

World Civilizations

PART I

The Rise of Agriculture and Agricultural Civilizations



Chapters

- 1 From Human Prehistory to the Early Civilizations

INTRODUCTION

The idea that the world is becoming smaller is, like much folk wisdom, only partly true. For several hundred years, but particularly during the past century, worldwide transportation and communication facilities have become steadily more elaborate and rapid. It was less than 500 years ago that a ship first sailed around the entire world, a dangerous and uncertain journey that took many months. Now, political leaders, business people, and even wealthy tourists can routinely travel across half the world in less than a day. Telephone and radio communications have for several decades provided worldwide linkages, and, thanks to satellites, even global television hookups have become routine. As a result, for the first time in world history, events of widespread interest can be simultaneously experienced by hundreds of millions of people in all parts of the globe. World Cup soccer finals and recent Olympic Games have drawn audiences of over a billion people.

The smallness of our world involves more than speedy international contact; it also involves the nature and extent of that contact. Our century is the first to experience world wars, as well as the fear of surprise attacks by enemies 6000 miles away. International negotiations and diplomatic contacts are not so novel, but the impact of events in distant parts of the globe has obviously increased. As an example, we can consider the conflicts between Christians and Muslims in unfamiliar parts of the Balkans that prompted several interventions by American troops in the late 1990s. Worldwide economic contacts have increased at least as fast as those in the military and diplomatic fields. Production surges in China or Mexico vitally affect Americans as consumers and workers; shifts in the oil prices levied by Middle Eastern nations

influence the driving habits of Americans and Europeans. Cultural linkages have also proliferated, as witness the existence of international sporting events and the widespread audience for French films or American television. Only in the twentieth century has a traveler been able to journey to cities on every inhabited continent and find buildings that look just like those at home. Indeed, U.S. hotel and restaurant chains now literally span the earth.

To some observers, our smaller world is also an increasingly homogeneous world. Certain people lament the widespread adoption of various customs that seem to reduce valuable and interesting human diversity. Thus, purists in France deplore the practice of modern French supermarkets in imitating American packaging of cheese, just as many in Japan or Egypt deplore the decline of traditional costumes in favor of more Western-style dress. Probably more people, or at least more Americans, rejoice that our life-style has been adopted by other societies. Many Americans, comfortable in their own ways, are pleased to see familiar products and styles in other countries. Others, firm believers in the importance of international harmony, are eager to minimize the strangeness of foreign lands.

Despite new and important international linkages, our world is also marked by fundamental, often agonizing, divisions and diversities. Japan, in 1984, ordered a government inquiry into the use of chopsticks among schoolchildren. Their use had been declining because of a growing eagerness to eat quickly. Surely, to many American eyes, this might seem to represent a quaint, if harmless, concern for distinctive traditions. But such concerns are not altogether different from those of Muslim leaders, many of whom from the late 1970s to the present have thundered against Western influences, ranging from styles of women's dress to the idea that economic development rather than religion should be society's foremost priority. Varied reactions to Western influence reflect serious global divisions. And there are the direct conflicts over identity that rage in various parts of the world.

Correspondingly, certain systematic separations shape our world as much as linkages. As Russia experiments with democracy, China resolutely combines political authoritarianism with economic innovations. Stark divisions separate societies that have industrialized, and in which a minority of people are directly engaged in food production, from the larger number of nations in which full industrialization remains a distant dream. Cultural divisions also remain strong. India is the leading producer of films in the contemporary world, but these films, steeped in traditional Indian themes and values, rarely find non-Indian audiences. The United States, although able to export some films and television shows widely, also enjoys certain sports, notably football, that have only modest appeal to other cultures. Japan, in copying televised American quiz shows, imposes shame on losing contestants in a fashion that would seem bizarre to the West. Changes in the role of women in the workplace and their growing assertiveness and independence, commonplace factors in Western societies, find limited echoes in the Muslim world or even in Japan.

The point is clear: The smallness of the world, as represented by the new and sometimes beneficial exchanges among diverse peoples, exists alongside deep divisions. International contacts do not necessarily bring harmony or friendship. Any interpretation of

2.5 Million B.C.E.	30,000 B.C.E.	10,000 B.C.E.	6,000 B.C.E.	4000 B.C.E.	3000 B.C.E.	2000 B.C.E.
2.5 million B.C.E. Emergence of more humanlike species, initially in eastern Asia	16,000 Passage of people from Siberia to tip of South America	9,000 Domestication of sheep, pigs, goats, cattle	6,000 First potter's wheel	4000–3000 Age of innovation in Middle East: writing, bronze metalworking, wheel, plow	2500–1500 India civilization in South Asia	1500 Shang kingdom in China; writing develops
750,000 Further development of species into <i>Homo erectus</i> , an upright, tool-using human	14,000 End of Great Ice Age	8500–3500 Development of farming in Middle East	5000 Domestication of maize (corn) in Mesoamerica	3500–1800 Sumerian civilization, with some disruptions through conquest	2050–1750 Babylonian Empire in Middle East	1122 Western Zhou kings in China
600,000 Wide spread of species across Asia, Europe, Africa; development of fire use			5000–2000 Hwang He culture develops in China	3100 Rise of Egyptian civilization		
120,000 Completion to date of basic human evolution; species <i>Homo sapiens sapiens</i> replaces other human species						

the contemporary world must take into account this complex tension, involving the undeniable existence of certain patterns that have worldwide influence but the equally undeniable existence of divergencies and conflicts that stubbornly persist. Policymakers face this conflict in applying their beliefs to the wider world: Should U.S. policy be based on assumptions that most of the world will become increasingly like us, or should it build on assumptions of permanent political and cultural differences? U.S. policy in recent decades has, in fact, oscillated between both approaches, in part because each approach—the vision of expanding contact and imitation, and the vision of deep-seated, possibly growing differentiation—has much to commend it.

The same tension must inform any study of how the world became what it is today—that is, any effort to convey the basic dynamics of world history. Both international influences and major diversities are rooted in the past. Humankind has always been united in some respects. The human species displays certain common responses, and as a result, all human societies share certain basic features. Moreover, there have always been some links among different human societies in various parts of the world, although admittedly such linkages have only recently become complex and rapid. Cultural diffusion—the process by which an idea or technique devised in one society spreads to another—describes the way plowing equipment first invented in China ultimately was adopted in Europe, or the way a numbering system conceived in India reached the Middle East and then Europe many centuries ago. The same basic process of cultural diffusion, now speeded up, indicates how the Japanese copied and then improved upon American assembly-line production during the 1970s and 1980s. There have always been, in other words, some common themes in world history, affecting many peoples and establishing a common dynamic for developments in many parts of the world in a given set of centuries. However, there also have always been important

differences among the world's peoples, as even prehistoric societies differed markedly in how they viewed death, how they treated the elderly and children, or the kind of government they established.

There are two ways to make the study of these complexities relatively manageable. The evolution of worldwide processes—that is, developments that ultimately shaped much of the world's population—can be understood by dividing the past into coherent periods of world history, from the prehistoric age to the development of agriculture to the spread of the great religions and on to more recent stages. The leading diversities of human society for at least the past 3000 years can be conveyed by concentrating on the development of particularly extensive and durable civilizations, whose impact runs from their own origins to the present time. These civilizations, while not embracing the entire human species even today, have come to include most people, and they are, fortunately, not infinite in number. Five early traditions—in the Middle East (Mesopotamia and Persia), the Mediterranean (the Middle Eastern coast, North Africa, and Southern Europe), India, China, and Central America—ultimately were replaced by seven major patterns of government, society, and culture. Exploring the nature of these patterns in the world's seven regions—East Asia; India and Southeast Asia; the Middle East; Eastern Europe; sub-Saharan Africa; Western Europe and North America; and Latin America—and then assessing their interaction with the larger processes of world history provide the key to understanding the essential features of human society past and present.

Think of a pattern as follows: Each civilization deals with some common issues, such as how to organize a state, how to define a family, how to integrate technology and whether or not to encourage technological change, how to explain and present the natural universe, and how to define social inequality. The distinctive ways that each civilization handles these issues follow from geographical differences plus early cultural and historical experience. The goal in comparing the major civilizations involves understanding these different approaches to common social issues. But civilizations were never entirely isolated, and ultimately they all had to decide what to do about growing international trade, migrations, spreading diseases, and missionary religions. They also had to decide how to respond to examples and influences from other societies. Responses to these common forces sometimes drew civilizations together, but they also often reflected very diverse adjustments. The puzzle of world history—its pieces composed of distinct civilizations, contacts, and ongoing change—is not hard to outline but it is undeniably challenging.

Not long ago, many Americans believed that world history consisted of the rise of their own Western civilization and its interaction with the rest of the globe. Not long ago, many Chinese believed that world history involved little more than the fascinating story of the evolution of the only civilization that mattered—their own. These were attractive visions, adequate for many purposes; they certainly offered simpler explanations than a focus on the interaction and differentiation of several vibrant civilizations. But just as many people today see that the world is growing “smaller,” in the same way, many also observe that it is growing more complex. A study of world history can and should respond to this complexity.

Chapter I

From Human Prehistory to the Early Civilizations

Cave paintings discovered in Lascaux, France in 1940—an example of which is shown here—probably served a ritualistic purpose for the Paleolithic artists who created them.



- The Neolithic Revolution
- Civilization
- **DOCUMENT:** Hammurabi's Law Code
- **IN DEPTH:** The Idea of Civilization in World Historical Perspective
- **VISUALIZING THE PAST:** Mesopotamia in Maps
- The Heritage of the River Valley Civilization
- **IN DEPTH:** The Legacy of Asia's First Civilizations
- **CONCLUSION:** The First Civilizations

The human species has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time. There are significant disagreements over how long an essentially human species, as distinct from other primates, has existed. However, a figure of 2 or 2.5 million years seems acceptable. This is approximately 1/4000 of the time the earth has existed. That is, if one thinks of the whole history of the earth to date as a 24-hour day, the human species began at about 5 minutes until midnight. Human beings have existed for less than 5 percent of the time mammals of any sort have lived. Yet in this brief span of time—by earth-history standards—humankind has spread to every landmass (with the exception of the polar regions) and, for better or worse, has taken control of the destinies of countless other species.

To be sure, human beings have some drawbacks as a species, compared to other existing models. They are unusually aggressive against their own kind: While some of the great apes, notably chimpanzees, engage in periodic wars, these conflicts can hardly rival human violence. Human babies are dependent for a long period, which requires some special family or child-care arrangements and often has limited the activities of many adult women. Certain ailments, such as back problems resulting from an upright stature, also burden the species. And, insofar as we know, the human species is alone in its awareness of the inevitability of death—a knowledge that imparts some unique fears and tensions.

Distinctive features of the human species account for considerable achievement as well. Like other primates, but unlike most other mammals, people can manipulate objects fairly readily because of the grip provided by an opposable thumb on each hand. Compared to other primates, human beings have a relatively high and regular sexual drive, which aids reproduction; being omnivores, they are not dependent exclusively on plants or animals for food, which helps explain why they can live in so many different climates and settings; the unusual variety of their facial expressions aids communication and enhances social life. The distinctive human brain and a facility for elaborate speech are even more important: Much of human history depends on the knowledge, inventions, and social contracts that resulted from these assets. Features of this sort explain why many human cultures, including the Western culture that many Americans share, promote a firm separation between human and animal, seeing in our own species a power and rationality, and possibly a spark of the divine, that “lower” creatures lack.

Although the rise of humankind has been impressively rapid, however, its early stages can also be viewed as painfully long and slow. Most of the 2 million plus years during which our species has existed are described by the term *Paleolithic*, or *Old Stone Age*. Throughout this long time span,

2.5 Million B.C.E.	30,000 B.C.E.	10,000 B.C.E.	6000 B.C.E.	4000 B.C.E.	3000 B.C.E.	2000 B.C.E.
2.5 million Emergence of more humanlike species, initially in Africa 750,000 Further development of species into <i>Homo erectus</i> 600,000 Wide spread of species across Asia, Europe, Africa, development of fire use 120,000 Completion to date of basic human evolution; <i>Homo sapiens sapiens</i> displaces other human species	16,000 Passage of people from Siberia to tip of South America 14,000 End of Great Ice Age 12,000 Fashioning of stone tools	10,000-8,000 Development of farming in the Middle East 9000 Domestication of pigs, sheep, goats, cattle 8000 Transition of agriculture, introduction of silk weaving in China	6000 First potter's wheel 5500 Catal Hüyük at its peak 5000 Domestication of maize (corn) in Mesoamerica	4000 Yangshao culture in China 4000-3000 Age of innovation in the Middle East: introduction of writing, bronze, metalwork, wheel, plow 3500-1800 Civilization of Sumer, cuneiform alphabet	3100 Rise of Egyptian civilization 2500 Emergence of (Indus) Harappan civilization	2000 Kotash culture in Peru 2000 Conversion to agriculture in northern Europe, southern Africa 1500 Emergence of Shang kingdom in China; writing develops 1500 First ironwork in the Middle East 1200 Jews settle near the Mediterranean, first monotheistic religion 1122 Western Zhou kings

which runs until about 14,000 years ago, human beings learned only simple tool use, mainly through employing suitably shaped rocks and sticks for hunting and warfare. Fire was tamed about 750,000 years ago. The nature of the species also gradually changed during the Paleolithic, with emphasis on more erect stature and growing brain capacity. Archeological evidence also indicates some increases in average size. A less apelike species, whose larger brain and erect stance allowed better tool use, emerged between 500,000 and 750,000 years ago; it is called, appropriately enough, *Homo erectus*. Several species of *Homo erectus* developed and spread in Africa, to Asia and Europe, reaching a population size of perhaps 1.5 million 100,000 years ago.

Considerable evidence suggests that more advanced types of humans killed off or displaced many competitors over time, which explains why there is only one basic human type throughout the world today, rather than a number of rather similar human species, as among monkeys and apes. The newest human breed, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, of which all humans in the world today are descendants, originated about 120,000 years ago, also in Africa. The success of this subspecies means that there have been no major changes in the basic human physique or brain size since its advent.

Even after the appearance of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, human life faced important constraints. People who hunted food and gathered nuts and berries could not support large numbers or elaborate societies. Most hunting groups were small, and they had to roam widely for food. Two people required at least one square mile for survival. Population growth was slow, partly because women breast-fed infants for several years to limit their own fertility. On the other hand, people did not have to work very hard—hunting took about seven hours every three days on average. Women, who gathered fruits and vegetables, worked harder but there was significant equality between the sexes based on common economic contributions.

Paleolithic people gradually improved their tool use, beginning with the crude shaping of stone and wooden implements. Speech developed with *Homo erectus* 100,000 years ago, allowing more group cooperation and the trans-

mission of technical knowledge. By the later Paleolithic period, people had developed rituals to lessen the fear of death and created cave paintings to express a sense of nature's beauty and power. Goddesses often played a prominent role in the religious pantheon. Thus, the human species came to develop cultures—that is, systems of belief that helped explain the environment and set up rules for various kinds of social behavior. The development of speech provided rich language and symbols for the transmission of culture and its growing sophistication. At the same time, different groups of humans, in different locations, developed quite varied belief systems and corresponding languages.

The greatest achievement of Paleolithic people was the sheer spread of the human species over much of the earth's surface. The species originated in eastern Africa; most of the earliest types of human remains come from this region, in the present-day countries of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. But gradual migration, doubtless caused by the need to find scarce food, steadily pushed the human reach to other areas. Key discoveries, notably fire and the use of animal skins for clothing—both of which enabled people to live in colder climates—facilitated the spread of Paleolithic groups. The first people moved out of Africa about 750,000 years ago. Human remains (Peking man, Java man) have been found in China and Southeast Asia dating from 600,000 and 350,000 years ago, respectively. Humans inhabited Britain 250,000 years ago. They first crossed to Australia 60,000 years ago, followed by another group 20,000 years later; these combined to form the continent's aboriginal population. Dates of the migration from Asia to the Americas are under debate. Most scholars believe that humans crossed what was then a land bridge from Siberia to Alaska about 17,000 years ago and quickly began to spread out, reaching the tip of the South American continent possibly within a mere thousand years. But some recent carbon-dating of Native American artifacts suggests an earlier arrival date. Settlers from China reached Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia 4500 to 3500 years ago.

In addition, soon after this time—roughly 14,000 years ago—the last great ice age ended, which did wonders for living conditions over much of the Northern Hemisphere. Human development began to accelerate. A new term, *Mesolithic*, or Middle Stone Age, designates a span of several thousand years, from about 12,000 to 8000 B.C.E.,* in which human ability to fashion stone tools and other implements improved greatly. People learned to sharpen and shape stone, to make better weapons and cutting edges. Animal bones were used to make needles and other precise tools. From the Mesolithic also date the increased numbers of log rafts and dugouts, which improved fishing, and the manufacture of pots and baskets for food storage. Mesolithic people domesti-

*In Christian societies, historical dating divides between years “before the birth of Christ” (B.C.) and after (A.D., *anno Domini*, or “year of our Lord”). This system came into wide acceptance in Europe in the eighteenth century, as formal historical consciousness increased (although ironically, 1 A.D. is a few years late for Jesus' actual birth). China, Islam, Judaism, and many other societies use different dating systems, referring to their own history. This text, like many recent world history materials, uses the Christian chronology (one has to choose some system) but changes the terms to B.C.E. (“before the common era”) and C.E. (“of the common era”) as a gesture to less Christian-centric labeling.

cated more animals, such as cows, which again improved food supply. Population growth accelerated, which also resulted in more conflicts and wars. Skeletons from this period show frequent bone breaks and skull fractures caused by weapons.

In time, better tool use, somewhat more elaborate social organization, and still more population pressure led people in many parts of the world to the final Stone Age—the *Neolithic*, or *New Stone Age* (see Map 1.1). And from Neolithic people, in turn, came several more dramatic developments that changed the nature of human existence—the invention of agriculture, the creation of cities, and other foreshadowings of civilization, which ended the Stone Age altogether throughout much of the world.

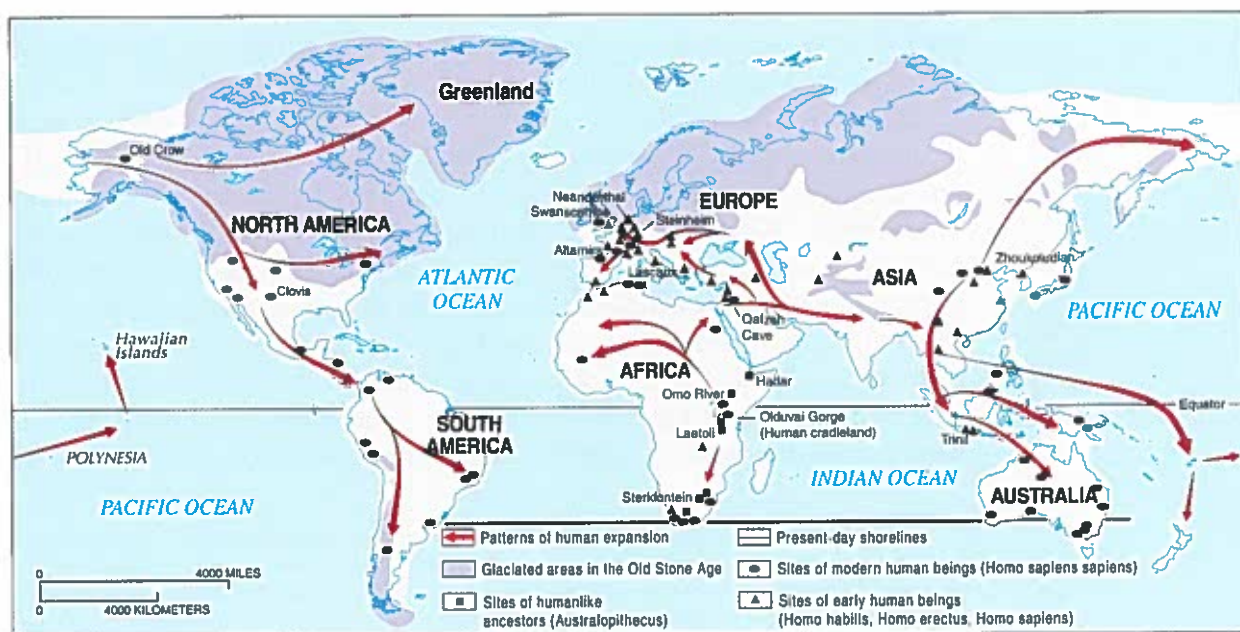
THE NEOLITHIC REVOLUTION

■ *The Neolithic Revolution involved the development of agriculture. This occurred in different times in different places. Agriculture created important changes from humankind's hunting and gathering past, going well beyond food supply.*

Human achievements during the various ages of stone are both fascinating and fundamental, and some points are hotly debated. Our knowledge of Stone Age soci-

ety is of course limited, although archeologists have been creative in their interpretations of tool remains and other evidence, such as cave paintings and burial sites, that Stone Age people produced in various parts of the world. What people accomplished during this long period of prehistory remains essential to human life today; our ability to make and manipulate tools thus depends directly on what our Stone Age ancestors learned about physical matter.

However, it was the invention of agriculture that most clearly moved the human species toward more elaborate social and cultural patterns of the sort that people today would find recognizable. With agricul-



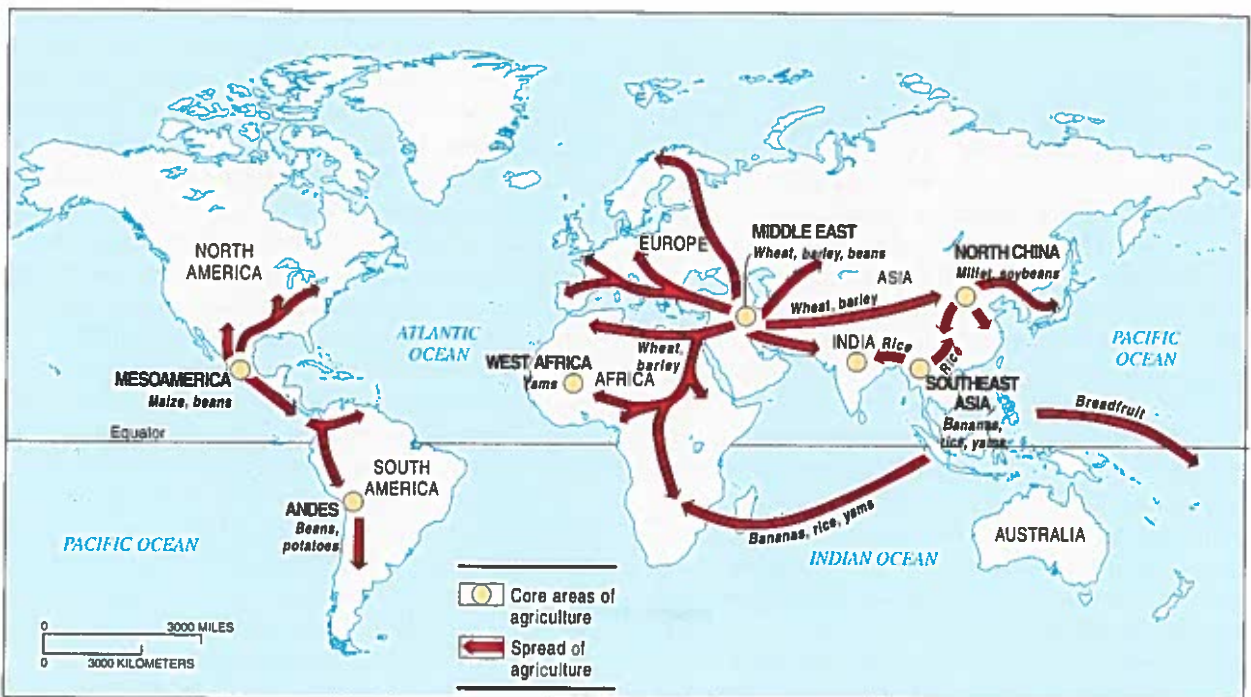
Map 1.1 The Spread of Human Populations, c. 10,000 B.C.E.

ture, human beings were able to settle in one spot and focus on particular economic, political, and religious goals and activities. Agriculture also spawned a great increase in the sheer number of people in the world—from about 6 to 8 million across the earth's surface during early Neolithic times, to about 100 million some 3000 years later.

The initial development of agriculture—that is, the deliberate planting of grains for later harvest—was probably triggered by two results of the ice age's end. First, population increases, stemming from improved climate, prompted people to search for new and more reliable sources of food. Second, the end of the ice age saw the retreat of certain big game animals, such as mastodons. Human hunters had to turn to smaller game, such as deer and wild boar, in many forested areas. Hunting's overall yield declined. Here was the basis for new interest in other sources of food. There is evidence that by 9000 B.C.E., in certain parts of the world, people were becoming increasingly dependent on regular harvests of wild grains, berries, and nuts. This undoubtedly set the stage for the deliberate planting of seeds (probably accidental to begin with) and the improvement of key grains through the selection of seeds from the best plants.

As farming evolved, new animals were also domesticated. Particularly in the Middle East and parts of Asia, by 9000 B.C.E. pigs, sheep, goats, and cattle were being raised. Farmers used these animals for meat and skins and soon discovered dairying as well. These results not only contributed to the development of agriculture, they also served as the basis for nomadic herding societies.

Farming was initially developed in the Middle East, in an arc of territory running from present-day Turkey to Iraq and Israel. This was a very fertile area, more fertile in those days than at present. Grains such as barley and wild wheat were abundant. At the same time, this area was not heavily forested, and animals were in short supply, presenting a challenge to hunters. In the Middle East, the development of agriculture may have begun as early as 10,000 B.C.E., and it gained ground rapidly after 8000 B.C.E. Gradually during the Neolithic centuries, knowledge of agriculture spread to other centers, including parts of India, North Africa, and Europe. Agriculture, including rice cultivation, soon developed independently in China. Thus, within a few thousand years agriculture had spread to the parts of the world that would produce the first human civilizations (Map 1.2). We will see that agriculture spread later to much of Africa south of the Mediterranean



Map 1.2 The Spread of Agriculture

coast, reaching West Africa by 2000 B.C.E., although here too there were additional developments with an emphasis on local grains and also root crops such as yams. Agriculture had to be invented separately in the Americas, based on corn cultivation, where it was also a slightly later development (about 5000 B.C.E.).

Many scholars have termed the development of agriculture a “Neolithic revolution.” The term is obviously misleading in one sense: Agriculture was no sudden transformation, even in the Middle East where the new system had its roots. Learning the new agricultural methods was difficult, and many peoples long combined a bit of agriculture with considerable reliance on the older systems of hunting and gathering. A “revolution” that took over a thousand years, and then several thousand more to spread to key population centers in Asia, Europe, and Africa, is hardly dramatic by modern standards.

The concept of revolution is, however, appropriate in demonstrating the magnitude of change involved. Early agriculture could support far more people per square mile than hunting ever could; it also allowed people to settle more permanently in one area. The system was nonetheless not easy. Agriculture required more regular work, at least of men, than hunting did. Hunting groups today, such as the pygmies of the Kalihari Desert in southwest Africa, work an average of 2.5 hours a day, alternating long, intense hunts with periods of idleness. Settled agriculture concentrated populations and encouraged the spread of disease. As much as agriculture was demanding, it was also rewarding: Agriculture supported larger populations, and with better food supplies and a more settled existence, agricultural peoples could afford to build houses and villages. Animals provided not only hides but also wool for more varied clothing.

We know next to nothing of the debates that must have raged when people were first confronted with agriculture, but it is not hard to imagine that many would have found the new life too complicated, too difficult, or too unexciting. Most evidence suggests that gathering and hunting peoples resisted agriculture as long as they could. Gradually, of course, agriculture did gain ground. Its success was hard to deny. And as farmers cleared new land from forests, they automatically drove out or converted many hunters. Disease played a role: Settled agricultural societies suffered from more contagious diseases because of denser population concentrations. Hunting and gathering peoples lacked resistance and often died when agriculturists who had developed immunity to these diseases carried them into their areas.

Not all the peoples of the world came to embrace the slowly spreading wave of agriculture, at least not until very recently. Important small societies in southern Africa, Australia, the islands of Southeast Asia, and even northern Japan were isolated for so long that news of this economic system simply did not reach them. The white-skinned hunting tribes of northern Japan disappeared only about a hundred years ago. Northern Europeans and southern Africans converted to agriculture earlier, about 2000 years ago, but well after the Neolithic revolution had transformed other parts of their continents. Agriculture was initiated in the Americas as early as 5000 B.C.E. and developed vigorously in Central America and the northern part of South America. However, most Indian tribes in North America continued a hunting and gathering existence, sometimes combined with limited agriculture, until recent centuries. Finally, the peoples of the vast plains of central Asia long resisted a complete conversion to agriculture, in part because of a harsh climate; herding, rather than grain-growing, became the basic socioeconomic system of this part of the world. And from this area would come waves of tough, nomadic invaders whose role in linking major civilizations was a vital force in world history until a few centuries ago.

Development possibilities among people who became agriculturists were more obvious than those among smaller populations who resisted or simply did not know of the system: Agriculture set the basis for more rapid change in human societies. Greater wealth and larger populations freed some people for other specializations, from which new ideas or techniques might spring. Agriculture itself depended on control over nature that could be facilitated by newly developed techniques and objects. For example, during the Neolithic period itself, the needs of farming people for storage facilities, for grains and seeds, promoted the development of basket-making and pottery. The first potter’s wheel came into existence around 6000 B.C.E., and this, in turn, encouraged faster and higher-quality pottery production. Agricultural needs also encouraged certain kinds of science, supporting the human inclination to learn more about weather or flooding.

Much of what we think of as human history involves the doings of agricultural societies—societies, that is, in which most people are farmers and in which the production of food is the central economic activity. Nonagricultural groups, like the nomadic herders in Central Asia, made their own mark, but their greatest influence usually occurred in interactions with agricultural peoples. Many societies remain largely agricultural still today. The huge time span we have

thus far considered, including the Neolithic revolution itself, is all technically “prehistorical”—involved with human patterns before the invention of writing allowed the kinds of records-keeping historians prefer. In fact, since we now know how to use surviving tools and burial sites as records, the prehistoric–historic distinction means less than it once did. The preagricultural–agricultural distinction is more central. Fairly soon after the development of agriculture—although not, admittedly, right away—significant human change began to occur in decades and centuries, rather than in the sizable blocks of time, several thousand years or more, that describe preagricultural peoples.

Indeed, one basic change took place fairly soon after the introduction of agriculture, and, again, societies in the Middle East served as its birthplace. The discovery of metal tools dates back to about 4000 B.C.E. Copper was the first metal with which people learned how to work, although the more resilient metal, bronze, soon entered the picture. In fact, the next basic age of human existence was the Bronze Age. By about 3000 B.C.E., metalworking had become so commonplace in the Middle East that the use of stone tools dissipated, and the long stone ages were over at last—although, of course, an essentially Neolithic technology persisted in many parts of the world, even among some agricultural peoples.

Metalworking was extremely useful to agricultural or herding societies. Metal hoes and other tools allowed farmers to work the ground more efficiently. Metal weapons were obviously superior to those made from stone and wood. Agricultural peoples had the resources to free up a small number of individuals as toolmakers, who would specialize in this activity and exchange their products with farmers for food. Specialization of this sort did not, however, guarantee rapid rates of invention; indeed, many specialized artisans seemed very conservative, eager to preserve methods that had been inherited. But, specialization did improve the conditions or climate for discovery, and the invention of metalworking was a key result. Like agriculture, knowledge of metals gradually fanned out to other parts of Asia and to Africa and Europe.

Gradually, the knowledge of metal tools created further change, for not only farmers but also manufacturing artisans benefited from better tools. Woodworking, for example, became steadily more elaborate as metal replaced stone, bone, and fire in the cutting and connecting of wood. We are, of course, still living in the metal ages today, although we rely primarily on iron—whose working was introduced around

1500 B.C.E. by herding peoples who invaded the Middle East—rather than copper and bronze.

CIVILIZATION

■ ■ *The emergence of civilization occurred in many though not all agricultural societies. It often built on additional changes in technology including the introduction of metal tools. Most civilizations had common features including cities, writing, and formal states. Early civilizations included Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus River, and China. These can be compared to determine other commonalities plus early differences.*

Agriculture encouraged the formation of larger as well as more stable human communities than had existed before Neolithic times. A few Mesolithic groups had formed villages, particularly where opportunities for fishing were good, as around some of the lakes in Switzerland. However, most hunting peoples moved in relatively small groups, or tribes, each containing anywhere from 40 to 60 individuals, and they could not settle in a single spot without the game running out. With agriculture, these constraints changed. To be sure, some agricultural peoples did move around. A system called *slash and burn agriculture* existed in a few parts of the world, including portions of the American South, until about 150 years ago. Here, people would burn off trees in an area, farm intensively for a few years until the soil was depleted, and then move on. Herding peoples also moved in tribal bands, with strong kinship ties. But, most agricultural peoples did not have new lands close by to which they could move after a short time. And, there were advantages to staying put: Houses could be built to last, wells built to bring up water, and other “expensive” improvements afforded because they would serve many generations. In the Middle East, China, and parts of Africa and India, a key incentive to stability was the need for irrigation devices to channel river water to the fields. This same need helps explain why agriculture generated communities and not a series of isolated farms. Small groups simply could not regulate a river’s flow or build and maintain irrigation ditches and sluices. Irrigation and defense encouraged villages—groupings of several hundred people—as the characteristic pattern of residence in almost all agricultural societies from Neolithic days until our own century. Neolithic settlements spread widely in agricultural societies. New ones continued to be founded as



Figure 1.1 *Skara Brae in the Orkney Islands off the Scottish coast is an excellent example of a late Neolithic settlement that dates from 1500 B.C.E.*

agriculture spread to regions such as northern Europe, as late as 1500 B.C.E. (Figure 1.1).

One Neolithic village, Çatal Hüyük in southern Turkey, has been elaborately studied by archeologists. It was founded about 7000 B.C.E. and was unusually large, covering about 32 acres. Houses were made of mud bricks set in timber frameworks, crowded together, with few windows. People seem to have spent a good bit of time on their rooftops in order to experience daylight and make social contacts—many broken bones attest to frequent falls. Some houses were lavishly decorated, mainly with hunting scenes. Religious images, both of powerful male hunters and “mother goddesses” devoted to agricultural fertility, were common, and some people in the village seem to have had special religious responsibilities. The village produced almost all the goods it consumed. Some trade was conducted with hunting peoples who lived in the hills surrounding the village, but apparently, it was initiated more to keep the peace than to produce economic gain. By 5500 B.C.E., important production activities developed in the village, including those of skilled toolmakers and jewelers. With time also came links with other communities. Large villages like Çatal Hüyük ruled over smaller communities. This meant that some fam-

ilies began to specialize in politics, and military forces were organized. Some villages became small cities, ruled by kings who were typically given divine status.

By 3000 B.C.E., Çatal Hüyük had become part of a civilization. Although many of the characteristics of civilization had existed by 6000 or 5000 B.C.E. in this Middle Eastern region, the origins of civilization, strictly speaking, approximately date to only 3500 B.C.E. The first civilization arose in the Middle East along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Another center of civilization started soon thereafter in northeast Africa (Egypt), and a third by around 2500 B.C.E. along the banks of the Indus River in northwestern India. These three early centers of civilization had some interaction. The fourth and fifth early civilization centers, a bit later and considerably more separate, arose in China and Central America.

Unlike an agricultural society, which can be rather precisely defined, civilization is a more subjective construct. Some scholars prefer to define civilizations only as societies with enough economic surplus to form divisions of labor and a social hierarchy involving significant inequalities. This is a very inclusive definition and under it most agricultural societies and even some groups like North American Indians who combined

farming with hunting would be drawn in. Others, however, press the concepts of civilization further, arguing, for example, that a chief difference between civilizations and other societies (whether hunting or agricultural) involves the emergence of formal political organizations, or states, as opposed to dependence on family or tribal ties. Most civilizations produce political units capable of ruling large regions and some, of course, characteristically produce huge kingdoms or empires.

The word *civilization* itself comes from the Latin term for *city*, and in truth most civilizations do depend on the existence of significant cities. In agricultural civilizations, most people do not live in cities. But, cities are crucial because they amass wealth and power, they allow the rapid exchange of ideas among relatively large numbers of people, thereby encouraging intellectual thought and artistic expression, and they promote specialization in manufacturing and trade.

Most civilizations developed writing, starting with the emergence of cuneiform (writing based on wedge-like characters; see p. 17) in the Middle East around 3500 B.C.E. Societies that employ writing can organize more elaborate political structures because of their ability to send messages and keep records. They can tax more efficiently and make contracts and treaties. Societies with writing also generate a more explicit intellectual climate because of their ability to record data and build on past, written wisdom. (One of the early written records from the Middle East is a recipe for making beer—a science of a sort.) Some experts argue that the very fact of becoming literate changes the way people think, encouraging them to consider the world as a place that can be understood by organized human inquiry, or “rationally,” and less by a host of spiritual beliefs. In all agricultural civilizations—that is, in all human history until less than 200 years ago—only a minority of people were literate, and usually that was a small minority. Nonetheless, the existence of writing did make a difference in such societies.

Since civilizations employ writing and are by definition unusually well organized, it is not surprising that almost all recorded history is about what has happened to civilized societies. We simply know the most about such societies, and we often are particularly impressed by what they produce in the way of great art or powerful rulers. It is also true that civilizations tend to be far more populous than noncivilized societies. Therefore, the history of civilization generally covers the history of most people.

But, the history of civilization does not include everybody. No hunting or nomadic peoples could gen-

erate a civilization—they lacked the stability and resources, and, with the exception of a limited number of signs and symbols, they never developed writing, unless it came from the outside. Furthermore, some agricultural peoples did not develop a full civilization, if our definition of civilization goes beyond the simple acquisition of economic surplus to formal states, cities, and writing. Portions of West Africa, fully agricultural and capable of impressive art, have long lacked writing, major cities, or more than loose regional government.

People in civilizations, particularly during the long centuries when they were surrounded by non-civilized peoples, characteristically looked down on any society lacking in civilization. The ancient Greeks coined the word “barbarian” to describe such cases—indeed, they were prone to regard all non-Greeks as barbarians. As a result of labels like this, it is easy to think of much human history as divided between civilizations and primitive nomads.

Such a distinction is incorrect, however, and it does not follow from the real historical meaning of civilization. In the first place, like agriculture, civilization brings losses as well as gains. As Çatal Hüyük moved toward civilization, distinctions based on social class and wealth increased. Civilizations often have firmer class or caste divisions, including slavery, than do “simpler” societies. They also often promote greater separation between the rulers and ruled, monarchs and subjects. Frequently, they are quite warlike, and there is greater inequality between men and women than in “noncivilized” societies. With civilization, more fully patriarchal structures emerged. In cities, male superiority was even clearer than in agriculture, as men did most of the manufacturing and assumed political and religious leadership, thus relegating women to subordinate roles. “Civilization,” then, is not a synonym for “good.”

By the same token, noncivilized societies may be exceptionally well regulated and have interesting, important cultures. Many noncivilized societies, in fact, have more regulations—in part, because they depend on rules transmitted by word of mouth—than civilized societies. Some of the societies most eager to repress anger and aggression in human dealings, such as Zuni Indians in the American Southwest, are noncivilized. Although some noncivilized societies treat old people cruelly, others display more respect and veneration toward elders than most civilizations do. In other words, noncivilized societies are not all alike. They are not characteristically populated with cannibals and warmongers, but rather are often shocked by the doings of civilized peoples. For

example, American Indians were appalled at the insistence of European settlers on spanking their children, a behavior they regarded as vicious and unnecessary. A fascinating, although probably unanswerable, question involves determining whether or not the civilization form has left more or less good in its wake.

The development of civilization continued the process of technological change and political organization, of increasingly elaborate artistic and intellectual forms. It is in this context that the term has real meaning and in which it legitimately commands the attention of most historians.

Civilizations also increased human impact on the environment. For example, the first center of copper production in Europe, along the Danube valley, led to such deforestation that the fuel supply was destroyed, and the industry collapsed after about 3000 B.C.E. The extensive agriculture needed to support Indus river cities opened the land to erosion and flooding because of overuse of the soil and removal of trees.

Having started in 3500 B.C.E., civilization developed in its four initial centers—the Middle East, Egypt, northwestern India, and northern China—over the following 2500 years. These areas covered only a tiny portion of the inhabited parts of the world, although they were the most densely populated. Such early civilizations, all clustered in key river valleys, were in a way pilot tests of the new form of social organization. Only after about 1000 B.C.E. did a more consistent process of development and spread of civilization begin—and with it, came the main threads of world history. However, the great civilizations unquestionably built on the achievements of the river valley pioneers, and so some understanding of this contribution to the list of early human accomplishments is essential.

Tigris-Euphrates Civilization

The most noteworthy achievements of the earliest civilizations were early versions of organizational and cultural forms that most of us now take for granted—writing itself, formal codes of law, city planning and architecture, and institutions for trade, including the use of money. Once developed, most of these building blocks of human organization did not have to be reinvented, although in some cases they spread only slowly to other parts of the world.

It is not surprising then, given its lead in agriculture, metalworking, and village structure, that the Middle East generated the first example of human civilization. Indeed, the first civilization, founded in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in a part

of the Middle East long called Mesopotamia, forms one of only a few cases of a civilization developed absolutely from scratch—and with no examples from any place else to imitate. (Chinese civilization and civilization in Central America also developed independently.) By 4000 B.C.E., the farmers of Mesopotamia were familiar with bronze and copper and had already invented the wheel for transportation. They had a well-established pottery industry and interesting artistic forms. Farming in this area, because of the need for irrigation, required considerable coordination among communities, and this in turn served as the basis for complex political structures.

By about 3500 B.C.E., a people who had recently invaded this region, the Sumerians, developed a cuneiform alphabet, the first known case of human writing. Their alphabet at first used different pictures to represent various objects but soon shifted to the use of geometric shapes to symbolize spoken sounds. The early Sumerian alphabet may have had as many as 2000 such symbols, but this number was later reduced to about 300. Even so, writing and reading remained complex skills, which only a few had time to master. Scribes wrote on clay tablets, using styluses shaped quite like the modern ballpoint pen (Figure 1.2).

Sumerian art developed steadily, as statues and painted frescoes were used to adorn the temples of the gods. Statues of the gods also decorated individual homes. Sumerian science aided a complex agricultural society, as people sought to learn more about the movement of the sun and stars—thus founding the science of astronomy—and improved their mathematical knowledge. (Astronomy defined the calendar and provided the astrological forecasts widely used in politics and religion.) The Sumerians employed a system of numbers based on units of 10, 60, and 360 that we still use in calculating circles and hours. In other words, Sumerians and their successors in Mesopotamia created patterns of observation and abstract thought about nature that a number of civilizations, including our own, still rely on, and they also introduced specific systems, such as charts of major constellations, that have been current at least among educated people for 5000 years, not only in the Middle East but, by later imitation, in India and Europe as well.

Sumerians developed complex religious rituals. Each city had a patron god and erected impressive shrines to please and honor this and other deities. Massive towers, called ziggurats, formed the first monumental architecture in this civilization. Professional priests operated these temples and conducted the rituals within. Sumerians believed in many powerful gods,

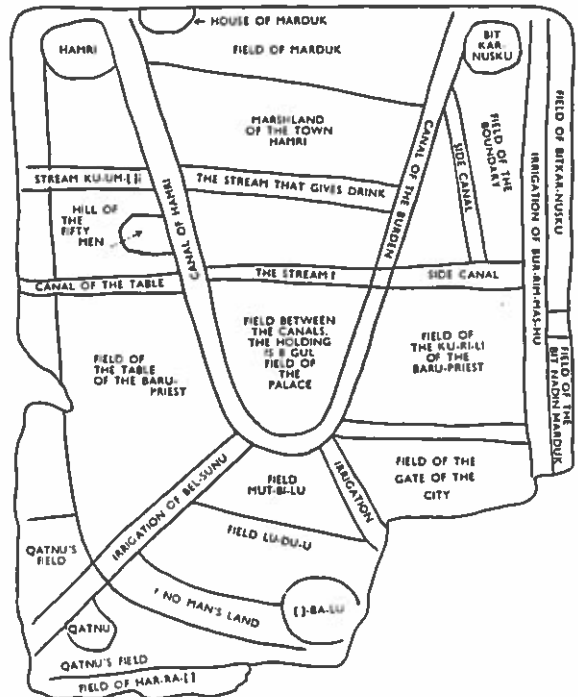


Figure 1.2 One of the early uses of writing involved marking property boundaries. This picture shows cuneiform writing on a Mesopotamian map from about 1300 B.C.E. The map focuses on defining the king's estate, with sections for priests and for key gods such as Marduk. In what ways did writing improve property maps?

for the nature on which their agriculture depended often seemed swift and unpredictable. Prayers and offerings to prevent floods as well as to protect good health were a vital part of Sumerian life. Sumerian ideas about the divine force in natural objects—in rivers, trees, and mountains—were common among early agricultural peoples; a religion of this sort, which sees gods in many aspects of nature, is known as polytheism. More specifically, Sumerian religious notions, notably their ideas about the gods' creation of the earth from water and about the divine punishment of humans through floods, later influenced the writers of the Old Testament and thus continue to play a role in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim cultures. Sumerian religious ideas, which had a decidedly gloomy cast, also included a belief in an afterlife of punishment—an original version of the concept of hell.

Sumerian political structures stressed tightly organized city-states, ruled by a king who claimed divine authority. The Sumerian state had carefully defined boundaries, unlike the less formal territories of precivilized villages in the region. Here is a key early example of how civilization and a more formal

political structure came together. The government helped regulate religion and enforce its duties; it also provided a court system in the interests of justice. Kings were originally military leaders during times of war, and the function of defense and war, including leadership of a trained army, remained vital in Sumerian politics. Kings and the noble class, along with the priesthood, controlled considerable land, which was worked by slaves. Thus began a tradition of slavery that would long mark Middle Eastern societies. Warfare remained vital to ensure supplies of slaves taken as prisoners during combat. At the same time, slavery was a variable state of existence, and many slaves were able to earn money and even buy their freedom.

The Sumerians added to their region's agricultural prosperity not only by using wheeled carts but also by learning about fertilizers and by adopting silver as a means of exchange for buying and selling—an early form of money. However, the region was also hard to defend and proved a constant temptation to outside invaders from Sumerian times to the present. The Sumerians themselves fell to a people called the Akkadians, who continued much of Sumerian culture.

DOCUMENT

Hammurabi's Law Code

Hammurabi, as king of Babylon, united Mesopotamia under his rule from about 1800 to 1750 B.C.E. His law code, the earliest such compilation still in existence, was discovered on a stone slab in Iran in 1901 C.E. Not a systematic presentation, it was a collection of exemplary cases designed to set general standards of justice. The code provides vital insights into the nature of social relations and family structure in this ancient civilization. Examples of the Hammurabic code follow:

When Marduk commanded me to give justice to the people of the land and to let [them] have [good] governance, I set forth truth and justice throughout the land [and] prospered the people.

At that time:

If a man has accused a man and has charged him with manslaughter and then has not proved [it against] him, his accuser shall be put to death.

If a man has charged a man with sorcery and then has not proved [it against] him, he who is charged with the sorcery shall go to the holy river; he shall leap into the holy river and, if the holy river overwhelms him, his accuser shall take and keep his house; if the holy river proves that man clear [of the offense] and he comes back safe, he who has charged him with sorcery shall be put to death; he who leapt into the holy river shall take and keep the house of his accuser.

If a man has come forward in a case to bear witness to a felony and then has not proved the statement that he has made, if that case [is] a capital one, that man shall be put to death.

If he has come forward to bear witness to [a claim for] corn or money, he shall remain liable for the penalty for that suit.

If a judge has tried a suit, given a decision, caused a sealed tablet to be executed, [and] thereafter varies his judgment, they shall convict that judge of varying [his] judgment and he shall pay twelvefold the claim in that suit; then they shall remove him from his place on the bench of judges in the assembly, and he shall not [again] sit in judgment with the judges.

If a free person helps a slave to escape, the free person will be put to death.

If a man has committed robbery and is caught, that man shall be put to death.

If the robber is not caught, the man who has been robbed shall formally declare whatever he has lost before a god, and the city and the mayor in whose territory or district the robbery has been committed shall replace whatever he has lost for him.

If [it is] the life [of the owner that is lost], the city or the mayor shall pay one maneh of silver to his kinsfolk.

If a person owes money and Adad [the river god] has flooded the person's field, the person will not give any grain [tax] or pay any interest in that year.

If a person is too lazy to make the dike of his field strong and there is a break in the dike and water destroys his own farmland, that person will make good the grain [tax] that is destroyed.

If a merchant increases interest beyond that set by the king and collects it, that merchant will lose what was lent.

If a trader borrows money from a merchant and then denies the fact, that merchant in the presence of god and witnesses will prove the trader borrowed the money and the trader will pay the merchant three times the amount borrowed.

If the husband of a married lady has accused her but she is not caught lying with another man, she shall take an oath by the life of a god and return to her house.

If a man takes himself off and there is not the [necessary] maintenance in his house, his wife [so long as] her [husband is delayed], shall keep [herself chaste; she shall not] enter [another man's house].

If that woman has not kept herself chaste but enters another man's house, they shall convict that woman and cast her into the water.

If a son strikes his father, they shall cut off his forehead.

If a man has put out the eye of a free man, they shall put out his eye.

If he breaks the bone of a [free] man, they shall break his bone.

If he puts out the eye of a villain or breaks the bone of a villain, he shall pay one maneh of silver.

If he puts out the eye of a [free] man's slave or breaks the bone of a [free] man's slave, he shall pay half his price.

If a man knocks out the tooth of a [free] man equal [in rank] to him[self], they shall knock out his tooth.

If he knocks out the tooth of a villain, he shall pay one-third maneh of silver.

If a man strikes the cheek of a [free] man who is superior [in rank] to him[self], he shall be beaten with 60 stripes with a whip of ox-hide in the assembly.

If the man strikes the cheek of a free man equal to him[self in rank], he shall pay one maneh of silver.

If a villain strikes the cheek of a villain, he shall pay ten shekels of silver.

If the slave of a [free] man strikes the cheek of a free man, they shall cut off his ear.

Questions: What can you tell from the Hammurabic code about the social and family structure of Mesopotamia? What is the relationship between law and trade? Why did agricultural civilizations such as Babylon insist on harsh punishments for crimes? What religious and magical beliefs does the document suggest? Using specific examples, show how interpreting this document for significant historical meaning differs from simply reading it.

Another period of decline was followed by conquest by the Babylonians, who extended their own empire and thus helped bring civilization to other parts of the Middle East. It was under Babylonian rule that the king Hammurabi introduced the most famous early code of law, boasting of his purpose:

to promote the welfare of the people, me Hammurabi, the devout, god-fearing prince, to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, that the strong might not oppress the weak.

Hammurabi's code established rules of procedure for courts of law and regulated property rights and the duties of family members, setting harsh punishments for crimes.

For many centuries during and after the heyday of Babylon, peace and civilization in the Middle East were troubled by the invasions of hunting and herding groups. Indo-European peoples pressed in from the north, starting about 2100 B.C.E. In the Middle East itself, invasions by Semitic peoples from the south were more important, and Semitic peoples and languages increasingly dominated the region. The new arrivals adopted the culture of the conquered peoples as their own so the key features of the civilization persisted. But, large political units declined in favor of smaller city-states or regional kingdoms, particularly during the centuries of greatest turmoil, between 1200 and 900 B.C.E. Thereafter, new invaders, first the Assyrians and then the Persians, created large new empires in the Middle East.

Egyptian Civilization

A second center of civilization sprang up in northern Africa, along the Nile River. Egyptian civilization, formed by 3000 B.C.E., benefited from the trade and technological influence of Mesopotamia, but it produced a quite different society and culture. Less open to invasion, Egypt retained a unified state throughout most of its history. The king, or pharaoh, possessed immense power. The Egyptian economy was more fully government-directed than its Mesopotamian counterpart, which had a more independent business class. Government control may have been necessary because of the complexity of coordinating irrigation along the Nile. It nonetheless resulted in godlike status for the pharaohs, who built splendid tombs for themselves—the pyramids—from 2700 B.C.E. onward. During periods of weak rule and occasional invasions, Egyptian society suffered a decline, but revivals kept the framework of Egyptian civilization intact until after 1000 B.C.E. (Map 1.3). At key points, Egyptian influ-



Map 1.3 *Egypt, Kush, and Axum, Successive Dynasties.* As Egypt weakened, kingdoms farther up the Nile and deeper into Africa rose in importance.

ence spread up the Nile to the area now known as the Sudan, with an impact on the later development of African culture. The kingdom of Kush interacted with Egypt and invaded it at some point.

Neither Egyptian science nor the Egyptian alphabet was as elaborate as its Mesopotamian equal, although mathematics was more advanced in this civilization. Egyptian art was exceptionally lively; cheerful and colorful pictures decorated not only the tombs—where the belief in an afterlife made people want to be surrounded by objects of beauty—but also palaces and furnishings. Egyptian architectural forms were also quite influential, not only in Egypt but in other parts of the Mediterranean as well. Egyptian mathematics produced the idea of a day divided into 24 hours, and here too Egypt influenced the development of later Mediterranean cultures.

Indian and Chinese River Valley Civilizations

River valley civilizations developed in two other centers. A prosperous urban civilization emerged along the Indus River by 2500 B.C.E., supporting several large

cities, including Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, whose houses even had running water (Figure 1.3). Indus River peoples had trading contacts with Mesopotamia, but they developed their own distinctive alphabet and artistic forms. Invasions by Indo-Europeans, however, resulted in such complete destruction of this culture that we know little about its nature or its subsequent influence on India. Harappan writing, for example, has yet to be deciphered. It remains true that civilization never had to be fully reinvented in India. The Indo-European invaders combined their religious and political ideas with those that had taken root in the early cities. In recent times, Indians' pride in their early civilized history has become an important part of their national identity.

Civilization along the Hwang He (Yellow River) in China developed in considerable isolation, although some overland trading contact with India and the Middle East did develop. Hwang He civilization was the subject of much later Chinese legend, which praised the godlike kings of early civilization, starting with the



Figure 1.3 The ruins at Mohenjo-Daro are still impressive more than four millennia after the city was established.

IN DEPTH

The Idea of Civilization in World Historical Perspective

The belief that there are fundamental differences between civilized and “barbaric” or “savage” peoples is very ancient and widespread. For thousands of years the Chinese set themselves off from cattle- and sheep-herding peoples of the vast plains to the north and west of China proper, whom they saw as barbarians. To the Chinese, being civilized was cultural, not biological or racial. If barbarians learned the Chinese language and adopted Chinese ways—from the clothes they wore to the food they ate—they were regarded as civilized.

A similar pattern of demarcation and cultural absorption was found among the American Indian peoples of present-day Mexico. Those who settled in the valleys of the mountainous interior, where they built great civilizations, lived in fear of invasions by peoples they regarded as barbarous and called *chichimecs*, meaning “sons of the dog.” The latter were nomadic hunters and gatherers who periodically moved down from the desert regions of north Mexico into the fertile central valleys in search of game and settlements to pillage. The Aztecs were simply the last, and perhaps the most fierce, of a long line of *chichimec* peoples who entered the valleys and conquered the urban-based empires that had developed there. But after the conquerors settled down, they adopted many of the religious beliefs and institutional patterns and much of the material culture of defeated peoples.

The word *civilization* is derived from the Latin word *civilis*, meaning “of the citizens.” The term was coined by the Romans. They used it to distinguish between themselves as citizens of a cosmopolitan, urban-based civilization and the “inferior” peoples who lived in the forests and deserts on the fringes of their Mediterranean empire. Centuries earlier, the Greeks, who had contributed much to the rise of Roman civilization, made a similar distinction between themselves and outsiders. Because the languages of the non-Greek peoples to the north of the Greek heartlands sounded like senseless babble to the Greeks, they lumped all the outsiders together as *barbarians*, which

meant “those who cannot speak Greek.” As in the case of the Chinese and Aztecs, the boundaries between civilized and barbarian for the Greeks and Romans were cultural, not biological. Regardless of the color of one’s skin or the shape of one’s nose, it was possible for free people to become members of a Greek *polis*—city-state—or to become Roman citizens by adopting Greek or Roman customs and swearing allegiance to the polis or the emperor.

Until the 17th and 18th centuries C.E., the priority given to cultural attributes (e.g., language, dress, manners) as the means by which civilized peoples set themselves off from barbaric ones was rarely challenged. But in those centuries, two major changes occurred among thinkers in western Europe. First, efforts were made not only to define the differences between civilized and barbarian but to identify a series of stages in human development that ranged from the lowest savagery to the highest civilization. Depending on the writer in question, candidates for civilization ranged from Greece and Rome to (not surprisingly) Europe of the 17th and 18th centuries. Most of the other peoples of the globe, whose “discovery” since the 15th century had prompted the efforts to classify them in the first place, were ranked in increasingly complex hierarchies. Peoples such as the Chinese and the Arabs, who had created great cities, monumental architecture, writing, advanced technology, and large empires, usually won a place along with the Europeans near the top of these ladders of human achievement. Nomadic, cattle- and sheep-herding peoples, such as the Mongols of Central Asia, usually were classified as barbarians. Civilized and barbarian peoples were pitted against various sorts of *savages*. These ranged from the hunters and gatherers who inhabited much of North America and Australia to many peoples in Africa and Asia, whom the Europeans believed had not advanced beyond the most primitive stages of social and political development.

The second major shift in Western ideas about civilization began at the end of the 18th century but did not really take hold until a century later. In keeping with a growing emphasis in European thinking and social interaction on racial or biological differences, modes of human social organization

and cultural expression were increasingly linked to what were alleged to be the innate capacities of each human race. Although no one could agree on what a race was or how many races there were, most European writers argued that some races were more inventive, moral, courageous, and artistic—thus more capable of building civilizations—than others. Of course, white (or Caucasian) Europeans were considered by white European authors to be the most capable of all. The hierarchy from savage to civilized took on a color dimension, with white at the top, where the civilized peoples clustered, to yellow, red, brown, and black in descending order.

Some authors sought to reserve all the attainments of civilization for whites, or peoples of European stock. As the evolutionary theories of thinkers such as Charles Darwin came into vogue in the late 1800s, race and level of cultural development were seen in the perspective of thousands of years of human change and adaptation rather than as being fixed in time. Nevertheless, this new perspective had little effect on the rankings of different human groups. Civilized whites were simply seen as having evolved much further than backward and barbaric peoples.

The perceived correspondence between race and level of development and the hardening of the boundaries between civilized and “inferior” peoples affected much more than intellectual discourse about the nature and history of human society. These beliefs were used to justify European imperialist expansion, which was seen as a “civilizing mission” aimed at uplifting barbaric and savage peoples across the globe. In the last half of the 19th century virtually all non-Western peoples came to be dominated by the Europeans, who were confident that they, as representatives of the highest civilization ever created, were best equipped to govern lesser breeds of humans.

In the 20th century much of the intellectual baggage that once gave credibility to the racially embedded hierarchies of civilized and savage peoples has been discarded. Racist thinking has been discredited by 20th-century developments,

including the revolt of the colonized peoples and the crimes committed by the Nazis before and during World War II in the name of racial purification. In addition, these ideas have failed because racial supremacists cannot provide convincing proof of innate differences in mental and physical aptitude between various human groups. These trends, as well as research that has resulted in a much more sophisticated understanding of evolution, have led to the abandonment of rigid and self-serving 19th-century ideas about civilization. Yet even though non-European peoples such as the Indians and Chinese are increasingly given credit for their civilized attainments, much ethnocentrism remains in the ways social theorists determine who is civilized and who is not.

Perhaps the best way to avoid the tendency to define the term with reference to one’s own society is to view civilization as one of several human approaches to social organization rather than attempting to identify specific kinds of cultural achievement (e.g., writing, cities, monumental architecture). All peoples, from small bands of hunters and gatherers to farmers and factory workers, live in societies. All societies produce cultures: combinations of the ideas, objects, and patterns of behavior that result from human social interaction. But not all societies and cultures generate the surplus production that permits the levels of specialization, scale, and complexity that distinguish civilizations from other modes of social organization. All peoples are intrinsically capable of building civilizations, but many have lacked the resource base, historical circumstances, or desire to do so.

Questions: Identify a society you consider to be civilized. What criteria did you use to determine that it was civilized? Can you apply those criteria to other societies? Can you think of societies that might not fit your criteria and yet be civilizations? Do the standards that you and others use reflect your own society’s norms and achievements rather than neutral, more universal criteria?

Visualizing THE PAST

Mesopotamia in Maps

The Mesopotamian civilizations steadily expanded from their roots in the fertile valley between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers throughout their centuries of existence. Reading the maps can help explain the nature of the civilizations in the region.

What do these maps suggest about the relationship between Mesopotamian civilizations and the topography of the Middle East? Does geography suggest reasons for invasion and political instability

in this civilization center? Did later empires in the region have the same relationship to river valleys as did the earlier states? What might have caused the change? Why did even the larger empires not spread through the Arabian peninsula? What were the potential contacts between Mesopotamia and other river valley civilization centers? Why has the Middle East been so significant in European, African, and Asian history?



Mesopotamia and the Middle East

mythic ancestor of the Chinese, P'an Ku. The Chinese had an unusually elaborate concept of their remote origins, and they began early to record a part-fact, part-fiction history of their early kings. What is clear is the following: First, the existence of an organized state that carefully regulated irrigation in the fertile but flood-prone river valley. Second, by about 2000 B.C.E. the Chinese had produced an advanced technology and developed an elaborate intellectual life. They had learned how to ride horses and were skilled in pottery; they used bronze well and by 1000 B.C.E. had introduced iron, which they soon learned to work with coal. Their writing progressed from knotted ropes to scratches of lines on bone to the invention of ideographic symbols. Science, particularly astronomy, arose early. Chinese art emphasized delicate designs, and the Chinese claim an early interest in music (Figure 1.4). Because of limits on building materials in the region, the Chinese did not construct many massive monuments, choosing to live in simple houses built of mud. By about 1500 B.C.E., a line of kings called the Shang ruled over the Hwang He valley, and these rulers did construct some impressive tombs and palaces. Invasions disrupted the Shang dynasty and caused a temporary decline in civilization. However, there was less of a break between the river valley society and the later, fuller development of civilization in China than occurred in other centers.

THE HERITAGE OF THE RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATIONS

■ *River valley civilizations left a number of durable achievements. But most river valley civilizations declined after about 1200 B.C.E. A number of small centers emerged in the Middle East; these introduced further innovations including the religion of Judaism.*

Many accomplishments of the river valley civilizations had a lasting impact. Monuments such as the Egyptian pyramids have long been regarded as one of the wonders of the world. Other achievements, although more prosaic, are fundamental to world history even today: the invention of the wheel, the taming of the horse, the creation of usable alphabets and writing implements, the production of key mathematical concepts such as square roots, the development of well-organized monarchies and



Figure 1.4 This elaborately decorated bronze incense vessel from the Shang era, with its whimsical horse and catlike figure, shows the high level of artistic expression achieved very early in Chinese history. It also demonstrates a high level of metalworking ability, which carried over into Shang weapons and tools. Although the design of these ritual vessels often was abstract, mythical creatures such as dragons and sacred birds were deftly cast in bronzes that remain some of the great treasures of Chinese art.

bureaucracies, and the invention of functional calendars and other divisions of time. These basic achievements, along with the awe that the early civilizations continue to inspire, are vital legacies to the whole of human history. Almost all the major alphabets in the world today are derived from the writing forms pioneered in the river valleys, apart from the even more durable concept of writing itself. Almost all later civilizations, then, built on the massive foundations first constructed in the river valleys.

Despite these accomplishments, most of the river valley civilizations were in decline by 1000 B.C.E. The civilizations had flourished for as many as 2500 years,

although of course with periodic disruptions and revivals. But, particularly in India, the new waves of invasion did produce something of a break in the history of civilization, a dividing line between the river valley pioneers and later cultures.

And, this break raises one final question: Besides the vital achievements—the fascinating monuments and the indispensable advances in technology, science, and art—what legacies did the river valley civilizations impart for later ages? The question is particularly important for the Middle East and Egypt. In India, we must frankly admit much ignorance about possible links between Indus River accomplishments and what came later; in China, there is a definite connection between the first civilization and subsequent forms. Indeed, the new dynasty in China, the Zhou, took over from the Shang about 1000 B.C.E., ruling a loose coalition of regional lords; recorded Chinese history flowed smoothly at this point. But, what was the legacy of Mesopotamia and Egypt for later civilizations in or near their centers?

Europeans, even North Americans, are sometimes prone to claim these cultures as the “origins” of the Western civilization in which we live. These claims should not be taken too literally. It is not altogether clear that either Egypt or Mesopotamia contributed much to later political traditions, although the Roman Empire emulated the concept of a god-like king, as evidenced in the trappings of the office, and the existence of strong city-state governments in the Middle East itself continued to be significant. Ideas about slavery may also have been passed on from these early civilizations. Specific scientific achievements are vital, but scholars argue over how much of a connection exists between Mesopotamian and Egyptian science and later Greek thinking, aside from certain techniques of measuring time or charting the stars. Some historians of philosophy have asserted a basic division between a Mesopotamian and Chinese understanding of nature, which they claim affected later civilizations around the Mediterranean in contrast to China. Mesopotamians were prone to stress a gap between humankind and nature, whereas Chinese thinking developed along ideas of basic harmony. It is possible, then, that some fundamental thinking helped shape later outlooks, but the continuities here are not easy to assess. Mesopotamian art and Egyptian architecture had a more measurable influence on Greek styles, and through these, in turn, later European and Muslim cultures. The Greeks thus learned much about temple build-

ing from the Egyptians, whose culture had influenced island civilizations, such as Crete, which then affected later Greek styles.

There was a final connection between early and later civilizations in the form of regional cultures that sprang up under the influence of Mesopotamia and Egypt, along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean mainly after 1200 B.C.E. Although the great empires from Sumer through Babylon were disrupted and the Egyptian state finally declined, civilization in the Middle East had spread widely enough to encourage a set of smaller cultures capable of surviving and even flourishing after the great empires became weak. These cultures produced important innovations that would affect later civilizations in the Middle East and throughout the Mediterranean. They also created a diverse array of regional identities that would continue to mark the Middle East even as other forces, like the Roman Empire or the later religion of Islam, took center stage. Several of these small cultures proved immensely durable, and in their complexity and capacity to survive, they would influence other parts of the world as well.

A people called the Phoenicians, for example, devised a greatly simplified alphabet with 22 letters around 1300 B.C.E.; this alphabet, in turn, became the predecessor of Greek and Latin alphabets. The Phoenicians also improved the Egyptian numbering system and, as great traders, set up colony cities in North Africa and on the coasts of Europe. Another regional group, the Lydians, first introduced coined money.

The most influential of the smaller Middle Eastern groups, however, were the Jews, who gave the world the first clearly developed monotheistic religion. We have seen that early religions, both before and after the beginnings of civilization, were polytheistic, claiming that many gods and goddesses worked to control nature and human destiny. The Jews, a Semitic people influenced by Babylonian civilization, settled near the Mediterranean around 1200 B.C.E. The Jewish state was small and relatively weak, retaining independence only when other parts of the Middle East were in political turmoil. What was distinctive about this culture was its firm belief that a single God, Jehovah, guided the destinies of the Jewish people. Priests and prophets defined and emphasized this belief, and their history of God’s guidance of the Jews formed the basis for the Hebrew Bible. The Jewish religion and moral code persisted even as the Jewish state suffered domination by a series of foreign rulers,

IN DEPTH

The Legacy of Asia's First Civilizations

In their size, complexity, and longevity, the first civilizations to develop in south Asia and China match, and in some respects surpass, the earliest civilizations that arose in Mesopotamia and Egypt. But the long-term impact of the Harappan civilization in the Indus basin was strikingly different from that of the Shang and Zhou civilization in north China. The loess zone and north China plain where the Shang and Zhou empires took hold became the center of a continuous civilization that was to last into the 20th century C.E. and, some historians would argue, to the present day. Although regions farther south, such as the Yangtze basin, would in some time periods enjoy political, economic, and cultural predominance within China, the capital and center of Chinese civilization repeatedly returned to the Yellow River area and the north China plain. By contrast, the Indus valley proved capable of nurturing a civilization that endured for more than a thousand years. But when Harappa collapsed, the plains of the Indus were bypassed in favor of the far more lush and extensive lands in the basin of the Ganges River network to the east. Although the Indus would later serve, for much shorter time spans, as the seat of empires, the core areas of successive Indian civilizations were far to the east and south.

The contrast between the fates of the original geographic centers of Indian and Chinese civilizations is paralleled by the legacies of the civilizations themselves. Harappa was destroyed, and it disappeared from history for thousands of years. Although the peoples who built the Indus complex left their mark on subsequent Indian culture, they did not pass on the fundamental patterns of civilized life that they had evolved. Their mother-goddess, yoga positions, and the dancing god of fertility endured. Some of their symbols, such as the swastika and the *lingam* (a phallic image, usually made of stone), were prominent in later artistic and religious traditions. The Harappans' tanks, or public bathing ponds, remain a central feature of Indian cities, particularly in the south. Their

techniques of growing rice and cotton were preserved by cultivating peoples fleeing nomadic incursions and were later taken up by the newly arrived Indo-Aryan tribes.

Nearly everything else was lost. In contrast to the civilizations of Mesopotamia, which fell but were replaced by new civilizations that preserved and built on the achievements of their predecessors, much of what the Harappan peoples had accomplished had to be redone by later civilized peoples. The cities of the Indus civilization were destroyed, and comparable urban centers did not reappear in south Asia for more than a thousand years. The Harappans' remarkably advanced standards for measuring distance and weight ceased to be used. Their system of writing was forgotten, and when rediscovered it was celebrated as an intriguing but very dead language from the past. Harappan skills in community planning, sewage control, and engineering were meaningless to the nomadic peoples who took control of their homelands. The Harappan penchant for standardization, discipline, and state control was profoundly challenged by the brawling, independent-minded warriors who supplanted them as masters of the Indian subcontinent.

In contrast to the civilization of the Indus valley, the original civilization of China has survived nomadic incursions and natural catastrophes and has profoundly influenced the course of Chinese history. Shang irrigation and dike systems and millet and wheat cultivation provided the basis for the innovations and expansion of subsequent dynasties. Shang and Zhou fortified towns and villages surrounded with stamped earth walls have persisted as the predominant patterns of settlement throughout Chinese history. The founders of the Shang and Zhou dynasties have been revered by scholars and peasants alike as philosopher-kings who ought to be emulated by leaders at all levels. The Shang and Zhou worship of heaven and their veneration of ancestors have remained central to Chinese religious belief and practice for thousands of years. The concept of the Mandate of Heaven has been pivotal in Chinese political thinking and organization.

Above all, the system of writing that was originally formulated for Shang oracles developed into

the key means of communication between the elites of the many peoples who lived in the core regions of Chinese civilization. The scholar-bureaucrats, who developed this written language and also profited the most from it, soon emerged as the dominant force in Chinese culture and society. Chinese characters provided the basis for the educational system and bureaucracy that were to hold Chinese civilization together through thousands of years of invasions and political crises. Many of the key ingredients of China's early civilizations have remained central throughout Chinese history. This persistence has made for a continuity of identity that is unique to the Chinese people.

It has also meant that China, like the early civilizations of Mesopotamia, was one of the great sources of civilizing influences in human history as a whole. The area affected by ideas developed in China was less extensive than that to which the peoples of Mesopotamia gave writing, law, and their other great achievements. But contacts with China provided critical impetus for the development of civilization in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Writing and political organization were two areas in which the earliest formulations of Chinese civilization vitally affected other peoples. In later periods, Chinese thought and other modes of cultural expression such as art, architecture, and etiquette also strongly influenced the growth of civilized life throughout east Asia.

China's technological innovation was to have an impact on global civilization comparable to that of early Mesopotamia. Beginning with increasingly sophisticated irrigation systems, the Chinese have devised a remarkable share of humankind's basic machines and engineering principles. In the Shang and Zhou eras they also pioneered key processes such as silk manufacturing.

The reasons for the differing legacies of Harappan and early Chinese civilizations are numerous and complex. But critical to the disappearance of the first and the resilience of the second were different patterns of interaction between the sedentary peoples who built early civilizations and the nomadic herders who challenged them. In India, the nomadic threat was remote—perhaps nonexistent—for centuries.

The Harappan peoples were deficient in military technology and organization. When combined with natural calamities, the waves of warlike nomads migrating into the Indus region proved too much for the Harappan peoples to resist or absorb. The gap between the nomads' herding culture and the urban, agriculture-based Harappan civilization was too great to be bridged. Conflict between them may well have proved fatal to a civilization long in decline.

By contrast, the loess regions of northern China were open to invasions or migrations on the part of the nomadic herding peoples who lived to the north and west. Peoples from these areas moved almost continuously into the core zones of Chinese civilization. The constant threat posed by the nomads forced the peoples of the north China plain to develop the defenses and military technology needed to defend against nomadic raids or bids for lasting conquest. Contrasting cultures and ways of life strengthened the sense of identity of the cultivating peoples. The obvious nomadic presence prodded these same peoples to unite under strong rulers against the outsiders who did not share Chinese culture. Constant interaction with the nomads led the Shang peoples to develop a culture that was receptive to outside influences, social structures, and political systems. Nomadic energies reinvigorated and enriched the kingdoms of the Shang and the Zhou, in contrast to India, where they proved catastrophic for the isolated and far less adaptable peoples of the Indus valley civilization.

Questions: Compare the early civilizations of India and China with those of Sumer and Egypt. Which are more similar in terms of longevity? Which factors were critical in the failure of the Indus civilization to persist? Which best explain Chinese longevity? Are these the same as those that account for the long life of Egyptian civilization? Why did the Indus civilization have such a limited impact on subsequent civilizations in India, in contrast to Sumer and the other civilizations of Mesopotamia? What is the chief legacy of each of these early civilizations to subsequent human history?

from 772 B.C.E. until the Romans seized the state outright in 63 B.C.E. Jewish monotheism has sustained a distinctive Jewish culture to our own day; it would also serve as a key basis for the development of both Christianity and Islam as major world religions.

Because Judaism stressed God's special compact with the chosen Jewish people, there was no premium placed on converting non-Jews. This belief helps explain the durability of the Jewish faith itself; it also kept the Jewish people in a minority position in the Middle East as a whole. However, the elaboration of monotheism had a wide, if not immediate, significance. In Jewish hands, the concept of God became less humanlike, more abstract. This represented a basic change in not only religion but also humankind's overall outlook. Jehovah had not only a power but also a rationality far different from what the traditional gods of the Middle East or Egypt possessed. These gods were whimsical and capricious; Jehovah was orderly and just, and individuals would know what to expect if they obeyed God's rules. God was also linked to ethical conduct, to proper moral behavior. Religion for the Jews was a way of life, not merely a set of rituals and ceremonies. The full impact of this religious transformation on Middle Eastern civilization would be realized only later, when Jewish beliefs were embraced by other, proselytizing faiths. However, the basic concept of monotheistic religion was one of the legacies of the end of the first great civilization period to the new cultures that would soon arise.

Conclusion

The First Civilizations

Overall, then, the river valley civilizations, flourishing for many centuries, created a basic set of tools, intellectual concepts such as writing and mathematics, and political forms that would persist and spread to other parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Invasion in India, and invasion and political decline in Egypt, marked a fairly firm break between river valley institutions and those that would later develop. Hwang He civilization, in contrast, flowed more fully into the more extensive Chinese civilization that would follow. The Middle East, where civilization had first been born, provided the most complex heritage of all. Here too there was a break between the initial series of riverine empires and the civilizations of Greece and Persia that would later dominate the region. However, the development of smaller cultures provided a bridge between the river valley period and later Middle Eastern society, pro-

ducing vital new inventions and ideas. The smaller cultures also generated a deeply entrenched network of regional or minority values and institutions that would continue to make the Middle East a complex, vibrant, and sometimes troubled part of the world.

One final result of the first, long period of human civilization is certainly clear: a pattern of division among the world's peoples. The diffusion of *Homo sapiens sapiens* set the initial stage. Small groups of people spread to almost every corner of the world but maintained little contact with each other thereafter. Separate languages and cultures developed widely. The rise of agriculture stimulated new links, and the spread of farming and new technologies began to cut into local isolation. Trade soon entered the picture: Although most commerce centered within a region, linking a city to its hinterland, a few routes traveled greater distances. By 1000 B.C.E., Phoenicians traded with Britain for metals (they bought lead to make bronze), while Chinese silk was reaching Egypt. Here we have one of the basic themes of world history: steadily proliferating contacts against a background of often fierce local identity.

The rise of civilization further reduced local autonomy, as kings and priests tried to spread trade contacts and cultural forms and warred to gain new territory. Civilization itself was an integrating force at a larger regional level, although, as we have seen in the Middle East, smaller identities persisted. However, individual civilizations had only sporadic contacts with each other. They, and their leading institutions and cultural forms, developed separately. Thus, four distinct centers of civilization developed (five, if the emerging Olmec culture in Mexico is included), each with widely varied patterns, from style of writing to beliefs about nature. The early civilizations shared important features, including cities, trade, and writing, that helped them meet the common basic definition of civilization in the first place. They also frequently developed some mutual relationships, although the Hwang He culture in China is one example of a civilization that flourished in relative isolation. Egypt and Mesopotamia, in particular, had recurrent contacts through trade and war. But, the values or belief systems of each civilization, and their manifestation in political and business styles, were not so easily disseminated. Even relatively close neighbors, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, developed radically different political attitudes, beliefs about death, and artistic styles. Civilization and considerable diversity thus co-existed hand in hand.

Further Readings

Two collections of sources offer some materials on early China and India: W. T. De Bary, Jr., et al., eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (1960) and W. T. De Bary, Jr., et al., eds., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (1958). On prehistory,

see Robert J. Wenke, *Patterns in Prehistory* (1984); Brian Fagan, *The Journey from Eden: The Peopling of Our World* (1990); Richard Adams, *Prehistoric Mesoamerica* (1991); and Chris Scarre, ed., *Smithsonian Timelines of the Ancient World* (1994). On early civilizations, see C. L. Redman, *The Rise of Civilization: From Early Farmers to Urban Society in the Ancient Near East* (1988); H. Crawford, *Sumer and the Sumerians* (1991); J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (1981); and A. Nibbi, *Ancient Egypt and Some Eastern Neighbors* (1981). On India and China, see G. O. Posschl, ed., *Harappan Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective* (1982); V. & R. Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan* (1982); Ping-ti Ho, *Cradle of the East: An Inquiry into the Indigenous Origins of Techniques and Ideas of Neolithic and Early History in China* (1975); Wolfram Eberhard, *History of China* (1977 ed.); and K. C. Wu, *The Chinese Heritage* (1982). On the crucial issue of gender, see M. Ehrenberg, *Women in Prehistory* (1989) and G. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (1993). On other key topics, refer to Richard Gabriel, *The Culture of War: Invention and Early Development* (1991); and Paul Bairach, *Cities and Economic Development: From the Dawn of History to the Present* (1988). For a challenging statement on the legacy of African and Middle Eastern societies to later Greece, read Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Africanistic Roots of*

Classical Civilization (1987). On the environment, see I. G. Simmons, *Environmental History* (1993). On patterns of contact, see Luce Boulnois, *The Silk Road* (1966); Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (1984); Xincu Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges* (1988); and Shereen Ratnagar, *Encounter: The Westerly Trade of the Harappan Civilization* (1981). The science and technology of the ancient world are discussed in Richard Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (1975); George Ifrah, *From One to Zero: A Universal History of Numbers* (1985); and Edgardo Marcorini, ed., *The History of Science and Technology: A Narrative Chronology* (1988).

On the Web

On early human life forms, up to *Homo sapiens sapiens*, see <http://www.iinet.net.au/~chawkins/heaven.htm>; for a virtual tour of Egyptian cities, see <http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/menu.html>; on the Gilgamesh epic, see <http://www.wsu.edu/~dvc/MESO/GILG.HTM>; on the evolution of Hindu epics and beliefs, see <http://campus.northpark.edu/history/WebChron/India/India.html>.



PART 2

The Classical Period, 1000 B.C.E.–500 C.E.

Chapters

- 2 Classical Civilization: China
- 3 Classical Civilization: India
- 4 Classical Civilization in the Mediterranean: Greece and Rome
- 5 The Classical Period: Directions, Diversities, and Declines by 500 C.E.

INTRODUCTION

Having quickly reviewed the hundreds of thousands of years of human prehistory and the 3000 years of developments in the river valley civilizations, we now slow down our discussion considerably. In the remainder of this book, we deal with the most recent 3000 years of human experience, from roughly 1000 years before the common era (B.C.E.) until the present. There are several reasons for this radical change of pace. Available knowledge is one. Civilizations over the past 3000 years have produced far more records than their predecessors. We not only know more about events such as wars and rebellions, but we also have a fuller sense of how ordinary people in these societies thought about daily issues such as health and family. More important is the fact that civilizations created after 1000 B.C.E. have direct links to civilizations which exist today. Chinese civilization, indeed, flows quite coherently from the middle of the Zhou dynasty (500 B.C.E.) to the present, with surges and declines and significant changes but with equally important connections to preceding events. Even in Western society, where there have been far more shattering disruptions than in China, we can look back to Greek

and Roman civilizations and find philosophies and political institutions directly related to contemporary ideas and forms.

The period in the history of civilization after the decline of the river valley cultures is known as classical; it runs from about 1000 B.C.E. until the fifth century C.E. In three parts of the world—China, India, and the Mediterranean area (which extends from the Middle East to southern Europe and North Africa)—new or renewed civilizations arose that

proved very durable. These civilizations did not touch all the world's peoples, although they spread well beyond the boundaries of the river valleys. It is important to remember that the history of classical civilization does not reflect the whole of world history during this period, because it does not include northern Europeans, central Asians, most Africans below the Sahara, and of course all American Indians. Historical developments in these regions were significant, but they followed more diverse patterns.

Also during the classical period, new empires arose around the Tigris-Euphrates valley, resuming the developments of those started by the Sumerians and Babylonians. First the Assyrians and then the Persians established large empires that at times extended through the Middle East and even into Europe and India. These empires boasted not only great power but also important new religious ideas and artistic styles that influenced both Greek and Indian cultures later on.

The three classical civilizations of China, India, and the Mediterranean left the most substantial legacies, however, and they also included the largest population concentrations in the world at that time. Moreover, all three classical civilizations set in motion institutions and values that would continue to shape these key parts of the world long after the classical period was over. Some of the continuing diversity of our world is the result of distinctions created during the classical period. Examples include the intense political centralization of the Chinese in contrast to the greater regionalism of Indian political life, or the emotional restraint the Chinese and Japanese were taught to exhibit compared with the greater display of feeling allowed many Mediterranean peoples.

All three classical civilizations built on the achievements of the river valley societies. In the Mediterranean, Greeks benefited from the influence of the earlier Minoan civilization, which had been centered on the Greek islands and partially derived from the greater Egyptian culture. Here, and still more obviously in India and China, classical peoples relied on the technologies developed in the river valley societies; they also utilized earlier artistic styles and possibly some more abstract ideas. And, of course, they adapted earlier writing systems and mathematical concepts.

However, the classical civilizations were not, in the final analysis, simple continuations of the earlier societies from which they derived. Use of iron weapons, first by invading peoples, gave governments a new military edge. Classical civilizations also created larger political structures, capable of controlling more territory. They shifted their geographical base: The center of Indian development moved from the Indus to the Ganges River; China expanded to include the rice-growing Yangtze River (Chiang Jiang) as well as the Hwang He. All the classical civilizations improved on earlier technologies for agriculture, manufacturing, and urban life. They established more elaborate philosophical and religious systems and expanded scientific and mathematical knowledge. The sophistication of these achievements helps account for the enduring influence of classical civilizations today, not only in the regions where they flourished but also in other areas of the world to which their heritage ultimately spread.

Expansion and integration dominated the outcomes of classical civilizations, even though each created a distinctive specific culture. Each classical civilization spread beyond

2000 B.C.E.	1000 B.C.E.	500 B.C.E.	250 B.C.E.	1 C.E.	250 C.E.	500 C.E.
1700 Indo-European invasions in Mediterranean	c. 1000 Polynesians reach Fiji, Samoa	c. 500 Lao-zi and Daoism	221–202 Qin dynasty; Great Wall	23–220 Later Han dynasty; invention of paper, compass	312–337 Constantine; division of Roman empire administration; toleration of Christianity	527–565 Justinian, Eastern Emperor
1500–1000 Vedic Age in India, formative period	1000–600 Epic Age in India, beginnings of early Hinduism	500–449 Greek defeat of Persia; spread of Athenian Empire	202 B.C.E.–220 C.E. Han dynasty	30 Crucifixion of Christ	319–540 Gupta Empire	589–618 Sui dynasty in China
1400 Kingdom of Mycenae	800 Rise of Greek city-states; Homeric epics, beginnings of Rome	470–430 Athens at height; Pericles, Phidias, Sophocles, Socrates, etc.	140–87 Rule of Wu Ti	c. 100 Root crops introduced to southern Africa through trade	450 Beginning of Hun invasions in India	600 Harsha's Empire
1029–258 Zhou dynasty	800–400 Spread of Olmec civilization: cultivation of maize (corn), potatoes, domestication of turkeys, dogs	431–404 Peloponnesian Wars	133 Decline of Roman republic	180 Death of Marcus Aurelius, beginning of decline of Roman Empire	476 Last Roman emperor deposed, fall of Rome	618 Tang dynasty
	700 Zhou decline	402–201 Warring States period in China	30 B.C.E.–220 C.E. Kushan rule in India, Hindu beliefs develop	2nd century Development of porcelain in China		
	563–483 Gautama Buddha	330 ff. Macedonian Empire, Alexander the Great	27 Augustus Caesar, rise of Roman Empire	220–589 Nomadic invasions, disorder, considerable spread of Buddhism in China		
	551–478 Confucius	330–100 Hellenistic period		231 Initial Germanic invasion effort		
	509–450 Beginnings of Roman republic; Twelve Tables of Law	264–146 Rome's Punic Wars				
		322–184 Maurya dynasty in India				

a regional center to embrace a growing diversity of people and a growing amount of territory. This, in turn, created the challenge of building institutions and beliefs that could integrate these peoples, without necessarily homogenizing them. Integration included politics, so it was no accident that massive empires grew, at least toward the end of the classical era, within each center. Integration also included growing internal trade. And it also came to involve cultural systems deliberately designed to draw people together in common beliefs. The problem of integrating new territories, and the processes that resulted, led to the fundamental characteristics of the classical period.

Expansion resulted from massive population growth and encouraged the further development of the classical civilizations. In the final centuries before the common era, China's population tripled, to 60 million. At 14 B.C.E., the Roman Empire had a population of about 54 million people and India about 50 million. Expansion included the migration of farming populations from the regional center to escape crowding and deliberate commercial efforts to seek new sources of food supply—the factor behind Greek colonies scattered around the Mediterranean. It also included explicit military expansion, particularly by the great empires of China, India, Greece, and Rome, which often resulted in significant resettlement efforts. Military conquest by these three civilizations was backed by well-organized political units and often the advantage in weaponry that iron-based technology provided.

In the Mediterranean, expansion was actually aided by the various diseases settlers brought to the new lands: It reduced local populations and hence the pressure or need to deal with local diversities. Expansion in China and India meant embracing large local

populations, already resistant to the contagions of agricultural society. This resulted in greater attention to social, cultural, and political institutions. Both China and India, though in very different ways, worked harder on the process of integration than Greece and Rome. Everywhere, however, the need to innovate in response to expansion, to draw peoples and territories into manageable interaction, determined many of the key characteristics of this period of world history.

Each classical civilization operated separately for the most part. Trade brought silk from China to the Middle East and the Roman Empire, but while such luxuries were welcomed, no economy was deeply affected by international commerce. There was important cultural exchange between Greece and India, but India's adaptation of Greek artistic style and the Mediterranean's adoption of Indian religious concepts were unusual occurrences. For the most part, developments within each expanding civilization, more than contacts between them, marked this phase of world history.

Chapter 2

Classical Civilization: China

This bronze miniature of a horse and carriage demonstrates the high level of both artistic and technological proficiency that the Chinese had attained by the last centuries B.C.E. The elaborate harness and finely crafted wheels and axle were as refined as those of any world culture at that time.



- Patterns in Classical China
- Political Institutions
- Religion and Culture
- **DOCUMENT:** Teachings of the Rival Chinese Schools
- Economy and Society
- **CONCLUSION:** How Chinese Civilization Fits Together

China generated the first of the great classical societies. The region remained rather isolated. This 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 Hwang He precedents. Particularly important was a general, if somewhat vague, world view developed by Hwang He thinkers 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, called *Dao*, 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 itself, 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, as the religious and particularly the political habits of the Shang kingdom were substantially modified as part of building the world's largest classical empire. As a result of these new centuries of development, resulting in much diversity but often painful conflict, 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.

1200 B.C.E.	500 B.C.E.	250 B.C.E.
1029–258 Zhou dynasty; introduction of standard spoken language 551–478 Confucius	c. 500 Lao-zi and Daoism c. 500 Editing of the Five Classics c. 450 Development of calendar 402–201 Era of the Warring States	221–202 Qin dynasty; the First Emperor, the Great Wall begun, 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

PATTERNS IN CLASSICAL CHINA

❖ *China developed in many ways from its river valley period. The Zhou dynasty featured centralized politics but important cultural innovation. 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 twentieth 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.

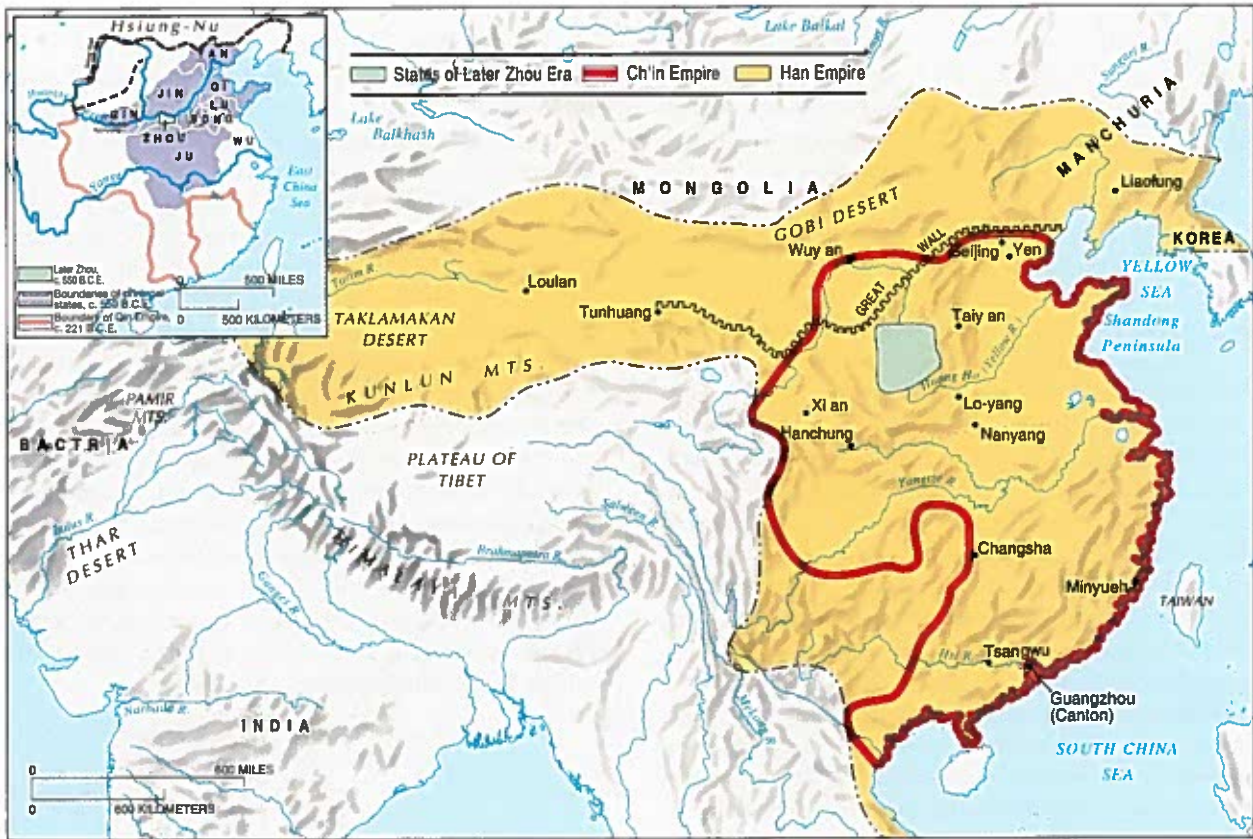
Three dynastic cycles cover the many centuries of classical China: the Zhou, the Qin, and the Han (Map 2.1). The Zhou dynasty lasted from 1029 to 258 B.C.E. Although lengthy, this dynasty flourished, in fact, only until about 700 B.C.E.; it was then beset by a decline in the political infrastructure 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 system was, of course, vulnerable to regional disloyalties, and the ultimate decline of the Zhou dynasty occurred when regional landowning 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 taking over the Yangtze River valley. This stretch of territory, from the Hwang He to the Yangtze, 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. This is why the Zhou relied so heavily on the loyalty of regional supporters.

Despite these circumstances, the Zhou did actually heighten the focus on the central government itself. 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 from 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 Hwang He



Map 2.1 China from the Later Zhou Era to the Han Era

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.

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 sixth and early fifth centuries B.C.E., the philosopher known in the West as Confucius (see p. 41) wrote an elaborate statement on political ethics, providing the core of China's distinctive philo-

sophical 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.

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. He took the title Qin Shih Huangdi, or First Emperor. The dynastic name, Qin, conferred on the whole country its name of China. Shih 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; and Shih 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 Shih Huangdi's rule, powerful armies crushed regional resistance.

The First Emperor followed up on centralization by extending Chinese territory to the south, reaching present-day Hong Kong on the South China Sea and even influencing northern Vietnam. In the north, to guard against barbarian invasions, Shih Huangdi built a Great Wall, extending over 3000 miles, wide enough for chariots 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, Shih 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 Shih 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. Shih 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 oppo-

nents and in 202 B.C.E. established the third dynasty of classical China, the Han.

And it was the Han dynasty, which lasted over 400 years, to 220 C.E., that 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

■ *Political institutions became one of classical China's hallmarks. The power of the emperor, the development of a bureaucracy, and the expansion of state functions combined together.*

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 landowning 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. Shih Huangdi not

only attacked local rulers, he 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.

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 twentieth 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, 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 more 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.

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. Daoism, a distinctive science and artistic traditions complemented this emphasis.*

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.

Confucius, or K'ung Fu-tse, (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. And 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 *Analecets*, 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 their 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.

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

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

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.

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 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 and emblems, and household decorations honoring the spirits, 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.

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 Lao-zi, who probably lived during the fifth century B.C.E. Lao-zi (often called Lao-tsu in popular Daoist texts) stressed that nature contains a divine impulse which 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.

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; in the Classic of Songs, over 300 poems dealing with love, joy, politics, and family life appeared. 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 2.1). 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 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, finally, important practical work was encouraged, rather than imaginative theorizing. Chinese astronomers had developed an accurate calendar



Figure 2.1 A Han relief on a funeral tile found in the Chengdu region in Sichuan (eastern Han dynasty, 25 B.C.E.–221 C.E.). The hunting scene in a luxuriant landscape in the upper panel is linked with a scene (lower panel) of peasants working in the fields. Such illustrations enable historians to track the development of tool- 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.

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, devel-

oping 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.

ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

- *China's economy featured extensive internal trade but some ambivalence about merchants. Important technological innovations occurred. Social inequality included some respect for the peasant masses. China's family system stressed a rigid patriarchy.*

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 impact on the empire's history for a significant period of time.

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, slave-holding may have been common in China, but by the time of the Zhou the main social division existed between the landowning 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.

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 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 money-making. 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 itself 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 work force 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.

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.

Conclusion

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.

Classical Chinese technology, religion, philosophy, and political structure evolved with very little outside contact. Although important trade routes did lead 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. Of course, China displayed some patterns that were similar to those of the other agricultural civilizations, but it also did occasionally embrace 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.

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. In 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.

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, explored deeper mysteries through Daoist rituals. However, between both groups there was considerable hostility and mutual disdain, as many Confucianists found Daoists superstitious and over-excited. Daoism did not inherently disrupt the political unity of Chinese culture, but at times the religion did inspire 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 the force of 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 overpopula-

tion 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.

Further Readings

Several sources offer original materials on classical Chinese thought and politics: John Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (1973); Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1963); and P. Ebrey, *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook* (1981). Two excellent general surveys for this period and later ones are John Fairbank and Albert Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* (1993); E. O. Reischauer and John Fairbank, *A History of East Asian Civilization, Vol. I: East Asia, The Great Tradition* (1961); 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. I* (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-Serstein, *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

On Daoism, see <http://www.bis.com/~merkin/DaoBrief.html>; for a virtual tour of the Great Wall, see <http://www.chinavista.com/travel/greatwall/greatwall.html>.


Chapter 3

Classical Civilization: India

Indian stone carving showing Buddhists worshipping the site beneath the Bodhi tree, where the Buddha gained Enlightenment.



- **The Framework for Indian History: Geography and a Formative Period**
- **Patterns in Classical India**
- **Political Institutions**
- **Religion and Culture**
- **Economy and Society**
- ***IN DEPTH:* Inequality as the Social Norm**
- ***VISUALIZING THE PAST:* The Pattern of Trade in the Ancient Eurasian World**
- **Indian Influence**
- ***CONCLUSION:* China and India**


 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 related philosophical values, the emphasis in classical India shifted to religion and social structure; a political culture existed, but it was less cohesive and central than its Chinese counterpart. Less familiar but scarcely less important were distinctions that arose in India's scientific tradition and the tenor of the economy and family life. Here, too, the classical period generated impulses that are still felt in India today—and that continue to distinguish India from other major civilizations in the world.

India's distinctiveness was considerable, but a comparison must not be one-sided. India was an agricultural society, and this dictated many similarities with China. Most people were peasant farmers, with their major focus on food production for their own family's survival. The clustering of peasants in villages, to provide mutual aid and protection, gave a strong localist flavor to many aspects of life in China and India alike. In addition, agriculture influenced family life, with male ownership of property creating a strongly patriarchal flavor, and women held as inferiors and often treated as possessions. As agricultural civilizations, both China and India produced important cities and engendered significant trade, which added to social and economic complexity and also created the basis for most formal intellectual life, including schools and academies.

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 Period of Aryan invasions 1500–1000 Vedic Age	1200–700 Sacred Vedas composed 1000–600 Epic Age; <i>Mahabharata</i> , <i>Ramaayana</i> , <i>Upanishads</i> composed	700–c.550 Era of unrivaled Brahmin dominance c. 563–483 Life of the Buddha	327–325 Alexander the Great's invasion 322–298 Chandragupta Maurya rules 269–232 Reign of Ashoka	200 B.C.E.–200 C.E. Period of greatest Buddhist influence	319 Beginning of the Gupta Empire; one of the world's first universities established 535 Gupta Empire overturned by the Huns

THE FRAMEWORK FOR INDIAN HISTORY: GEOGRAPHY AND A FORMATIVE PERIOD

■ *Indian civilization was shaped by geography and climate, which help explain some differences from China. Classical Indian civilization was further prepared by cultural and social developments during the centuries of Aryan invasion and subsequent consolidation.*

Important reasons for India's distinctive paths lie in 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, had little impact—interestingly, China was more affected. But, India was frequently 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. Briefly, Alexander the Great invaded India, and while he did not establish a durable empire, he did allow 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, more isolated, largely avoided.

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. Important passes through the mountains, especially in the northwest, linked India to other civilizations in the Middle East; although it lacked the isolation of China's Middle Kingdom, the subcontinent was somewhat set apart within Asia. 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.

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 were able to plant and harvest two crops and could thus support a sizable population.

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. Also 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.

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. 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*, India’s greatest epic poem, and the *Ramayana*, 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*, epic poems with a more mystical religious flavor.

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 also to regulate property relationships among families. Family structure itself 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, as a means of establishing relationships between the Aryan conquerors and the indigenous people, whom the Aryans regarded as inferior. Aryan social classifications partly enforced divisions familiar in agricultural societies. Thus, a warrior or governing class, the Kshatriyas, and the priestly caste, or Brahmins, 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, 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 caste. Initially, the warrior group ranked highest, but during the Epic Age the Brahmins replaced them, signaling the importance of religious links in Indian life. Thus, a law book stated, “When a Brahmin 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.

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 brahmin 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, apart from the Indo-European polytheistic faiths, endures to this day. 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 Brahmin priestly caste 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 formed at crucial periods in classical Indian history, the Mauryan and, later, the Gupta.*

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 Brahmin caste, 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 fourth 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.

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 seized power along the Ganges River. He became the first of the Maurya dynasty of Indian rulers, who in turn were the first rulers to unify much of the entire subcontinent. Borrowing from Persian political models and 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.

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.

Such drastic precautions paid off. Chandragupta finally designated his rule to a son and became a religious ascetic, 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 Brahmin 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 himself 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 even 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.

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.



Map 3.1 India at the Time of Ashoka



Map 3.2 The Gupta Empire

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

- *India did not place as much emphasis on politics as China did, in part because of the structures implanted in the caste system.*
- *Regional political units were often highlighted.*

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.

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, 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 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 holy men and 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 castes subdivided until ultimately almost 300 castes or Jati subcastes were defined. 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. The fact that Brahmins replaced warriors as the top caste also indicates some flexibility. And rulers, like the Mauryans, might spring from the merchant caste, although most princes were warrior-born. It is important not to characterize the caste system in an oversimplified way, for it did offer some flexibilities. Nevertheless, the system did give 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 caste was scorned, confined to poverty and degrading work, but its 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.

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, are confronted less sharply with outside reality. Some observers argue that even Indian adults, on average, are less interested in general, agreed upon truths than in individually satisfying versions. A mind set of this sort goes back to the religious patterns created over 2000 years ago in classical India, where Hinduism encouraged imaginative links with a higher, divine 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 through centuries in which political control escaped Indian hands almost completely.

RELIGION AND CULTURE

■ *Two major religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, marked classical India. Artistic patterns linked to religion. A significant scientific tradition developed as well.*

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 Brahmin 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 the 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 Brahmins 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 Brahmin leadership, Indian ideas about the gods gradually became more elaborate (initially, the religion was simply called Brahminism). 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. . . ."

However, the *Upanishads* did more than advance the idea of a mystical contact with a divine essence. They also attacked the conventional Brahmin view of what religion should be, a set of proper ceremonies that would lead to good things in this life or rewards after death. And 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.

The mystics, often called gurus as they gathered disciples around them, and the Brahmin 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 spirit of Brahma enters several gods or forms of 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.

Hinduism provided several channels for the good life. For the holy men, 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 Brahmins. 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 3.1). Worship to these divinities could aid the process of reincarnation to a higher state. Thus, many ordinary Hindus placed a lot of importance on prayers, sacrifices, and gifts to the gods that would bring them 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 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 a god 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



Figure 3.1 Perhaps the most frequently depicted Indian religious image is the god Shiva as the celestial dancer, here portrayed in a south Indian bronze. The position of the god's hands and the objects held in them each represent a different aspect of his power, which may be simultaneously creative and destructive. His left hand closest to his head, for example, is held in the posture of reassurance, and the left hand furthest away holds a drum, which signifies time. His right foot crushes the demon of ignorance, which seems to want to be destroyed by the illustrious god.

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, 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 Brahmins, 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 caste of priests and through the efforts of individual gurus and mystics.

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, 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 many Hindu beliefs, but he protested the Brahmin emphasis on ceremonies. In a related sense, he downplayed the polytheistic element in Hinduism by focusing on the supreme divinity over separate, lesser gods. Buddha believed in rewards after life, seeing the ultimate goal as destruction of the self and union with the divine essence, a state that he called "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 liberality, the liar by the truth." A holy life could be achieved through individual effort from any level of society. Here, Buddhism attacked not only the priests but also the caste system; 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 holy men, organized in monasteries but preaching throughout the world (Figure 3.2). 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



Figure 3.2 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.

life on earth. Ironically, however, Buddhism did not witness a permanent following in India. Brahmin 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 *Kama-sutra*, written in the fourth century C.E., discusses relationships between men and women.

Indian literature, taking many themes from the great epic poems and their tales of military adventure, stressed lively story lines. The epics themselves 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 Brahmins. 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. 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 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

■ *India developed extensive internal and maritime trade. Family life combined patriarchy with an emphasis on affection.*

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 Brahmin 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. This is a common pattern in agricultural societies, as a sphere of action women enjoyed in hunting cultures 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

IN DEPTH

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.

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 are challenged by many major religions, like Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, that believe in spiritual equality. They also 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 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 pro-

tected 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.

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 those modern Westerners assume to be the norm. Ancient Egyptians or Greeks, or for that matter medieval Europeans or 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 distinc-

tions 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 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 were outcast or exiled, physically punished, imprisoned, or 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 that made up most of the population? Why did people belonging to these subordinate social strata, including oppressed groups such as slaves and untouchables, accept these divisions? Comparing these modes of social organization with the ideals of your own society, what do you see as the advantages and drawbacks of each?

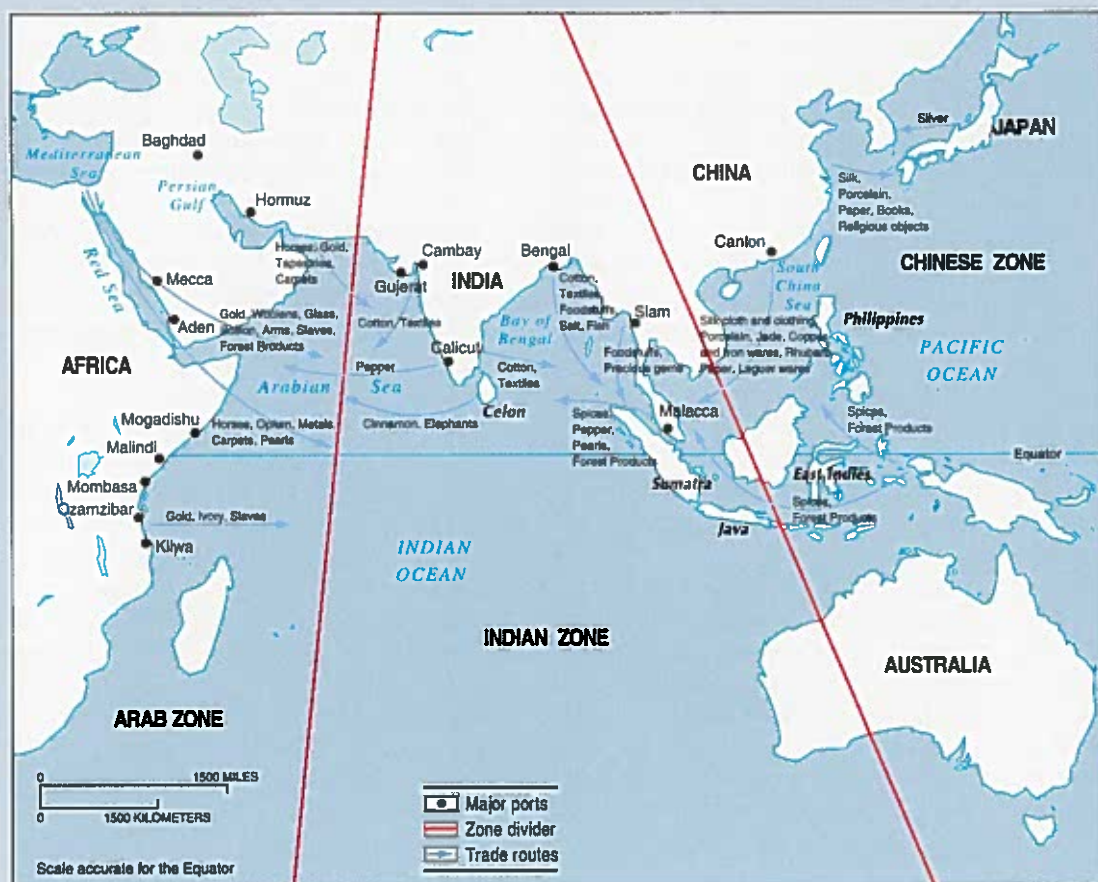
Visualizing THE PAST

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 cen-

ters 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



Eurasian and African Trading Goods Routes, c. 300 B.C.E. to 300 C.E.

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 seamen, 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.

This map 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. In each of the main sectors participating in the system, key ports, inland

trading centers, and the products produced in different regions are shown.

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? Which areas and port centers strike you as key points of convergence for the various types of trade? What advantages would these areas enjoy? 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? What were the advantages and disadvantages of sea and land transport? Besides trade goods, what other things might be transmitted through the trading networks? How great a role do you think the trading system played in the development of global civilization?

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. And, they 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

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, carried goods and influence 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.

CONCLUSION

China and India

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 dif-

ferent 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, 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.

Further Readings

Two useful sources for Indian religion and philosophy are Franklin Edgerton, tr. and ed., *The Bhagavad Gita, Translated and Interpreted* (1944) and S. Radhakrishnan and Charles Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (1957). There are fewer provocative surveys of Indian history than available about China, but at least four competent efforts exist: Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, Vol. 1 (1966); P. Spear, *India* (1981); Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India* (1994); and D. D. Kosambi, *Ancient India, A History of Its Culture and Civilization* (1965). See also Rhoads Murphy, *A History of Asia* (1992). On more specialized topics, see J. W. Sed-

lar, *India and the Greek World* (1952); H. Scharff, *That State in Indian Tradition* (1988); T. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition* (1971); Jeannine Auboyer, *Daily Life in Ancient India* (1961); A. L. Basham, *A Cultural History of India* (1975); and Trevor Ling, *The Buddha* (1973).

On the Web

On the Guptas, see <http://www.meadex.gov.in/culture/history/history3.htm>. India's first great emperor, Chandragupta Maurya, is discussed at <http://www.itihaas.com/ancient/chandra.html>.


Chapter 4

Classical Civilization in the Mediterranean: Greece and Rome

Vase art, with realistic figures from Greek legends surrounded by geometric designs, played a prominent role in Greece. In this myth, Hercules is bringing the Erymanthian boar back to Eurystheus, who is so frightened that he has hidden in a wine jar. The representation of emotion was more vivid than it had been in stylized Egyptian art.



- The Persian Tradition
- Patterns of Greek and Roman History
- Greek and Roman Political Institutions
- *IN DEPTH:* The Classical Mediterranean in Comparative Perspective
- Religion and Culture
- Economy and Society in the Mediterranean
- *VISUALIZING THE PAST:* Commerce and Society
- *DOCUMENT:* Rome and a Values Crisis
- *CONCLUSION:* Toward the Fall of Rome


 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's burgeoning provinces, 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 came closer to conquering surrounding peoples, but even its empire 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 American 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 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 next 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

2000 B.C.E.	1000 B.C.E.	500 B.C.E.	250 B.C.E.	1 C.E.	250 C.E.
1700 Indo-European invasions of Greek peninsula 1400 Kingdom of Mycenae; Trojan War	800–600 Rise of Greek city-states; Athens and Sparta become dominant c. 700 Homeric epics <i>Iliad</i> , <i>Odyssey</i> ; flowering of Greek architecture 550 Cyrus the Great forms Persian Empire 550 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 Phillip II of Macedonia 338–323 Macedonian Empire, Alexander the Great 300–100 Hellenistic period 264–146 Rome's Punic Wars	41 Julius Caesar becomes dictator; 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

engineering, Greece specialized in scientific thought. Rome created a mighty empire, whereas the Greek city-states proved rather inept in 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.

THE PERSIAN TRADITION

- ❖ *The development of classical Mediterranean civilization includes the rise of city states in Greece. This was followed by the expansion of the Hellenistic period. Rome emerged as a separate republic but strongly influenced by Greece. Roman expansion led to a decline of republican forms and the rise of a great empire.*

As a vibrant classical civilization developed in the Mediterranean, a second center flourished in the Middle East, inheriting many of the achievements of the earlier Mesopotamian society. By 550 B.C.E., Cyrus the Great established a massive Persian Empire across the northern Middle East and into northwestern India. Although tolerant of local customs, the Persians advanced iron technology, developed a new religion—Zoroastrianism—and a lively artistic style. While the Persians had only limited influence

on the Mediterranean coast and were ultimately toppled by the Greek-educated conqueror Alexander the Great, Persian language and culture survived in the northeastern portion of the Middle East, periodically affecting developments elsewhere in the region even into the twentieth century. A separate empire in the area, the Sassanid, emerged again during Rome's imperial centuries.

PATTERNS OF GREEK AND ROMAN HISTORY

Greece. 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 themselves 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.

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 a 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 4.1).



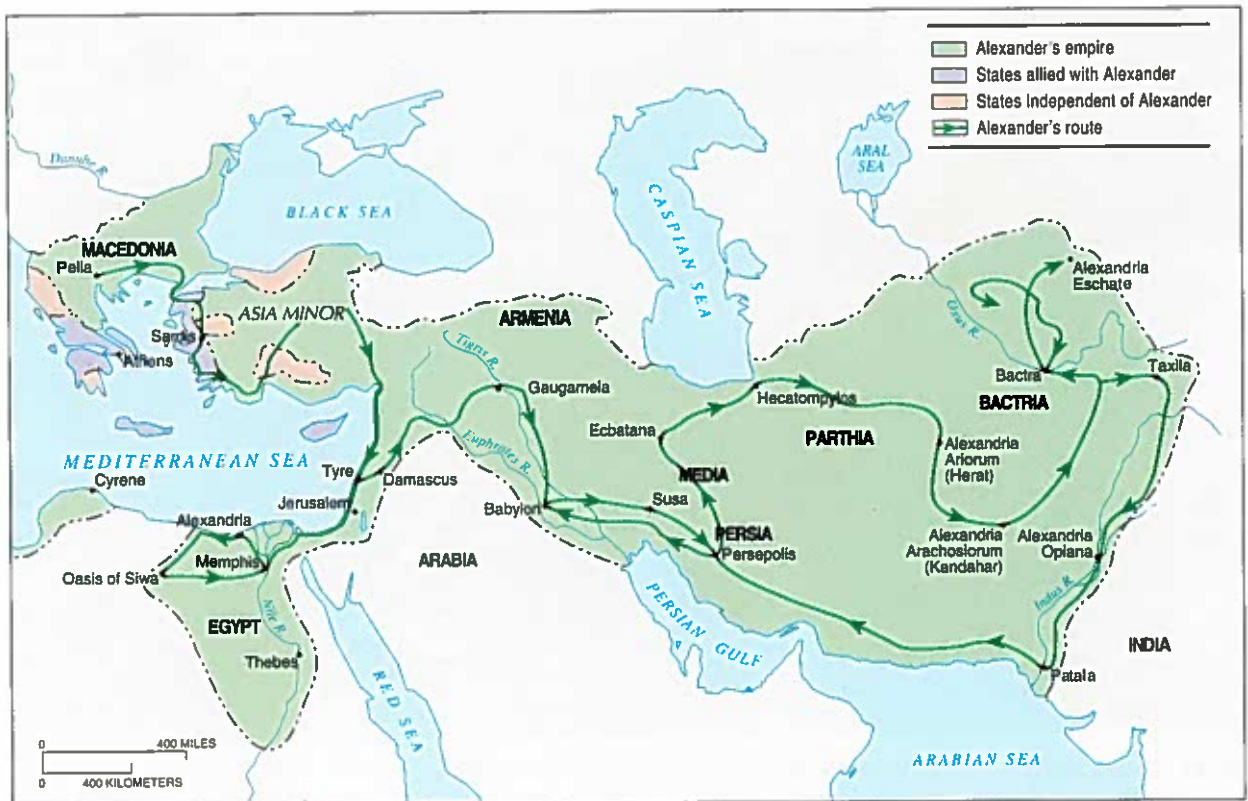
Map 4.1 Greece and Greek Colonies of the World, c. 431 B.C.E. On the eve of the Peloponnesian War, Greek civilization had succeeded in spreading to key points around the Mediterranean world.

It was during the fifth century B.C.E. that the most famous Greek political figure, Pericles, 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, which would deplete both sides.

Political decline soon set in, as Athens and Sparta vied for control of Greece during the bitter Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 B.C.E.). Ambitious kings from Macedonia, in the northern part of the peninsula, soon conquered the cities. Philip of Macedonia 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 4.2). 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 a period called "Hellenistic," 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 out the monarchy around 509 B.C.E. and established more elaborate political institutions for their city-state. The new



Map 4.2 Alexander's Empire, c. 323 B.C.E., and the Hellenistic World

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 itself 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 4.3).

Then the empire suffered a slow but decisive fall, which 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 birthrate 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 even provide a system of justice. The Roman armies depended increasingly on non-Roman recruits, whose loyalty was suspect. And then, in this deepening mire,



Map 4.3 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. How do the size and location of the empire compare with the earlier expansion of the republic?

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.

To conclude: The new Mediterranean civilization 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 featured an important variety of political forms. Both tended to emphasize aristocratic rule. But there were significant democratic elements in some cases, as well as examples of autocracy. Later Rome added emphasis on law and the institutions of a great, though somewhat decentralized empire.*

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. And, the minority of people throughout the empire who were Roman citizens were intensely proud of this privilege.

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, did select 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 fifth-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 ten days. Executive officers, including judges, were chosen for brief terms to control their power, and they 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. The Athenian leader 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.

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 aristo-

crats, 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, until the final decades of dissension in the first century B.C.E., which led to the establishment of the empire, 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.

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.

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 eighth-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. 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 itself 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 itself, 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 himself 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 itself, 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.

IN DEPTH

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 other-worldly 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. 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. As we will see in Chapter 8, 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. We will see that 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 20th century.

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 use?

RELIGION AND CULTURE

■ ■ *Greek and Roman culture did not directly generate a major religion, though Christianity arose in the classical Mediterranean context. Emphasis on philosophy and science and a strong artistic tradition described classical Mediterranean culture.*

The Greeks and Romans did not create a significant, world-class religion; in this, they differed from India 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.

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 story-telling; 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.

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 either. 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.

The idea of a philosophy separate from the official religion, although not necessarily hostile to it, informed classical Mediterranean political theory, which made little reference to religious principles. It 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 himself 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. Socrates' great pupil Plato accentuated the

positive somewhat more strongly by suggesting that human reason could approach an understanding of the three perfect forms—the absolutely True, Good, and Beautiful—which he believed characterized nature. 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.

Greek interest in rationality carried over 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 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 engineer-

Figure 4.1 *This Roman painting features a young woman in an unusual role, as a student of the early Greek poet Sappho.*



ing 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 itself, 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 real-

istic 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.) (Figure 4.1).

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 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 eighth century B.C.E. Roman authors, particularly the poet Virgil, 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' brilliant fifth 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 eighth century B.C.E. onward, emphasized monumental construction, square or rectangular in shape, with columned porticos (Figure 4.2). 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,

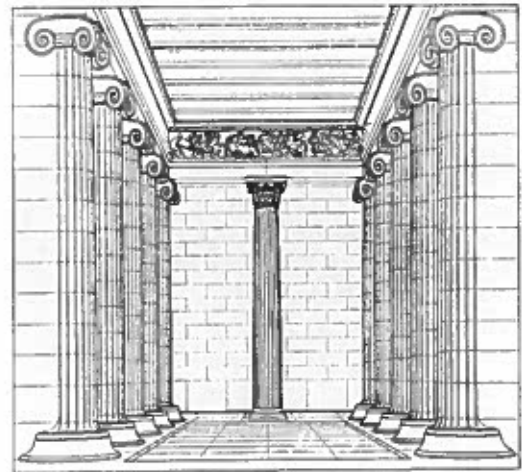


Figure 4.2 Varied column designs marked the progression of Greek architecture from the square Doric simplicity of the Parthenon (left), through the Ionic (the outer columns in image at right), to the more ornate Corinthian (center column in image at right).

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. 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.

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 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 indeed 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, the fact remains that, even in Rome, 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 4.3) providing another lasting expression.

ECONOMY AND SOCIETY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

■ *Greek and Roman economies featured commercial agriculture, trade and slavery. Patriarchal family structure was characteristic.*

Politics and formal culture in Greece and Rome were mainly affairs of the cities—which means 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 rather 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' 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.

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 wine making. 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

Visualizing THE PAST

Commerce and Society

Greek commerce expanded along with the colonies. In this painting on the interior of the Arkesilas Cup, dating from 560 B.C.E., the king of Cyrene, a Greek colony in northern Africa, is shown supervising the preparation of hemp or flax for export. What does the picture suggest about the nature and extent of social hierarchy? How can costumes be used in this kind of assessment? What is the king most concerned with? What kinds of technology are suggested? Can you think of other types of evidence to use in analyzing this kind of colonial commercial economy?



grape vines required substantial capital, for they would not bear fruit for at least five years after planting. This was one reason why 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 Romans encouraged such heavy cultivation in North Africa that they promoted a soil depletion which 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 craftsmen 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, interestingly, 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.

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'

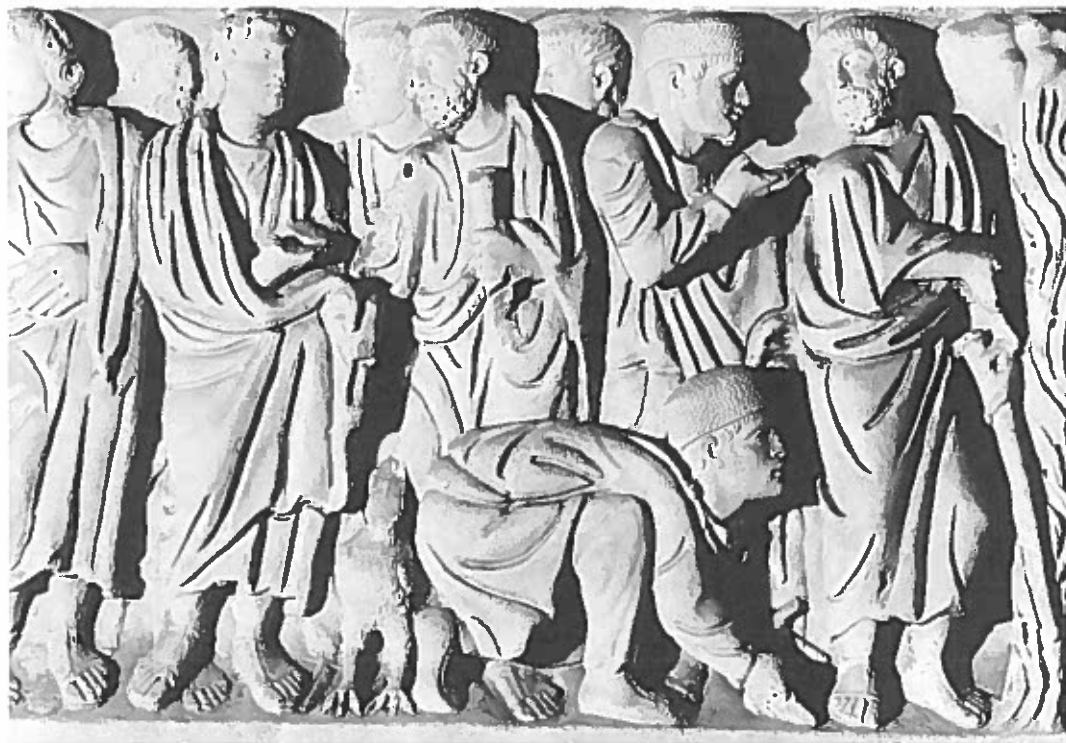


Figure 4.3 This sarcophagus, or tomb, from the 4th century shows Christ and the apostles in typical Roman dress.

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 money-making.

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, which provided the manpower for Athens' 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, which 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 valued. They 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 upon 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

DOCUMENT

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 to 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.

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. But in law and culture, 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 eighteenth-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 itself 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.

Conclusion

Toward the Fall of Rome

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; in essence, 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.

Further Readings

There are a number of excellent sources on classical Greece and Rome, even aside from translations of the leading thinkers and writers. See M. Crawford, ed., *Sources for Ancient History* (1983); C. Fornara, *Translated Documents of Greece and Rome* (1977); N. Lewis, *Greek Historical Documents: The Fifth Century B.C.* (1971); M. Crawford, *The Roman Republic* (1982); P. Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Ages* (1990); and M. M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest* (1981). Useful surveys on ancient Greece include K. Dover, *The Greeks* (1981), and F. J. Frost, *Greek Society* (1980). Important specialized works include M. Crawford and D. Whitehead, *Archaic and Classical Greece* (1983); Cyril Robinson, *Everyday Life in Ancient Greece* (1987); W. Burkert, *Greek Religions* (1985); G. E. R. Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practices of Ancient Greek Science* (1987); Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (1975); A. R. Burn, *Persia and the Greeks* (1962); and Moses Finley, *Slavery in the Ancient World* (1972). On Rome, K. Christ, *The Romans: An Introduction to Their History and Civilization* (1984) is eminently readable and provocative. See also M. Crawford, *The Roman Republic* (1978); L. P. Wilkinson, *The Roman Experience* (1974); B.

Cunliffe, *Rome and the Empire* (1978); Cyril Robinson, *Everyday Life in Ancient Greece* (1987); J. Boardman et al., *Oxford History of the Classical World* (1986); and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire* (1987).

On early history, see H. H. Schulhard, *A History of the Roman World, 753–146 B.C.* (1961). For social aspects, good sources include R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 B.C.–A.D. 284* (1981); P. Garnsey and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (1987); K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves, Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire* (1987); K. R. Bradley and W. Phillips, Jr., *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade* (1985); Peter Garnsey and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture* (1987); and Y. Garlan, *War in the Ancient World* (1975).

A useful reference on women's history in the classical period, and in later Western history, is R. Bridenthall and C. Koonz, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (1977); see also M. Lefkowitz and M. Faut, *Women and Life in Greece and Rome* (1992). The rise and spread of Christianity are treated in two outstanding studies, R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (1984), and Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, A.D. 150–750* (1971). (Brown has also written a number of more specialized studies on early Christianity in the West.)

On the Web

For websites on Alexander, see <http://www.mediatime.net/alex>; on Greek religion, see <http://www.greekcitypx.edu/religion/relig.htm>; for a virtual tour of ancient Rome, see <http://library.thinkquest.org/11402/homeforum.html>; on Roman women, see http://library.thinkquest.org/11402/women_in_rome.html.

Chapter 5

The Classical Period: Directions, Diversities, and Declines by 500 c.e.

The conversion of kings, such as Clovis, king of the Franks, helped inspire wider conversions and gave the clergy some symbolic power over the state. This relief shows Clovis being converted to Christianity.



- **Expansion and Integration**
- **Beyond the Classical Civilizations**
- **IN DEPTH: 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**
- **CONCLUSION: The World Around 500 C.E.**

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.

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 formed a leading direction for world history to come.

Classical civilizations (including Persia) had never embraced the bulk 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 themselves 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.

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. 4 Birth of Jesus	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 decay c. 200 Extensive agriculture 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 476 Collapse of Rome	c. 500 Huns begin to invade India c. 500 Buddhism takes root in East and Southeast Asia c. 500 Formation of Ghana c. 600 Beginning of Islam 618 T'ang dynasty in China: glorious cultural period 700 Shintoism unified into single national religion in Japan

EXPANSION AND INTEGRATION

❖ *Common themes for the classical civilizations involve territorial expansion and related efforts to integrate the new territories. Integration included a mixture of central political values and institutions, common cultures and social values, and commercial links.*

The heritage of the classical civilizations involves 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 Lao-zi, 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.

China, India, and the Mediterranean set about the tasks of uniting their expanding civilizations 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 why 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 reign 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 the hope of future incarnation to the lower castes. None of these approaches consistently united the society. Lower-class risings, even slave rebellions, were part of the classical experience as well. On balance, however,

some techniques may have worked better than others. Again, 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

❏ *Outside the classical civilizations important development occurred in other parts of the world. Significant civilizations operated in the Americas and also in Africa outside the immediate classical orbit. Agriculture and other developments occurred in northern Europe and northern Asia. Nomadic societies played a vital role, particularly in Central Asia, in linking and occasionally disrupting classical civilizations.*

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.

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 itself (Figure 5.1). Major

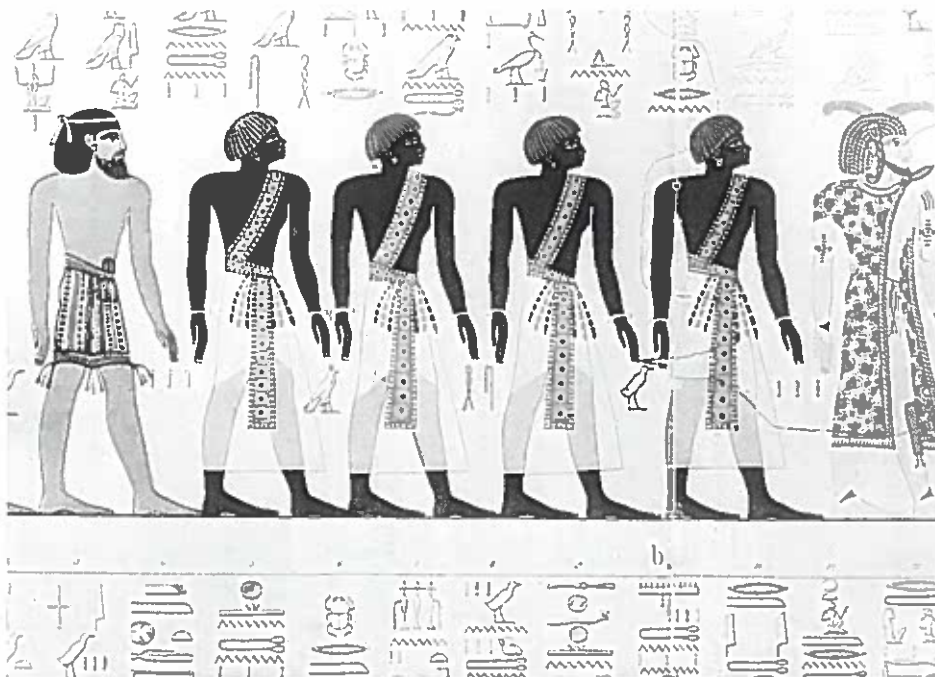


Figure 5.1 This tomb painting from about 1300 B.C.E. highlights black-skinned people from the rising kingdom of Kush, who interacted increasingly with Egyptian society and at one point controlled Egypt directly.

IN DEPTH

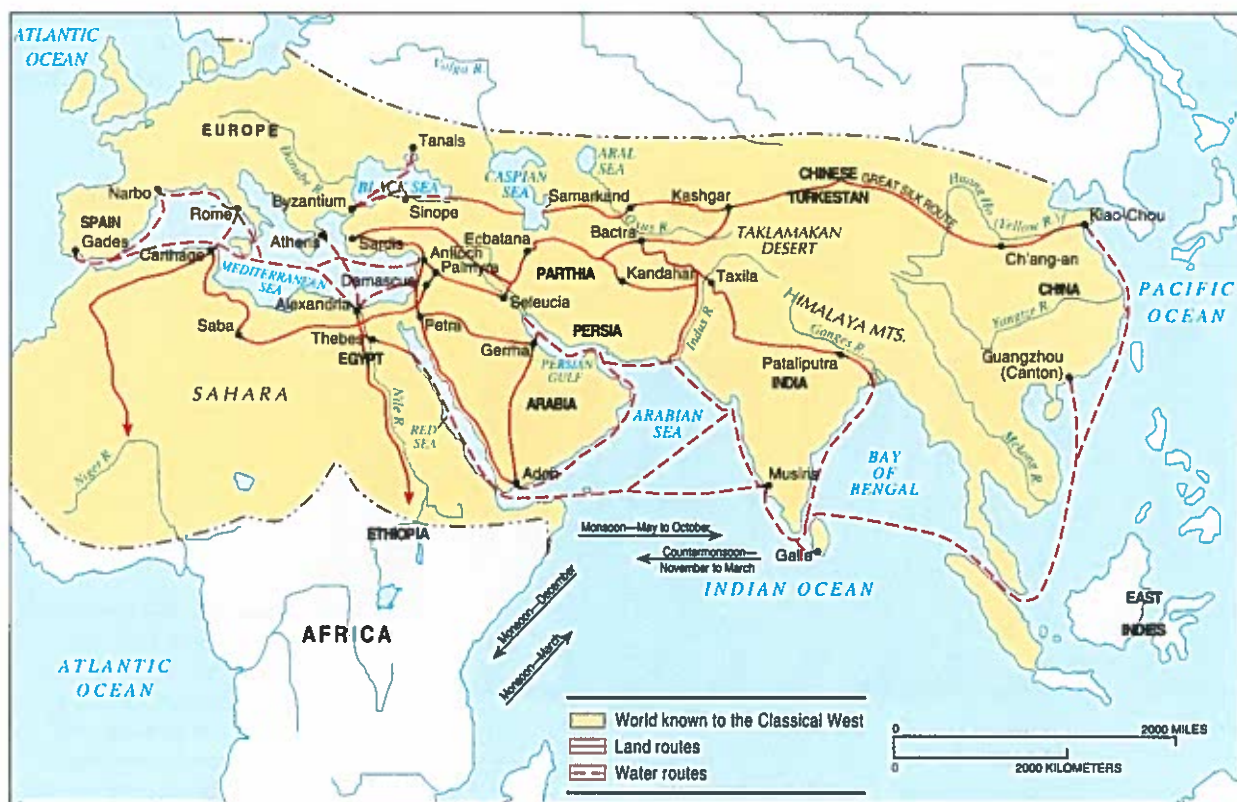
Nomads and Cross-Civilization Contacts and Exchanges

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 were the fabled *silk routes* 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. (Map 5.1).

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,



Map 5.1 Main African-Eurasian Trade Routes in the Classical Age

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 been converted to Islam clashed with the armies of the Chinese Empire 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 paper-making 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 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 cavalymen 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?

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 have 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 fourth century C.E. The Ethiopian Christian Church was, however, cut off from mainstream Christianity thereafter, flourishing in isolation to modern times. And Ethiopia could boast, into the late twentieth century when it was abolished, of having the oldest continuous monarchy anywhere in the world.

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 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 itself. 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 did prepare 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.

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; interestingly, 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.

Japan's religion, called 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. And, 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.

Much of northern Europe lagged behind Japan's pace. Teutonic or Celtic peoples in what is today Germany, England, and Scandinavia, and 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.

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.

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 themselves 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—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 Mayans, 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 Incas. 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.

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 civilizations 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.

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 mounted horsemen to aim weapons better. The herding groups thus enjoyed an important history of their own and also 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



Map 5.2 *Civilizations of Central and South America*

themselves swept once across Italy, invading the city of Rome amid great destruction. It was another Hun group from central Asia who 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. For 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.

By about 100 C.E., the Han dynasty in China began to enter a serious decline. Confucian intellectual activity gradually became less creative. Politically, the central government's control diminished, bureaucrats became more corrupt, and 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 both 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 twentieth century. Northern China, particularly, seemed near collapse.

Nonetheless, China did revive itself near the end of the sixth century. Strong native rulers in the north drove out the nomadic invaders. The Sui dynasty briefly ruled, and then in 618 C.E. it was followed by the T'ang, 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.

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 it did not have to reinvent its civilization.

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 fifth 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," controlled the small states and emphasized military prowess. Few political events of more than local significance occurred.

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, spread widely, encouraging a new popular emotionalism in religious ritual. Indian economic prosperity also continued at high levels.

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 their god Allah, reached India's porous northwestern frontier during the seventh 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.

DECLINE AND FALL IN ROME

❖ *Decline in Rome was particularly complex. Its causes have been much debated. Developments varied between the eastern and western portions of the Empire, as the Mediterranean region pulled apart.*

The Roman Empire exhibited a great many symptoms of decay after about 180 C.E. There was statistical evidence in the declining population in addition to growing difficulties in recruiting effective armies. There were also political manifestations in the greater brutality and arbitrariness of many Roman emperors—victims, according to one commentator at the time, of “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.

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.

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, there is another side to Rome’s downfall, although whether as a cause or result of the initial difficulties is hard to say. 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; 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.

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 did provide 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 with-

out 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).

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 itself. 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, yet found a common religion that appealed deeply enough, or satisfied enough needs, to maintain unity amid political fragmentation. Christianity's appeal would fill this gap, but it came too late to save the empire. Ultimately, a deep rift in this world developed—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).



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. Was this the cause or result of greater weakness in the West than in the empire's eastern territory?

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 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 empire itself 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,



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

revived, although there was some conversion to Christianity as well. Persian styles in art and manufacturing experienced a brilliant resurgence. 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 seventh 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.

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. And 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.

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. This religious change had wider culture, social and political implications. Islam would soon be added to the new map of world religions.*

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. And, 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 had 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.

Despite these important common features, the major religions were themselves 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

Buddhism was altered more substantially, 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 Buddha's death, a doctrine of bodhisattvas 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.

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 Korea and Japan. The East Asian form of Buddhism, called Mahayana, or the Greater Vehicle, retained basic Buddhist beliefs. However, the emphasis on Buddha himself as god and 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, or *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 himself 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 himself.

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. And, of course, 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 255 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.

DOCUMENT

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 Suttas), 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 Jung—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 Tao-jung—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 Buddhasingha 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?

Christianity

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 itself. Even more than Buddhism, it placed a premium on missionary activity and widespread conversions. More, perhaps, than any other major religion, Christianity 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.

The message of Jesus and his disciples seemed clear: There was a single 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 single 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.

During the first three centuries after Christ, the new religion competed among a number of eastern mystical religions. It also 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.

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 as 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 intolerance for 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 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 blind devotion to an all-powerful God. Christian faith was valued over intellectual rationales for religious practices. However, 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. 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 preached the equality of men’s and women’s souls. Unlike Islam, for example, it also encouraged men and women to worship together, though scholars have suggested that in some religious activities, such as pilgrimages, it was more constraining on women.

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. 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

Visualizing THE PAST

Religious Geography

The distribution of the world's major religions calls for knowledge both of numerical data and geography. This map and 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.

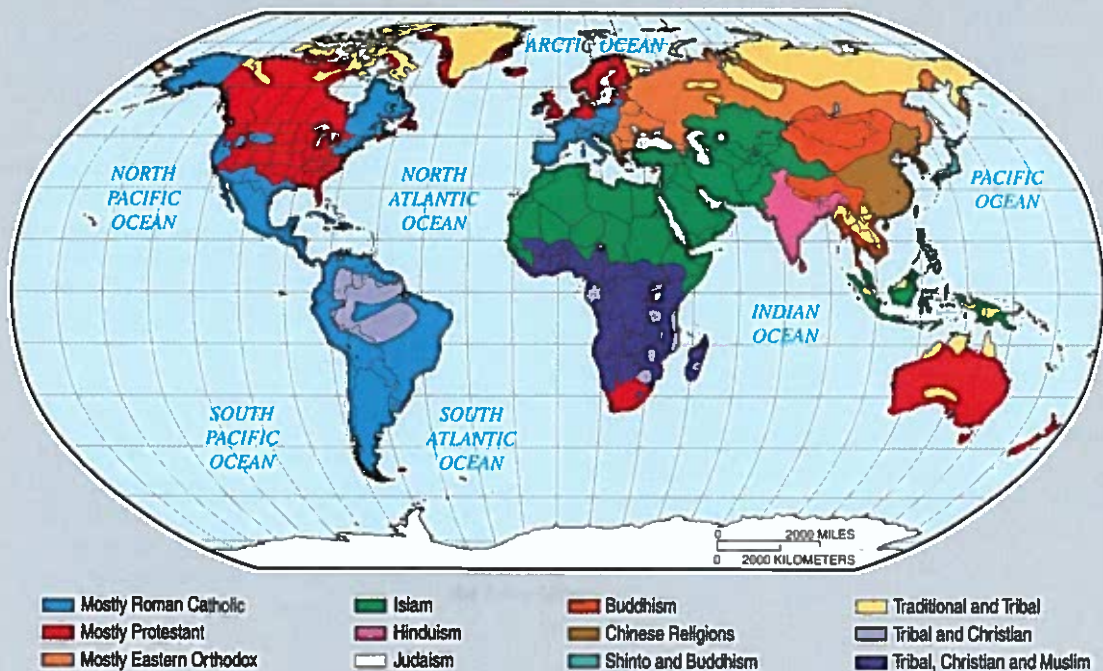
Questions: Where are the greatest concentrations of the four major religions today? Which religions affect the largest landmasses? Which affect the largest numbers of people? Which aspects of modern religious geography follow from the patterns of religious dissemination under way by the end of the classical period? Which cannot be explained by these late-classical developments? If you had been well informed about world religions and classical history in the 5th century, and magically gained knowledge about religions' distribution in the 21st century,

which features would you find most surprising in light of logical 5th-century predictions?

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.



Major Religions of the Modern World

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

Islam

One final world religion remained. Islam, launched early in the seventh century, would initially surpass Christianity as a world faith and has remained Christianity's most tenacious rival. 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, producing a religious map that, in Europe and Asia and even parts of Africa, would not alter greatly until our own time. The table on page 105 shows the distribution of religions in the world today.

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 Christian and Muslim, 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.

CONCLUSION

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.

Further Readings

The fall of the Roman Empire has generated rich and interesting debate. For recent interpretations 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. Thapar, *History of India*, Vol. 1 (1966); R. C. Majumdar, ed., *The Classical Age* (1966); Raymond Dawson, *Imperial China* (1972); J.