection became increasingly difficult, as residents of the empire fell on hard times. The governor of Egypt complained that "the once numerous inhabitants of the aforesaid villages have now been reduced to a few, because some have fled in poverty and others have died and for this reason we are in danger owing to impoverishment of having to abandon the tax-collectorship."

Above all, there were human symptoms. Inscriptions on Roman tombstones increasingly ended with the slogan, "I was not, I was, I am not, I have no more desires," suggesting a pervasive despondency over the futility of this life and despair at the absence of an afterlife.

Symptoms of Decline

The decline of Rome was more disruptive than the collapse of the classical dynasties in Asia. For this reason, and because memories of the collapse of this great empire became part of the Western tradition, the process of deterioration deserves particular attention. Every so often, Americans or western Europeans concerned about changes in their own society wonder if there might be lessons in Rome's fall that apply to the uncertain future of Western civilization today.

We have seen that the quality of political and economic life in the Roman Empire began to shift after about 180 C.E. Political confusion produced a series of weak emperors and many disputes over succession to the throne. Intervention by the army in the selection of emperors complicated political life and contributed to the deterioration of rule from the top. More important in initiating the process of decline was a series of plagues that swept over the empire. As in China, the plagues' source was growing international trade, which brought diseases endemic in southern Asia to new areas like the Mediterranean, where no resistance had been established even to contagions such as the measles. The resulting diseases decimated the population. The population of Rome decreased from a million people to 250,000. Economic life worsened in consequence. Recruitment of troops became more difficult, so the empire was increasingly reduced to hiring Germanic soldiers to guard its frontiers. The need to pay troops added to the demands on the state's budget, just as declining production cut into tax revenues.

The Rise and Fall of Rome



Here, perhaps, is the key to the process of decline: a set of general problems, triggered by a cycle of plagues that could not be prevented, resulting in a rather mechanistic spiral that steadily worsened. However, it is hard to say whether another side to Rome's downfall is either a cause or result of the initial difficulties. Rome's upper classes became steadily more pleasure-seeking, turning away from the political devotion and economic vigor that had characterized the republic and early empire. Cultural life decayed. Aside from some truly creative Christian writers—the fathers of Western theology—there was very little sparkle to the art or literature of the later empire. Many Roman scholars contented themselves with writing textbooks that rather mechanically summarized earlier achievements in science, mathematics, and literary style. Writing textbooks is not, of course, proof of absolute intellectual incompetence—at least, not in all cases—but the point was that new knowledge or artistic styles were not being generated, and even the levels of previous accomplishment began to slip. The later Romans wrote textbooks about rhetoric instead of displaying rhetorical talent in actual political life. And they wrote simple compendiums, for example, about animals or geometry, that barely captured the essentials of what earlier intellectuals had known, and often added superstitious beliefs that previous generations would have scorned.

This cultural decline, finally, was not clearly due to disease or economic collapse, for it began in some ways before these larger problems surfaced. Something was happening to the Roman elite, perhaps because of the deadening effect of authoritarian political rule, perhaps because of a new interest in luxuries and sensual indulgence. Revealingly, the upper classes no longer produced many offspring, for bearing and raising children seemed incompatible with a life of pleasure-seeking.

Rome's fall, in other words, can be blamed on large, impersonal forces that would have been hard for any society to control or a moral and political decay that reflected growing corruption among society's leaders. Probably elements of both were involved. Thus, the plagues would have weakened even a vigorous society, but they would not necessarily have produced an irreversible downward spiral had not the morale of the ruling classes already been sapped by an unproductive lifestyle and superficial values.

Effort at Revival: An East/West Split

Regardless of precise causes, the course of Roman decay is quite clear. As the quality of imperial rule declined, as life became more dangerous and economic survival more precarious, many farmers clustered around the protection of large landlords, surrendering full control over their plots of land in the hope of military and judicial protection. The decentralization of political and economic authority, which was greatest in the western, or European, portions of the empire, foreshadowed the manorial system of Europe in the Middle Ages. The system of estates gave great political power to landlords and provided some local stability. But, in the long run, it weakened the power of the emperor and also tended to move the economy away from the elaborate and successful trade patterns of Mediterranean civilization in its heyday. Many estates tried to be self-sufficient. Trade and production declined further as a result, and cities shrank in size. The empire was locked in a vicious circle, in which responses to the initial deterioration merely lessened the chances of recovery.

Some later emperors tried vigorously to reverse the tide. Diocletian, who ruled from 284 to 305 C.E., tightened up the administration of the empire and tried to improve tax collection. Regulation of the dwindling economy increased. Diocletian also attempted to direct political loyalties to his own person, exerting pressure to worship the emperor as god. This was what prompted him to persecute Christians with particular viciousness, for they would not give Caesar preference over their god. The emperor Constantine, who ruled from 312 to 337 C.E., experimented with other methods of control. He set up a second capital city, Constantinople, to regulate the eastern half of the empire more efficiently. He tried to use the religious force of Christianity to unify the empire spiritually, extending its toleration and adopting it as his own faith. These measures were not without result. The Eastern empire, ruled from Constantinople (now the Turkish city of Istanbul), remained an effective political and economic unit. Christianity spread under his official sponsorship, although there were some new problems linked to its success.

None of these measures, however, revived the empire as a whole. Division merely made the weakness of the western half worse. Attempts to regulate the economy reduced economic initiative and lowered production; ultimately tax revenues declined once again. The army deteriorated further. And, when the Germanic invasions began in earnest in the 400s, there was scant basis to resist. Many peasants, burdened by the social and economic pressures of the decaying empire, actually welcomed the barbarians. A priest noted that "in all districts taken over by the Germans, there is one desire among all the Romans, that they should never again find it necessary to pass under Roman jurisdiction." German kingdoms were established in many parts of the empire by 425 C.E., and the last Roman emperor in the West was displaced in 476 C.E. The Germanic invaders numbered at most 5 percent of the population of the empire, but so great was the earlier Roman decline that this small, poorly organized force was able to put an end to one of the world's great political structures (Map 5.3).



Germanic Kingdoms, c. 525

The collapse of Rome echoed mightily through the later history of Europe and the Middle East. Rome's fall split the unity of the Mediterranean lands that had been so arduously won through Hellenistic culture and then by the Roman Empire. This was one sign that the end of the Roman Empire was a more serious affair than the displacement of the last classical dynasties in India and China, for Greece and Rome had not produced the shared political culture and bureaucratic traditions of China that could allow revival after a period of chaos. Nor had Mediterranean civilization, for all its vitality, generated a common religion that appealed deeply enough, or satisfied enough needs, to maintain unity amid political fragmentation, as in India. Such religions would reach the Mediterranean world as Rome fell, but they came too late to save the empire and produced a deep rift in this world—between Christian and Muslim—that has not been healed to this day.

However, Rome's collapse, although profound, was uneven. In effect, the fall of Rome divided the Mediterranean world into three zones, which formed the starting points of three distinct civilizations that would develop in later centuries (Map 5.4).

The Early Byzantine Empire

In the eastern part of the empire, centered now on Constantinople, the empire in a sense did not fall. Civilization was more deeply entrenched here than in some of the western European portions of the empire, and there were fewer pressures from invaders. Emperors continued to rule Greece



Map 5.3 Germanic Kingdoms after the Invasions. Nomadic tribes converged mainly on the western part of the Roman Empire, invading Rome itself and its European outposts.

Byzantine Empire Eastern half of Roman Empire following collapse of western half of old empire; retained Mediterranean culture, particularly Greek; later lost Palestine, Syria, and Egypt to Islam; capital at Constantinople.

Justinian (c. 482–565) Early Byzantine emperor, responsible for major building in Constantinople and a codification of Roman law; his efforts to recapture some additional previously Roman territory ended in failure.

and other parts of southeast Europe, plus the northern Middle East. This Eastern empire—later to be known as the **Byzantine Empire**—was a product of late imperial Rome, rather than a balanced result of the entire span of classical Mediterranean civilization. Thus, although its language was Greek, it maintained the authoritarian tone of the late Roman rulers. But the Eastern empire was vibrant, artistically creative, and active in trade. Briefly, especially under the emperor **Justinian** (who ruled from 527 to 565 C.E.), the eastern emperors tried to recapture the whole heritage of Rome. However, Justinian was unable to maintain a hold in Italy and even lost the provinces of north Africa. He did issue one of the most famous compilations of Roman law, in the code that bore his name. But his was the last effort to restore Mediterranean unity.

The Byzantine Empire did not control the whole of the northern Middle East, even in its greatest days. During the late Hellenistic periods and into the early centuries of the Roman Empire, a Parthian empire had flourished, centered in the Tigris–Euphrates region but spreading into northwestern India and to the borders of Rome's holdings along the Mediterranean. Parthian conquerors had taken over this portion of Alexander the Great's empire. They produced little culture of their own, being content to rely on Persian styles, but they long maintained an effective military and bureaucratic apparatus. Then, around 227 C.E., a Persian rebellion displaced the Parthians and created a new Sassanid Empire that more directly revived the glories of the earlier Persian Empire. Persian religious ideas, including the religion of Zoroastrianism, revived although there was some conversion to Christianity as well. Persian styles in art and manufacturing experienced a brilliant resurgence.



Map 5.4 The Mediterranean, Middle East, Europe, and North Africa, c. 500 C.E. Soon after the fall of Rome, the former empire split into three distinct zones.

Both the Parthian and the Sassanid empires served as bridges between the Mediterranean and the East, transmitting goods and some artistic and literary styles between the Greek-speaking world and India and China. As the Roman Empire weakened, the Sassanids joined the attack, at times pushing into parts of southeastern Europe. Ultimately, however, the Byzantine Empire managed to create a stable frontier. The Sassanid Empire preserved the important strain of Persian culture in the eastern part of the Middle East, and this continued to influence this region as well as India. The Sassanids themselves, however, were finally overthrown by the surge of Arab conquest that followed the rise of Islam, in the 7th century C.E.

Rome's fall, then, did not disrupt the northern Middle East—the original cradle of civilization—as much as might have been expected. Persian rule simply continued in one part of the region, until the Arab onslaught, which itself did not destroy Persian culture. Byzantium maintained many of the traditions of the later Roman Empire, plus Christianity, in the western part of the Middle East and in Greece and other parts of southeastern Europe.

Western Europe and North Africa

The second zone that devolved from Rome's fall consisted of North Africa and the southeastern shores of the Mediterranean. Here, a number of regional kingdoms briefly succeeded the empire. While Christianity spread into the area—indeed, one of the greatest Christian theologians, **Augustine,** was a bishop in North Africa—its appearance was not so uniformly triumphant as in the Byzantine Empire or western Europe. Furthermore, separate beliefs and doctrines soon split north African Christianity from the larger branches, producing most notably the **Coptic** church in Egypt, which still survives as a Christian minority in that country. Soon this region would be filled with the still newer doctrines of Islam and a new Arab empire.

Augustine (Saint) Influential church father and theologian (354–430 C.E.); born in Africa and ultimately bishop of Hippo in Africa; champion of Christian doctrine against various heresies and very important in the long-term development of Christian thought on such issues as predestination.

Coptic Christian sect in Egypt, later tolerated after Islamic takeover.

Finally, there was the western part of the empire—Italy, Spain, and points north. Here is where Rome's fall not only shattered unities but also reduced the level of civilization itself. Crude, regional Germanic kingdoms developed in parts of Italy, France, and elsewhere. Cities shrank still further, and, especially outside Italy, trade almost disappeared. The only clearly vital forces in this region emanated not from Roman traditions but from the spread of Christianity. Even Christianity

could not sustain a sophisticated culture of literature or art, however. In the mire of Rome's collapse, this part of the world forgot for several centuries what it had previously known.

In this western domain, what we call the fall of Rome was scarcely noted at the time, for decay had been progressing for so many decades that the failure to name a new emperor meant little. There was some comprehension of loss, some realization that the present could not rival the past. Thus, Christian scholars were soon apologizing for their inability to write well or to understand some of the doctrines of the earlier theologians like Augustine. This sense of inferiority to classical achievements would long mark the culture of this western zone, even as times improved.

The New Religious Map

The period of classical decline saw the rapid expansion of Buddhism and Christianity.

Religious change had wider cultural, social, and political implications.

The end of the classical period is not simply the story of decay and collapse. This same period, from 200 to 600 C.E., saw the effective rise of many of the world's major religions. The devastating plagues caused new interest in belief systems that could provide solace amid rising death rates. From Spain to China, growing political instability clearly prompted many people to seek solace in joys of the spirit, and while the religious surge was not entirely new, the resulting changes in the religious map of Europe and Asia and the nature and intensity of religious interests were significant new forces. Christianity, born two centuries before Rome's collapse began, became a widespread religion throughout the Mediterranean region as the empire's political strength weakened. Buddhism, although launched still earlier, saw its surge into eastern Asia furthered by the growing problems of classical China. Thus, two major faiths, different in many ways but similar in their emphasis on spiritual life and the importance of divine power, reshaped major portions of Europe and Asia precisely as the structures of the classical period declined or disappeared. Finally, shortly after 600 C.E., an entirely new religion, Islam, surfaced and became the most dynamic force in world history during the next several centuries. In sum, the religious map of the world, although by no means completed by 500 C.E., was beginning to take on dramatic new contours. This means that while civilization in many ways declined, it was also being altered, taking new directions as well as losing some older strengths. Never before had single religions spread so widely, crossing so many cultural and political boundaries.

The newly expanding religions shared some general features. Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism (as well as Islam later on) all emphasized intense devotion and piety, stressing the importance of spiritual concerns beyond the daily cares of earthly life. All three offered the hope of a better existence after this life ended, and each one responded to new political instability and to the growing poverty of people in various parts of the civilized world.

The spread of the major religions meant that hundreds of thousands of people, in Asia, Europe, and Africa, underwent a conversion process as the classical period drew to a close. Radically changing beliefs is an unusual human experience, symptomatic in this case of the new pressures on established political structures and on ordinary life. At the same time, many people blended new beliefs with the old, in a process called *syncretism.* This meant that the religions changed too, sometimes taking on the features of individual civilizations even while maintaining larger religious claims.

Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism

Despite important common features, the major religions were very different. Hinduism, as we have seen, retained its belief in reincarnation and its combination of spiritual interest in union with the divine essence and extensive rituals and ceremonies. The religion did experience greater popular appeal after the fall of the Guptas, associated with the expanded use of popular languages and with the worship of the mother goddess Devi.

Buddhism was altered more substantially than Hinduism as it traveled mainly beyond India's borders, becoming only a small minority faith in India itself. The chief agents of Buddhist expansion and leadership were monks, for Buddhism tended to divide the faithful among a minority who abandoned earthly life in favor of spiritual dedication and the larger number who continued to work in the world while doing the best they could to meet their spiritual obligations. Some centuries after

The Popularization of Buddhism

Chinese Buddhism, unlike most Chinese beliefs, spread among all regions and social groups. Although it divided into many sects that disagreed over details of theology and rituals by commenting on earlier Buddhist scriptures (the Sutras), many ordinary Chinese believers cared little for such details and were more concerned with direct spiritual benefits. Often they arranged to have Buddhist sermons copied, as a means of obtaining merit, while adding a note of their own. The following passages come from such notes, written mainly in the 6th century. They suggest the various reasons people might go through the challenging process of converting to a new religion.

Recorded on the 15th day of the fourth month of 531.
The Buddhist lay disciple Yuan Rong—having lived in this degenerate era for many years, fearful for his life, and yearning for home—now makes a donation of a thousand silver coins to the Three Jewels [the Buddha, the Law, and the Monastic Order]. This donation is made in the name of the Celestial King Vaisravana. In addition, he makes a donation of a thousand to ransom himself and his wife and children [from their earthly existence], a thousand more to ransom his servants, and a thousand more to ransom his domestic animals. This money is to be used for copying sutras. It is accompanied by the prayer that the Celestial King may attain Buddhahood; that the disciple's family, servants, and animals may be blessed with long life, may attain enlightenment, and may all be permitted to return to the capital.

Dated the 29th day of the fourth month of 550.
Happiness is not fortuitous: Pray for it and it will respond. Results are not born of thin air: Pay heed to causes and results will follow. This explains how the Buddhist disciple and nun Daorong—because her conduct in her previous life was not correct—came to be born in her present form, a woman, vile and unclean.

Now if she does not honor the awesome decree of Buddha, how can future consequences be favorable for her? Therefore, having cut down her expenditures on food and clothing, she reverently has had the Nirvana Sutra copied once. She prays that those who read it carefully will be exalted in mind to the highest realms and that those who communicate its meaning will cause others to be so enlightened.

She also prays that in her present existence she will have no further sickness or suffering, that her parents in seven other incarnations (who have already died or will die in the future) and her present family and close relatives may experience joy in the four realms [earth, water, fire, and air], and that whatever they seek may indeed come to pass. Finally, she prays that all those endowed with knowledge may be included within this prayer.

Recorded on the 28th day of the fifth month of 583.
The Army Superintendent, Sung Shao, having suffered the heavy sorrow of losing both his father and mother, made a vow on their behalf to read one section each of [many] sutras. He prays that the spirits of his parents will someday reach the Pure Land [paradise] and will thus be forever freed from the three unhappy states of existence and the eight calamities and that they may eternally listen to the Buddha's teachings.

He also prays that the members of his family, both great and small, may find happiness at will, that blessings may daily rain down upon them while hardships disperse like clouds. He prays that the imperial highways may be open and free of bandits, that the state may be preserved from pestilence, that wind and rain may obey their proper seasons, and that all suffering creatures may quickly find release. May all these prayers be granted!

The preceding incantation has been translated and circulated.

If this incantation is recited 7, 14, or 21 times daily (after having cleansed the mouth in the morning with a willow twig, having scattered flowers and incense before the image of Buddha, having knelt and joined the palms of the hands), the four grave sins, the five wicked acts, and all other transgressions will be wiped away. The present body will not be afflicted by untimely calamities; one will at last be born into the realm of immeasurably long life; and reincarnation in the female form will be escaped forever.

Now, the Sanskrit text has been reexamined and the Indian Vinaya monk Buddhasangha and other monks have been consulted; thus we know that the awesome power of this incantation is beyond comprehension. If it is recited 100 times in the evening and again at noon, it will destroy the four grave sins and five wicked acts. It will pluck out the very roots of sin and will ensure rebirth in the Western Regions. If, with sincerity of spirit, one is able to complete 200,000 recitations, perfect intelligence will be born and there will be no relapses. If 300,000 recitations are completed, one will see Amita Buddha face to face and will certainly be reborn into the Pure Land of tranquility and bliss.

Copied by the disciple of pure faith Sun Szu-chung on the 8th day of the fourth month of 720.

QUESTIONS Why did Buddhism spread widely in China by the 6th century? How did popular Buddhism compare with original Buddhist teachings (see Chapter 2)? How did Chinese Buddhists define holy life? How do these documents suggest some of the troubles China faced after the collapse of the Han dynasty?

Buddha's death, a doctrine of **bodhisattvas** (boh-dih-SAHT-vuh) developed, which held that some people could attain nirvana through their own meditation while choosing to remain in the world as saints and to aid others by prayer and example. Buddhism increasingly shifted from an original emphasis on ethics to become a more emotional cult stressing the possibility of popular salvation. The role of the bodhisattvas, in broadening the prospects of salvation for ordinary people by leading them in prayer and advising on spiritual matters, was crucial in this transformation.

bodhisattvas [boh-dih-SAHT-vuh] Buddhist holy men; built up spiritual merits during their lifetimes; prayers even after death could aid people to achieve reflected holiness.

Buddhism evolved further as the religion spread seriously to China after the fall of the Han dynasty, when the idea of a celestial afterlife proved almost irresistible. Monasteries in India and the Himalaya Mountains continued to serve as spiritual centers for Chinese Buddhism, but the religion developed strong roots in east Asia directly, spreading through China and from there to

Mahayana Chinese version of Buddhism; placed considerable emphasis on Buddha as god or savior.

Korea and Japan. The east Asian form of Buddhism, called **Mahayana,** or the Greater Vehicle, retained basic Buddhist beliefs. However, the emphasis on Buddha as a divine savior increased in the Mahayana version. Statues devoted to Buddha as god countered the earlier Buddhist hostility to religious images. And the religion improved its organization, with priests, temples, creeds, and rituals. Buddhist holy men, the bodhisattvas, remained important. Their souls after death resided in a kind of superheaven, where they could receive prayers and aid people. Intense spirituality continued to inform Buddhist faith as well. But prayers and rituals could now help ordinary people to become holy. Buddha became a god to whom one could appeal for solace, "the great physician for a sick and impure world." East Asian Buddhism also spurred new artistic interests in China and, later, in Japan, including the pagoda style of temple design and the statues devoted to Buddha.

Buddhism had a fascinating impact on women in China, largely among families who converted. On the face of things, Buddhism should have disrupted China's firm belief in patriarchal power, because Buddhists believed that women, like men, had souls. Indeed, some individual women in China captured great attention because of their spiritual accomplishments. But Chinese culture generated changes in Buddhism within the empire. Buddhist phrases like "husband supports wife" were changed to "husband controls his wife," whereas "the wife comforts the husband"—another Buddhist phrase from India—became "the wife reveres her husband." Here was a vital case of cultural blending, or syncretism. Finally, many men valued pious Buddhist wives, because they might benefit the family's salvation and because Buddhist activity would keep their wives busy, calm, and out of mischief. Buddhism was perhaps appealing to Chinese women because it led to a more meaningful life, but it did not really challenge patriarchy. A biography of one Buddhist wife put it this way: "At times of crisis she could be tranquil and satisfied with her fate, not letting outside things agitate her mind."

Buddhism was not popular with all Chinese. Confucian leaders, particularly, found in Buddhist beliefs in an afterlife a diversion from appropriate political interests. They disliked the notion of such intense spirituality and also found ideas of the holy life incompatible with proper family obligations. More important, Buddhism was seen as a threat that might distract ordinary people from loyalty to the emperor. When imperial dynasties revived in China, they showed some interest in Buddhist piety for a time, but ultimately they attacked the Buddhist faith, driving out many missionaries. Buddhism remained a minority current in China, and many villages worshipped in Buddhist shrines. Thus, China's religious composition became increasingly complex, but without overturning earlier cultural directions.

Daoism reacted to Buddhism as well, by improving its organization and emphasizing practical benefits obtainable through magic. It was at this point that Daoism developed a clear hold on many peasants, incorporating many of their beliefs in the process.

Buddhism had a greater lasting influence in the religious experience of other parts of east Asia, notably Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, than in China itself. Buddhism had also spread to significant parts of southeast Asia, where it remained somewhat truer to earlier Buddhist concepts of individual meditation and ethics.

In the world today, some 500 million people count themselves as Buddhists. Most live in the areas of east and southeast Asia, where the religion had taken root by 500 C.E. Buddhism did not, by itself, dominate any whole civilization; rather, it lived alongside other faiths. However, it provided major additions to Asia's religious map and an important response to changing conditions in the troubled centuries after the classical period had ended.

Christianity and Islam

The Spread of Christianity MAP

Christianity moved westward, from its original center in the Middle East, as Buddhism was spreading east from India. Although initially less significant than Buddhism in terms of the number of converts, Christianity would ultimately prove to be one of the two largest faiths worldwide. And it would play a direct role in the formation of two postclassical civilizations, those of eastern and western Europe. Despite important similarities to Buddhism in its emphasis on salvation and the guidance of saints, Christianity differed in crucial ways. It came to place more emphasis on church organization and structure, copying from the example of the Roman Empire. Even more than Bud-

dhism, it placed a premium on missionary activity and widespread conversions. Christianity also stressed the exclusive nature of its truth and was intolerant of competing beliefs. Such fierce confidence was not the least of the reasons for the new religion's success.

Christianity began in reaction to rigidities that had developed in the Jewish priesthood during the two centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ. A host of reform movements sprang up, some of them preaching the coming of a Messiah, or savior, who would bring about a Last Judgment on humankind. Many of these movements also stressed the possibility of life after death for the virtuous, which was a new element in Judaism. **Jesus of Nazareth,** believed by Christians to be the son of God sent to earth to redeem human sin, crystallized this radical reform movement. Combining extraordinary gentleness of spirit and great charisma, Jesus preached widely in Israel and gathered a group of loyal disciples around him. Initially, there seems to have been no intent on his or his followers' part to found a new religion. After Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples expected his imminent return and with it the end of the world. Only gradually, when the Second Coming did not transpire, did the disciples begin to fan out and, through their preaching, attract growing numbers of supporters in various parts of the Roman Empire.

Jesus of Nazareth Prophet and teacher among the Jews; believed by Christians to be the Messiah; executed c. 30 C.E.

The message of Jesus and his disciples seemed clear: There was a single supreme being, God, who loved humankind despite earthly sin. A virtuous life was one dedicated to the worship of God and fellowship among other believers; worldly concerns were secondary, and a life of poverty might be most conducive to holiness. God sent Jesus (called "Christ" from the Greek word for "God's anointed") to preach his holy word and through his sacrifice to prepare his followers for the widespread possibility of an afterlife and heavenly communion with God. Belief, good works, and the discipline of fleshly concerns would lead to heaven; rituals, such as commemorating Christ's Last Supper with wine and bread, would promote the same goal.

Christianity's message spread at an opportune time. The official religion of the Greeks and Romans had long seemed rather sterile, particularly to many of the poor. The Christian emphasis on the beauty of a simple life and the spiritual equality of all people, plus the fervor of the early Christians and the satisfying rituals they created, captured growing attention. The great reach of the Roman Empire made it relatively easy for Christian missionaries to travel widely in Europe and the Middle East, to spread the new word, although as we have seen, they also reached beyond, to Persia, Axum, and Ethiopia. Then, when conditions began to deteriorate in the empire, the solace this otherworldly religion provided resulted in its even wider appeal. Early Christian leaders made several important adjustments to maximize their conversions. Under the guidance of **Paul,** not one of the original disciples but an early convert, Christians began to see themselves as part of a new religion, rather than part of a Jewish reform movement, and they welcomed non-Jews. Paul also encouraged more formal organization within the new church, with local groups selecting elders to govern them; soon, a leader, or bishop, was appointed for each city. This structure paralleled the provincial government of the empire. Finally, Christian doctrine became increasingly organized, as the writings of several disciples and others were collected into what became known as the New Testament of the Christian Bible.

Paul (3–67) One of the first Christian missionaries; moved away from insistence that adherents of the new religion follow Jewish law; use of Greek as language of Church.

During the first three centuries after Christ, Christianity did not advance entirely smoothly. The new religion faced, as we have seen, periodic persecution from the normally tolerant imperial government. Even so, by the time Constantine converted to Christianity and accepted it as the one true legitimate faith, perhaps 10 percent of the empire's population had accepted the new religion. Constantine's conversion brought new troubles to Christianity, particularly some interference by the state in matters of doctrine. However, it became much easier to spread Christianity with official favor, and the continued deterioration of the empire added to the impetus to join this amazingly successful new church. In the eastern Mediterranean, where imperial rule remained strong from its center in Constantinople, state control of the church became a way of life. But in the West, where conditions were far more chaotic, bishops had a freer hand. A centralized church organization under the leadership of the bishop of Rome, called **pope** from the word *papa,* or "father," gave the Western church unusual strength and independence.

pope Bishop of Rome; head of the Christian Church in western Europe.



Early Christian Symbols

By the time Rome collapsed, Christianity had thus demonstrated immense spiritual power and developed a solid organization, although one that differed from East to West. The new church faced a number of controversies over doctrine but managed to promote certain standard beliefs against several heresies. A key tenet involved a complex doctrine of the Trinity, which held that the

one God had three persons—the Father, the Son (Christ), and the Holy Ghost. Experience in fighting heresies promoted Christian interest in defending a single belief and strengthened its resistance to any competing doctrine or faith. Early Christianity also produced an important formal theology, through formative writers such as Augustine. This theology incorporated many elements of classical philosophy with Christian belief and aided the church in its attempts to gain respectability among intellectuals. Theologians like Augustine grappled with such problems as freedom of the will. If God is all-powerful, can mere human beings have free will? And if not, how can human beings be justly punished for sin? By working out these issues in elaborate doctrine, the early theologians, or church fathers, provided an important role for formal, rational thought in a religion that continued to emphasize the primary importance of faith.

Finally, Christianity was willing to accommodate some earlier polytheistic traditions among the common people. The celebration of Christ's birth was thus moved to coincide with the winter solstice, a classic example of syncretism, which allowed the new faith to benefit from the power of selective older rituals.

Like all successful religions, Christianity combined a number of appeals. It offered deep devotion to an all-powerful God. Christianity also developed its own complex intellectual system. Mystical holy men and women flourished under Christian banners, particularly in the Middle East. In the West, soon after the empire's collapse, this impulse was partially disciplined through the institution of monasticism, first developed in Italy under **Benedict,** who started a monastery among Italian peasants whom he lured away from the worship of the sun god Apollo. The Benedictine Rule, which soon spread to many other monasteries and convents, urged a disciplined life, with prayer and spiritual fulfillment alternating with hard work in agriculture and study. Thus, Christianity attempted to encourage but also to discipline intense piety, and to avoid a complete gulf between the lives of saintly men and women and the spiritual concerns of ordinary people.

Benedict of Nursia Founder of monasticism in what had been the western half of the Roman Empire; established Benedictine Rule in the 6th century; paralleled development of Basil's rules in Byzantine Empire.

Christianity's success and organizational strength obviously appealed to political leaders. But the new religion never became the creature of the upper classes alone. Its popular message of salvation and satisfying rituals continued to draw the poor, more than most of the great classical belief systems; in this regard, it was somewhat like Hinduism in India. Christianity also provided some religious unity among different social groups. It even held special appeal for women. Christianity did not create equality among men and women, but it did preach the equal importance of male and female souls. And it encouraged men and women to worship together, unlike many other faiths.

The Roman and Christian Views of the Good Life



Christianity promoted a new culture among its followers. The rituals, the otherworldly emphasis, the interest in spiritual equality—these central themes were far different from those of classical Mediterranean civilizations. Christianity modified classical beliefs in the central importance of the state and of political loyalties. Although Christians accepted the state, they did not put it first. Christianity also worked against other classical institutions, such as slavery, in the name of brotherhood (although later Christians would accept slavery in other contexts). Christianity may have fostered greater respectability for disciplined work than had been the case in the Mediterranean civilization, where an aristocratic ethic dominated. Western monasteries, for example, set forth rigid work routines for monks. Certainly, Christianity sought some changes in classical culture beyond its central religious message, including greater emphasis on sexual restraint. But Christianity preserved important classical values as well, in addition to an interest in solid organization and some of the themes of classical philosophy. Church buildings retained Roman architectural styles, although often with greater simplicity if only because of the poverty of the later empire and subsequent states. Latin remained the language of the church in the West, Greek the language of most Christians in the eastern Mediterranean. Through the patient librarianship of monks, monasticism played an immensely valuable role in preserving classical as well as Christian learning.

When the Roman Empire fell, Christian history was still in its infancy. The Western church would soon spread its missionary zeal to northern Europe, and the Eastern church would reach into the Slavic lands of the Balkans and Russia. By then, Christianity was already established as a significant world religion—one of the few ever generated. A world religion is defined as a faith of unusual durability and drawing power, one whose complexity wins the devotion of many different kinds of people. Major world religions, like Christianity and Buddhism, do indeed show some

Religious Geography

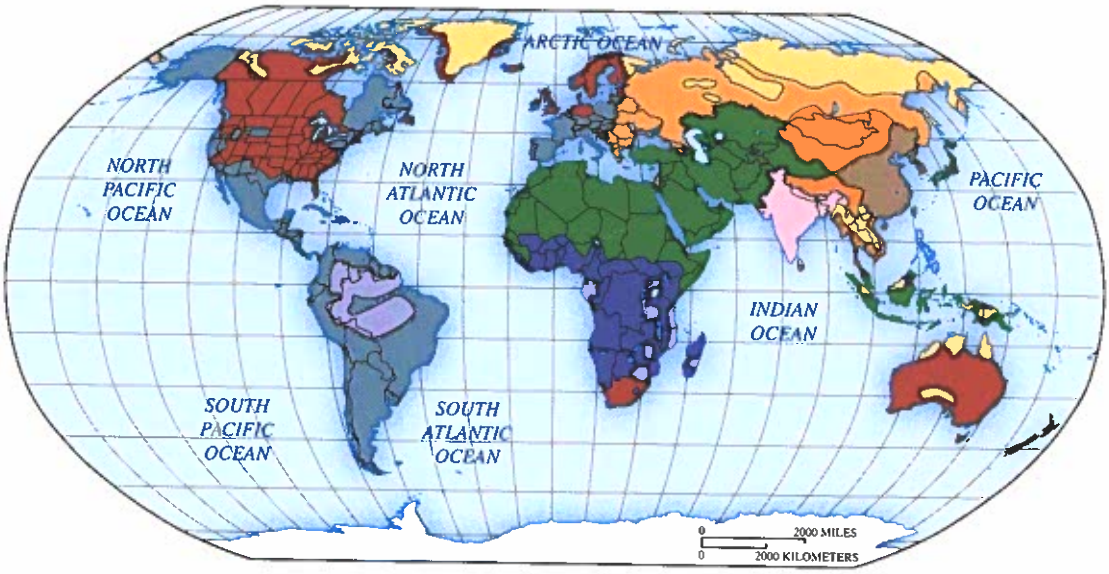
The distribution of the world's major religions calls for knowledge both of numerical data and geography. Map 5.5 and this table, using contemporary data, also suggest which aspects of the world's religious distribution were beginning to solidify at the end of the late classical period and which aspects depended on developments yet to come.

QUESTIONS Where are the greatest concentrations of the four major religions today? Which aspects of modern religious geography follow from the patterns of religious dissemination underway by the end of the classical period? Which cannot be explained by these late-classical developments?

Religions and Their Distribution in the World Today

Religion	Distribution*
Christianity	1.9 billion
Roman Catholic	(1 billion)
Protestant	(458 million)
Eastern Orthodox	(173 million)
Other	(195 million)
Islam	1 billion
Hinduism	751 million
Buddhism	334 million
Shintoism	3 million
Daoism	31 million
Judaism	18 million

*Figures for several religions have been reduced over the past 50 years by the impact of communism in eastern Europe and parts of Asia.



Map 5.5 Major Religions of the Modern World. This map shows the contemporary geography of the major religions, including areas of considerable mixture, like Africa.

ability to cut across different cultures, to win converts in a wide geographic area and amid considerable diversity.

Islam, launched early in the 7th century, would initially surpass Christianity as a world faith and has remained Christianity's most tenacious rival (see Chapter 6). With Islam, the roster of world religions was essentially completed. Changes would follow, but no totally new religion of major significance arose—unless one counts some of the secular faiths, like communism, that appeared in the last century. The centuries after Christianity's rise, the spread of Buddhism, and the inception of Islam would see the conversion of most of the civilized world to one or another of the great faiths. This produced a religious map that, in Europe and Asia and even parts of Africa, would

not alter greatly until our own time. (The table in the Visualizing the Past feature shows the distribution of religions in the world today.)

The Spread of the Major Religions

The spread of major religions—Hinduism in India, Buddhism in east and southeast Asia, a more popular Daoism in China, Christianity in Europe and parts of the Mediterranean world, and ultimately Islam—was a vital result of the changes in classical civilizations brought on by attack and decay. Despite the important diversity among these great religions, which included fierce hatreds, particularly between Christians and Muslims, their overall development suggests the way important currents could run through the civilized world, crossing political and cultural borders—thanks in part to the integrations and contacts built by the classical civilizations. Common difficulties, including invading forces that journeyed from central Asia and contagious epidemics that knew no boundaries, help explain parallel changes in separate civilizations. Trade and travel also provided common bonds. Chinese travelers learned of Buddhism through trading expeditions to India, whereas Ethiopians learned about Christianity from Middle Eastern traders. The new religions spurred a greater interest in spiritual matters and resulted in a greater tendency to focus on a single basic divinity instead of a multitude of gods. Polytheistic beliefs and practices continued to flourish as part of popular Hinduism and popular Daoism, and they were not entirely displaced among ordinary people who converted to Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam. But the new religious surge reduced the hold of literal **animism** in much of Asia and Europe, and this too was an important development across boundaries.

animism A religious outlook that sees gods in many aspects of nature and propitiates them to help control and explain nature; typical of Mesopotamian religions.

The World Around 500 C.E.

Developments in many parts of the world by 500 C.E. produced three major themes for world history in subsequent centuries. First, and particularly in the centers of classical civilization, there was a response to the collapse of classical forms. Societies in China, India, and around the Mediterranean faced the task of reviving or reworking their key institutions and values after internal decline and external invasion. Second, in these areas, but also in other parts of Africa, Europe, and Asia, was the need to react to the new religious map that was taking shape, to integrate new religious institutions and values into established civilizations or, as in northern Europe, to use them as the basis for a civilization that had previously been lacking. Finally, increased skill in agriculture and the creation of early civilizations or new contacts—like the Japanese import of writing—prepared parts of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas for new developments in the centuries to come. The centers of classical civilization would still hold a dominant position in world history after 500 C.E., but their monopoly would be increasingly challenged by the spread of civilization to other areas.

The decline of the classical civilizations obviously transformed the Big Concepts of the whole classical period, though in complex ways. The cultural traditions that had been codified during the classical period might survive the new challenges, though they would have to interact with new influences. Empires, however, proved more fragile, so this aspect of the classical heritage underwent even more extensive change. Patterns of trans-regional contact were also affected, but the motivation of trade, and some of the routes that had been established during the classical period, particularly in the Indian Ocean, proved to be quite resilient.

Global Connections

The Late Classical Period and the World

During most of the classical period, key developments often focused within civilizations. We have seen that there were wider contacts. Each civilization radiated trade and other influences to a larger region; thus India had contacts with other parts of south and southeast Asia, and China with Korea and Vietnam. Trade along the Silk Road through central Asia, conducted mainly by nomadic merchants, was another key connection.

As the classical civilizations began to fail, contacts in some ways accelerated—but they also encountered new difficulties. Overland travel between China and Rome became more dangerous, because government protection faltered in both empires. This placed a new premium on using shipping connections, particularly in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, traders, missionaries, and of course

nomadic invaders began to reach out in new ways as borders became more porous. The end of the classical period thus witnessed important new cultural exchanges across regions. These included the spread of Buddhism from India to China and to other parts of east Asia, and the spread of Christianity beyond the Roman Empire into parts of northeast Africa and into Armenia. These developments set new bases for connections among various societies in Afro-Eurasia.

Further Readings

The fall of the Roman Empire has generated rich and interesting debate. For recent works, see Simon Swain and Mark Edwards, eds., *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire* (2004); James W. Ermatinger, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (2004); Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2005). On barbarian attacks, J.H.G.W. Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Change in Late Antiquity: Religion, Barbarians and their Historiography* (2006); Simon MacDowall, *Adrianopole, AD 378: The Goths Crush Rome's Legions* (2005); Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (2007); and Stephen Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284-641* (2007).

For interpretation and discussion of earlier views, see A. H. M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World* (1966); J. Vogt, *The Decline of Rome* (1965); and F. W. Walbank, *The Awful Revolution: The Decline of the Roman Empire in the West* (1960). On India and China in decline, worthwhile sources include R. Tharpar, *Early History of India* (2004); R. C. Majumdar, ed., *The Classical Age* (1966); Raymond Dawson, *Imperial China* (1972); and J. A. Harrison, *The Chinese Empire* (1972). See also J. R. Fairbank and E. O. Reischauer, *China: Tradition and Transformation* (1989), a fine survey with good postclassical coverage.

On the role of disease in imperial decline, W. McNeill's *Plagues and Peoples* (1977) is provocative and useful. Speculations on the causes of the rise and fall of civilizations, including those of the classical world, are addressed in Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (1997); Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World Systems* (1997); Walter Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (2006); Michael Whitby, *Rome at War, AD 293–696* (2003); Joseph A. Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (1988); and Norman Yoffee and George L. Cowgill, eds., *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations* (1991).

For the rise and spread of world faiths, see Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher, eds., *The Spread of Buddhism* (2007); and Frederick Denny, *Atlas of the World's Religions* (2007). A good overview is Geoffrey Parinder, ed., *World Religions* (1971); see also Lewis M. Hopfe, *Religions of the World* (1997); and Jamail Ragi al Farugi, ed., *Historical Atlas of the Religions of the World* (1974). On Hinduism, see N. C. Chandhuri's *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* (1979). Two good studies of Buddhism are N. Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History* (1994); and A. F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (1959). Christianity's spread is the subject of S. Renko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (1986); and M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (1986). Important special topics are covered in J. Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (1975), a fascinating comparative effort; A. Sharma, ed., *Women in World Religions* (1987); and on Christianity, B. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (1988). An important study of civilization contacts in this period and later is Jerry Bentley's *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Exchanges and Contacts in Pre-Modern Times* (1993).

On the Web

Bantu language migration and the multiethnic character of Africa can be explored at http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/CIVAFRCA/IRONAGE.HTM and http://emuseum.mnsu.edu/cultural/oldworld/africa/bantu.html. The Web offers a brief history of Axum (http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/CIVAFRCA/AXUM.HTM), accounts of this and other Nubian kingdoms (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/nubia1.html), and images of their cities and monuments (http://www.hp.uab.edu/image_archive/um/umn.html). How the trans-Saharan trade was captured by the state of Ghana and how it flourished before its conquest by the Almoravids is discussed at http://www.mrdowling.com/609-trade.html.

Many Web sites offer insights and/or virtual visits to Teotihuacan (http://archaeology.asu.edu/teo/index.php, http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/CIVAMRCA/TEO.HTM), Tenochtitlan (http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/archaeology/sites/meso_america/tenochtitlan.html), Monte Alban (http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/monte-alban.htm), the Incan center of Machu Picchu (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machu_Picch), the Hopewell Amerindian site (including a study guide, at http://www.michigan.pic.org/historythemes/resources/hopewell_why.html), cliff dwellings of the Anasazi (http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/archaeology/sites/northamerica/chaco.html, http://www.exploratorium.edu/chaco/, and http://www.learner.org/exhibits/collapse/chacocanyon.html (see the Chaco Digital Archive at http://www.chacoarchive.org/resources.html).

A virtual visit can also be made to the Chavin culture of the Andes at http://www.globalheritagefund.org/where/chavin.html, http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/latinamerica/south/cultures/chavin.html, http://chavin.perucultural.org.pe/vvirtual.shtml. The intriguing flat-topped temples, burial practices and agriculture of the Moche people of northwestern Peru are addressed at http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/moche.htm, http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/dept/d10/asb/anthro2003/legacy/moche/el_nino_2.html, http://www.archaeology.org/0203/abstracts/moche.html, and http://www.doaks.org/moche.pdf. Moche art is discussed at http://www.museum.upenn.edu/Moche/mocheculture.html and http://www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Post/254792. The magnificent tomb of the Moche Lord of Sipan, compared in terms of golden splendor to the tomb of ancient Egypt's Tutankhamen, is discussed at http://agutie.homestead.com/files/Sipan.htm (see also the PowerPoint presentation at http://employees.oneonta.edu/walkerr/Mesoamerica/Andean%20Civilizations.ppt.).

The Maya are the subject of several excellent Web sites that offer a detailed look at that civilization. Take a virtual visit to their capital at Chichén Itzá at (http://www.mysteriousplaces.com/mayan/TourEntrance.html), and other principal sites (http://www.smm.org/