

**CHAPTER THREE:  
CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS  
(1000 B.C.E. - 600 C.E.)**

By 1000 B.C.E. the old river valley centers of civilization in the Middle East had been eclipsed by many factors, including the devastating collapse of trade and cultural connections around 1200 B.C.E. No such event had occurred in eastern Asia, where the Zhou Dynasty remained strong, and civilizations continued to develop in Mesoamerica and the Andes Mountains region. Most significantly, some major changes began to usher in a new era in the world's story: the age of classical civilizations that lasted until the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium C.E.

No single "marker event" started the new era, so it is easy to argue that the era actually began or ended a little earlier or later. However, by 1000 B.C.E. some clear changes were occurring, including the shift of civilization centers away from the older centers in the Eastern Hemisphere. For example, on the Indian subcontinent, human activities were focused on the Ganges River valley to the east of the Indus River valley. In China, the Huang He (Yellow) River remained active, but farming became more intense and cities began to grow along the Yangze River valley to the south. By the mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.E. Persia, a new empire in the Middle East, was stirring. In the area around the Mediterranean Sea a new civilization was emerging from the ashes of Mycenae in Greece by about 800 B.C.E.

These new civilizations differed from earlier ones in several ways:

- **Size and political strength** – Empire developed as a political form as rulers strengthened governmental and military organizations to allow them to rule larger land areas. For example, Rome controlled areas that stretched from northern Europe to western Asia to northern Africa. The Mauryan Empire on the Indian subcontinent was far larger than the area controlled earlier by the Harappans. Whereas the classical civilization of Han China was not larger in land space than the old Zhou Dynasty, the emperors generally had more centralized control of the area.

- **More complex cultures** – During this era several of the world's great religions emerged as forces determining the course of world history, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. In China the important philosophy of Confucianism emerged as a powerful cultural influence. Even though Hinduism and Judaism have roots in the earlier era, all these belief systems diffused to lands outside their areas of origin so that their overall impact on world history became enormous. Many civilization areas produced art and literature that remain "classics" today.
- **More numerous and better written records** – We know more about classical civilizations than we know about the river valley civilizations partly because they were more recent, but also because their written records were more numerous and systematic. All had developed sophisticated forms of writing, and some began to use a simplified system of symbols (alphabets) that allowed literacy to become more widespread, though not universal.
- **More complex long-distance trade** – During this era great trade routes connected the civilizations by land (The Silk Road) and by sea (the Indian Ocean trade). Although trade was still confined by hemisphere (west was not trading with east), the trade contacts and distance travelled grew tremendously. These trade routes increased the prosperity of the empires and spread ideas, including belief systems, as well as material goods.
- **More contacts between nomads and sedentary people** - Partly because of the extended trade routes, the boundaries of the empires expanded, and people from urban centers came in contact with those living on the periphery. In central Asia nomadic groups took over the transport of goods across vast plains, and in some cases settled into communities that grew into great trade cities along the Silk Road. Attacks of nomadic groups on civilization centers also grew, although a great deal of the contact was peaceful as all benefitted from growing trade routes.
- **More direct influence on modern civilizations** – Many modern beliefs and practices may be traced much more directly to the classical era than to the earliest civilization era. This is true partly because we have more knowledge of the later era, but also because classical beliefs and practices are more similar to those of the modern era. For example, modern law codes are much more similar to Roman law codes than they are to Hammurabi's Code of early Mesopotamia. Religious beliefs that

developed during the classical era are still intact today, whereas the religions of Ancient Egypt and Sumeria have not survived the years.

The classical civilizations emerged in three areas:

- 1) **The Mediterranean** – The Greeks emerged as the first classical civilization of the Mediterranean area, followed by the Romans.
- 2) **The Indian subcontinent** – Two empires rose on the Indian subcontinent: the Mauryan Empire and the Gupta Empire.
- 3) **East Asia** – China emerged from the Warring States Period that followed the Zhou Dynasty to form the Qin Dynasty, followed by the much longer lasting Han Dynasty.

### MEDITERRANEAN CIVILIZATIONS: GREECE

Settled agricultural communities had developed along the Aegean Sea in the eastern Mediterranean area by about 2000 B.C.E., probably first on the island of Crete. Although they were not far away from Mesopotamia and Egypt, their environmental conditions were quite different. Greece is mountainous with little suitable land for farming and no broad river valleys or level plains. The sea is ever-present, since much of the main land is surrounded by water inlets, and the sea itself is full of small islands. One geographical advantage the early Greeks had was good access to water through natural harbors and navigable bays, and the sea itself is calm with islands serving as multiple docking places for ships. Land travel was difficult because of the mountains and the deep water inlets, so the early Greeks became some of the most skilled sailors of their day.

The **Minoan** civilization on the island of Crete controlled most of the area by about 1600 B.C.E., and was replaced by the **Mycenaeans**, who almost certainly were part of the great trade network of the Late Bronze Age that fell apart by about 1200 B.C.E. The Mycenaeans were often at war with others around them, and by 1200 B.C.E. they were at war with the city of Troy on the other side of the Aegean Sea (in Anatolia). Their cities were also invaded about this time by people from the north, so the times were chaotic, eventually ending in the destruction of their cities, with inhabitants abandoning them. After the fall of the Mycenaean civilization, the Aegean area entered into a “Dark Age” that lasted till about 800 B.C.E., when Greek cities began to reemerge as important urban centers.

From the fall of Mycenae until about 800 B.C.E. the Greeks were isolated from others around them. This isolation ended when another seafaring group from the eastern Mediterranean, the **Phoenicians**, visited the Aegean, reestablishing



### **PERSPECTIVES: ALTERNATIVES TO SEDENTARY LIFE**

Whereas the focus of historical study of the classical era is on the great civilizations, most of the earth's landscape was occupied by nomadic or migratory people. Two alternatives to sedentary agriculture were:

**Shifting cultivation** - Sometimes called "slash and burn" agriculture, this practice predominated in the rainforests of Central and South America, west Africa, east and central India, and much of south China and Southeast Asia. Shifting cultivators burned off the rain forest undergrowth, but left the large trees to protect the soil. They used the ash from the burned undergrowth to fertilize the crops before depleting the nutrients from the soil and moving on to another area to begin the process again.

**Pastoral Nomadism** - This practice continued from earlier days across the vast plains of central Eurasia, the central Arabian Peninsula, and areas south of the Sahara Desert in Africa. The animals the pastoralists herded were domesticated but they followed them seeking good pastures. Animals included horses, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and reindeer. During the classical era, trade routes across central Asia were controlled by pastoral nomads, although many settled into sedentary lives in the trade cities along the Silk Road.

contact between Greece and the Middle East. Soon Greek ships were traveling across the Mediterranean, and the trade that they established brought new prosperity to the Aegean.

### **Political Development**

The geographic features of the Greek homeland encouraged the development of the **polis**, or the city-state. Each city was separated from others by mountains, inlets, or the sea itself, so each came to dominate the countryside around it. At its peak, Greek civilization was made up of about 200 poleis, each thinking of itself as a political and cultural unit, independent of every other. Some were stronger and more influential than others, and at key times they cooperated with



### MARKER EVENT: THE PHOENICIANS' ALPHABET

The Phoenicians originated along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, and since they were unable to expand because of surrounding mountains and desert, they took to the sea to widen their horizons. They were the most significant Mediterranean traders and seafarers until they roused the Greeks in the 600s B.C.E. Phoenicia was eventually absorbed by the Assyrian Empire, but their legacy lived on in a whole series of colonies that they established in the western Mediterranean.

The Phoenicians are best known for their use of a **phonetic alphabet**, a system of 22 written marks ("letters") that each corresponded to a sound in the spoken language. Their alphabet was much simpler than any other written language of its day, and was much easier to learn and use for their trading. The Greeks built on the Phoenician alphabet by adding signs for vowels, which the original system did not have. This alphabet - with a change in letter formats - became the basis for the development of many modern languages, so the Phoenicians certainly made their "mark" on history.

one another in inter-city organizations called leagues, but they were never united under one government. Often when we refer to Ancient Greece, we are thinking about one city-state: Athens. Although its politics and culture dominated other city-states for much of the time period, Athens was always its own city-state, and its main rival was Sparta, a city-state south of Athens with very different values and practices. Each city-state had its own patron god or goddess, and held regular rituals to celebrate and maintain the patron's protection.

The poleis took different political forms, including **monarchies** (hereditary rule by one), **oligarchies** (rule by a few), **aristocracies** (rule by leading families), and **democracies** (a new form of popular government). One outcome of these conflicting governing styles was the emergence of **tyrants** by the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. These tyrants were often military leaders who won popular support against the aristocracy, and though they were not necessarily oppressive (as the modern term implies), the idea of one-man rule contradicted traditions of community governance.



### HISTORICAL EVIDENCE: HOMER'S *ILIAD* AND *ODYSSEY*

Epic poetry may be an important source of information about societies from the distant past, as is illustrated by Mesopotamia's *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Epic poetry, in the form of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, also provides us with much of our knowledge of the early Greek period.

No one knows whether or not Homer was an actual person, but both poems were probably written down during the 8th century B.C.E., more than 400 years after the events actually occurred.

The *Iliad* tells the story of the Greek war against Troy (about 1200 B.C.E.) from the Greek point of view. The *Odyssey* recounts the adventures of a Greek hero, Odysseus, as he returned home after the Trojan war was over. Both stories illuminate Greek attitudes toward their "wine dark sea," and depict their heroes as the great mariners that they were.

#### Early Athens

Athens went through all of these forms of government in the period between 800 and 400 B.C.E. with democracy emerging during the 5th century. The original monarchy was gradually forced aside by the aristocrats, who in turn gave way to oligarchs in the 500s. The most important oligarch was Solon, a reformer early in the 6th century, who set up laws that could be written and revised, rather than just passed down through tradition. A rebellion in 510 B.C.E. put Cleisthenes, an aristocrat, in control, but the instability of the times encouraged him to experiment with democracy.

At the heart of Athenian democracy was the "town meeting" of all free males, who were called together to make decisions affecting the future of the polis. All could speak freely, and they often tried to sway others to their opinions, and their collective vote determined political actions. Also present was the Council of 500, citizens chosen by lot for one-year terms who were responsible for making and implementing policy under the supervision of the town meeting. Since Athens was at its height of political power during the 5th century B.C.E., it is

probable that other city-states also practiced democracy as well. It is notable that these democracies consisted of only free males, so women and slaves had no political power.

#### Early Sparta

Before the 7th century B.C.E. the two city-states of Sparta and Athens probably were similar in many ways, but major rebellions in and around Sparta apparently influenced a highly militaristic society to develop there. In the 700s the Spartans had defeated a neighboring city-state, Messenia, and had taken their people as servants, called **helots**. Although they were not slaves, they could not leave the land, and their role in society was to provide agricultural labor. During the 600s the Messenians rebelled over and over again, encouraging the Spartans to emphasize military control. The rebellions were put down, and the helots met the society's economic needs, while Spartan men were warriors. The Spartans were self-disciplined and rigidly obedient, and put a great deal of emphasis on physical fitness.

#### Economic Characteristics

In their settlements on the western edge of Anatolia, an area the Greeks called Ionia, rivers formed broad and fertile plains near the coast, but no other areas had large rivers. As a result, Greek farmers on the mainland depended entirely on sparse rainfall to water their crops. The soil was poor, and so they could only raise a limited number of crops. They usually planted barley, which was hardier than wheat, on the flat plains, olive trees at the edge of the plain, and grapevines on the lower slopes of the foothills. Sheep and goats were raised in most areas, and cattle and horses in northern Greece. Natural resources included building stones such as marble, and clay for pottery, but very few metal deposits. They traded across the Aegean for timber, gold, iron, copper, tin, and grain to allow them access to basic needs for building a civilization. The significant invention of coins (probably in western Anatolia) facilitated trade because it replaced an inefficient system of weighing gold, silver, or bronze in exchange for goods. Coins were much smaller and easier to store, and also made bookkeeping and storage of wealth more efficient.

In early Greek history, farmers also were part-time soldiers who were called up by the government of their city-state for brief periods to meet military needs. Campaigns took place when farmers were available, which meant that military actions were generally not planned during planting and harvesting seasons. These Greek farmer soldiers served as **hoplites**, heavily armored infantrymen who fought in very close contact and cooperation together. Each soldier was protected by a helmet, breastplate, and leg guards, and held a shield that protected half of his body and half of the soldier next to him. The shields were ar-

ranged in continuous formation in front of the men, who moved together so no gaps appeared between shields. When two hoplite lines met, the fighting was brutal and short with a clear victor, a convenient fighting style that allowed the survivors to get back to their crops quickly.

Colonies, such as Ionia and those areas settled along the northern Aegean, formed partly because the Greek mainland's limited land space could not support a growing population. Eventually, Greeks formed colonies far away, including Marsalia, now called Marseille, in southern France. This colonization served to spread Greek culture far and wide, as well as create new trading partners across the seas.

### **Social Distinctions**

An important social distinction in most city-states was between citizens and non-citizens. In Sparta, the helots were a large subject-people that outnumbered citizens by perhaps ten to one. Beyond that basic distinction, all Spartan citizens were theoretically equal in status. To maintain this equality, Spartans wore simple clothing and no jewelry, nor did they accumulate possessions. Their houses were equally unadorned, and their lifestyle overall was frugal and austere. Distinctions among citizens were based on athletic prowess and military talent, and the Spartan educational system prepared boys, starting at age seven, to be soldiers. They were removed from their families, placed in military barracks, and trained until they were ready at age twenty to join the military. Sparta also maintained self-sufficiency, believing that trade and the luxuries it brought were harmful to their purity. Although the Spartans lost some of their zest for equality over time, with their aristocracy succumbing to luxuries by the 4th century B.C.E., they still maintained a society based on military values.

In Athens, the basic distinction between citizens and non-citizens was also important, but Athenians had no disdain for luxuries, and developed a clear urban-based aristocracy. Most Athenians were simple farmers that lived outside the urban area, but aristocrats also made differences between themselves and common folk within the city. These distinctions led to discontent and, in response, reforms (such as those of Solon) were enacted that gave commoners more rights, including membership in the town meeting and Council of 500. As a result, democracy spread to all free male citizens, making them more equal, but ironically deepening the division between free men and slaves. Perhaps 30 percent of the total population was enslaved, although by most accounts they were generally well treated. Only in the silver mines near Athens were slaves abused on a regular basis. Most others were personal servants, and some were craftsmen who worked for pay but were not free to seek employment from anyone other than their owners. Slaveholders usually did not own more than one or





**Ancient Greece.** Geographically, the Greeks settled all around the Aegean Sea, establishing colonies in Ionia, a region in Anatolia. Travel by land was difficult because of mountainous terrain and long distances to get around bodies of water, so the fastest and cheapest way to travel was by water.

two slaves, and friendships often formed between slaves and non-slaves. However, slaves had no political rights, nor could they serve in the military.

In regard to gender relations, Sparta and Athens provide an interesting contrast. Spartan women were free and equal with men, and they were encouraged to be as physically fit as the men, especially so they could have strong, healthy babies. Wives did not live with their husbands (who were away at war), so Sparta in many ways was run by women, who were left at home to take care of everything else except fighting. In Athens, gender inequality was much more clearly defined. Respectable Athenian women were confined to the home and only ventured outside under the guardianship of slaves and servants. One or two rooms of a home were reserved for women's use, always away from the street.

Rural women probably had more freedom of movement because of their many farm chores. However, no Athenian women had political rights, nor could they own property or businesses. Women were citizens, since it was important that citizenship be passed down to their children, particularly the males. Besides the respectable women, others were prostitutes who did not follow the same rules, but had even lower status than other women.

### Cultural Characteristics

Like most other ancient people, Greeks were polytheistic. The main gods were Zeus and his wife Hera; Poseidon, god of the seas; Athena, goddess of wisdom and war; and Apollo, god of the sun. Greek gods, however, were not omnipotent, and they were quite capable of deceit, playfulness, jealousy, and anger. Neither did the Greeks have a priestly class, although priests served as informal leaders of religious services. Most educated Athenians did not take their gods very seriously, nor did they believe that the gods controlled human destiny. The Greek emphasis on **secularism**, or affairs of this world, led them to seek answers to the dilemmas of human existence in philosophy, in much the same way that the ancient Chinese embraced Confucianism.

The Greek word *philosophy* means “love of wisdom.” The early philosophers were mainly interested in investigating the physical world. They did not believe that the gods caused natural phenomena. Instead, they invented **natural law**, or forces in nature that cause phenomena to occur. **Socrates** (470-399 B.C.E.) was the first philosopher to focus on ethical questions and truth-seeking regarding human nature, understandings, and relationships. He particularly emphasized the rational in human nature, or the ability of individuals to reason for themselves. We know about Socrates through the writings of his student, **Plato**, who wrote about his arrest, conviction, and forced suicide for “poisoning” the minds of Athens’ youth. In many ways, the trial of Socrates represents the clash between traditional religious values and the new emphasis on human capabilities, particularly the ability to think for themselves. **Aristotle** was Plato’s student who was interested in practically every field of human endeavor, including the natural and social sciences.

The classical Greeks also developed at least three major art forms:

- 1) Drama – This Greek invention arose in the 600s, probably in Athens, as a presentation of myths about the gods and their interventions in human affairs.
- 2) Lyric poetry – This style of poetry has the form and musical quality of a song that often expresses personal feelings. Aristotle contrasted lyric poetry with drama and epic poetry, whose intentions are to tell a story.

- 3) “Classical” architecture – Greek temples, including the Parthenon atop the **Acropolis** (hill) in Athens, were widely copied by the Romans, and still provide basic building principles for modern architecture.

Greek sculpture reflects how much they valued the worth of the individual, reveling in human capabilities, both physically and intellectually. The bodies depicted in the sculpture influenced later concepts of beauty and perfection, and their expressions were individualized. Greek ceramics were in great demand throughout the Mediterranean world, and craftsmen also worked in metal, leather, and wood. The overall achievement of the Greeks during their “Classical Age” (c. 500-300 B.C.E.) is termed **Hellenic culture**, based on the Greek name for their homeland, *Hellas*.



**EVIDENCE: PLATO ON THE DEATH OF SOCRATES**

Almost everything that we know about Socrates comes from his student, Plato, who could hardly have been objective about the conviction and death of his teacher. However, Socrates’ ruminations about the philosophical nature of death reinforces our knowledge of the Greeks’ strong belief in human rationality. Notice, though, that Socrates makes a bow to religion in the end.

“And if we reflect in another way we shall see that we may well hope that death is a good thing. For the state of death is one of two things: either the dead man wholly ceases to be and loses all sensation; or, according to the common belief, it is a change and a migration of the soul unto another place. And if death is the absence of all sensation, like the sleep of one whose slumbers are unbroken by any dreams, it will be a wonderful gain... But if death is a journey to another place...that all who have died dwell there, what good could be greater than this, my judges?

...But now the time has come, and we must go hence: I to die, and you to live. Whether life or death is better is known to God, and to God only.”

Reference: F.J. Church, trans. *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1886, pp 76- 77. (slightly modified)



### The Greeks v. the Persians

Most of what we know about the Persians comes to us from the Greeks, who faced them in battle throughout the early 5th century B.C.E., so their accounts are hardly objective. The wars occurred because both civilizations were expanding in Anatolia, and their clash was probably inevitable. The wars were sparked by rebellions in Ionia, an area governed by the Persians but inhabited by people with Greek backgrounds and sympathies. When Darius I sent his troops to put down the rebellion, Athens went to aid its fellow Greeks in Ionia. In order to punish their impudence, Darius then sent an army to mainland Greece, where the Greeks defeated the Persians at the legendary battle of **Marathon** in 490 B.C.E. A second series of battles began under Darius' successor, **Xerxes**, who was defeated even more decisively at the battle of Thermopylae in 480 and again at Platea in 479. Some historians see this clash between Athens and the Persians as the trigger event that set "West" (Greece) v. "East" (Persia) as a defining concept for modern day international politics. Following this line of thinking, today's clashes in the Middle East are framed in the mind set that "West" and "East" have been natural enemies since these ancient days.

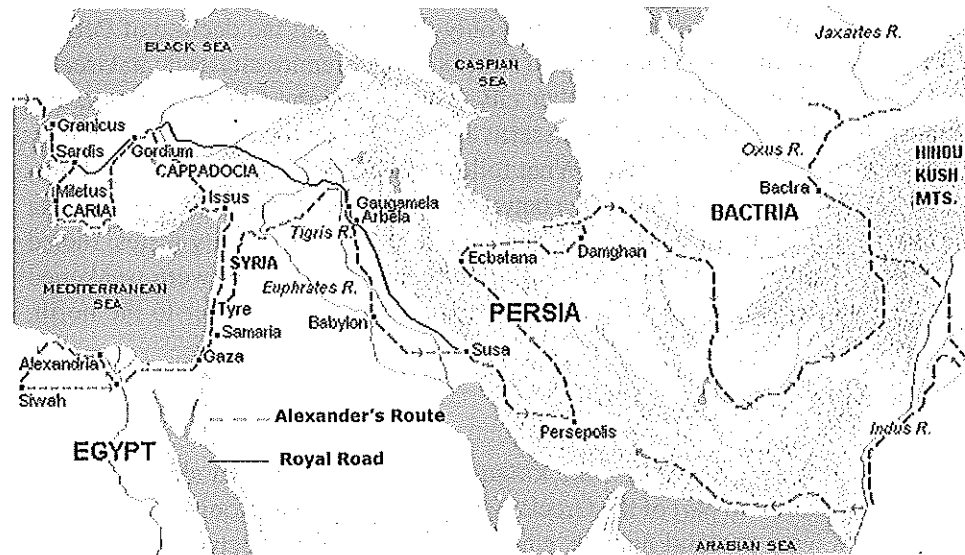
The Persian Wars were significant not only for sparking the decline of Persian power, but for the boost they gave to Athens as the premier city-state in Greece. They formed an alliance with other city-states called the **Delian League**, and under their leader **Pericles**, their assertiveness offended the Spartans when they attacked Sparta's ally, Corinth. What followed was the highly destructive **Peloponnesian War** (431-404 B.C.E.) between Athens and Sparta. Although Sparta eventually won, the war set off a series of quarrels among the city-states, fueled by their long-established independence and individuality. All were weakened in the end, leaving them vulnerable to conquest by a new power to the north, Macedonia.

### The Hellenistic Synthesis

Until the 4th century B.C.E., the kingdom of Macedon was a sleepy frontier state in the northern part of the Greek mainland. Some Macedonians were farmers, others were pastoral nomads who migrated seasonally between the mountains and valleys, and others made a living trading with Greek city-states. King Philip II (359-336 B.C.E.) transformed Macedonia by building a powerful military of farmer infantrymen and aristocratic cavalry. After he consolidated his power by subduing local Macedonian clan-based leaders, he turned his attention to the quarreling Greek city-states to the south. Philip was able to conquer the poleis one by one, since they were unable to agree with one another enough to form an alliance against him. In a little more than ten years, he brought all of Greece under his control. He was poised to invade Persia when he was assas-

minated in 336 B.C.E., so that task fell to his 20-year-old son, known in history as **Alexander the Great**.

In his short career (13 years), Alexander conquered most of the world known to the Greeks, and his feats became legendary. He inherited a well-equipped, disciplined army from his father, and his ambition drove them to conquer one area after the other, starting with Anatolia, and then Egypt, now a mere regional state, where he was greeted as pharaoh. Persia was weaker than it had been, and he dared to press his troops on till they had defeated the mighty old empire. Alexander's army made their way all the way to the Indus River valley, where the troops refused to go any farther. He planned to merge Greek and Asian institutions under his control, naming many cities *Alexandria* in his honor, and forcing his men to marry Asian women to forge the new, blended civilization. Alexander himself married multiple daughters of conquered princes. His dream of consolidating his empire was cut short by his untimely death at the age of 33 of a fever in Babylon. Without his leadership, his empire fell apart. Although his political ambitions failed, his conquests had a huge cultural impact on the course of world history.



**Alexander's Path of Conquest.** After his father's death, Alexander marched his army into Anatolia, then south through the lands on the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, to Egypt, across the great Persian Empire all the way to the Indus River, and back to Babylon where he died in 323 B.C.E. His route reflects some geographic curiosity as well as a desire to conquer. For example, he was curious to know whether the Caspian Sea was connected to a great northern sea, as the Greeks had speculated. Alexander decided that it was not, since he found no salt-water marine life on the southern end of the sea.

Historians call the epoch following the conquests of Alexander the **Hellenistic Age** (323-30 B.C.E.) because of the spreading of Greek culture to northeastern Africa and western Asia. After Alexander's death, his empire was divided

among his generals into three large states: Antigonus took Greece and Macedonia; Ptolemy took Egypt; and Seleucus took the bulk of the old Persian Empire. Many Greeks left their overcrowded homeland to settle in the new lands, and they took their culture with them, where it blended in a **Hellenistic synthesis** with many other cultures, creating cosmopolitan societies connected by trade and Greek culture. Recent archaeological expeditions have unearthed Greek shrines and inscriptions in far away Bactria and India. In the urban centers many individuals spoke Greek, dressed in Greek fashions, and adopted Greek customs. Without Alexander's conquests, little Greece probably would have remained just that. Instead, its beliefs, values, and material culture spread, so that its influence has reverberated through the ages to be one of the most influential civilizations in all of world history.

### MEDITERRANEAN CIVILIZATIONS: ROME

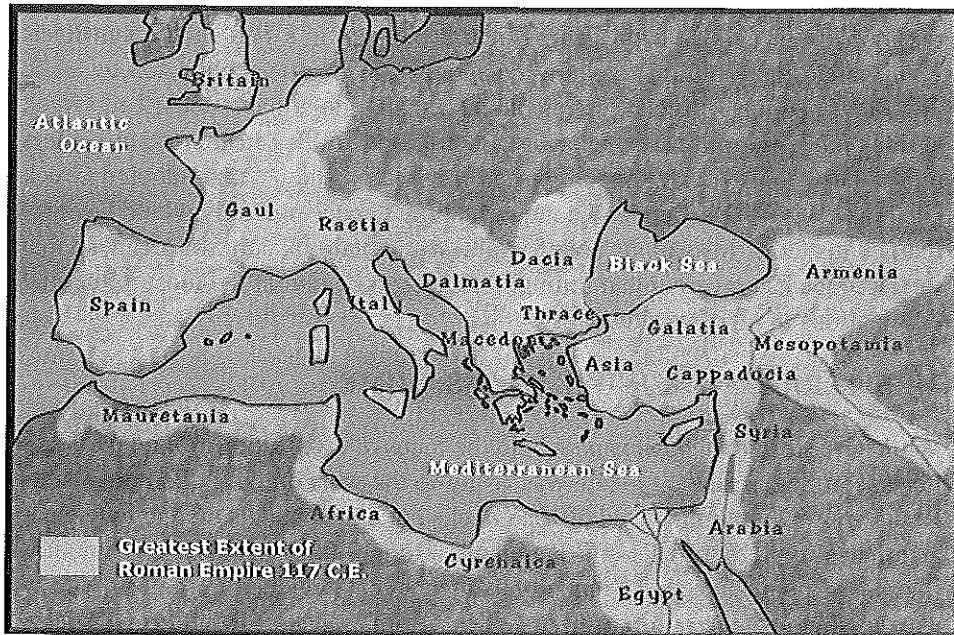
While Greece and then Alexander held the focus of civilization around the Mediterranean Sea, a new city-state was rising to the west on the Italian peninsula. Rome was heavily influenced by the Greeks but developed its own unique characteristics, including the Latin language. Roman influence spread gradually, first on the peninsula, and eventually to an area that stretched from northern Europe to southwest Asia to northern Africa. Roman history went through many phases, encompassing more than 2000 years from start to finish, and dominating the area for more than 700 years. Rome brought many diverse people together under its rule, and came into contact with nomadic peoples who eventually contributed to its downfall.

#### Political Development

The **Etruscans** came into Italy about 800, where they established a series of small city-states that ruled over the native people. Exactly where they came from isn't known because they left only a small amount of writing that has never been deciphered. A federation (central government with smaller subunits) headed by Etruscan kings that managed local leaders existed from about 750 to 509 B.C.E. One of its subject communities was Rome, founded according to legend by twin brothers Romulus and Remus. In 509 B.C.E. Rome gained its independence from Etruscan rule, and established itself as a **republic**, or a state without a monarch (*res publica*). The republic lasted until the rule of the first emperor, Augustus (31 B.C.E. -14 C.E.), when it became an empire that fell in 476 C.E., although the eastern part of the empire existed until 1453 C.E.

Under the republican form of government, Rome was not a democracy, even though it was not ruled by a monarch. Instead the most important ruling body was a **Senate** composed of **patricians**, or aristocrats who passed their positions down to their sons. The **plebeians**, commoners who were about 90 %

of the population, were represented by an elective General Assembly. Even though this political structure looks democratic on the face of it, the General



**The Roman Empire.** Rome began as a small city-state on the Italian peninsula during the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., and reached its greatest extent during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E., when it stretched from Britain to Armenia to Egypt, and completely dominated the Mediterranean Sea.

Assembly had little power, and the patricians of the Senate controlled political decisions. The executive was headed by two **consuls**, elected from among the members of the Senate for one-year terms that were not to be repeated. Each consul had veto power over the other, and because they were usually military generals, they were often fiercely competitive and keen to challenge each other's power. These generals came to have great sway over the republic, especially after the Senate discontinued the practice of replacing the consuls every year. The plebeians protested their lack of political power, and managed to get the government to allow them representatives called **tribunes**, who at first were elected by the people, but eventually came to be controlled by the Senate by the mid 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E.

The Senate's power was challenged by **Julius Caesar**, a charismatic patrician general with great sway over his soldiers, and a **Triumvirate** (rule of three) was formed: Caesar, Crassus (for his wealth), and Pompey, a rival general to Caesar. Caesar eventually declared himself dictator, only to be assassinated by senators on the Ides of March (March 15), 44 B.C.E. His nephew Octavian battled a general, Mark Antony, for control of Rome. Octavian defeated Antony in the



**Battle of Actium** in 31 B.C.E. and the Senate declared him **Augustus** ("revered one") Caesar, establishing the Roman Empire.



### PERSPECTIVES: WHO WAS CLEOPATRA?

How does Queen Cleopatra fit into the story of the world? Cleopatra VII was the last queen of Egypt, a direct descendant of Alexander the Great's general Ptolemy, who took control of Egypt after Alexander's death. Cleopatra was a Greek by descent, language, and culture, and she was supposedly the first member of her family in their 300-year reign to have learned the Egyptian language.

Cleopatra played a role in the history of Ancient Rome through her maneuverings to form alliances with powerful Romans. She bore Julius Caesar's child, whom she wished to have named as his father's heir. After Julius Caesar's assassination in 44 B.C.E., she sided with Mark Antony in his struggle against Octavian for control of Rome. She married Mark Antony and had several children with him, but of course, Octavian defeated Antony, and Cleopatra ended up on the wrong side of history. Quite famously, she committed suicide by convincing an asp (a snake) to bite her, ending her ambitions forever. Our main source for the details of her death is the Roman scholar Plutarch, who wrote them down about 130 years after the event occurred.

Augustus Caesar did not change the old political structures of the Roman Republic. He retained the title of "consul," but in effect became consul for life. The Senate remained intact, and for the remainder of the empire's history, the Senate technically named the new emperor. In reality, though, the Senate had no real power because they gratefully gave it to Augustus for saving Rome from destruction. Augustus Caesar was a clever politician and an effective ruler, always catering to the Senate, while he made all real policy decisions. He preferred to be called **princeps** ("first citizen"), but in his forty-year rule, he overhauled the military, the economy, and the government, putting in place a system that would last for another 250 years without substantial changes.

One of the many accomplishments of Augustus was a new civil service that managed the large empire with considerable efficiency and honesty. The officials were **equites**, a class of Italian merchants and landowners who helped

run the Roman Empire. The provinces were ruled by governors appointed in Rome but allowed a great deal of freedom in local affairs. Augustus studied and codified Roman Law, adding onto the code from the days of the republic - the **Law of the Twelve Tables**. He also set up a network of officials to hear cases and administer the law. A new class of legal experts rose, whose opinions and interpretations often were given the force of law. His reforms to the military included reducing its unwieldy size, so that all that remained were professional soldiers. The army also became an engineering force to build roads and public works all over the provinces. The army was made up of twenty-eight legions, each with about 6000 infantrymen supported by cavalry. The navy was reorganized effectively to combat pirates, who had been disruptive to shipping on the Mediterranean Sea and the rivers.

These reforms ushered in the **Pax Romana**, or the "Roman peace," that lasted until the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. The empire reached its largest extent during that era, and settled into a long period of peace and prosperity in which Roman strength was generally unchallenged. After that, Rome settled into a decline that eventually ended in its conquest in 476 C.E. One continuing problem was the uncertainty concerning the emperor's successor. Although heredity was important, the emperor had the right to name a non-relative to replace him, a situation that often led to intrigue, competition, and conflict.

#### **Economic Development and Social Distinctions**

The early Roman economy resembled that of Greece about three centuries before. Aristocrats controlled large plots of land that were worked by tenant farmers, but there were many independent farmers who also served in the military. The elite were called **patricians**, and the commoners were known as **plebeians**. The basic unit of Roman society was a multi-generational family with domestic slaves. The oldest living male, the "paterfamilias," had complete authority over his family, and he was tied to other family heads through **patron-client** relationships. Patrons were men of wealth who clients turned to for help and protection. A senator had many clients who depended on his political power, and in return they gave him military service, labor, and political support. The Roman Forum was the center of business for these networks, and senators with large throngs around them held high prestige. Some of the senator's more prosperous clients might in turn be patrons of poorer men, so Rome's citizenry were tied to one another in a web of inequality. Tensions existed between the classes as long as the republic lasted, as evidenced by the patricians' concession to allow plebeians political representation through tribunes.

Women in the upper classes were generally treated like children under the strict scrutiny of the men of their family. During a woman's life cycle, first her father

supervised her, then her husband, and finally her son. However, compared to women in Ancient Greece, Roman women probably had more freedom, with some economic rights. By the first century B.C.E., many women supervised family businesses and the financial affairs of wealthy estates. Roman literature describes women who appeared to be well educated and vocal.

As the Roman Republic expanded on the Italian peninsula, Romans began to play a large role in the Mediterranean Sea trade. Their economy and political power were increased tremendously by their victory in the **Punic Wars** fought with Carthage between 264 and 146 B.C.E. Carthage, a former Phoenician colony, located on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, controlled the western Mediterranean before its defeat. The Romans burned the city of Carthage to the ground, salted the earth to keep anything from growing there again, and took control of the lands, rich in grain, oil, wine, and precious metals. These resources fed the continuing expansion that continued after the founding of the empire by Augustus Caesar.

With expansion came the issue of how to incorporate conquered people into the republic. Some gained Roman citizenship, wealth, and respect through military accomplishments, but others were taken as slaves. Although slaves were found in most ancient societies, Rome was one of the few in which slave labor was indispensable. Some worked in households or craft production, but gangs of slaves were used in mining and on the great agricultural estates. Slaves worked longer and harder than hired laborers, and their numbers grew to probably about two million people by the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C.E.

During the **Pax Romana** from 31 B.C.E. until 180 C.E., the empire prospered. Its borders stabilized, giving economic relief to the strains of constant expansion. Trade thrived, with transport across land and sea protected by the Roman political and military structures. Economic problems returned in the **3rd century crisis** (C.E.), after a series of problematic emperors, and under pressure from a growing number of raids by nomadic people across Roman borders.

### **Roman Culture**

Although the Romans borrowed heavily from the Greeks in philosophy, science, and the arts, they had their share of independent invention as well. Most of their contributions were in law, bureaucratic administration, finance, and engineering. The size and diversity of the Roman civilization called for a flexible system of laws that combined effective central control with local autonomy. Their Roman legal system developed pragmatically as the republic grew, and continued to change during the years of the empire. Some of their legal inventions include:



### **CHANGE OVER TIME: ROMAN REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE**

Why did the Roman Republic fail, and why was it replaced with an empire? The Republic first emerged in an ethnically homogeneous city-state controlled by an agricultural aristocracy who came to dominate the Senate. As Rome expanded, many diverse people came under its control, largely through conquests by a military force that relied on citizen-farmers to fight its battles. Military service required men to be away from their farms for long periods of time, and when they returned, often their land had been seized by large landowners or given as a reward to military officers. With no place to go, poor farmers poured into urban areas, and without enough work, demanded reform. Conservative aristocrats refused to change traditions, others pushed for change, and charismatic military leaders attracted the support of the poor.

Julius Caesar appeared in the midst of this social and economic crisis to claim the power to restore law and order, and even though he did not succeed, his nephew Octavian did, and as Augustus Caesar, he eased Rome through the transition from troubled republic to a stabilized empire.

- 1) The concept of precedent, or court decisions that help to determine how courts rule in subsequent cases
- 2) The belief that equity among all citizens should be the goal of the legal system
- 3) Interpretation of the law, or the responsibility of judges to decide what a law means and how it should be applied
- 4) Natural law, an idea that would be a foundation block for later European and North American societies, or the belief that all human beings have basic rights in nature that cannot be abridged

### Roman Arts, Literature, and Religion

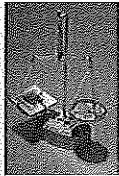
Greek art and literature shaped the everyday lives of the Roman elite so deeply that their influence sparked a debate in the early days of the empire about what Roman values actually were. Cultural diffusion from Greece was facilitated by the large number of Greek servants who worked for wealthy Romans. Most were well educated and often served as tutors for Roman children. Imitation of Greek culture also was promoted by the similarity between the religions of the two civilizations, since both had essentially the same gods and goddesses with different names.



**Roman Architecture.** This magnificent arch is among the ruins left by the Romans in Vaison-la-Romaines in southern France. The Romans were unsurpassed in their ability to construct elaborate arches, which allowed buildings to carry great structural weight. In this example, the arch rests on columns clearly influenced by Greek architecture.

Rome's literary contributions are not as numerous as those of Greece, partly because the Greeks were generally better read. However, the Roman poet **Virgil** linked great epic poetry like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to Roman history in his *Aeneid*, which became the official version of the founding of Rome. Roman literary works also spread its language – Latin – far and wide, so that poetry written by Ovid and history written by Livy could be read in many areas of the world long after the Roman Empire was gone. Romans valued oratory skills

and ethical philosophy, although they tended to value the practical more than the philosophical. This preference is reflected in the fact that they did little beyond copying Greek sculpture, and yet they made significant advances in architecture that served a particular purpose. Roman roads were built for marching armies and facilitating trade, and great aqueducts were built to carry water to the urban areas. Roman genius was unmatched when the task was to solve a practical problem.



### COMPARISONS: GREEK AND ROMAN RELIGION

Like the Ancient Greeks, Romans did not look to their gods for ethical guidance. Neither civilization believed (like Gilgamesh in early Mesopotamia) that the gods could grant humans immortality. Both Greeks and Romans thought of an afterlife as an open question, as reflected in Socrates' ruminations as he contemplated his own death. Most Greeks and Romans believed that even if there was an afterlife, the gods would have nothing to do with what happened to humans after they died. The Romans, more than the Greeks, believed in stoicism, or the idea that service to the state and community was the highest calling.

Greek and Roman gods did have different names, although they were essentially the same:

Greek Name	Roman Name
Zeus	Jupiter
Poseidon	Neptune
Aphrodite	Venus
Athena	Minerva
Ares	Mars

### The Decline of Rome

Reasons for the decline of Rome are numerous, and in most ways it was a slow process. A common problem of all the large empires was defense of a very long border, far from the capital city. This difficulty was sensed by Germanic tribes in the north, and their constant attacks meant that defense costs went up significantly. Unfortunately these attacks increased during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E.

during a time when Rome had a string of incompetent, often corrupt emperors. Although the strong emperor **Diocletian** stopped the slide temporarily, the problems continued. As in the waning days of the republic, the empire by the 3rd century C.E. was rife with class struggles over land, since large estates that used slave labor had taken up most free land. Contact through easy trade and transportation had its downside as well, in the form of devastating epidemics that followed the trade routes, killing large numbers of people as they spread.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. the Roman Emperor **Constantine** established a second capital city in the east that he named "Constantinople" in order to have better connections in that part of the empire and to escape the threatening attacks of Rome by nomads. This move had the effect of gradually sacrificing the western provinces to the Germanic groups, including the Franks, Saxons, Angles, Vandals, Visigoths, and Ostrogoths. By the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, Rome itself was sacked by the Visigoths, and the last Roman emperor was deposed in 476 C.E.

### CHINA DURING THE CLASSICAL ERA

At the same time that Rome was increasing its influence around the Mediterranean Sea, China was recovering from its **Warring States Period** at the end of the Zhou Dynasty. The Warring States Period was a time of political turmoil, with regional warlords constantly challenging the authority of the Zhou. However, it was also a period that prompted much debate over how to solve China's many problems, resulting in the origins of three influential belief systems:

- 1) **Legalism** – Legalist thinkers believed that humans were naturally evil and would only obey authority through force. They advocated strict laws, harsh punishments, and sacrifice of personal freedom for the good of the state.
- 2) **Daoism** – A philosopher named **Laozi**, who reputedly lived during the 6th century B.C.E., reacted to the constant warfare by encouraging people to avoid useless struggles by following the **Dao**, or the "path." He shunned political and military ambitions as lacking morality and meaning, and guided his followers toward nature for comfort and understanding. Daoism emphasizes acceptance and individual retreat from society.
- 3) **Confucianism** – The philosopher Confucius emphasized the importance of hierarchical, harmonious relationships in the creation of an orderly society. Everyone has a place in society, from the ruler to his lowliest subject, and all have responsibilities in their relationships with others. Confucianism saw the family as the foundation of society that serves as a model for benevolence, duty, and courtesy.

### The Qin Dynasty

Legalism met an enthusiastic response from the leaders of the state of Qin in western China, who used the philosophy of harsh, strict rule to dominate their neighbors. The Qin army was well organized and equipped with the best available iron weapons, and it defeated one state after the other, until finally the Qin had brought China under their rule. Since the Qin government had much stronger centralized authority than the previous dynasties had, the king declared himself "The First Emperor," or **Shi Huangdi**, who ruled from 221-210 B.C.E. The dynasty only survived for a few years after his death, but its brevity does not reduce its significance in the development of the Chinese state.

Shi Huangdi ruled his empire through a centralized bureaucracy from his capital near the modern city of Xi'an. The tenets of legalism served him well as he stripped the nobility of power and divided China into administrative provinces governed by administrators that served at his pleasure. He built roads to facilitate communications and move his armies. He also forced his subjects to contribute their labor to building public works, including the first fortifications of the **Great Wall** of China. Confucians widely criticized the harsh rule of the emperor, who responded by sentencing them to death. Quite famously, he demanded the burning of all books of philosophy, ethics, history, and literature, and only allowed books of practical use (such as medicine and agriculture) to be spared.

Despite his harshness, Shi Huangdi strengthened China in many ways. He standardized laws and currencies, so that they were the same across all regional states. An important step in his unification of China was his mandate that the Shang version of Chinese script be used all over the empire. The regions continued to speak their own languages, but the common script enabled people across China to communicate with one another through writing.

Although Shi Huangdi today is seen as one of the greatest figures in Chinese history, his strict rule made him quite unpopular. Shortly after his death, revolts began, resulting in the overthrow of the dynasty in 207 B.C.E., when state buildings were destroyed and government officials killed, paving the way for the Han Dynasty.

### The Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.)

Instead of falling into years of chaos, as had happened during the Warring States Period at the end of the Zhou Dynasty, China was brought under control quickly by Liu Bang, who was not a particularly talented military commander, but was a strong ruler, partly because he picked able bureaucrats who organized the new dynasty efficiently.





**The Terra Cotta Army.** Shi Huangdi was buried in a magnificent underground palace, surrounded by thousands of terra cotta soldiers, crafted specifically to guard the ruler after his death. These soldiers each had individual features, poses, and dress, and they were accompanied by horses and weapons. The site of the tomb and the soldiers has only been excavated since 1974, when a Chinese farmer digging for water accidentally discovered a piece of a soldier. New discoveries continue to be made, so no one yet knows just how many soldiers were created for Shi Huangdi.

### Political Development

Like their contemporaries, the Romans, the Han organized and controlled their realm through a strong, nonhereditary bureaucracy. Although they kept many of the structures created by Shi Huangdi, the Han de-emphasized legalism in favor of a government based on Confucian values. The family hierarchy became the basis for government structure, with subjects owing the emperor the same obedience that children gave to their fathers. The old Zhou belief in the “mandate of heaven” was incorporated into Confucian values; the emperor had the support of the heavens as long as he was a good ruler, and people owed him their fealty. The Han brought forward the Confucian value of benevolence to substitute for the Qin strictness and reliance on force.

Liu Bang was followed by several able rulers, most notably **Han Wudi** (140-87 B.C.E.), who issued a royal decree that required the nobility to divide their land between all their sons so that large estates would be broken up, checking the

lords' power. The emperor's appointees expanded their authority at the expense of local lords and centralized power in the central government, sometimes going so far as to confiscate land in the name of the emperor.

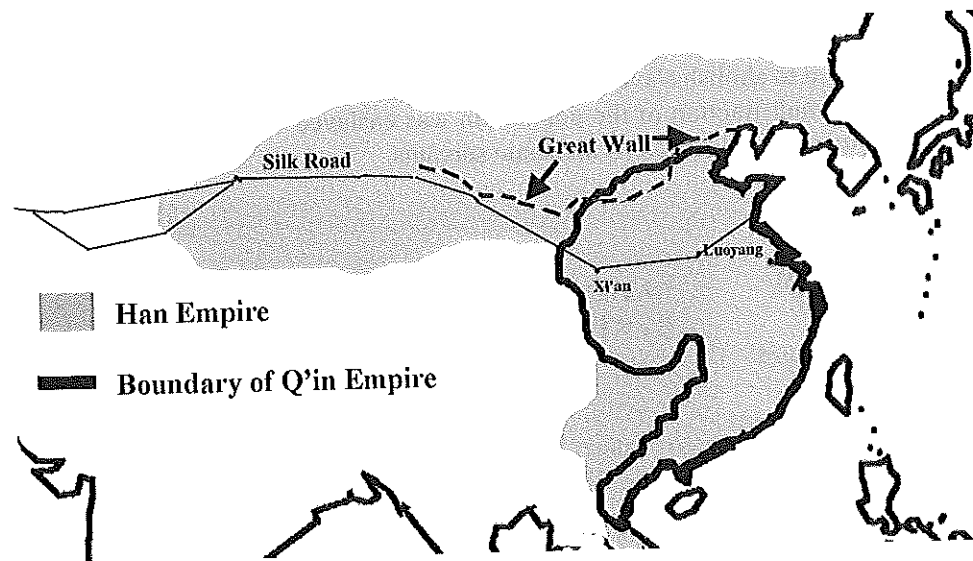
Even more than Shi Huangdi, the Han rulers expanded the Chinese frontiers west, north, and south. These conquests brought the Chinese into contact with other civilizations, including the Romans, although probably only through intermediaries. Other trade contacts included India, northeast Asia, and Southeast Asia. The nomadic groups to the north were a big threat to Han stability, as they had been for the Qin. The beginning structures of the Great Wall were built to keep them out, but these skilled horsemen constantly got around it to attack settlements to their south. Han Wudi's forces defeated the nomads and annexed their pasture lands to the Han domain, although the annexation only brought temporary relief. In the east, the northern parts of Korea were conquered, and many of the various groups in Southeast Asia also came under Han control.

#### Economic Developments and Social Distinctions

Like Rome, Han China was an urban empire that ruled a rural and peasant population. Urban areas of China grew rapidly during this era, with the population of Xi'an (also called Chang'an) reaching to about 100,000 within the city walls, with thousands of others outside the walls and in neighboring communities. The emperor lived in the **forbidden city**, so called because only his family, servants, and closest advisors were permitted within its boundaries. Administrative buildings and houses of aristocrats and the scholar-gentry surrounded the forbidden city, and the streets bustled with commerce. Other urban areas grew as well, so that as much as 30 percent of the population lived in towns and cities. Canals were built, and the road system expanded to improve communication and commerce. The most important export was silk, and its production from cocoons on the leaves of mulberry trees was a closely guarded secret that gave the Chinese a silk monopoly.

Despite the importance of trade to the empire's prosperity, merchants did not have a high social status. Instead, the highest regard was for the **shi**, or the scholar bureaucrats (sometimes called mandarins). The shi generally fared much better under the Han than they did under the Qin, largely because their affinity for Confucianism had brought them disfavor by Shi Huangdi. The Han rulers after Liu Bang increasingly promoted Confucianism, and thorough knowledge of Confucian teachings became essential for promotion in the Han government. A university was founded in Xi'an to educate young scholars to prepare them for jobs in the bureaucracy, and an examination system was set up in the last century B.C.E. to help the government to identify the best candidates for the bureaucracy. The examinations were based almost exclusively on knowledge of the Confucian texts. Theoretically, any Chinese man could take the exams,

but only the sons of the wealthy had the leisure to study for them, so the bureaucracy was generally filled from aristocratic and scholar-gentry families. The importance of social class was reinforced by the fact that many government positions were still hereditary, and automatically passed from father to son.



**Qin and Han China.** Both dynasties were expansionist, with the Han extending to the north to try to placate invading nomads, south to take over various people of Southeast Asia, and west to protect and control trade along the Silk Road.

Three main social classes characterized Han China:

- 1) **The scholar-gentry** – This class was linked to the shi, and eventually superseded it. Their status was based on their control of large amounts of land and bureaucratic positions in the government. Wealth from landholding supported their brightest sons to study for and win important administrative positions. These families tended to maintain homes in both the city and the countryside, and they passed their wealth and status down to their children, sometimes for many centuries.
- 2) **Ordinary, but free, citizens** – The common people included a broad range, with the majority being peasants. Some peasants had significant amounts of land, and occasionally might support a son to study for government examinations. Most peasants who had a decent-sized plot of land lived well. However, others were forced to work for landlords, and still others did not have enough to eat. All peasants were required to work a designated number of days each year on public works, and they also could be forced to join the army.

- 3) **The Underclass** – This broad category included many different groups, including non-Han Chinese on the fringes of the empire. Some were shifting cultivators driven out of their areas by the growing Han population. They were described in various accounts as bandits, beggars, and vagabonds. Slavery did exist, but it was far less prominent than it was in Ancient Rome. During the Warring States Period, dependent peasants as well as slaves worked the large estates. The Qin government tried to abolish slavery, but it persisted into the Han era. However, only a small fraction of the population was enslaved, and most people that were slaves served as domestic servants.



#### **MARKER EVENT: THE EXAMINATION SYSTEM IN CHINA**

Even though most government jobs in the Han Dynasty were filled according to heredity, the Chinese first experimented with the idea that administrative offices should be filled on the basis of merit and effort. They set up an examination system that measured a young person's knowledge of Confucian texts, and only those that passed the exams could work in certain positions in the emperor's government. This idea may seem commonplace today, but it was revolutionary in ancient times.

Although they were not given high status by the scholar-gentry, the artisan, manufacturing classes grew during the Han period as a result of numerous inventions and technological innovations. The introduction of the brush pen and paper greatly facilitated the work of the scholar-gentry, and the demand for their manufacture increased. The Han Chinese also developed water mills for agriculture, rudders and compasses for ships, and new mining techniques for iron and copper. Skilled artisans were in high demand, and most probably lived more comfortable lives than the peasants.

Like all other ancient civilizations, China was a patriarchy, but most historians believe that women's status during the Han period was higher than it was in later periods of Chinese history. Marriages were arranged according to family ties, but neither young men nor women had much say about who their partners would be. Powerful relatives usually protected their daughters from abuse by the husband's family, and women of upper-class families were often educated in writing, the arts, and music. Still, women at all social levels remained sub-

ordinated to men. Families were run by the older men, and male children were favored over their sisters. Political positions were reserved for men, and only boys could sit for the examinations. Women from peasant families played traditional roles as cooks, house cleaners, and support for men in the fields. All were legally subordinated to their fathers and husbands.



### SEEING SIMILARITIES: ROME AND HAN

Often it is easier to see the differences between two societies than it is to see their similarities. However, the great classical empires of Rome and China had more in common than you might think.

Both Rome and China were huge empires with long borders to defend. Each built walls and maintained a chain of forts and garrisons. Both spent a great deal of time, effort, and money trying to defend their borders from nomadic attack, and both ultimately failed.

The economies of both societies were based on agriculture, but both grew into wealthy urban empires. Their free peasantry came into conflict with wealthy aristocrats over land ownership, and peasants in both societies rebelled when they were reduced to dependent tenant farmers.

Both Rome and Han Empires spread from a homogeneous core to encompass many diverse people. Each brought a cultural unity that conquered people came to value, and each had to delegate ruling authority to local officials. Both developed a competent bureaucracy that allowed the empires to thrive for a number of years.

#### Han Culture and Science

The Han were interested in decorative arts, and their bronze and ceramic figures, bowls, vases, jade and ivory carvings, and woven silk screens were of very high quality. One of the highest art forms was **calligraphy**, or the artistic rendering of the written word, a skill that is still highly prized in Chinese society. Historical record-keeping was important for the Han, with some scripts surviving until today. Mathematics, geography, and astronomy were also valued, especially for the practical inventions that were based on these sciences. An interest in

## 100 FOUNDATIONS

the sciences led to more intensive knowledge of the parts of the body and their functions, including the circulation of blood. Acupuncture was first mentioned in the historical records of the Han Period. All and all, the Chinese were more drawn to practical scientific experimentation than theory.

### Decline of the Han Empire

Although the Han Dynasty lasted for more than four hundred years, its last two hundred years were a time of gradual decline. Defending the long borders from nomadic invasions remained a problem, and the expense became burdensome. The early emperors were successful in reducing the wealth and landholdings of the aristocracy, but by the late Han era, many had regained huge tracts of land and local nobility again controlled peasants in their areas. Official corruption and inefficiency marred the government's ability to effectively rule, and peasant uprisings destabilized many parts of the empire. Like the Zhou before, the Han Dynasty suffered the ill effects of the dynastic cycle, and a period of chaos followed its downfall in 220 C.E. that lasted for 135 years.

## CLASSICAL INDIA

Before the fall of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa in the Indus River valley, the **Aryans** had migrated into the Indian sub-continent from their home north of the Black Sea. After 1000 B.C.E., they began to settle in the area between the Himalayan foothills and the Ganges River, and by 500 B.C.E., they had migrated as far south as the Deccan plateau in the south central part of the sub-continent. At first, they probably had a fairly simple society consisting of herders and farmers led by warrior chiefs and priests. As they settled, however, their social complexity grew, especially as they interacted with the native Dravidians.

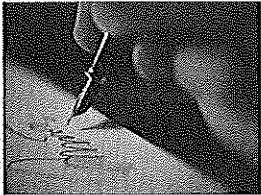
### The Development of the Caste System

The term **caste** – a social class of hereditary and usually unchangeable status – was first used in India by Portuguese merchants and mariners during the 16<sup>th</sup> century C.E. when they noticed the sharp social distinctions on the Indian sub-continent. The Aryans used the term **varna**, a Sanskrit word meaning “color,” to refer to their social classes. By about 1000 B.C.E., four major varnas were recognized, as explained in a creation myth in which a primordial creature named Purusha was sacrificed:

- **Brahmins** – The highest social classes were the priests and scholars, who sprang from Purusha's mouth, and represented intellect and knowledge.
- **Kshatriya** – Warriors and government officials sprang from the arms of the creature.

- **Vaishya** – From Purusha’s thighs came the third layer of people – land-owners, merchants, and artisans.
- **Shudra** – The creature’s feet were represented by common peasants and laborers.

During the classical era the caste system became much more complex, with each caste further subdivided into **jati**, or birth groups, each with its own occupation, duties, and rituals. Each jati had very little contact with others, and its members intermarried and followed the same occupations of the ancestors.



### ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS: *THE LAWBOOK OF MANU*

Original documents often reflect the values and beliefs of their authors and offer us insight into the societies they belonged to. A good example is the *Lawbook of Manu*, written by an anonymous scribe in the 1st century B.C.E., who attributed it to Manu, founder of the human race according to Indian beliefs. What do these excerpts tell us about early Indian society and culture?

“It is the nature of women to seduce men in this world; for that reason the wise are never unguarded in the company of females...

When women are honored, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards...

In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.

She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both her own and her husband’s families contemptible...”

*Source:* Andrea, Alfred, and James H. Overfield, *The Human Record, Vol. 1*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

### Early Religion and Culture

The period from 1500 to 500 B.C.E. is called the “Vedic Age,” after the **Vedas**, religious texts that were passed down from generation to generation of Aryans

in the form of hymns, songs, prayers and rituals honoring the Aryan gods. The most important is called the **Rig Veda**, compiled between about 1400 and 900 B.C.E., but was not written down until about 600 B.C.E. The Vedas reflect the conflicts between the Aryans and the Dravidians, and they identify Indra as the Aryan war god and military hero, as well as gods of the sun, sky, moon, fire, and the underworld. Over the years the Aryan religion blended with beliefs of the Dravidians, as reflected in a body of works called the **Upanishads**, which appeared in the late Vedic Age, about 800 to 400 B.C.E. The Upanishads spoke about a universal spirit, known as Brahman, who is eternal and unchanging. A central belief was that through **reincarnation**, the rebirth of a soul after the body dies, the human spirit (**atman**) could eventually join the universal spirit, as long as the human being behaved ethically. Eventually these beliefs came to be called **Hinduism**, the religion of most people that live today in the Indian sub-continent.

A second major world religion, **Buddhism**, began in India during the early classical period. Its founder was **Siddhartha Gautama** (563-483 B.C.E.), born to a kshatriya family in the north of India. Although his life as a prince was comfortable and satisfying, he left his family to seek the meaning of life, and eventually experienced an enlightenment that became the foundation of the faith. Siddhartha was called the Buddha (“Enlightened One”), and spent the rest of his life in the area around the Ganges River valley spreading his knowledge to others. He never claimed to be a god, but after his death, some of his followers elevated him to that status. Although the religion spread, most Indians remained faithful to the old beliefs, and by the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E., it looked as if Buddhism was destined to be a small regional religion.

### Political Development

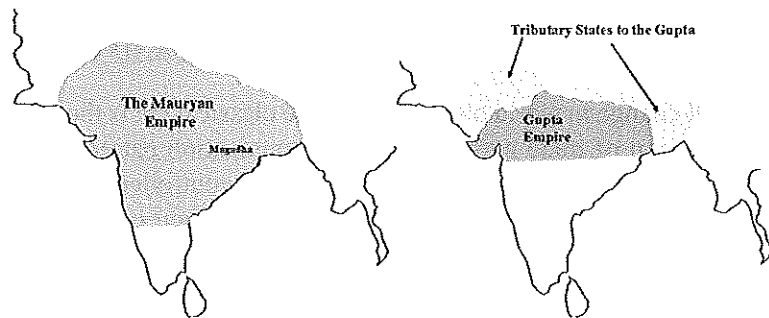
Political developments in India greatly impacted the growth of Buddhism, particularly after **Ashoka**, the third and greatest ruler of the **Mauryan Dynasty** converted to it. Before the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. India was politically fragmented into separate kinship groups and independent groups. Different terrains – mountains, river valleys, plains, forests, steppes, and deserts – made transportation and communication difficult, and various languages and cultural practices developed. The caste system was in place across the sub-continent, and although religious beliefs were shared, the hundreds of jati separated people into groups of identification, so political authority was of only secondary importance. Despite these divisions, the Mauryan Dynasty came to rule a good part of the area for almost 300 years, beginning in the kingdom of Magadha, in eastern India. The kingdom was wealthy and strategically located along the trade routes of the Ganges River valley, and its leader, Chandragupta Maurya expanded it into India’s first centralized empire. His grandson, Ashoka, ruled over the entire sub-



continent except for the southern tip of the peninsula. A large imperial army helped the dynasty to maintain control of the area.

Ashoka's early life was spent conquering different regions of India until, according to his own account, he was shocked by the bloodshed at the battle of Kalinga at the midpoint of his reign. He turned to Buddhism because of its emphasis on peace, tolerance, and nonviolence, and he spent the remainder of his years promoting these values. Ashoka's dominant image in Indian history is of a young warrior turned responsible monarch who saw himself as the father of his people. The Mauryan Empire lasted for a time after Ashoka's death in 232 B.C.E., but eventually it collapsed from the pressure of attacks in the northwest. In 184 B.C. E. India returned to its usual political arrangement – fragmented, regional kingdoms for more than 500 years.

In the early 4th century C.E., a new empire rose to centralize power once again, although it never was as large as the Mauryan Empire had been. The **Gupta Empire** began in the same powerful area, Magadha, with its founder, Chandra Gupta, modeling himself after the Mauryan founder by borrowing his name. The Gupta Empire was not only smaller, but it also never had as much control over regional lords as the Maurya had, particularly under Ashoka. The Gupta did not build a genuine bureaucracy to rule their subjects, but instead were content to draw tribute from them, allowing regional warrior elites a great deal of autonomy to rule their areas.



**Classical India.** Two great empires rose on the Indian subcontinent during the classical era: the Mauryan Empire (324-184 B.C.E.) and the Gupta Empire (320-550 C.E.). During the 500+ years between empires, India reverted to the fragmented regional rule that it knew before. The map shows that the earlier empire was quite a bit larger than the later one, which is depicted as it was about 400 C.E.



### COMPARISONS: THEATRE STATE IN THE PERSIAN AND GUPTA EMPIRES

A technique used by both the Persians and the Gupta is “theatre state,” or the art of awing subjects into remaining loyal to the ruling family. In both empires the ruler took the title “King of Kings,” and both required tribute to be brought to their capitals, where a splendid palace, magnificent buildings, beautiful grounds, spectacular entertainment, and ornate court costumes were designed to impress the visitors.

At the Persian capital of Persepolis, visitors first entered the Gate of All Nations, a grand hall where a pair of Lamassus (bulls with the head of a bearded man) stand on the western threshold, and another pair with wings and a Persian head on the eastern entrance, to reflect the Empire’s power. The palace at the Gupta capital of Pataliputra was described by a Buddhist monk, Faxian, as too beautiful to have been built by human hands, but instead was “all made by spirits which [King Ashoka] employed.”

*Reference:* Legge, James, *The Travels of Fa-hien: Fa-hien’s Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*. Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1971.

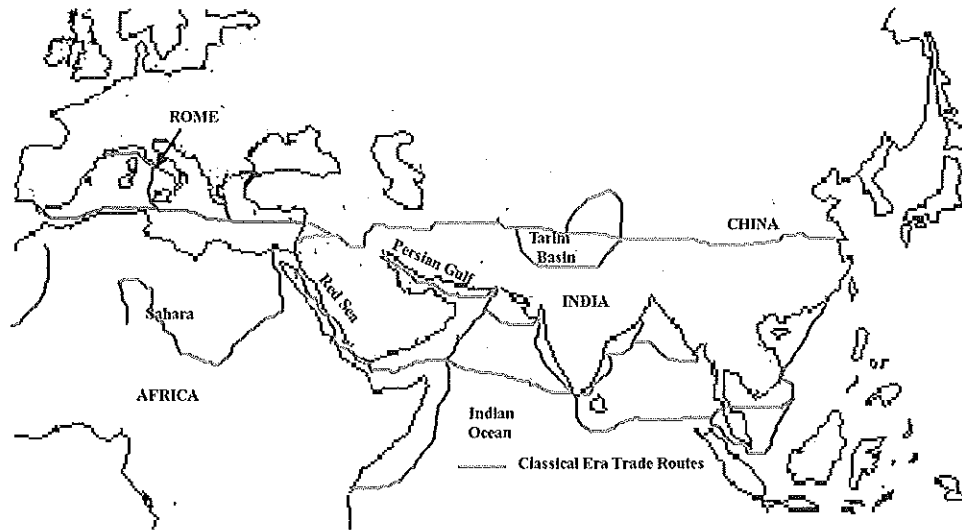
### CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS: TRADE PATTERNS AND CONTACTS

One important change in world history during the classical era is the intensification and expansion of trade networks and communication patterns among the major civilizations. These trade networks were often controlled by nomads that lived in the vast expanses between civilizations and on their outskirts. As a result of these growing networks, many more areas of the world were interacting and becoming increasingly dependent on one another. Three large trade networks that developed in the Eastern Hemisphere between 300 B.C.E. and 600 C.E. were the Silk Road, the Indian Ocean trade, and the Saharan trade.

#### The Silk Road

This fabled trade route that extended overland from Xi’an in China to the eastern Mediterranean had its beginnings in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E. when a Chinese general named Zhang Jian made his way to the Tarim Basin in central Asia on an exploratory journey. There he discovered “heavenly horses” that were far

better than any that had been bred in China. The Chinese had many goods to trade, including their highly prized silk, and with the discovery of the horses, they now had something that they wanted in return. The Tarim Basin was connected by trade routes to civilizations to the west, and by 100 B.C.E. Greeks



Classical Era Trade Routes. Extensive interconnecting trade routes developed in the Eastern Hemisphere during the Classical Era between 300 B.C.E. and 600 C.E.

could buy Chinese silk from traders in Mesopotamia, who in turn had traded for the silk with nomads that came from the Tarim Basin. Although the Romans and Chinese probably never actually met, goods made it from one end of the Silk Road to the other, making all people along the route aware of the presence of others. Traders going west from China carried peaches, apricots, cinnamon, ginger, and other spices, as well as the precious silk. Traders going east carried alfalfa (for the horses), grapes, pistachios, sesame, and spinach. Many other goods travelled along parts of the route, so that inventions in any place within access could make their way to other people. For example, the **stirrup** was probably invented in what is now northern Afghanistan, and warriors in many places realized what an advantage the stirrup gave them in battle, so its use spread to faraway China and Europe.

The Silk Road was essentially held together by pastoral nomads of Central Asia who supplied animals to transport goods and food and drink needed by the caravan parties. For periodic payments by merchants and bureaucrats, they provided protection from bandits and raiding parties. They insured the smooth operation of the trade routes, allowing not only goods to travel, but also ideas, customs, and religions, such as Christianity and Buddhism.

### The Indian Ocean Maritime System

Water travel from the northern tip of the Red Sea southward goes back to the days of the river valley civilization, with the Ancient Egyptians probably trading with areas along the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Likewise, other shorter water routes had developed in coastal areas around the Indian Ocean. During the classical era, however, these routes connected to one another to form a vast trade network that extended from southeastern China to Africa. Like the traders along the Silk Road, most Indian Ocean traders only traveled back and forth on one of its three legs: 1) southeastern China to Southeast Asia; 2) Southeast Asia to the eastern coast of India; and 3) the western coast of India to the Red Sea and the eastern coast of Africa.



#### **COMPARISON: TRAVEL ON THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN**

Differences in the physical geography of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea shaped different techniques and technologies for water travel in ancient times. The Mediterranean's calm waters meant that sails had to be designed to pick up what little wind they could, so large, square sails were developed. The most famous of the ships, the Greek trireme, also had three tiers of oars operated by 170 rowers. In contrast, sailing on the Indian Ocean had to take into account the strong seasonal monsoon winds that blew in one direction during the spring and the opposite direction during the fall. Indian Ocean vessels did without oars, and used the **lateen sail** (roughly triangular with squared off points) for maneuverability through the strong winds. The boats were small, with planks tied together by palm fiber, whereas Mediterranean sailors nailed their ships together. Mediterranean sailors usually stayed close to shore because they could not rely on winds to carry them over the open water. In contrast, the monsoon winds allowed Indian Ocean sailors to go for long distances across water.

Countless products traveled along the Indian Ocean routes, including ivory from Africa, India, and Mesopotamia; frankincense and myrrh (fragrances) from southern Arabia; pearls from the Persian Gulf; spices from India and Southeast Asia; and manufactured goods and pottery from China.

### Trade Routes across the Sahara

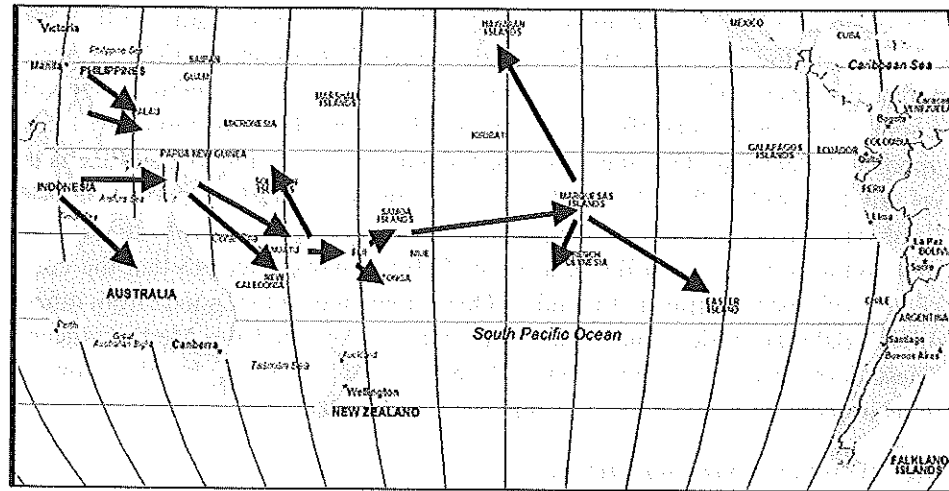
Before the classical era, the vast Sahara Desert of northern Africa had long formed a geographic barrier between the people of Sub-Saharan Africa and those that lived to its north and east. The introduction of the camel to the area (probably in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E.) made it possible to establish trade caravans across the desert. Camels probably reached the Sahara from Arabia by way of Egypt, and in both areas effective camel saddles were developed to allow trade goods to be carried. One incentive for Saharan trade was the demand for desert salt, and traders from Sub-Saharan Africa brought forest products from the south, such as kola nuts and palm oil, to be exchanged for the salt. Extensive trade routes connected different areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, so that the connection of Eastern Africa to the Indian Ocean trade meant that goods from much of Sub-Saharan Africa could make their way to Asia and the Mediterranean. These desert routes were to extend substantially in later years, but the connections of these early years were an important beginning.

### SIGNIFICANT MIGRATIONS

During the late classical era (200-600 C.E.) for reasons that are not all clear, a number of major migrations occurred, with some directly impacting the major civilizations. Some of these migrations are:

- **The Huns** – During the late 4th century C.E. the nomadic Huns began an aggressive westward migration from their homeland in central Asia. They had invaded China centuries earlier, and their motivation for movement in this later era was probably related to drought and competition over grazing lands. During the mid-5th century, **Attila** organized the Huns into a great attacking army, invading Hungary, crossing Roman frontiers in the Balkans, and venturing into Gaul and northern Italy. By the later 5th century the Huns were pouring into the Indian subcontinent. Defense of the frontier exhausted the Gupta's treasury, and the empire collapsed by 550.
- **Germanic People** – As the Huns moved westward, they competed for pasture land with various Germanic people who they displaced. The Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Angles, Saxons, and Vandals began to move as well. Even though the Huns dispersed after Attila's death, they showed the vulnerability of the Romans, and the Germanic groups took full advantage. They spent much of their time fighting one another, and the Romans encouraged this behavior to keep them weak. However, by the 4th and 5th centuries the Germanic tribes roamed through the western provinces without much resistance from the Romans, and the tribal war chiefs began creating their own kingdoms that eventually

evolved into European countries. For example, the Franks settled in what would become France, and the Angles and Saxons invaded and conquered England in the 5th century.



**The Migration of Polynesian People.** The migration began on the mainland of Asia thousands of years ago, and the spread of Polynesian people was quite gradual. It is estimated that they reached New Guinea by about 28,000 B.C.E., Vanuatu by 1500 B.C.E., the Marquesa Islands by 200 B.C.E., and Hawaii by 400 C.E.

- **Bantu** – The Bantu most likely originated in an area south of the Sahara Desert in the region around modern Nigeria. They may have begun leaving their homeland as early as 2000 B.C.E., possibly because of **desertification**, or the expansion of the Sahara Desert that dried out their agricultural lands. They traveled for centuries all over sub-Saharan Africa, but retained many of their customs, including their Bantu language. As their language spread, it combined with others, but still retained enough similarity to the original that the family of Bantu languages can still be recognized over a huge expanse of territory. Unlike the surges by the Huns and Germanic people, the Bantu migrations were quite gradual, so that by the end of the classical era, the Bantu migrations had introduced agriculture, iron metallurgy, and the Bantu language to most regions of sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Polynesians** – Although their efforts did not immediately impact civilizations on mainland Eurasia, the peopling of the islands of the Pacific Ocean was quite a remarkable feat. Like the Bantu, the migration was gradual, but between 1500 B.C.E. and 1000 C.E., almost all the major islands west of New Guinea were visited, and many were settled. The people, now called Polynesians, came from mainland Asia, and expanded eastward to Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa. They left no written records,

so our knowledge of them relies on archaeological evidence, accounts by early European sailors, and oral traditions. Their ships were great double canoes that carried a platform between two hulls and large triangular sails that helped them catch ocean winds. The distances they travelled were remarkably long, and by the time the Europeans arrived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Polynesians had explored and colonized almost every habitable island in the vast Pacific Ocean.

### THE LATE CLASSICAL PERIOD: THE FALL OF GREAT EMPIRES

In the centuries between 200 and 600 C.E. all three of the great classical civilizations collapsed, at least in part. The western part of the Roman Empire fell, the Han Dynasty ended in disarray, and the Gupta Empire in India fragmented into regions. Some common reasons include:

- **Attacks by nomadic groups** – The migration of the Huns from their homeland in Central Asia impacted all three civilizations as they moved east, south, and west. Their movement caused other groups to move out of their way, causing a domino effect that put pressure on Rome, India, and China.
- **Serious internal problems** – All the empires had trouble maintaining political control over their vast lands, and were ultimately unable to keep their empires together. No governments had ever spread their authority over so much land space, and perhaps it was inevitable that their sheer sizes could not be maintained. In Rome and Han China, disputes between large landowners and peasants created instability and unrest.
- **The problems of interdependence** – Just as the earlier civilizations collapsed or suffered severe strain in the time period around 1200 B.C.E., the civilizations of the late classical age all ended before 600 C.E. When one weakened it impacted all, as trade routes became vulnerable when imperial armies could no longer protect them or when the economic resources necessary for trade were no longer available. Disease spread along the trade routes, killing people that would not have died had they not been in contact with others. Some estimates are that each civilization lost as many as half its citizens during the late classical era.

Despite their similarities, decline and fall had very different consequences for the three civilizations. Only one – Rome – did not retain its identity after it fell. India and China lost their political unity, but they did not permanently lose their identity as civilizations, and both eventually reorganized into major world pow-

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ers. The Roman Empire was destined to never regain its former identity, but instead fell into many pieces that retained separate orientations. Why? What were the differences? Part of the answer lies in what happened next in the story of the world – political power is not the only “glue” that holds a civilization together. In the period before and after 600 C.E. the most important sources of identity were religious, with older religions and philosophies, such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism growing in influence that transcended political boundaries. An important new religion was on the horizon as well. Islam was destined to become the force behind one of the most remarkable land expansions in world history, a path made easier because it appeared at a time when the old political empires of Rome, China, and India had fallen.

In this new era of religious unity, Rome fell short. Christianity had become its official religion during the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E., too late to be a unifying force for the failing empire. When political and military power failed, nothing was left except crumbling material architecture, symbols of a past era. However, the Indian subcontinent was bound together by Hinduism, and the intricate caste loyalties that supported it, so that the fall of the Gupta had only a limited impact on the civilization’s development. Likewise, Confucianism had become such a part of the identity of the Han Chinese that the fall of the dynasty was not a fatal blow to the civilization. Chaos did characterize the period, but the Chinese civilization lived on to reassert its true character when political stability returned.

### CONCEPTS AND IDENTIFICATIONS

“3rd century crisis”

Actium

Alexander the Great

Aristotle

Ashoka

atman

Attila

Augustus Caesar (Octavian)

Buddhism

calligraphy

castes, varna, jati

classical civilizations

Cleisthenes

Cleopatra

Confucianism

Constantine

consuls (Rome)

Cyrus the Great



Daoism  
 Delian League  
 desertification  
 Diocletian  
 equites  
 Etruscans  
 forbidden city  
 Great Wall  
 Greek "Classical Age"  
 Gupta Empire  
 Han Wudi  
 Hellenic culture  
 Hellenistic synthesis  
 helots  
 Hinduism  
 hoplites  
 Julius Caesar  
 Laozi  
 lateen sail  
 Law of the Twelve Tables  
 Legalism  
 Marathon  
 Mark Antony  
 Mauryan Dynasty  
 Minoans  
 monarchies, aristocracies, democracies  
 Mycenaean  
 natural law  
 patricians, plebeians  
 patron-client relationships  
 Pax Romana  
 Peloponnesian War  
 Pericles  
 Phoenicians  
 phonetic alphabet  
 Plato  
 polis  
 princeps  
 Qin Dynasty  
 Punic Wars  
 reincarnation  
 Roman Republic, Roman Empire

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satraps

scholar-gentry

secularism

Senate (Rome)

Shi Huangdi

Siddhartha Gautama

Socrates

stirrup (importance of)

Terra Cotta Army

tribunes (Rome)

Triumvirate (Rome)

tyrants (Greece)

Upanishads

Vedas, Rig Veda

Virgil

Warring States Period (China)

Xerxes