

UNIT I: FOUNDATIONS (8000 BCE TO 600 CE)

Of all the time periods covered in the AP World History curriculum, Foundations (8000 BCE - 600 CE) spans the largest number of years. It begins with an important Marker Event - the Neolithic Revolution - and ends after the fall of three major classical civilizations - Rome in the Mediterranean region, Han China, and the Gupta Empire of India.

Broad topics addressed in the Foundations time period are:

- Environmental and periodization issues
- Early development in agriculture and technology
- Basic cultural, political, and social features of early civilizations: Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley, Shang China, and Meso/South America
- The rise and fall of classical civilizations: Zhou and Han China, India (Gupta Empire), and Mediterranean civilizations (Greece and Rome)
- Major belief systems, including polytheism, Hinduism, Judaism, Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Christianity

A NOTE ABOUT PREHISTORY (BEFORE 3500 CE)

A basic type of periodization is to divide all of time into "prehistory" and "history." Usually the distinction is based on whether or not the people left written records, but the presence of written records is very closely tied to the beginnings of agriculture. Scholars are not entirely sure about when human beings first appeared on earth, but new discoveries continue to push the date further back in time. So "prehistory" lasted for millions of years. The first humans probably emerged in eastern Africa, due to a happy confluence of availability of food and domesticable animals and favorable climate. For thousands of years humans sustained themselves as hunters and gatherers, and as a result were quite dependent on the abundance of food. Hunters gained skills in capturing and killing animals, and gatherers learned which plants and fruits were edible and nutritious. Technological inventions generally supported the fulfillment of these basic activities. Stones (and eventually metals) were shaped as tools and weapons, and techniques were developed for efficient gathering and storage of food. By 8000 BCE, humans had migrated to many other areas, probably following the herds and other available food sources. Major migrations include:

- Early Africans to Australia, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia
- Asians across the land bridge to the Americas

Our knowledge of prehistoric people is limited, partly because they lived so long ago, and partly because they left no written records. However, archaeologists have found evidence of these generally shared characteristics of prehistoric people:

- 1) Social structure - Most people traveled in small bands, and authority was based on family relationships. Men took leadership roles, but women were highly valued for their gathering skills. Labor was generally divided based on gender, with men as hunters and women as gatherers. However, status differences between men and women were generally not wide, with relative gender equality apparently characterizing their group life.
- 2) Beliefs - Archaeological evidence suggests that prehistoric people were guided by their beliefs in spirits and sacred places. Their cave drawings and traces of their cultural objects indicate that they believed in an afterlife, although they probably did not practice polytheism, or a belief in many gods. Instead, polydaemonism, or the belief in many spirits (not specific gods), probably describes their religion more accurately. Bushes, rocks, trees, plants, or streams could be inhabited by these spirits, who often appeared to communicate with humans. The prehistoric era includes the early stages of agriculture from about 10,000 to 4,000 BCE, but once settlement began, the stage was set for the development of reading and writing and the period known as "history."

ENVIRONMENTAL AND PERIODIZATION ISSUES

When, how, and why did people give up their wandering and settle to live in one place? First of all, it happened in different parts of the world at different times, but settled communities had developed in many places by 8000 BCE. The ability to settle was based almost entirely on successful cultivation of crops and domestication of animals. These drastic changes in human life are known collectively as the Neolithic Revolution that almost

certainly happened independently in different places over a large span of time. For example, the people settling along the major rivers in China did not learn to farm because they were in contact with the people in the Indus River area. Instead, people in both areas probably figured out the advantages of settled life on their own. Although the Neolithic Revolution was one of the most significant Marker Events in world history, it occurred gradually and probably by trial and error.

The changes that resulted include:

- Increase in reliable food supplies - Agricultural skills allowed people to control food production, and domestication of animals both helped to make agricultural production more efficient and increased the availability of food.
- Rapid increase in total human population - Reliable food supplies meant that people were less likely to starve to death. With increasing life spans came increasing reproduction, and more children meant that there were more people to tend the land and animals.
- Job specialization - Other occupations than farming developed, since fewer people were needed to produce food. Some early specialized jobs include priests, traders, and builders.
- Widening of gender differences - Status distinctions between men and women increased, as men took over most agricultural cultivation and domestication of animals. Women were responsible for raising children, cooking food, and keeping the house, but in virtually all of the early civilizations men became more and more dominant. A patriarchal system commonly developed, with men holding power in the family, the economy, and the government.
- Development of distinction between settled people and "nomads" - All people did not settle into communities but remained as hunters and gatherers. As more settled communities developed, the distinction between agriculturalists and hunters and gatherers grew.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHY

American students are often criticized for their lack of knowledge of geography, but it is essential in the study of world history. Although you will not have to specifically identify places on the AP Exam, you cannot follow change over time nor make accurate comparisons unless you know something about both physical and political geography.

Our concepts of geography have been shaped by western historians of the past, and in recent years some scholars have questioned very basic assumptions about the ways that the globe is divided. For example, take the concept of a continent. Why is Europe considered a continent? What actually separates Europe from Asia? Certainly, physical geographical separation of the two continents is far from clear. Historians Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen refer to cartographic ethnocentrism in their controversial book, *The Myth of Continents*. This ethnic point of view is centered around Europe, and a little later, around the United States. For example, where did the name "Middle East" come from? From the European perspective, this area is east of Europe, but it is not as far away as China is. If we look at the Middle East from a cultural point of view, we certainly can see commonalities that extend throughout northern Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Europe, and Asia. So why do we divide the area up into several continents?

Biased divisions that Lewis and Wigen identify include:

- East vs. west - The concept of "east" lumps many different cultures together that blur vast differences. Some of this occurs in considering the west, but cultural distinctions are generally more readily acknowledged.
- South vs. north - The history of the southern part of the globe has often been ignored in the telling of world history, and the northern half has been highlighted.

Even maps that we use reflect these biases. Most map projections center around the Atlantic Ocean, clearly showing Europe and North America in the middle. Inventors of the relatively new Peders' projection claim that older, more familiar projections (like Mercator and Robertson's) actually short change "less important" countries in terms of land space. Of course, we cannot talk about world history without labels, biased though they may be. However, it is essential to use objective criteria in determining what events, places, and people have shaped the course of history. Do not automatically assume that one part of the world is inherently more important than another at any particular time without thinking it through carefully and objectively.

THE NATURE OF CIVILIZATION

These changes in turn allowed the development of "civilization," a basic organizing principle in world history. Civilization may be defined in many ways, but it is generally characterized by:

- Large cities that dominate the countryside around them - Growing populations required more food production, so the cities controlled their hinterlands in order to guarantee a reliable and continuous supply of food for their inhabitants.
- Monumental architecture and public building projects that take many forms - They may include temples, palaces, irrigation projects, city walls, public arenas, government buildings, and aqueducts.
- A complex political organization - In order to coordinate activities and provide protection for the cities and hinterlands, governments developed. The larger the area and population, the more demanding political positions became, and control of the government began to move away from kinship ties. Although many early rulers passed their authority down to their sons, other factors became important, such as military prowess and ability.
- A written language - This important development in human history allowed societies to organize and maintain the growing political, social, and economic structure that followed settlement into agricultural areas. Those societies that developed a written language were able to communicate multiple ideas and large amounts of information that in turn encouraged greater complexity and growth.
- Specialization of labor - With basic food needs taken care of by fewer people, others may specialize in jobs that help to improve the quality of life. For example, engineers may construct bigger and better irrigation systems, and bureaucrats may increase their level of government services.
- Advanced art and literature - In prehistoric times and in simple communities, most artwork and literature was (is) produced by people who were preoccupied with activities that sustained their lives, such as hunting and gathering or farming. Art consisted of simple drawings, and literature usually took the form of oral stories passed down from one generation to the next. With the advent of civilization, some people had the time to concentrate on art and literature, making them their primary occupation.
- Long distance trade - As technologies improved and specialization increased, trade with other civilization centers began. This trade led to cultural diffusion, or the spreading and sharing of cultural characteristics. Not only was material culture - objects such as pottery, tools, and textiles - shared, but nonmaterial culture - such as beliefs, customs, and values - also spread, contributing to the cosmopolitan nature of cities.

THE CIVILIZATION CONTROVERSY

The term "civilization" is derived from Latin, the language of the ancient Roman Empire. The Latin word *civilis* means "of the citizens," and the Romans used it to distinguish between themselves and the "inferior" people who lived on the fringes of their empire. However, the distinctions that the word implies began long before the time of the Romans. The process of civilization, or the development of the characteristics listed above, indisputably occurred in several parts of the world before 1500 BCE, and the feelings of superiority that urban folks displayed probably began just as early.

Civilization as an organizing principle in world history is actually quite controversial. Traditionally historians have seen the development of civilization in a positive light, or as improvements in the quality of human life. So they refer to some societies as more "advanced" than others that remain more "backward." However, other scholars have cautioned against ignoring the "dark side" of the distinctions that the word "civilization" implies.

The Civilization Controversy: a Building Block for Human Society?

Advantages of Civilization	Disadvantages of Civilizations
Development of specialized skills, inventions, arts, and literature	Increase in class and gender distinctions, creating oppression for some
Building of economically and politically coordinated cities	Overproduction of land, depletion of soil, eventual destruction caused by increase in population
Increased ability to protect people from dangers both inside and outside the city	Increased attacks from outsiders attracted to wealth; internal crime promoted by crowded conditions
Growth of prosperity, improving quality of life	Creation of life-threatening congestion, pollution, disease, and decrease in sanitation

Today most historians try to steer away from the question of whether the advent of civilization led to a higher level of human life or started us on the road to ultimate destruction. The important thing to remember is that it dramatically changed the course of world history, whether for good or for bad. No matter what the location or time period, the division between urban and rural lifestyles is a recurring theme throughout time, and biases toward one lifestyle or the other remain as a great continuity throughout eras and among many societies around the world.

PERIODIZATION

The Foundations time period (8000 BCE to 600 CE) is so vast that there are many ways to divide it into periods or eras. However, some major breaks within the time period are these:

1) Early agricultural and technological development (about 8000 BCE to 3500 BCE) - Small groups of settlers grew into kinship-based villages that practiced both crop cultivation and domestication of animals. Tools and inventions helped villages to stabilize and eventually grow.

2) Development of the earliest civilizations (about 3500 to 1500 BCE) - Villages grew into cities that came to dominate the land around them. Collectively known as the "river valley" civilizations, they include:

- Mesopotamia (developed by 3500 BCE or so) - between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the Middle East
- Egypt (developed by 3000 BCE or so) - along the Nile River in northeastern Africa
- Indus Valley people (developed by 2500 BCE or so) - along the Indus River in south central Asia
- Shang China (developed by 1700 BCE or so) - along several rivers in the north China plains

3) Classical civilizations (approximately 1000 BCE to 600 CE) - These civilizations were generally much larger than the earlier ones, and their political economic, cultural, and military organizations usually were more complex. All traded extensively with others, and conquered many new territories. Classical civilizations include Zhou and Han China, the Roman Empire, and the Gupta Empire in India.

EARLY AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Sedentary agricultural communities were usually the forerunners to the development of the earliest river valley civilizations. However, the shift away from hunting and gathering societies took many other forms.

ALTERNATIVES TO SEDENTARY AGRICULTURE

1) shifting cultivation - Often referred to as "slash and burn" agriculture, this farming method developed primarily in rain forest zones of Central and South America, West Africa, eastern and central Asia, and much of southern China and Southeast Asia. The obvious destruction to the environment was worsened by the frequency of the farmers' movement. At first, the soil in the burnt areas was very fertile, but when soil nutrients were depleted, farmers moved on to slash and burn another piece of jungle.

2) pastoral nomadism - This alternative to sedentary agriculture is characterized by following the herds, just as the earlier hunters and gatherers did. However, the herds were domesticated, and consisted of sheep, goats, cows, reindeer, camels, and/or horses. Nomadism, or the practice of moving frequently from one place to the other, was dictated by the need for pasture for the animals. This life style developed across the grassy plains of central Eurasia and nearby desert areas of the Arabian peninsula and the Sudan. Pastoral nomads may be categorized by the animals that they tended:

- Horse nomads - The first nomads did not ride them, but devised chariots for horses to pull. Some of these nomads formed empires (Hyksos, Hittites).
- Reindeer herders - These nomads populated Scandinavia and were generally far away from civilization centers.
- Camel herders - The main animal herded in the Sudan and the Arabian peninsula was the camel.
- Cattle nomads - Cattle were herded in the upper reaches of the Nile River and the southern Sudan, grass areas far away from civilization centers.

The life style of nomads by necessity means that they do not settle into villages, and therefore do not form the basis for the later development of cities. Settled agriculturalists generally saw them as "barbarians," an inferior lot that needed to be kept out of their villages. However, despite this designation, nomadic groups, especially when they have embarked on major migrations, have had a significant impact on the course of world history. Do not make the mistake of discounting them, because nomads have often sparked major changes that have greatly affected and sometimes dominated settled communities.

EARLY AGRICULTURE

By about 5000 BCE agriculture had become well established in several areas. In southwest Asia, wheat and barley were raised, and sheep and goats were domesticated. In southeast Asia, yams, peas, and early forms of rice were grown, and pigs, oxen, and chickens were kept. In the Americas, corn (maize), squash, and beans were staples of the diet, and in South America, potatoes were also grown. Domesticated animals were far less important in the Americas than they were elsewhere, but South Americans did domesticate llamas and alpacas. As agriculture began to take hold in various parts of the world, the population grew rapidly. For example, world population in 3000 BCE was probably about 14 million humans, but by 500 BCE, the total had risen to about 100 million.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

The time period that followed the advent of agriculture and preceded the earliest civilizations is known as the Neolithic era (in contrast to the earlier Paleolithic - or "Stone Age" - era). The name means "new stone age", and it is characterized by the refinement of tools, primarily for agricultural purposes. The time period spans roughly from 10,000 to 4000 BCE.

Early labor specialization is based on three craft industries:

- Pottery - Once agriculture begins, pots are needed for cooking and storage, so pottery making was probably the first craft industry to develop. Early on, people discovered that designs could be etched into the clay before it hardened, so pottery became a medium for artistic expression.
- Metallurgy - The first metal used was copper that could be hammered into shapes for tools and jewelry. No heat was required, but someone discovered that heating separated the metal from its ores improved the malleability and overall quality of the product. Early tools such as knives, axes, hoes, and weapons were made of copper.
- Textile production - Textiles decay much more readily than pottery and metal tools and jewelry do, but the earliest textiles can be documented to about 6000 BCE. Through experimentation with plant and animal fibers, they developed methods of spinning thread and weaving fabrics, jobs done primarily by women at home while tending to children and other domestic duties.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EARLIEST CIVILIZATIONS (3500 BCE - 1200 BCE OR SO)

Somewhere around 4000 BCE, a series of technological inventions forged the way for a new phase of development within some of the agricultural societies. Three important changes are:

- The introduction of the plow - Plows meant that more land could be cultivated more efficiently. Greater productivity led to the growth of towns into cities.
- The invention and use of bronze - Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin that led to vast improvements in equipment and tools.
- The advent of writing - Apparently, the first people to use writing were the Sumerians in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. Not coincidentally, this area was the site of perhaps the oldest civilizations in history, beginning in about 3500 BCE.

The Sumerians were the first of a series of people to inhabit Mesopotamia, and they developed all of the major characteristics of "civilization": cities, public buildings, job specialization, complex political organization, writing, arts and literature, long-distance trade. Other early civilizations were Egypt, the Indus Valley people, and Shang China.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RIVER-VALLEY CIVILIZATIONS

Each early civilization developed its own unique ways of life, but they all shared some common characteristics:

- Location in river valleys - Rivers provided water for crops, as well as the easiest form of transportation. All four river valleys of the earliest civilizations had very fertile soil called loess, or alluvial soil carried and deposited as river water traveled downstream.
- Complex irrigation systems - Controlling the flow of the rivers was a major issue for all of the civilizations, and all of them channeled the water for agricultural use through irrigation systems.
- Development of legal codes - The most famous set of laws was Hammurabi's Code, but all wrote and implemented laws as political organization and long-distance trade grew more complex.

- Use of money - Long distance trade made the barter system (trading one type of good for another) impractical, so all the civilizations developed some form of money for economic exchanges.
- Elaborate art forms and/or written literature - These took different forms, but all civilizations showed advancements in these areas. For example, Egyptians built pyramids and concentrated on decorate arts, and Mesopotamians wrote complex stories like the Epic of Gilgamesh.
- More formal scientific knowledge, numbering systems, and calendars - Developments in these areas varied from civilization to civilization, but all formalized knowledge in at least some of these areas.
- Intensification of social inequality - In all river valley civilizations, gender inequality grew, and all practiced some form of slavery. Slaves were often captives in war or hereditary, and they were used for household work, public building projects, and agricultural production.

In addition to the river valley civilizations, early civilizations appeared in Mesoamerica and South America, and though they shared many characteristics above, they did not develop along river valleys. The Olmecs appeared by about 1200 BCE in what is now Mexico. Their trade and culture influenced other parts of Central America and shaped the development of later civilizations in the area. Between 1800 and 1200 BCE, an elaborate culture developed in the Andes area of South America. The Chavin people in particular spread widely throughout the area from their center in present-day Peru.

All of the civilizations varied greatly, as the chart below (next page) reflects. For the exam, you only need to be able to accurately compare two of the civilizations.

COMPARISONS OF EARLY RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATIONS

	CULTURE	POLITICAL ORGANIZATION	SOCIAL STRUCTURE
MESOPOTAMIA (developed by 3500 BCE)	<p>Cuneiform writing with wedge shaped characters; 2000 symbols reduced to 300</p> <p>Extensive trade with Egypt and the Indus Valley</p> <p>Epic of Gilgamesh</p> <p>Early use of bronze tools, chariots</p> <p>Advanced astronomy; math based on 60</p> <p>Pessimistic view of world, perhaps due to irregular, unpredictable flooding of the rivers</p> <p>Polytheism - gods powerful and often cruel</p> <p>Kings powerful, but not divine</p>	<p>City-states and warrior kings in almost constant conflict with one another</p> <p>Large empires in later times</p> <p>Hammurabi's Code and lex talionis (law of retaliation)</p> <p>Competition among city states as well as frequent invasions led to less political stability than in Egypt</p>	<p>Job specialization - farmers, metallurgist, merchants, craftsmen, political administrators, priests</p> <p>Social classes:</p> <p>1) free land-owning class</p> <p>2) dependent farmers and artisans</p> <p>3) slaves for domestic service (could purchase freedom)</p> <p>merchant class important</p> <p>Marriage contracts, veils for women; women of upper classes less equal than lower class counterparts</p>

EGYPT (developed by 3000 BCE)	<p>No epic literature</p> <p>Concerned with decorative arts, shipbuilding, some medical knowledge</p> <p>Less advanced in math and astronomy than Mesopotamians</p> <p>Less extensive trade, especially in earlier eras</p> <p>Polytheism, with pharaoh as a god</p> <p>Optimistic view of life (regular, controllable flooding of the river)</p> <p>Strong belief in the afterlife; Book of the Dead</p> <p>Hieroglyphics - complex, pictorial language</p>	<p>Divine kingship - the pharaoh; highly centralized, authoritarian government</p> <p>Generally stable government throughout the 3 kingdoms</p> <p>Extensive bureaucracy; pharaoh's power channeled through regional governors</p>	<p>Smaller nobility than Mesopotamia; fewer merchants</p> <p>Some social mobility through the bureaucracy</p> <p>Priests have high status (only ones who understand the complex hieroglyphic written language)</p> <p>Women - probably higher status than in Mesopotamia; love poetry indicates some importance placed on male/female relationships</p> <p>One female pharaoh - Hatshepsut</p> <p>Influential wife of pharaoh - Nefertiti</p>
INDUS VALLEY (developed by 2500 BCE)	<p>Writing system only recently decipherable</p> <p>Soapstone seals that indicate trade with both Mesopotamians and China</p> <p>pottery making with bulls and long-horned cattle a frequent motif</p> <p>Small figurines of women</p> <p>Cruder weapons than Mesopotamians - stone arrowheads, no swords</p> <p>Polytheism - naked man with horns the primary god; fertility goddesses</p> <p>Two cities: Harappa and Mohenjo-Dara</p>	<p>Assumed to be complex and thought to be centralized</p> <p>Limited information, but large granaries near the cities indicate centralized control</p>	<p>Priests have highest status, based on position as intermediaries between gods and people</p> <p>Differences in house sizes indicate strong class distinctions</p> <p>Statues reflects reverence for female reproductive function</p>
	<p>Oracles bones used to communicate with ancestors</p> <p>Pattern on bones formed</p>		

SHANG CHINA (developed by 1700 BCE)	<p>basis for writing system; writing highly valued, complex pictorial language with 3000 characters by end of dynasty</p> <p>Uniform written language became bond among people who spoke many different languages</p> <p>Bronze weapons and tools, horse-drawn chariots</p> <p>Geographical separation from other civilizations, though probably traded with the Indus Valley</p>	<p>Centralized government, power in the hands of the emperor</p> <p>Government preoccupied with flood control of the rivers Job specialization - bureaucrats, farmers, slaves</p>	<p>Social classes - warrior aristocrats, bureaucrats, farmers, slaves</p> <p>Patriarchal society; women as wives and concubines; women were sometimes shamans</p>
MESO AND SOUTH AMERICA (developed by 1200 BCE)	<p>Olmecs in Mesoamerica:</p> <p>Highly developed astronomy; used to predict agricultural cycles and please the gods</p> <p>Polytheism; religious rituals important, shamans as healers</p> <p>Ritual ballgames</p> <p>Irrigation and drainage canals</p> <p>Giant carved stone heads; probably with religious significance</p> <p>Jaguar symbol important</p> <p>Chavin in Andean region:</p> <p>Polytheism; statues of jaguar men</p> <p>Square stone architecture, no mortar</p> <p>Well-developed agriculture based on maize</p> <p>Unique geography: lived on coast, in mountains, and in jungle</p>	<p>Olmecs: apparently not united politically; unusual for ancient civilizations</p> <p>Chavin: probably political unification; public works operated by reciprocal labor obligations; had a capital city</p>	<p>Olmec: craft specializations; priests have highest status; most people were farmers</p> <p>Chavin: Priests have highest status; capital city dominated the hinterlands; most people were farmers</p>

CHANGE OVER TIME - EGYPT AND WESTERN ASIA

The river valleys where civilizations first developed have been home to many people continuously over time right up to present day. In ancient times all of the areas changed significantly from their early beginnings through golden days to their eventual demise. The chart below reflects change over time in two of the areas - Egypt and Western Asia, concentrating on the era from 1500 to 500 BCE.

CHANGE OVER TIME - EGYPT AND WESTERN ASIA CHANGES BY 1500-500 BCE

	EGYPT	WESTERN ASIA
Political systems	Outside invaders took over; political fragmentation challenged power of the pharaoh; foreign rule for the first time - Hyksos; reunified into New Kingdom, when Hyksos expelled ; in contrast to Old Kingdom, aggressive and expansionist; building of army/fortifications; female pharaoh - Hatshepsut; Ramesses II - expansionist, dominated age for 66 year reign	Outside invaders took over, control city states; two distinct political zones: Babylonia in south, Assyria in north; Assyria was expansionist; Hittites; larger states interacted - a geopolitical sphere
Trade, contact	Increased amount of trade, contact; control of Syria/Palestine and Nubia - brought new resources - timber, gold, copper; myrrh and resin from punt	Increased amount of trade, contact; Assyrians brought in tin and textiles in exchange for silver; Hittites took over copper, silver, and iron deposits
Culture, including languages and writing	Hyksos intermarried with Egyptians, assimilation of Egyptian ways; Amarna letters - reflect contacts among cultures; "superiority" of Egyptian culture	More diverse languages - Hittites, Kassites (non-Semitic); diffusion of Mesopotamian political and cultural concepts, including Akkadian as language of international diplomacy; cuneiform writing spread; mythology, arts and architecture spread
Religion	Akhenaton - perhaps monotheism, devotion to sun god Aten	Spread of Sumerian mythology to entire area
Architecture	No more pyramids, but colossal statues and temples, and underground tombs	
Military	Clashes between Egypt and the Hittites	Clashes between Egypt and the Hittites
Transportation	Horses by 1500 BCE; horse drawn chariots; enabled larger kingdoms	Horses by 2000 BCE; horse drawn chariots; enabled larger kingdoms; camels arrived

THE DECLINE OF THE EARLIEST CIVILIZATIONS

Throughout history, no matter what the era, virtually all civilizations that have come to power eventually decline and die. Historians have always been intrigued with the question of why decline appears to be inevitable. The experience of the earliest civilizations provides some answers to the question of why empires

fall.

If you study the chart above carefully, you will notice that by the era from 1500 to 500 BCE, both Egypt and Western Asia were showing signs of conflict and weakness. Ironically, the problems began at a time when both areas were prosperous from trade. Their cities were cosmopolitan, arts and literature flourished, and the civilizations were in frequent contact with one another. So what happened?

An important change occurs around 1200 BCE for all of the civilizations except for China. Without exception the others experienced a major decline or destruction during this Marker Era in world history. Examples include:

- **Egypt** - Egypt experienced strong attacks from the north, and the government lost control of Nubia, a region to the south. Egypt survived, but was considerably weaker than before.
- **The Hittites** - This powerful group that occupied and controlled what is now Turkey fell apart when attacked from the northeast, never to appear as a unified empire again.
- **The Indus Valley people** - This civilization disappeared as Aryans from the north spilled into the area and took control.
- **Mycenaens** - These people who were the precursors to the later Greek civilization collapsed shortly after their famous conflict with Troy in the Trojan Wars.

In all cases, the very infrastructure of civilization collapsed, remarkably all about the same time. Why? Or a better question may be why China was spared the debacle. A common denominator is invasion, and one answer is that Indo-Europeans from an area north of Mesopotamia migrated south into Western Asia and the Indus Valley. This massive migration began in the mid-2nd millennium BCE, and for more than a thousand years thereafter, they threatened all of the early civilizations except for China. However, a more intriguing idea is that the very thing that brought strength also destroyed them - trade and contact with others. Interactions among the societies led to shared prosperity - the more trade, the more money people made. Trade also brought about cultural diffusion, which contributed to the diversity and sophistication of the cities. However, weaknesses may be shared as easily as strengths. When one weakened, the others felt the impact. Only China survived because it was not as involved in the trade loop as the others were.

The fall of empires around 1200 BCE is an excellent example of the role that interactions among societies play in determining the course of world history. As we will see as we go through time, interactions, both positive and negative, have been a major force that shape broad, important changes over time.

NOMADS AND MIGRATIONS (3500 - 500 BCE)

During the era of the earliest river valley civilizations, numerous nomadic groups migrated to new areas, with many resulting repercussions. Many of the kingdoms and empires themselves were founded by nomadic groups that took control and settled into the area of the people that they conquered. Mesopotamia in particular, largely because of its geography, was always subject to frequent invasions from outsiders. As we saw earlier, nomads also played a large role in the fall of empires around 1200 BCE. Other groups migrated westward to Europe, setting the stage for later developments there.

Three major migrations of the era from 3500 - 1100 BCE are:

- **Phoenicians** - By about 2000 BCE this small group of seafaring people from a coastal area of the eastern Mediterranean Sea had set up colonies in North Africa and southern Europe. Pressured by both lack of space in their homeland and desire for prosperity from trade, the Phoenicians traveled widely over the entire Mediterranean area. To facilitate their trading, they simplified the cuneiform system, producing an alphabet with 22 characters that was far easier to learn and use. Not only did the Phoenicians spread their maritime skills, but their alphabet became the basis for alphabets in Greece, Rome, and eventually for many modern languages.
- **Israelites** - According to Judaism, the Israelites actually originated about 2000 BCE in the Mesopotamian city of Ur with the founder of the religion, Abraham. Abraham and his family migrated to the eastern Mediterranean, where they settled in a land they called Canaan. The Jews were distinctly different from other people of the area because they were monotheistic, believing in only one god. They later migrated to Egypt to escape a spreading drought. There they became slaves, and under their leader Moses, they returned to Canaan where they eventually formed the kingdom of Israel. The Jewish religion greatly influenced the people that they contacted, although it did not actively encourage conversion of non-Jews.

Jewish beliefs and traditional stories were written down and later became basic to Christianity and Islam. The religion stressed the importance of prayer, worship, and good behavior – tenets that have become characteristic of many other monotheistic religions.

- **Aryans** - These herding peoples originated in the Caucasus area, but they began migrating in many directions about the mid 2nd millennium BCE. Waves of Aryan migrants invaded the Indian subcontinent, decimating the cities of the Indus Valley. The Aryans remained a nomadic people for many years, but eventually pushed eastward, settling in the fertile Ganges River area as agriculturalists. The Aryans imposed their caste system on the natives, a complex social structure with strict social status differences and virtually no social mobility. Their stories also became the basis for Hinduism.

THE CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS (1000 BCE - 600 CE)

The period after the decline of river valley civilizations (about 1000 BCE - 600 CE) is often called the classical age. During this era world history was shaped by the rise of several large civilizations that grew from areas where the earlier civilizations thrived. The classical civilizations differ from any previous ones in these ways:

1. They kept better and more recent records, so historical information about them is much more abundant. We know more about not just their wars and their leaders, but also about how ordinary people lived.
2. The classical societies provide many direct links to today's world, so that we may refer to them as root civilizations, or ones that modern societies have grown from.
3. Classical civilizations were expansionist, deliberately conquering lands around them to create large empires. As a result, they were much larger in land space and population than the river civilizations were.

Three areas where civilizations proved to be very durable were

- The Mediterranean - Two great classical civilizations grew up around this area: the Greeks and the Romans.
- China - The classical era began with the Zhou Empire and continued through the Han Dynasty.
- India - Although political unity was difficult for India, the Mauryan and Gupta Empire emerged during the classical era.

COMMON FEATURES OF CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS

The three areas of classical civilizations developed their own beliefs, lifestyles, political institutions, and social structures. However, there were important similarities among them:

- Patriarchal family structures - Like the river valley civilizations that preceded them, the classical civilization valued male authority within families, as well as in most other areas of life.
- Agricultural-based economies - Despite more sophisticated and complex job specialization, the most common occupation in all areas was farming.
- Complex governments - Because they were so large, these three civilizations had to invent new ways to keep their lands together politically. Their governments were large and complex, although they each had unique ways of governing
- Expanding trade base - Their economic systems were complex. Although they generally operated independently, trade routes connected them by both land and sea.

CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS

	Culture	Political Organization	Social Structure
	<p>Most enduring influences come from Athens:</p> <p>Valued education, placed emphasis on importance of human effort, human ability to shape future events</p> <p>Interest in political theory: which form of government</p>	<p>No centralized government; concept of polis, or a fortified site that formed the centers of many city states</p> <p>Governing styles varied (Sparta a military state, Athens eventually a democracy for adult males)</p>	<p>Slavery widely practiced</p>

<p>Greece (about 800-300 BCE)</p>	<p>is best?</p> <p>Celebration of human individual achievement and the ideal human form</p> <p>Philosophy and science emphasized the use of logic</p> <p>Highly developed form of sculpture, literature, math, written language, and record keeping</p> <p>Polytheism, with gods having very human characteristics</p> <p>Cities relatively small</p> <p>Great seafaring skills, centered around Aegean, but traveling around entire Mediterranean area</p>	<p>Athens government first dominated by tyrants, or strong rulers who gained power from military prowess; later came to be ruled by an assembly of free men who made political decisions.</p> <p>Both Athens and Sparta developed strong military organizations and established colonies around the Mediterranean. Sparta theoretically equal; wealth accumulation not allowed</p>	<p>Men separated from women in military barracks until age 30; women had relative freedom; women in Sparta encouraged to be physically fit so as to have healthy babies; generally better treated and more equal to men than women in Athens</p> <p>Athens encouraged equality for free males, but women and slaves had little freedom. Neither group allowed to participate in polis affairs.</p> <p>Social status dependent on land holdings and cultural sophistication</p>
<p>Rome (about 500 BCE to 476 CE, although eastern half continued for another thousand years)</p>	<p>Perfection of military techniques: conquer but don't oppress; division of army into legions, emphasizing organization and rewarding military talent</p> <p>Art, literature, philosophy, science derivative from Greece</p> <p>Superb engineering and architecture techniques; extensive road, sanitation systems; monumental architecture -buildings, aqueducts, bridges</p> <p>Polytheism, derivative from Greeks, but religion not particularly important to the average Roman; Christianity developed during Empire period, but not dominant until very late</p>	<p>Two eras:</p> <p>Republic - rule by aristocrats, with some power shared with assemblies; Senate most powerful, with two consuls chosen to rule, generally selected from the military</p> <p>Empire - non-hereditary emperor; technically chosen by Senate, but generally chosen by predecessor</p> <p>Extensive colonization and military conquest during both eras</p> <p>Development of an overarching set of laws, restrictions that all had to obey; Roman law sets in place principle of rule of law, not rule by whim of the</p>	<p>Basic division between patricians (aristocrats) and plebeians (free farmers), although a middle class of merchants grew during the empire; wealth based on land ownership; gap between rich and poor grew with time</p> <p>Paterfamilias - male dominated family structure</p> <p>Patron-client system with rich supervising elaborate webs of people that owe favors to them</p> <p>Inequality increased during the empire, with great dependence on slavery during the late empire; slaves used in households, mines, large estates, all kinds of manual labor</p>

	Great city of Rome - buildings, arenas, design copied in smaller cities	political leader	
China (about 500 BCE to 600 CE)	<p>Confucianism developed during late Zhou; by Han times, it dominated the political and social structure.</p> <p>Legalism and Daoism develop during same era.</p> <p>Buddhism appears, but not influential yet</p> <p>Threats from nomads from the south and west spark the first construction of the Great Wall; clay soldiers, lavish tomb for first emperor Shi Huangdi</p> <p>Chinese identity cemented during Han era: the "Han" Chinese</p> <p>Han - a "golden age" with prosperity from trade along the Silk Road; inventions include water mills, paper, compasses, and pottery and silk-making; calendar with 365.5 days</p> <p>Capital of Xi'an possibly the most sophisticated, diverse city in the world at the time; many other large cities</p>	<p>Zhou - emperor rules by mandate of heaven, or belief that dynasties rise and fall according to the will of heaven, or the ancestors. Emperor was the "son of heaven."</p> <p>Emperor housed in the forbidden city, separate from all others</p> <p>Political authority controlled by Confucian values, with emperor in full control but bound by duty</p> <p>Political power centralized under Shi Huangdi - often seen as the first real emperor</p> <p>Han - strong centralized government, supported by the educated shi (scholar bureaucrats who obtained positions through civil service exams)</p>	<p>Family basic unit of society, with loyalty and obedience stressed</p> <p>Wealth generally based on land ownership; emergence of scholar gentry</p> <p>Growth of a large merchant class, but merchants generally lower status than scholar-bureaucrats</p> <p>Big social divide between rural and urban, with most wealth concentrated in cities</p> <p>Some slavery, but not as much as in Rome</p> <p>Patriarchal society reinforced by Confucian values that emphasized obedience of wife to husband</p>
India	<p>Aryan religious stories written down into Vedas, and Hinduism became the dominant religion, although Buddhism began in India during this era;</p> <p>Mauryans Buddhist, Guptas Hindu</p> <p>Great epic literature such as the Ramayana and Mahabarata</p>	<p>Lack of political unity - geographic barriers and diversity of people; tended to fragment into small kingdoms;</p> <p>political authority less important than caste membership and group allegiances</p> <p>Mauryan and Gupta Empires</p>	<p>Complex social hierarchy based on caste membership (birth groups called jati); occupations strictly dictated by caste</p> <p>Earlier part of time period - women had property rights</p>

Extensive trade routes within subcontinent and with others; connections to Silk Road, and heart of Indian Ocean trade; coined money for trade	formed based on military conquest; Mauryan Emperor Ashoka seen as greatest; converted to Buddhism, kept the religion alive	Decline in the status of women during Gupta, corresponding to increased emphasis on acquisition and inheritance of property; ritual of sati for wealthy women (widow cremates herself in her husband's funeral pyre)
So-called Arabic numerals developed in India, employing a 10-based system	"theater state" techniques used during Gupta - grand palace and court to impress all visitors, conceal political weakness	

GLOBAL TRADE AND CONTACT

During the classical era the major civilizations were not entirely isolated from one another. Migrations continued, and trade increased, diffusing technologies, ideas, and goods from civilization centers to more parts of the world. However, the process was slow. Chinese inventions such as paper had not yet reached societies outside East Asia by the end of the classical era. The Western Hemisphere was not yet in contact with the Eastern Hemisphere. Nevertheless, a great deal of cultural diffusion did take place, and larger areas of the world were in contact with one another than in previous eras.

One very important example of cultural diffusion was Hellenization, or the deliberate spread of Greek culture. The most important agent for this important change was Alexander the Great, who conquered Egypt, the Middle East, and the large empire of Persia that spread eastward all the way to the Indus River Valley. Alexander was Macedonian, but he controlled Greece and was a big fan of Greek culture. His conquests meant that Greek architecture, philosophy, science, sculpture, and values diffused to large areas of the world and greatly increased the importance of Classical Greece as a root culture.

Trade routes that linked the classical civilizations include:

- **The Silk Road** - This overland route extended from western China, across Central Asia, and finally to the Mediterranean area. Chinese silk was the most desired commodity, but the Chinese were willing to trade it for other goods, particularly for horses from Central Asia. There was no single route, but it consisted of a series of passages with common stops along the way. Major trade towns appeared along the way where goods were exchanged. No single merchant traveled the entire length of the road, but some products (particularly silk) did make it from one end to the other.
- **The Indian Ocean Trade** - This important set of water routes became even more important in later eras, but the Indian Ocean Trade was actively in place during the classical era. The trade had three legs: one connected eastern Africa and the Middle East with India; another connected India to Southeast Asia; and the final one linked Southeast Asia to the Chinese port of Canton.
- **Saharan Trade** - This route connected people that lived south of the Sahara to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The Berbers, nomads who traversed the desert, were the most important agents of trade. They carried goods in camel caravans, with Cairo at the mouth of the Nile River as the most important destination. There they connected to other trade routes, so that Cairo became a major trade center that linked many civilizations together.
- **Sub-Saharan Trade** - This trade was probably inspired by the Bantu migration, and by the end of the classical era people south of the Sahara were connect to people in the eastern and southern parts of Africa. This trade connected to the Indian Ocean trade along the eastern coast of Africa, which in turn connected the people of sub-Saharan Africa to trade centers in Cairo and India.

TRADE DURING THE CLASSICAL ERA (1000 BCE to 600 CE)

Route	Description	What traded?	Who participated?	Cultural diffusion
	Overland from western	From west to east - horses, alfalfa, grapes, melons,	Chinese, Indians, Parthians, central	Chariot warfare, the stirrup, music, diversity of

Silk Road	China to the Mediterranean Trade made possible by development of a camel hybrid capable of long dry trips	walnuts From east to west - silk, peaches, apricots, spices, pottery, paper	Asians, Romans Primary agents of trade - central Asian nomads	populations, Buddhism and Christianity, wealth and prosperity (particularly important for central Asian nomads)
Indian Ocean Trade	By water from Canton in China to Southeast Asia to India to eastern Africa and the Middle East; monsoon-controlled	Pigments, pearls, spices, bananas and other tropical fruits	Chinese, Indians, Malays, Persians, Arabs, people on Africa's east coast	Lateen sail (flattened triangular shape) permitted sailing far from coast Created a trading class with mixture of cultures, ties to homeland broken
Saharan Trade	Points in western Africa south of the Sahara to the Mediterranean; Cairo most important destination Camel caravans	Salt from Sahara to points south and west Gold from western Africa Wheat and olives from Italy Roman manufactured goods to western Africa	Western Africans, people of the Mediterranean Berbers most important agents of trade	Technology of the camel saddle - important because it allowed domestication and use of the camel for trade
Sub-Saharan Trade	Connected Africans south and east of the Sahara to one another; connected in the east to other trade routes	Agricultural products, iron weapons	Diverse peoples in sub-Saharan Africa	Bantu language, "Africinity"

THE LATE CLASSICAL ERA: THE FALL OF EMPIRES (200 TO 600 CE)

Recall that all of the river-valley civilization areas experienced significant decline and/or conquest in the time period around 1200 BCE. A similar thing happened to the classical civilizations between about 200 and 600 CE, and because the empires were larger and more connected, their fall had an even more significant impact on the course of world history. Han China was the first to fall (around 220 CE), then the Western Roman Empire (476 CE), and finally the Gupta in 550 CE.

SIMILARITIES

Several common factors caused all three empires to fall:

- Attacks from the Huns - The Huns were a nomadic people of Asia that began to migrate south and west during this time period. Their migration was probably caused by drought and lack of pasture, and the invention and use of the stirrup facilitated their attacks on all three established civilizations.
- Deterioration of political institutions - All three empires were riddled by political corruption during their latter days, and all three suffered under weak-willed rulers. Moral decay also characterized the years prior to their respective falls.
- Protection/maintenance of borders - All empires found that their borders had grown so large that their military had trouble guarding them. A primary example is the failure of the Great Wall to keep the Huns out of China. The Huns generally just went around it.
- Diseases that followed the trade routes - Plagues and epidemics may have killed off as much as half of the population of each empire.

DIFFERENCES

Even though the empires shared common reasons for their declines, some significant differences also may be seen.

- The Gupta's dependence on alliances with regional princes broke down, exhibiting the tendency toward political fragmentation on the Indian subcontinent.
- Rome's empire lasted much longer than did either of the other two. The Roman Empire also split in two, and the eastern half endured for another 1000 years after the west fell.
- The fall of empire affected the three areas in different ways. The fall of the Gupta probably had the least impact, partly because political unity wasn't the rule anyway, and partly because the traditions of Hinduism and the caste system (the glue that held the area together) continued on after the empire fell. The fall of the Han Dynasty was problematic for China because strong centralized government was in place, and social disorder resulted from the loss of authority. However, dynastic cycles that followed the dictates of the Mandate of Heaven were well defined in China, and the Confucian traditions continued to give coherence to Chinese society. The most devastating fall of all occurred in Rome. Roman civilization depended almost exclusively on the ability of the government and the military to control territory. Even though Christianity emerged as a major religion, it appeared so late in the life of the empire that it provided little to unify people as Romans after the empire fell. Instead, the areas of the empire fragmented into small parts and developed unique characteristics, and the Western Roman Empire never united again.

COMMON CONSEQUENCES

The fall of the three empires had some important consequences that represent major turning points in world history:

- Trade was disrupted but survived, keeping intact the trend toward increased long-distance contact. Trade on the Indian Ocean even increased as conflict and decline of political authority affected overland trade.
- The importance of religion increased as political authority decreased. In the west religion, particularly Christianity, was left to slowly develop authority in many areas of people's lives. Buddhism also spread quickly into China, presenting itself as competition to Confucian traditions.
- Political disunity in the Middle East forged the way for the appearance of a new religion in the 7th century. By 600 CE Islam was in the wings waiting to make its entrance onto the world stage.

BELIEF SYSTEMS

Belief systems include both religions and philosophies that help to explain basic questions of human existence, such as "Where did we come from?" Or "What happens after death?" or "What is the nature of human relationships or interactions?" Many major beliefs systems that influence the modern world began during the Foundations Era (8000 BCE to 600 CE).

POLYTHEISM

The earliest form of religion was probably polydaemonism (the belief in many spirits), but somewhere in the Neolithic era people began to put these spirits together to form gods. In polytheism, each god typically has responsibility for one area of life, like war, the sea, or death. In early agricultural societies, quite logically most of the gods had responsibility for the raising of crops and domesticated animals. The most prominent god in many early societies was the Sun God, who took many forms and went by many names. Other gods supervised rain, wind, the moon, or stars. Many societies worshipped gods of fertility, as reflected in statues of pregnant goddesses, or women with exaggerated female features. Young male gods often had features of bulls, goats, or jaguars that represented power, energy, and/or virility. Perceptions of the gods varied from one civilization to the next, with some seeing them as fierce and full of retribution, and others seeing them as more tolerant of human foibles.

Religion was extremely important to the river-valley civilizations, and most areas of life revolved around pleasing the gods. Monotheism was first introduced about 2000 BCE by Israelites, but monotheism did not grow substantially till much later. Each of the classical civilizations had very different belief systems that partially account for the very different directions that the three areas took in succeeding eras. Rome and Greece were polytheistic, but Christianity had a firm footing by the time the western empire fell. Hinduism dominated Indian society from very early times, although Buddhism also took root in India. From China's early days, ancestors were revered, a belief reinforced by the philosophy of Confucianism. Other belief systems, such as

Daoism, Legalism, and Buddhism, also flourished in China by 600 CE.

HINDUISM

The beginnings of Hinduism are difficult to trace, but the religion originated with the polytheism that the Aryans brought as they began invading the Indian subcontinent sometime after 2000 BCE. Aryan priest recited hymns that told stories and taught values and were eventually written down in The Vedas, the sacred texts of Hinduism. One famous story is The Ramayana that tells about the life and love of Prince Rama and his wife Sita. Another epic story is The Mahabharata, which focuses on a war between cousins. Its most famous part is called The Baghavad Gita, which tells how one cousin, Arjuna, overcomes his hesitations to fight his own kin. The stories embody important Hindu values that still guide modern day India.

Hinduism assumes the eternal existence of a universal spirit that guides all life on earth. A piece of the spirit called the atman is trapped inside humans and other living creatures. The most important desire of the atman is to be reunited with the universal spirit, and every aspect of an individual's life is governed by it. When someone dies, their atman may be reunited, but most usually is reborn in a new body. A person's caste membership is a clear indication of how close he or she is to the desired reunion. Some basic tenets of Hinduism are

- **Reincarnation** - Atman spirits are reborn in different people after one body dies. This rebirth has no beginning and no end, and is part of the larger universal spirit that pervades all of life.
- **Karma** - This widely used word actually refers to the pattern of cause and effect that transcends individual human lives. Whether or not an individual fulfills his/her duties in one life determines what happens in the next.
- **Dharma** - Duties called dharma are attached to each caste position. For example, a warrior's dharma is to fight honorably, and a wife's duty is to serve her husband faithfully. Even the lowliest caste has dharma attached to it. If one fulfills this dharma, the reward is for the atman to be reborn into a higher caste. Only the atman of a member of the highest caste (originally the priests) has the opportunity to be reunited with the universal spirit.
- **Moksha** - Moksha is the highest, most sought-after goal for the atman. It describes the reunion with the universal spirit.

The universal spirit is represented by Brahman, a god that takes many different shapes. Two of Brahman's forms are Vishnu the Creator, and Shiva the Destroyer. Hinduism is very difficult to categorize as either polytheistic or monotheistic because of the central belief in the universal spirit. Do each of Brahman's forms represent a different god, or are they all the same? Brahman's forms almost certainly represent different Aryan gods from the religion's early days, but Hinduism eventually unites them all in the belief in Brahman.

BUDDHISM

Buddhism began in India in the Ganges River area during the 6th century BCE. Its founder was Siddhartha Guatama, who later became known as the Buddha, or the "Enlightened One." Siddhartha was the son of a wealthy Hindu prince who grew up with many advantages in life. However, as a young man he did not find answers to the meaning of life in Hinduism, so he left home to become an ascetic, or wandering holy man. His Enlightenment came while sitting under a tree in a Deerfield, and the revelations of that day form the basic tenets of Buddhism:

- **The Four Noble Truths** - 1) All of life is suffering; 2) Suffering is caused by false desires for things that do not bring satisfaction; 3) Suffering may be relieved by removing the desire; 4) Desire may be removed by following the Eightfold Path.
- **The Eightfold Path to Enlightenment** - The ultimate goal is to follow the path to nirvana, or a state of contentment that occurs when the individual's soul unites with the universal spirit. The eight steps must be achieved one by one, starting with a change in thoughts and intentions, followed by changes in life style and actions, that prelude a higher thought process through meditation. Eventually, a "breakthrough" occurs when nirvana is achieved that gives the person a whole new understanding of life.

Note that Hinduism supported the continuation of the caste system in India, since castes were an outer reflection of inner purity. For example, placement in a lower caste happened because a person did not fulfill his/her dharma in a previous life. Higher status was a "reward" for good behavior in the past. Although Buddhism, like Hinduism, emphasizes the soul's yearning for understandings on a higher plane, it generally supported the notion that anyone of any social position could follow the Eightfold Path successfully. Buddhists believed that changes in thought processes and life styles brought enlightenment, not the powers of one's caste. Although the

Buddha actively spread the new beliefs during his long lifetime, the new religion faced oppression after his death from Hindus who saw it as a threat to the basic social and religious structure that held India together. Buddhism probably survived only because the Mauryan emperor Ashoka converted to it and promoted its practice. However, in the long run, Buddhism did much better in areas where it spread through cultural diffusion, such as Southeast Asia, China, and Japan.

CONFUCIANISM

Three important belief systems (Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism) emerged in China during the Warring States Period (403-221 BCE) between the Zhou and Han Dynasties. Although the period was politically chaotic, it hosted a cultural flowering that left a permanent mark on Chinese history.

Confucius contemplated why China had fallen into chaos, and concluded that the Mandate of Heaven had been lost because of poor behavior of not only the Chinese emperor, but all his subjects as well. His plan for reestablishing Chinese society profoundly affected the course of Chinese history and eventually spread to many other areas of Asia as well. He emphasized the importance of harmony, order, and obedience and believed that if five basic relationships were sound, all of society would be, too:

- Emperor/subject - the emperor has the responsibility to take care of his subjects, and subjects must obey the emperor
- Father/son - the father takes care of the son, and the son obeys the father
- Older brother/younger brother - the older brother takes care of the younger brother, who in turn obeys him
- Husband/wife - the husband takes care of the wife, who in turn obeys him
- Friend/friend - The only relationship that does not assume inequality should be characterized by mutual care and obedience
- Confucius also defined the "superior man" - one who exhibits ren (kindness), li (sense of propriety), and Xiao (filial piety, or loyalty to the family).

Confucianism accepted and endorsed inequality as an important part of an ordered society. It confirmed the power of the emperor, but held him responsible for his people, and it reinforced the patriarchal family structure that was already in place in China. Because Confucianism focused on social order and political organization, it is generally seen as a philosophy rather than a religion. Religions are more likely to emphasize spiritual topics, not society and politics.

DAOISM

The founder of Daoism is believed to have been Laozi, a spiritualist who probably lived in the 4th century BCE. The religion centers on the Dao (sometimes referred to as the "Way" or "Path"), the original force of the cosmos that is an eternal and unchanging principle that governs all the workings of the world. The Dao is passive - not active, good nor bad - but it just is. It cannot be changed, so humans must learn to live with it. According to Daoism, human strivings have brought the world to chaos because they resist the Dao. A chief characteristic is wuwei, or a disengagement from the affairs of the world, including government. The less government, the better. Live simply, in harmony with nature. Daoism encourages introspection, development of inner contentment, and no ambition to change the Dao.

Both Confucianism and Daoism encourage self knowledge and acceptance of the ways things are. However, Confucianism is activist and extroverted, and Daoism is reflective and introspective. The same individual may believe in the importance of both belief systems, unlike many people in western societies who think that a person may only adhere to one belief system or another.

LEGALISM

The third belief system that arose from the Warring States Period is legalism, and it stands in stark contrast to the other beliefs. It had no concern with ethics, morality, or propriety, and cared nothing about human nature, or governing principles of the world. Instead it emphasized the importance of rule of law, or the imperative for laws to govern, not men. According to legalism, laws should be administered objectively, and punishments for offenders should be harsh and swift. Legalism was the philosophy of Shi Huangdi, the first emperor, whose Qin Dynasty rescued China from chaos. However, when he died, the Han emperors that followed deserted legalism and established Confucianism as the dominant philosophy.

JUDAISM

As noted earlier, Judaism was the first clearly monotheistic religion. At the heart of the religion was a belief in a Covenant, or agreement, between God and the Jewish people, that God would provide for them as long as they

obeyed him. The Ten Commandments set down rules for relationships among human beings, as well as human relationships to God. Because they were specially chosen by God, Jews came to see themselves as separate from others and did not seek to convert others to the religion. As a result, Judaism has remained a relatively small religion. However, its influence on other larger religions, including Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam is vast, and so it remains as a very significant "root religion."

Zoroastrianism is an early monotheistic religion that almost certainly influenced and was influenced by Judaism, and it is very difficult to know which one may have emerged first. Both religions thrived in the Middle East, and adherents of both apparently had contact with one another. Zoroastrianism was the major religion of Persia, a great land-based empire that was long at war with Ancient Greece and eventually conquered by Alexander the Great. The religion's founder was Zoroaster or Zarathushtra, who saw the world immersed in a great struggle between good and evil, a concept that certainly influenced other monotheistic religions.

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity grew directly out of Judaism, with its founder Jesus of Nazareth born and raised as a Jew in the area just east of the Mediterranean Sea. During his lifetime, the area was controlled by Rome as a province in the empire. Christianity originated partly from a long-standing Jewish belief in the coming of a Messiah, or a leader who would restore the Jewish kingdom to its former glory days. Jesus' followers saw him as the Messiah who would cleanse the Jewish religion of its rigid and haughty priests and assure life after death to all that followed Christian precepts. In this way, its appeal to ordinary people may be compared to that of Buddhism, as it struggled to emerge from the Hindu caste system. Christianity's broad appeal of the masses, as well as deliberate conversion efforts by its early apostles, meant that the religion grew steadily and eventually became the religion with the most followers in the modern world.

Jesus was a prophet and teacher whose followers came to believe that he was the son of God. He advocated a moral code based on love, charity, and humility. His disciples predicted a final judgment day when God would reward the righteous with immortality and condemn sinners to eternal hell. Jesus was arrested and executed by Roman officials because he aroused suspicions among Jewish leaders, and he was seen by many as a dangerous rebel rouser. After his death, his apostles spread the faith. Especially important was Paul, a Jew who was familiar with Greco-Roman culture. He explained Christian principles in ways that Greeks and Romans understood, and he established churches all over the eastern end of the Mediterranean, and even as far away as Rome.

Christianity grew steadily in the Roman Empire, but not without clashes with Roman authorities. Eventually in the 4th century CE, the Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity and established a new capital in the eastern city of Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople. As a result, the religion grew west and north from Rome, and also east from Constantinople, greatly extending its reach.

By the end of the classical era, these major belief systems had expanded to many areas of the world, and with the fall of empires in the late classical era, came to be major forces in shaping world history. One major religion - Islam - remained to be established in the 7th century as part of the next great period that extended from 600 to 1450 CE.