



Topic  
History

Subtopic  
Ancient History

# History of the Ancient World: A Global Perspective

## Course Guidebook

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University of Wisconsin-Green Bay



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## **Gregory S. Aldrete, Ph.D.**

Professor of Humanistic Studies and History  
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**P**rofessor Gregory S. Aldrete is Professor of Humanistic Studies and History at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay. He received his A.B. from Princeton University in 1988 and his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1995. His scholarship spans the fields of history, archaeology, and philology.

Among the many books Professor Aldrete has written or edited are *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (1999), *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome* (2007), *Daily Life in the Roman City: Rome, Pompeii, and Ostia* (2009), *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Daily Life I: The Ancient World* (editor, 2004), and *Unraveling the Linothorax Mystery: Reconstructing and Testing Ancient Linen Body Armor* (with S. Bartell, in press).

Professor Aldrete has received numerous awards for both his teaching and research. In 2009, he was a recipient of the American Philological Association Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Classics at the College Level. From 1997 to 1998, he was a University of Wisconsin System Teaching Fellow, and from 2007 to 2008, he was a University of Wisconsin–Green Bay Teaching Scholar. In addition, Professor Aldrete has received three prestigious year-long research fellowships: two Humanities Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Solmsen Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Institute for Research in the Humanities in Madison. He was chosen as a fellow of two NEH seminars held at the American Academy in Rome, was a participant in an NEH Institute at UCLA, and was a Visiting Scholar at the American Academy in Rome. In 2006, his university honored him with its highest awards for both teaching and research: the Founders Association Award for Excellence in Teaching and the Founders Association Award for Excellence in Scholarship.

Professor Aldrete maintains an active schedule of lectures to the general public, including speaking to retirement groups; in elementary, middle, and high schools; and on cruise ships; and he has been named one of the National Lecturers for the Archaeological Institute of America. ■

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# History of the Ancient World: A Global Perspective

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## Scope:

This course traces the development of civilizations around the world, from the appearance of the first cities in various places around 3500–3000 B.C. until the establishment of the first true European empire under Charlemagne and the golden ages of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad and the Tang dynasty in China, all during the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

The lectures are chronologically organized, but they interweave history with the examination of key aspects of culture, including art, literature, philosophy, religion, and architecture. We begin by looking at the earliest urban civilizations, which arose independently in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China, with an emphasis on how each unique physical environment indelibly and dramatically shaped the civilization that developed in each location.

In Mesopotamia, we follow a sequence of cultures: the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Hittites, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Persians, and Sassanians. In India, we follow the growth of the Indus Valley, Vedic, and Aryan civilizations and the achievements of the Mauryan and Gupta dynasties. In China, we observe the successive Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, Sui, and Tang dynasties, while in the eastern Mediterranean, the pre-Greek Minoans and Mycenaeans are described, as is the subsequent path of classical Greek civilization, including the famed cities of Athens and Sparta and the Hellenistic world created by Alexander of Macedon. In the western Mediterranean, the fortunes of the Etruscans, Carthaginians, Romans, and various barbarian nations are all outlined. Turning to North and South America, we survey the Olmec, Chavin, Moche, Teotihuacán, and Mayan civilizations. In Africa, the establishment of kingdoms such as Meroe, Ghana, and Axum are traced, and in Oceania, we chart the explorations of the Polynesian seafarers. Even some long-lasting hunter-gatherer societies, such as the Australian Aborigines, are examined. The course comes to a close chronologically with the rise of Islam and the establishment of the Islamic Caliphates and the effect of this on Europe and the Near East.

Throughout this course, particular attention is given to key similarities and differences among the many civilizations studied, and so, in addition to traditionally organized lectures that provide an overview of the history and culture of a certain civilization, this course features a number of special lectures that explicitly and exclusively juxtapose illuminating aspects of widely disparate civilizations. For example, an entire lecture is devoted to comparing the epic poetry of Vedic India with Homer's *Iliad*. Two lectures explore the moment of intellectual questioning that occurred simultaneously in many cultures in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. that resulted in new philosophies and religions such as Confucianism and Daoism in China, pre-Socratic philosophy in Greece, Buddhism and Jainism in India, and Zoroastrianism in Persia. A set of four interrelated lectures offers parallel biographies of five great conquerors and empire builders: Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great; Chandragupta Maurya and his grandson Asoka of India; and Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China.

One lecture investigates the nature of history writing itself and compares the very different methods used by three fathers of the historical craft: Herodotus, Thucydides, and Sima Qian. Another set of three lectures places two of the greatest empires of all time—the Roman Empire and Han China—side-by-side to assess how they dealt with analogous problems and challenges, such as administration, leadership, incorporating newcomers, and coping with technological limitations. Two lectures take a thematic, comparative approach to explore the topics of warfare and the symbolic expression of power through art and architecture. Thus you will learn how the Mayan, Roman, and Chinese military systems each expressed aspects of their respective cultures, and how monuments as varied as the tribute frieze of Persepolis, Trajan's Column in Rome, the tomb of Shi Huangdi, and the reliefs of Cerro Sechin in Peru all embody similar themes.

This course combines a sweeping survey of all of world history, from the beginnings of civilization up until the origins of the modern world were established, with targeted in-depth analysis of key figures, moments, and inventions. Its goal is to provide a solid foundational knowledge of the ancient world and deeper insight into the present. ■

# Cities, Civilizations, and Sources

## Lecture 1

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This chronologically structured ancient history course examines cultures around the world but also draws comparisons among different cultures as they confront similar challenges. We must keep in mind, in this or any ancient history course, the limitations of studying the distant past: Much of what we study is the history of urban life—that 10 or 20 percent of the population that lived in cities. We must also be very cautious about interpreting any sources, whether physical or textual, in isolation, and we must be ever mindful of our own biases when we approach the evidence.

### Approaching Ancient History

- History is about people, and this course will introduce many fascinating figures and events. However, it will also weave these into a narrative encompassing all aspects of culture, including art, literature, architecture, philosophy, and religion.
- Comparing civilizations to each other and drawing out the similarities and differences among them invites us to consider how various historical groups sometimes made different decisions when confronted with analogous challenges.
- Let us begin with a somewhat controversial assertion: What historians traditionally call “civilization” is almost entirely an urban phenomenon: law codes, writing systems, technological innovations, art, and so forth all tended to develop in cities.
- Cities also produced individuals such as kings, emperors, inventors, philosophers, poets, artists, and warriors. Thus when we examine the history of civilization, we are studying urban history.

- The problem with this approach is that it does not represent the typical experience of the average inhabitant of the ancient world. For every person who lived in a city, about eight or nine lived out their lives on a small family farm.

## A Typical Life in the Ancient World

- The typical ancient history course describes the atypical lives of a tiny minority, and we will do the same, but not before addressing, briefly, what life was like for the majority.
  - Most people were born on small family farms.
  - About one-quarter to one-third of babies died in their first year of life; diseases claimed many more children before puberty.
  - Those who lived to adolescence had a good chance of surviving several decades of adult life, scratching out just enough food from the soil to avoid starvation. Most people died before the age of 50.
  - Most people never traveled more than 20 miles from home and never saw a city. They never saw a king, took part in a battle, read a book, looked at a work of art, or heard a philosopher speak.
- This basic description applies equally well to ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, or China. This sounds grim, but it was the nearly universal experience of at least 80 percent of all human beings before the Industrial Revolution.

## Archaeological Evidence

- The scarcity of the surviving sources makes the study of ancient history both an exhilarating and a frustrating endeavor. Two examples illustrate the range of evidence available and the challenges the sources pose.

- In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, German scholar Heinrich Barth spent a number of years in Africa and discovered an astonishing archaeological site in what is now Libya: A series of 10-foot-high stone pillars, arranged in pairs, each pair topped with a lintel stone. In front of each structure was a square stone block inscribed with grooved channels.
- Barth labeled the square blocks altar stones and called the upright pillars senams. Because the structure reminded him of Stonehenge, he came to the conclusion that this was a place of worship.
- Barth's remarks inspired an Englishman named Henry Cowper to undertake a detailed study of this and similar sites in North Africa. Cowper found many such sites. The most spectacular, called Senam Semana, had no fewer than 17 trilithons.
- Cowper re-created some of the rituals performed at the altars, connecting them to ancient Babylonian gods and practices, and even suggested that the builders of Stonehenge may once have emigrated from North Africa.
- Other scholars better acquainted with Mediterranean culture soon proved, however, that the structures were actually the remains of Roman olive oil factories. The upright pillars supported the arm of the olive press, and the so-called altar stones with their grooved channels were not for lurid blood sacrifices but for directing the oil into storage containers.



**Roman ruins like Senam Semana were long misinterpreted.**

© Photo courtesy of Gregory S. Aldrete.

- How could Cowper and Barth have been so utterly and embarrassingly wrong? Simply put, they had allowed their cultural biases and ignorance of local history and culture to cloud their judgment.

## Reading Ancient Texts

- Part of Barth's and Cowper's difficulty lay in having no textual evidence to back up the physical remains. Such a situation is ripe for potential misinterpretation. However, the ancient textual evidence itself may be biased, or even worse, it may deliberately attempting to deceive us.
- Surviving documents often only give one perspective on important events. Most ancient authors intended to persuade their audience. This is not a problem if we can compare multiple accounts, but quite often only one version survives.
- Sometimes it is possible to glean more information from a text than the author meant to reveal. Consider the Behistan Inscription, a piece of propaganda that King Darius I of Persia had incised 225 feet up on the side of a sheer cliff in the Zagros Mountains.
- The opening demonstrates the flavor of the message: "I am Darius, the great king, the king of kings, the king of Persia, the king of all countries, the son of a king, the grandson of a king." The inscription lists no fewer than 23 countries he has conquered.
- It is possible to draw forth a more complex understanding of Darius's conquests from the inscription. It says of a rebellion in Armenia, "By the grace of Ahura Mazda, my army smote that rebellious army utterly." Yet in later sections, the inscription tells us that the Armenians rise up and must be defeated twice more—surely evidence of Darius's weakness, not his strength.

- Whenever you look at historical evidence, beware of overly confident claims about ancient history; keep in mind how much of our supposed knowledge is really more speculation than firm fact. Over the course of these lectures, I will attempt to highlight points where our understanding rests on shaky ground, as well as events regarding which historians are divided.

## Four Themes

- This course covers a vast span, both geographically and chronologically, but several broad themes will link many of the diverse and fascinating cultures we will be studying:
  - First, take note of how the physical environment in which a culture develops affects how it evolves.
  - Second, keep an eye out for instances when two civilizations meet, either because of peaceful migration or militant invasion. Often, key moments of change or transformation are sparked by such interactions.
  - Third, watch for innovations or experiences that seem to occur across all civilizations.
  - Finally, notice how much of our contemporary culture has its origins in antiquity, so that by the end of our trip through the ancient history of the world, you should have a better sense of how the world you live in today was formed.

## Suggested Reading

Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*.

Cowper, *The Hill of the Graces*.

Lockard, *Societies, Networks, and Transitions*.

## Questions to Consider

1. To what degree do you agree or disagree with the assertion that civilization itself is always an urban phenomenon?
2. Will the sort of cultural bias exemplified by the Senam Semana story always play some role in interpreting the past, and how can historians best avoid it?

# From Out of the Mesopotamian Mud

## Lecture 2

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The geography of Mesopotamia, where the world's first cities arose, gave rise to the particular characteristics of Near Eastern culture. The devastating storms and floods led to the worship of capricious sky gods and the construction of mud-brick temples shaped like mountains—the ziggurats. The lack of natural boundaries allowed rulers to conquer large territories, leading to the world's first empires and the world's first taxation systems, which required writing to coordinate. Sargon of Akkad created the first such empire and became the prototype of the Near Eastern god-king.

### The Land between Two Rivers

- The ancient Near East gave rise to the world's first civilization—meaning it was the first location where people built cities. It was also the point of origin for Western civilization in general, and many aspects of Western civilization, including writing and law codes, are directly derived from these cultures.
- The distinctive geography of the ancient Near East in turn created cultural constants that would last for thousands of years. Similar patterns would occur in Egypt, India, and China as well.
- The ancient Near East encompassed modern Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel, and Jordan. The center of this region was Mesopotamia—literally meaning the land between two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates.
- Around 3500 B.C., just before the first cities developed, Mesopotamia was a bleak and featureless expanse of arid, sun-baked mud, with no trees or noteworthy pieces of vegetation. Without warning, violent thunderstorms would lash across the open plains.

- Floods would transform the rivers into raging torrents that burst from their banks and covered the land, obliterating everything in their path. The timing of flood season seemed designed to bring maximum suffering, since it usually fell just before harvest time, leading to a year of starvation.

### The Birth of the Gods

- One day, an inhabitant of this region traveled further than any of his peers had ever wandered before and encountered an astonishing sight: mountains. It did not take long for people to notice that the rivers, the source of irrigation and life, emanated from the mountains, and so did the storms and floods.
- It was not much of a leap to assume that these mountains were the abode of the gods. The early chief gods and goddesses of Mesopotamia were therefore linked to the sky. The chief deity, An, was a sky god. Next in importance was Enlil, the Lord Wind, who was the god of storms.
- The randomness of the devastating weather events suggested that the motives of the gods were mysterious and unknowable to mortals. All this led to what many scholars call cultural pessimism, in which the average Mesopotamian felt that he or she lived in a fundamentally hostile world, reflected in proverbs that have survived on fired clay tablets.

### The World's First Civilization

- Mesopotamia had few internal geographic boundaries, such as mountain ranges or difficult-to-cross rivers, which might have served as natural state borders. This facilitated the growth of relatively large empires. Once such empires had been carved out, their boundaries were unstable and constantly fluctuating.

- In 3100 B.C., after humans had been living and farming in Mesopotamia for hundreds of years, the first substantial cities developed. We call this earliest urban civilization the Sumerian.
- The Sumerians organized labor and set up irrigation systems. This intensive agriculture made surplus food possible, which made cities possible. Surpluses also required an administration to do the collecting and organizing, which led to the first government. Note that taxes come before government.

## Mud and Reeds

- The cultures of ancient Mesopotamia achieved a number of significant firsts in human history, and the restrictions placed on them by their environment are central to understanding the forms that these innovations took.
- The lower plain region was especially poor in many natural resources, including the basic construction materials of wood and stone. Two things that this landscape did offer in abundance were mud and reeds, and both of these were exploited for a wide range of uses.
- Reeds were used to make baskets, mats, and boats; they were also burned as fuel. In the absence of stone, many tools were crafted out of mud. It was also shaped into a vast array of pots, dishes, basins, jars, lamps, and storage containers.
- Mud brick was the basic construction material. Most commonly mud was mixed with reeds or other vegetable matter and placed into molds. These shaped bricks were dried in the sun and then used to erect walls. Unfortunately, mud brick buildings were quite vulnerable to floods, which could literally dissolve them away.
- The earliest monumental structures in history were the temples erected to the gods. Since the gods were thought to dwell on top of the mountains, it followed that these edifices would take the form of artificial mountains. Such structures are known as ziggurats.

- The Anu ziggurat at Uruk has been calculated to have required nearly 100,000 person-days of labor to construct. Such effort was expended in the hope that they would serve as links between the gods and humans, as demonstrated by the names of the ziggurat to Enlil including the “Mountain of the Storm,” and “Bond between Heaven and Earth.”
- Ziggurats became the characteristic form of temples for the next 3,000 years of Near Eastern history. Some of these mountains of mud brick still survive, especially in Iraq.

## The Cuneiform Writing System

- One of the greatest achievements of the Sumerians was the invention of the earliest known system of writing. But for writing to be useful, one must have a durable yet readily available material on which to write.
- Once more, the Sumerians turned to mud. This was fashioned into flat clay tablets onto which they scratched their written language, known as cuneiform (or “wedge writing”) with styluses. For temporary notes, the tablet could be wiped smooth and reused. For more lasting records, the clay tablets were baked.
- The advent of writing was a moment of profound importance. It created memories that never faded, conferring power in the form of knowledge. For the very first time, someone could speak directly to future generations in his or her own words.
- The earliest type of writing was simple pictures: To depict one cow, then draw a cow. Quickly, shorthand was needed, so the next stage was to create a symbol for “cow.” From there writing evolved into symbols that represented abstract concepts, and from there into symbols that represented sounds rather than things, and eventually writing arrived syllabic alphabets such as ours.



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**Most early writing systems were pictographic. These were easy to use and read but not as flexible as later alphabetic systems.**

- The Sumerian penchant for record keeping led to the development of cylinder seals, probably the most common artifact from Mesopotamia found in museums. They were used to mark documents, seal trade shipments, and to otherwise personalize documents. Cylinder seals also became status symbols, worn around the neck to demonstrate the wearer's importance.
- The Sumerians also developed the earliest known counting system—actually, two systems. For most purposes, they used a base 10 system, as most humans do, because we have 10 fingers. But for time, they used a base six system. This dual system has survived to this day.

## The Cradle of Empires

- The early Sumerian cities, such as Ur, Uruk, and Shuruppak, each had their own rulers, who also controlled some surrounding territory. Just after 2400 B.C., the enterprising king of Akkad, Sargon, embarked on a successful series of military conquests and united much of Mesopotamia.
- The Akkadian Empire was a simple system in which the king was a god-like figure and everyone else were simply his slaves. For the next several thousand years, this would be the sole political structure in this region of the world.
- Sargon's Akkadian Empire endured for only a few generations. It was followed over the next 1,500 years by a string of famous Near Eastern empires, including the Babylonians, Hittites, Assyrians, and Chaldeans continuing the pattern of urbanism, absolute rule, and imperialistic expansionism. Each also made unique contributions to the cultural heritage of ancient Mesopotamia.
- The mud plains of Mesopotamia were highly suitable for agriculture, which is probably why civilization arose there in the first place, but the environment also had severe limitations. The people learned to adapt and to use their limited resources as best as they could, engaged in an incessant struggle against nature.
- Life in Mesopotamia was arbitrary, transitory, and ruled by inexplicable forces. The gods controlled all things, but they were distant and frightening figures. To generalize about the mood of a society can be a questionable endeavor, but there was, at the very least, a strongly and consistently pessimistic and fatalistic tone present in Mesopotamian culture.

## Suggested Reading

Crawford, *Sumer and the Sumerians*.

Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*.

Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*.

Pritchard, ed. *The Ancient Near East*.

Stiebing, *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture*.

## Questions to Consider

1. To what degree do you think the available physical resources determine a culture's attitudes and beliefs?
2. Why is writing such an important innovation, and what are its primary uses?

# Cultures of the Ancient Near East

## Lecture 3

**A**fter the Akkadian Empire, a succession of cultures left their mark on Mesopotamia. Each made unique contributions to Near Eastern culture and, ultimately, Western civilization. These included the Babylonians, who gave us law codes and epic literature; the Hittites, who brought chariot warfare to the region; the Phoenicians, who were great maritime merchants and carried alphabetic writing to the Greeks; the Hebrews, whose monotheism was the seed of three great modern faiths; and the Chaldeans, who were the West's first astronomers and mathematicians.

### The Rise of Babylon

- After the fall of the Akkadians, a pattern was established in Mesopotamia: A new city would gain power and established dominance in the region, only to be supplanted when a rival city arose to take its turn as the capital of an empire. The lack of natural barriers encouraged such rapid empire making and facilitated equally speedy downfalls.
- While different cities or even ethnic groups may have taken turns ruling over Mesopotamia, the underlying culture of the region retained strong continuities from one empire to the next. This was especially true in the area of religion.
- The next city to establish hegemony over most of Mesopotamia was Babylon. The Babylonian Empire lasted from approximately 2000 to 1600 B.C. It also was the source of several significant cultural firsts. One of the best known was the world's earliest known law code, the Code of Hammurabi.

## Hammurabi's Code

- Law codes are vital to the existence of cities. In small settlements, where nearly everyone is bound by kinship, disputes can be handled by elders. In cities, where large numbers of strangers must interact, conflicts must be mediated in an impartial manner. Law codes provide a clear set of rules to impersonally adjudicate and resolve disputes.
- By modern standards, Hammurabi's law code might appear somewhat harsh and unfair. The prescribed punishment for many offences is death, and not all human beings are treated equally, with different rules and punishments for women, the poor, and slaves.
- Hammurabi's code is retaliatory, meaning that what you do to someone else often gets done to you in return. Many of the rules of the Old Testament, also formulated in the Near East during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C., are of a similar nature, exemplified by the phrase "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."
- At other times, the code is surprisingly sympathetic to marginalized groups. For example, if a man divorces a wife who has borne him a child, he must not only return her dowry but must provide financial support for raising the child.



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**The ancient stele on which the Code of Hammurabi was carved shows the king receiving the law from the god Shamash.**

- Whatever its quirks, Hammurabi's code represents a huge step forward for civilization. The code itself is preserved on a stone stele, covered on both sides with 3,500 lines of text listing nearly 300 laws, as well as a prologue and an epilogue. At the top is a relief carving depicting Hammurabi standing before the god Shamash, god of both sun and of justice.

### ***The Epic of Gilgamesh***

- One of the oldest surviving works of literature also comes from Babylonian civilization: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. It tells the story of a Mesopotamian god-king from Uruk who, in the first part of the poem, fights a wild man named Enkidu.
- As a result of their combat, Gilgamesh and Enkidu develop a mutual respect and become best friends. At this point, the epic turns into a classic buddy movie. The friends go on all sorts of manly adventures together, camping out in the wilderness, hunting fierce beasts, drinking, subduing monsters, and so on.
- Gilgamesh offends the gods, however, and the gods are quick to take revenge. They strike down Enkidu. Traumatized and grieving, Gilgamesh decides to go on a quest for immortality, which occupies the rest of the poem.
- In the end, the quest is a failure, and Gilgamesh must confront the fact that all human beings are mortal. As the poem draws to a close, he approaches the walls of Uruk, and it dawns on him just how glorious and enduring the city is. Thus the poem suggests that while all individual humans must die, we can achieve a form of immortality through what we create.

## The Hittites and the Minor Kingdoms

- At this point in Mesopotamian history, something new occurs: Foreign invaders conquer the region. These were the Hittites, an Indo-European culture that had established a large empire in Anatolia, what is today western Turkey. They had a technological advantage in warfare: their mastery of horses and war chariots, which were not yet used in Mesopotamia.
- The high point of the Hittite empire was between 1500 and 1200 B.C. At times, they controlled not only Anatolia and most of Mesopotamia but the entire western coast of the Mediterranean. Other than in warfare, they did not contribute much to civilization but adopted a number of aspects of Mesopotamian culture, including the cuneiform writing system.
- The open landscape of the Near East facilitated not just the movement of armies but of merchants as well. Throughout these early civilizations, there was lively trade and communication not only among various Near Eastern kingdoms but across the Mediterranean, as far away as modern Spain.
- The eventual ebbing of Hittite power led to several confused centuries during which no single kingdom established dominance. A number of minor kingdoms flourished; none played a major role in terms of political power, but several made significant contributions to world history, such as the Phoenicians and the Hebrews.
- The Phoenicians created a coastal empire consisting of a string of port cities on the western Mediterranean as far away as Spain. One of these colonies, the city of Carthage, would eventually become a major rival to the Roman Empire. They transmitted many ideas from the Near East to the western Mediterranean. For instance, the written language of the Phoenicians, itself derived from Mesopotamian precedents, was later adopted by the Greeks and from there was the basis for many modern alphabets, including our own.

- The Hebrews had a long, distinctive religious and cultural heritage stretching back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. After the decline of the Hittites, they established two states, Israel and Judah. These states did not last, but what did persist was the unique religion of the Jews, with its concept of a single god.

## The Assyrian Empire

- The next major empire to assert control over the Near East was one of the mightiest militaristic states of all time. The Assyrians, named for their original capital city of Assur, came to the fore around 900 B.C. and built a military machine that included chariots, archers, foot soldiers, and cavalry. They developed effective techniques to capture walled cities by siege and stressed order and determination in their campaigns.
- The Assyrians ruled through a calculated policy of practicing terror and instilling fear. Most surviving Assyrian inscriptions were erected by Assyrian kings describing the cruelties that they inflicted on conquered peoples, intended not only to discourage rebellion but also to frighten future opponents.
- The most famous artworks of the Assyrians are stone reliefs depicting Assyrian kings hunting lions. A common belief was that if the king was a great hunter, he would also be a mighty warrior. The kings were such zealous hunters that they seem to have hunted the lions of the Near East to extinction.
- Each year, the Assyrian armies subjugated new territories, but as time went on, they had to spend more and more effort putting down internal rebellions. Eventually, a coalition of no fewer than 12 conquered peoples staged a coordinated uprising, and the Assyrian empire came crashing down around 600 B.C.

## Babylon Reborn

- The next city to rise to prominence in Mesopotamia was once again Babylon. The resulting empire is known as the Babylonian Renaissance, the New Babylonian Empire, or the Chaldean Empire.
- This period saw the growth of Babylon into the largest and most architecturally sophisticated city yet seen. It was surrounded by gigantic walls so broad that two chariots could drive side by side around their tops.
- The city contained the fabulous hanging gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This was still Mesopotamia, so these architectural wonders were still built of mud brick. However, the Babylonians discovered that you could coat the mud bricks with glazes and fire them to produce vivid, beautiful colors.
- The Chaldeans also excelled at mathematics and astronomy, but their achievements in these fields represented the fruition of a longstanding Mesopotamian interest in divination—what we today call astrology.
- In contrast to later beliefs that the movements of the stars and planets exerted an influence over events, the ancient Mesopotamians thought that these motions were a method by which the gods offered up clues about the future.
- From around 750 B.C., continuous and meticulous records of nightly observations of the sky were kept in Babylonia, and from at least the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., priests cast individual horoscopes. Their understanding of the heavens was so great that they were able to accurately calculate when celestial events such as eclipses would occur.
- In an environment where so much was unexplained and the violent forces of nature seemed to be controlled by fickle gods, it is not surprising that ancient Mesopotamians so desperately sought a means of bringing a measure of predictability to their world.

## Suggested Reading

Crawford, *Sumer and the Sumerians*.

Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*.

Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*.

Pritchard, ed. *The Ancient Near East*.

Stiebing, *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How much does *The Epic of Gilgamesh* reflect the specific culture that produced it versus concerns that are universal? How readily can we identify with its story 4,000 years later?
2. Considering the case of the Assyrians, how effective do you believe fear can be in maintaining an empire in the long term?

# Ancient Egypt—The Gift of the Nile

## Lecture 4

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The unique geography of Egypt had as profound an effect on its development as Mesopotamia's geography had on the Near East, but in this case, natural boundaries allowed Egypt to develop in isolation for millennia. The natural cycles of the Nile floods and the sun were reflected in Egyptian religion, particularly in pharaoh worship. The first pharaoh was Narmer, who united the scattered nomes into a single nation. But it was a vizier of the Old Kingdom, Imhotep, who created Egypt's most famous landmarks: the Pyramids.

### The Gift of the Nile

- In Egypt, perhaps more than in any other civilization in this course, the geography of the land profoundly and irrevocably shaped nearly every aspect of the culture that developed, including the most fundamental religious beliefs.
- About 97 percent of Egypt consists of bleak, uninhabitable desert. It is likely that Egypt would have remained an empty wasteland but for one factor: the Nile River, the longest river in the world, which flows northward for thousands of miles from its origins in the heart of Africa to a broad delta that empties into the Mediterranean Sea.
- Every year in late June, the waters slowly rise and overflow the riverbanks, spreading over the nearby land. The floodwaters remain at their peak for several months. Finally, in October, the waters creep back to their normal channels, and by mid-November, the flood is over for the year.

- It is only because of this event that life is possible in Egypt; moreover, this annual flood granted Egypt the richest agricultural land in the entire ancient world. This rich, black earth was the inspiration for the ancient Egyptians' name for their country—Kemet, literally “the black land.”
- According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the Egyptians viewed their land as the “gift of the Nile.” Both in antiquity and today, nearly the whole populace of Egypt is densely packed into the narrow stretch of arable land along the banks of the river.

## The Cycle of Death and Rebirth

- The ancient Egyptians could not help but be struck by how their land was dominated by powerful cycles of death and rebirth. This cyclical pattern therefore became central to Egyptian religion.
- The most obvious of these natural cycles was the Nile. Every year before the flood, the river and the country along with it dried up. Just when it seemed that everything would perish, the flood arrived. With the revival of the river, the land itself was reborn. The predictability of the annual flood contributed to the idea that this event was part of a great cosmic rhythm.
- The second great natural force that dominated Egyptians' lives was the sun. The sun could parch the land and make the desert a sweltering wilderness, but it was also vital to the growth of crops. Because of its daily cycle, being “born” in the east and “dying” in the west, Egyptian cemeteries and tombs faced west—toward the land of the dead. The east was regarded as the gods' land.
- Observing natural cycles imbued the Egyptians with a sense that the world was a place of order and stability and that life would ultimately triumph over death. Furthermore, they viewed themselves as a people blessed by the gods, for the gods granted to them, in the midst of the barren desert, a rich and fertile land.

- The third powerful force that shaped the lives of the ancient Egyptians was their king. Like the river and the sun, he could bring abundance or destruction, life or death. Like the river and the sun, the kings went through a cycle of life and death. So if the river was reborn, and the sun was reborn, it seemed logical that the pharaoh must be reborn.
- The Egyptians devised the elaborate and famous processes of mummification because the king would need his body in his next life. This is also why he was buried with all the furnishings and treasures he enjoyed in this life—because he would want them again in the next one.

## Narmer and the Unification

- A final important feature of the geography of Egypt was that the country was isolated and protected from other peoples by strong natural barriers: the Libyan Desert, the Arabian Desert, the Mediterranean Sea, and six cataracts along the Nile River that denied easy access from central Africa.
- The inhabitable parts of Egypt form a natural unit, separated from other areas. The physical isolation of Egypt enabled the Egyptians to dwell relatively unmolested for an unusually long time. This granted the Egyptians a strong sense of communal identity from the very start of its history.
- From before recorded history, Egypt was divided into districts called nomes. In the earliest phase of Egyptian history, called the predynastic period, alliances gradually built among the nomes until there were two main factions: Upper Egypt to the south and Lower Egypt to the north.

- Around 3100 B.C., a man named Narmer (who may be the same person as the mythical figure Menes) gained control of Upper Egypt and united all its nomes. In a great battle, he defeated the coalition of Lower Egypt and, for the first time, united the two regions, thus becoming the first pharaoh.
- Narmer and the pharaohs who followed him wore two crowns, one on top of the other: the white cobra crown of Upper Egypt and the red vulture crown of Lower Egypt. One of the earliest archaeological relics of Egypt is a carving called the Narmer Palette. On one side, it depicts Narmer wearing the white crown and smiting an enemy; on the other side, it shows him wearing the red crown in a procession.

## The Old Kingdom and the Pyramid Builders

- The capital of the united Egypt was Memphis, located right at the point where Upper and Lower Egypt met. Across the river was the cemetery at Saqqārah. This would be the site of one of the great architectural revolutions in human history.
- Egypt entered its first reliably attested historical period, known as the Old Kingdom, in the early 27<sup>th</sup> century B.C. One of the early pharaohs was Zoser (or Djoser). He is less significant than his vizier, Imhotep, a genius and a master of many fields, including architecture, medicine, and poetry.
- Imhotep was charged with building Zoser's tomb, and he was determined to give Zoser a tomb unlike any that had come before. The standard royal tomb had been a flat-topped mud-brick structure called a mastaba. Imhotep piled several stone mastabas atop one another, creating a colossal stairway to heaven known as the Step Pyramid.



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**The Step Pyramid, designed by Zoser's vizier, Imhotep, was constructed in the early 27<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and still stands near Memphis, Egypt.**

- The Step Pyramid laid the foundation for all the pyramids to come. The Old Kingdom became the golden age for pyramid building, including the famous pyramids of Giza. These were astonishing achievements constructed from millions of tons of gigantic stone blocks.
- Contrary to common belief, the pyramids were not built using slave labor. Later on in Egyptian history, slaves were used to construct temples and other structures, but during the golden age of pyramids, these buildings were the efforts of Egyptian citizens.
- Because of the pharaoh's godlike status, pyramid construction was regarded as holy work, and it was an honor to participate. We know how the workers felt from the inscriptions they left behind. The work crews chose names for themselves like "the king's favorites" and "the hard-working gang."

- Over time, the idea of rebirth trickled down from the king to other classes, so that officials, administrators, generals, and aristocrats all wanted their bodies preserved and wanted to be buried near the king. The pyramids became surrounded by entire cities of the dead.

## The Later Kingdoms

- Over time, the nobles gained more and more power and controlled much of the kingdom and its wealth. They then began to challenge the pharaohs for dominance. The economy was strained by this and other factors. The country fragmented, and the Old Kingdom came to an end.
- Egypt fell back into its constituent nomes, and for a while there was chaos. This era is known as the First Intermediate period. Eventually, another strong man from Upper Egypt, Mentuhotep II, compelled the other lords to accept his rule and founded the Middle Kingdom.
- The rulers of the Middle Kingdom had a more antagonistic relationship with the strong families throughout Egypt, who were always testing their power. We have letters from a Middle Kingdom pharaoh to his son in which he warns his son not to trust anyone as a king may find enemies anywhere, even in his own palace.
- There was less labor available for giant state projects like pyramids; too much energy had to be spent keeping the peace. Most Middle Kingdom pyramids, therefore, consist of a layer of limestone covering mud bricks. Thus these pyramids function as a nice metaphor for the era: On the surface, everything looks the same, but the core is weaker.
- Predictably, Egypt once more disintegrated into its components during a phase called the Second Intermediate period. During this time, a new element entered Egyptian history that would have profound effects on later periods. The desert and water borders of Egypt had thus far protected the land from major invasions. This all changed when a mysterious group known as the Hyksos invaded and conquered much of Lower Egypt.

## Suggested Reading

Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt*.

O'Connor, *Ancient Nubia*.

Shaw, *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*.

Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Is the geography of Egypt truly unique?
2. Does the shift in outlook and values from the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom reflect a natural and unavoidable societal progression?

# Pharaohs, Tombs, and Gods

## Lecture 5

Egypt's New Kingdom differed significantly from its predecessors. Egypt became an expansionist, imperialist power, amassing incredible wealth. But the struggles of the past were not forgotten: Egyptian religion began to emphasize *ma'at*, a difficult-to-translate concept that encompasses daily struggle and the importance of morality in life, plus judgment by the gods in the afterlife. Its central myth was the struggles of the goddess Isis and her consort Osiris against their evil brother Set. Comparing the beliefs of the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, it is impossible to dismiss the influence of geography and climate on each.

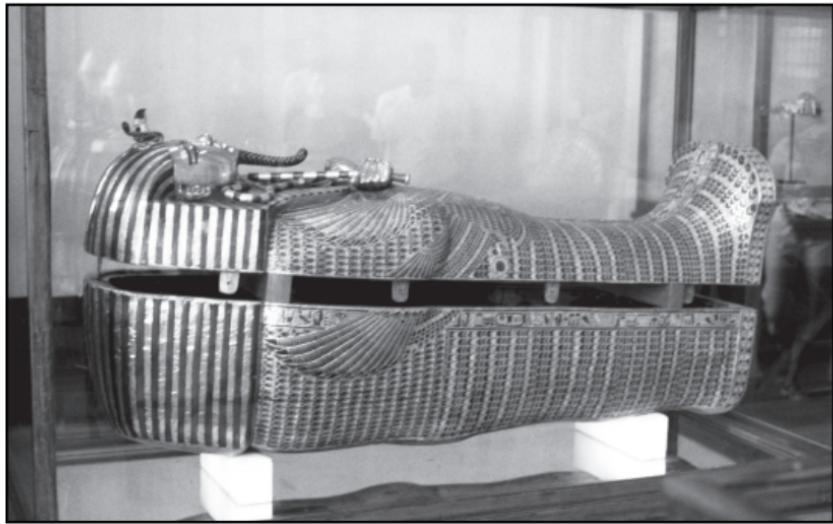
### The Hyksos Invasion and Reunification

- Egypt's isolation came to a traumatic end in the Second Intermediate period when the Hyksos, a mysterious people of Near Eastern origins, invaded and seized the Nile Delta region. Some scholars have recently argued that we should speak of Hyksos migrations rather than invasions, but either way, it is clear that the Egyptians regarded them as hostile invaders of their sacred land.
- The Hyksos enjoyed an advantage in combat due to their superior metallurgy and their use of war chariots. (We will shortly see how chariot-using invaders affected ancient India and China as well.) The people of Upper Egypt quickly adopted chariot warfare, which became a hallmark of Egyptian armies for centuries to come.
- Eventually a series of strong leaders emerged, based in the city of Thebes, who rallied Egyptian forces in Lower Egypt to oust the Hyksos. The reunification of Egypt inaugurated a dramatically different period called the New Kingdom (1570–1075 B.C.).

- Egypt became an aggressively expansionist state that sent armies far beyond its natural borders. It began looking outward rather than inward and actively sought the riches that being an imperial power could bring. Egyptian domination stretched eastward to Syria, Palestine, and the Euphrates River and southward to the Nubian and Kushite kingdoms. Nubia was especially rich in gold.
- New Kingdom Egypt had active diplomatic and trade interactions with the great kingdoms of Mesopotamia such as the Babylonians and fought huge, dramatic battles against rival Near Eastern empires such as the Hittites. In fact, the first battle that we can reconstruct is the Battle of Kadesh, fought in 1274 B.C. between the New Kingdom pharaoh Rameses II and the Hittite king Mutawalli II.

## The Valley of the Kings

- The New Kingdom pharaohs had one big problem: During the chaos of the intermediate periods, every single royal tomb had been broken into and robbed; even the mummies had been torn apart. According to Egyptian belief, if your physical body was destroyed, you lost your chance at eternal life. In retrospect, the pharaohs realized, marking their graves, and all their wealth, with the largest stone structures in the world was not the best idea.
- Instead of building pyramids, the pharaohs of the New Kingdom constructed underground tombs whose entrances were sealed up and hidden. Their cemetery was a valley out in the desert and that became known as the Valley of the Kings. They used a special workforce quartered at an isolated and quarantined village nearby in an attempt to keep the location secret.
- The tombs were splendid beyond belief. The walls and ceilings were covered with frescoes and painted reliefs, recording innumerable prayers for the pharaoh's safe journey through the challenges of the afterworld, and providing spells to protect him.



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The tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun contained a mind-boggling array of riches, yet his was a poor, minor tomb compared to his fellow kings'.

- Most of the tombs consisted of long, downward-sloping tunnels with rooms branching off of them. The largest tombs contained over 100 rooms on multiple levels, and these were filled with piles of gold, jewels, and art objects of exquisite craftsmanship.
- Despite the pharaoh's precautions, every one of these magnificent tombs was eventually broken into and robbed, except for one: a tiny, cramped, four-room structure. It was probably never intended as a royal tomb, but the pharaoh buried there had died young and unexpectedly and there had been no time to make a proper tomb for him.
- Thousands of years later, after all the great royal tombs had been found, opened, and looted, this little one remained. In 1924, it was found by Howard Carter, and it remains one of the greatest archaeological finds of all time: the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun, or King Tut.

- The amount of gold that emerged from this minor tomb is stunning; we can only dream of the sort of dazzling splendor that would have been found in a tomb that was hundreds of feet long, with dozens of huge chambers.
- The New Kingdom was the time of a number of the most famous pharaohs, including Akhenaten, who is famous for espousing a form of sun worship that approached monotheism, and Rameses II, who was one of the greatest builders in all of Egyptian history.

## Later Egyptian Religion

- The core myth of Egyptian religion during the New Kingdom nicely summarizes many of the people's fundamental beliefs. The main figures are Isis and Osiris. They are not only husband and wife but brother and sister, and such incestuous marriages were common at certain periods in Egyptian history.
- Isis and Osiris have an evil brother named Set. Set is jealous of them and so he locks Osiris in a box and throws it into the Nile. Isis embarks on a long, arduous journey to find his body. She finds it, but Set steals it again, chops Osiris into 14 pieces, and scatters them throughout the land.
- Isis embarks on an even longer and more difficult search. She manages to find 13 of the 14 pieces and magically puts Osiris back together, creating the first mummy. He attains eternal life, becoming the lord of the underworld.
- This myth became a central metaphor for the Egyptians: Isis's long, difficult journey that ends in immortality represented the long, difficult journey of life, and everything went right, humans also had the hope of eternal life. Osiris's life, death, and resurrection mirrored the sequence of life, death, and rebirth that the Egyptians observed in the sun, the Nile, and the seasons.

## ***Ma'at* and the Afterlife**

- Egyptian life was centered around the idea of *ma'at*. This term is difficult to translate literally, but it encompasses justice and morality, as well as order and divine equilibrium. It reflects the Egyptian conviction that the universe is carefully arranged and follows predictable patterns and hierarchies.
- *Ma'at* related to how humans were granted admission to the underworld after death. Like Isis, the dead went on a difficult journey and had to pass several tests. What determined success or failure was whether one had led a just and moral life.
- In one key test, the person came before the throne of Osiris, and the heart (containing the soul) was weighed against a single feather, known as the Feather of Truth. A good person's soul weighed the same as the feather; a bad person's soul was heavier, and the heart was immediately flipped off the scale and into the mouth of a hideous monster that devoured it, snuffing the soul out of existence.
- If the person passed the Weighing of the Heart ritual, he or she still had to appear before a gathering of 42 gods and swear an oath of negative confession. This consisted of a series of assertions that he or she had not committed various sins against humankind or the gods. If the oaths were accepted, the soul was granted entrance to the eternal paradise.
- Mesopotamia and Egypt were in fairly close proximity to one another, and the cultures began around the same time. But they also offer an interesting contrast. Mesopotamia had a harsh climate dominated by unpredictable, destructive events, whereas Egypt's climate was far more nurturing and followed a highly regular pattern.

- It is possible to attribute the fact that Mesopotamia gave rise to many unstable empires and a worldview that emphasized fatalism and the arbitrariness of the gods, whereas Egypt produced a single, long-lasting culture that saw the universe as stable and ruled by justice to these environmental differences.
- Perhaps nothing encapsulates the fundamental differences in the outlook of these two cultures better than a comparison of their respective ideas regarding the afterlife.
  - In Egyptian belief, the land of the dead was a lush, green paradise. Harvests were abundant, and no one experienced disease, pain, or suffering. The dead enjoyed all the same possessions and comforts they had when alive. Even unworthy souls did not suffer in some sort of hell; they simply ceased to exist.
  - For the Mesopotamians, the dead stumbled about through a constant, inky blackness. The environment was hot and dusty, and the dead suffered from intense thirst and hunger. All people ended up here, whether they had been good or bad in life. All that they once owned was left behind; the underworld contained nothing but souls and dust.
- Even if one accepts a less sweeping view of the effects of the environment on these cultures' religious outlook, it is hard not to see geography as playing a pivotal role in how these cultures developed, particularly in the Mesopotamians' pessimism and interest in predicting the future and the Egyptians' enduring obsession with orderly cycles of life, death, and rebirth.

## Suggested Reading

Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt*.

O'Connor, *Ancient Nubia*.

Shaw, *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*.

Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What similarities do you notice between aspects of ancient Egyptian religious beliefs and myths and those of Christianity?
2. Compare the Mesopotamian and Egyptian attitudes and belief systems. Do you agree with the interpretation presented here that these result from variations in the cultures' environments?

# The Lost Civilization of the Indus Valley

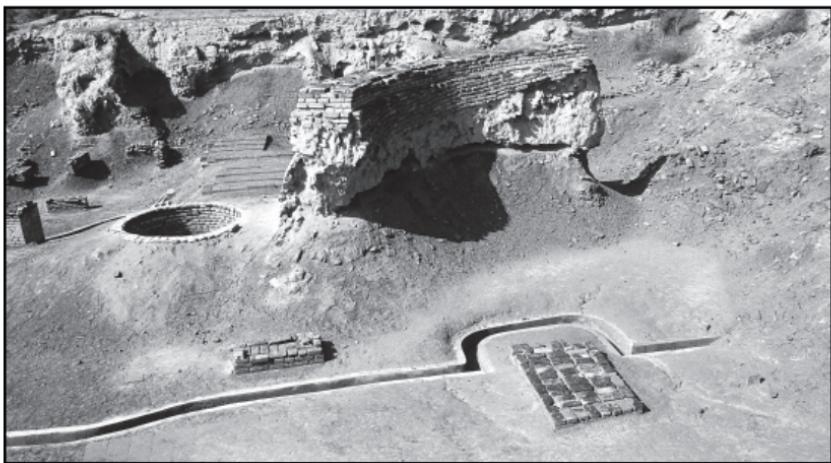
## Lecture 6

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The Indus Valley Civilization was lost to human history from its collapse around 1500 B.C. until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was a culture of remarkable complexity and achievement. Like the Mesopotamians, they built extensive irrigation systems and constructed large cities of mud brick, but all of their construction shows a remarkable amount of uniformity, planning, and civil engineering. The Indus Valley people kept records on clay tablets, but scholars have yet to decipher the symbols, and thus without textual support, it is difficult to interpret some of the physical remains.

### The Lost World

- The three great ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China had been remembered and revered. Lost to human memory for more than 2,500 years, however, was a fourth great early civilization centered on the Indus River Valley and encompassing a region including most of modern Pakistan, parts of northwestern India, and parts of Afghanistan.
- It is extremely difficult to analyze any civilization for which only physical evidence remains without any readable written texts. Thus many of the most basic issues concerning the Indus Valley Civilization, such as its form of government, religious beliefs, and social structures, remain matters of great debate among scholars.
- The story of how this civilization was rediscovered and recognized is an extraordinary tale in and of itself. On July 4, 1827, a disaffected British soldier serving in India deserted his regiment. Adopting the alias Charles Masson, he fled west into regions not yet controlled by the British and spent the next four years traveling the frontier.



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The ruins of ancient Harappa, near the modern village of the same name, are one of the few surviving hints of the once-great Indus Valley civilization.

- Masson was eventually pardoned, became an amateur archaeologist, and wrote several books about his adventures. One book described the remnants of a vast city that the locals told him stretched for 25 miles. In this rubble, he marveled at “the huge remains of a ruinous brick castle.”
- The significance of Masson’s find was not appreciated at the time, and the site would suffer great indignities at the hands of the British a few decades later, when British engineers were building a railway line from Karachi to Lahore and the engineers used bricks from these 4,000-year-old ruins, near the modern village of Harappa, as road bed for 93 miles of track.
- In 1921, the first proper, organized excavation by a team of British and Indian archaeologists began at Harappa. A year later, another dig started 400 miles south along the Indus River, at an equally impressive site called Mohenjo-daro. These two ancient cities are now acknowledged as centers of a civilization that arose around 3000 B.C. and lasted approximately 1500 years.

## **Indus Valley Geography**

- The geography of the Indus Valley is much like that of ancient Mesopotamia. Large rivers flow from a mountain chain in the north down through broad mudflats. These rivers bear a rich load of silt, facilitating agriculture, and can be canalized to provide extensive irrigation.
- The Indian subcontinent is extremely geographically diverse, covering an area of more than 1.5 million square miles. It has four distinct regions: a mountainous north dominated by the Himalayas; the alluvial plains of the Indus and Ganges rivers; the hilly and dry Deccan Plateau; and the thin tropical rainforest-like Malabar Coast.
- In this land full of arid and desert stretches, it is no surprise that water was sacred and important in ritual. Such bathing and cleansing rituals seem to extend all the way back to the time of the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro.

## **The Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization**

- Archaeological excavations would eventually reveal over 1,500 settlements of the Indus Valley Civilization, scattered over 250,000 square miles, most of which were small villages. Harappa was roughly three and a half miles in circumference and was surrounded by massive mud brick walls that were 40 feet thick at the bottom.
- Population estimates range from 20,000 to 40,000 for Mohenjo-daro and from 25,000 to 30,000 for Harappa. The site of Mohenjo-daro suggests a crowded, densely populated city with buildings and streets packed close together. However, density does not necessarily equate to chaos.

- One of the most striking aspects of Indus Valley cities is careful, systematic urban planning. They are oriented according to the cardinal directions, and the streets form a grid pattern, with major streets running north-south and smaller lanes running east-west. Some scholars argue that these alignments reflect astronomical observations, and perhaps also religious beliefs.
- Another remarkable aspect of these cities is the degree of order and standardization they display. Neighborhood blocks were often of uniform size, and wells were carefully spaced throughout the city.
- As in the ancient Near East, all the structures were made from baked bricks, but the bricks show an astonishing degree of standardization: Smaller bricks were used in houses, and larger ones in the city walls, but both had an exact thickness-to-width-to-length ratio of 1:2:4. That same ratio is found underlying the dimensions of individual houses, public structures, and even entire regions of the city.
- The culture had standardized weights and measures. Archaeologists have found weight stones which increase in a ratio of 1:2:4:8:16:32:64, with the most common weight being the 16<sup>th</sup> ratio. The weights do not correspond to any of the systems then in use in Mesopotamia or Egypt, but an identical set of weights was used by the later kingdoms of the Ganges River plains and is still used in traditional Indian marketplaces today.

## The Importance of Water

- The single most impressive aspect of Indus Valley cities was their skillful management of water. Like other early flood plain civilizations, they learned to dig canals and irrigate their fields. But at Mohenjo-daro, for example, all the streets had graded drainage systems that included underground pipes. Individual houses were often equipped with running water and specialized rectilinear structures that have been labeled bathing platforms.

- There is also evidence of public water facilities. At Mohenjo-daro, a structure labeled the Great Bath by excavators has been called the earliest public water tank in the ancient world. Scholars think it was a place for ritual bathing. It is located on a mound separated from the rest of the city, its position emphasizing its special status.
- The prominence of water in daily life suggested by the cities' architecture and infrastructure has been interpreted by many scholars as proof of water's important ideological, ritual, and religious resonances.

## **The Artifacts of Daily Life**

- The Indus Valley Civilization seems to have had a system of writing. More than 4,000 clay tablets and seals have been found containing a unique set of 400 distinct symbols. These symbols have also been found on pots and other objects. Scholars have thus far been unable to translate or interpret this script.
- One common find is large numbers of small clay toy figures. Among these are tiny carts and oxen, some of which even have movable parts. There are also models of ordinary household objects such as pots, dishes, beds, and tables; spinning tops; whistles; marbles; and dice.
- The cities had distinct neighborhoods, some of which seem to have specialized in various crafts or professions, such as shell and agate workshops and coppersmithing. A few fragments of cloth, including several of dyed cotton, hints at the clothing of these cities' inhabitants.
- The Indus Valley Civilization engaged in thriving and far-flung trade. Harappan goods have been found as far as Mesopotamia. Mesopotamian records list Indus Valley goods including hardwoods, metals, carnelian, shell, pearls, ivory, and animals. On the Indian coast, the port city of Lothal testifies to a high volume of maritime trade.

- The typical art objects uncovered at Indus Valley sites are intricately carved, glazed steatite seals. These often feature realistically rendered animals like bulls, bison, rhinoceroses, and crocodiles as well as fantastic mythical beasts.
- One especially famous seal depicts a seated, cross-legged figure in a yogic posture of meditation with two deer below him. This image is tantalizingly similar to later images of the Buddha preaching at a deer park. It also suggests an ancient precedent for the distinctive cross-legged yogic posture so prominent and important in later Indian spirituality.

## The Mysterious Decline of the Indus Valley Civilization

- By 3000 B.C., the Indus Valley was densely populated; its great cities had arisen by 2600 B.C. and flourished down to about 1900 B.C. Shortly thereafter, the civilization went into a dramatic decline, so that these once-thriving cities were largely abandoned by 1700–1500 B.C.
- For many years, scholars subscribed to the theory that the civilization was destroyed by nomadic invasions, but recent scholarship has challenged this. The decline may have been internally generated.
- Long-term irrigation increased levels of salt in the soil, reducing crop yields. Portions of the Ghaggar Hakra river system, along which many cities were located, seem to have dried up during this era, with potentially disastrous consequences.
- The settlements that followed the Indus Valley cultures showed many indications of a loss of material prosperity: They abandoned town planning; large cities became depopulated; long-distance trade declined; the Indus script was no longer employed; the standardized weights were no longer used; stoneware and bronze manufacture declined or disappeared; and even mud bricks fell out of use.

- Many fundamental questions persist about the most basic aspects of this once-flourishing culture, including its political structure and religious beliefs. They left behind few images of warfare, leading some to suggest an atypically peaceful society. No figures priestly or kingly figures have been positively identified—an anomalous situation compared to other cultures.
- There is little archaeological evidence for political or religious hierarchy or a centralized state. Without these institutions, how to explain the coordination, specialization, and complexity of the Indus Valley Civilization? How was such extensive infrastructure implemented, and in such a uniform fashion?

### Suggested Reading

Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*.

McIntosh, *The Ancient Indus Valley*.

Possehl, *The Indus Civilization*.

Wright, *The Ancient Indus*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think water was so important to the Indus Valley Civilization, and what did it represent to them?
2. What do you think are the most significant gaps in our current knowledge about the Indus Valley Civilization?

# The Vedic Age of Ancient India

## Lecture 7

The Indus Valley Civilization was followed by the Aryan and Vedic eras, for which we have little archeological but a great deal of textual evidence. These nomadic peoples from south-central Asia spoke an early Indo-European tongue that was an ancestor of modern European languages. Aryan culture developed into a deeply religious, intensely stratified society that considered dharma, or duty, the highest moral calling. However, a later emphasis on proper performance of ritual gave the priestly class a stranglehold on religious affairs, leading to sectarian splits and the development of new religions.

### Who Were the Aryans?

- For the Aryan and Vedic eras of Indian history, from about 1500 to 500 B.C., our situation is the reverse of the Indus Valley Civilization: We have almost no material remains and a gigantic body of readable texts, and those texts are not concerned with everyday life but religious and intellectual ideas.
- The Aryans were one of several nomadic groups to migrate from south-central Asia sometime after 2000 B.C. They went east through the mountains of the Hindu Kush and reached India perhaps as early as around 1800 B.C. They spoke an early version of Sanskrit, which belongs to the Indo-European language family.
- The Romance, Celtic, Germanic, and Baltic languages are all of Indo-European derivation, and many words in English have direct cognates in Sanskrit. For example, the Sanskrit word *nava*, meaning “ship,” is related to “navy”; *deva*, meaning “god,” comes from the same root as “divine”; *raja*, meaning “ruler,” is related to “regal”; and *matru* and *pitru* are related to “maternal” and “paternal.”



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The language of Vedic civilization was Sanskrit, an early Indo-European language related to most modern European languages.

- By around 1000 B.C., the Aryans had spread into most of northern India. The migrations followed natural topographical boundaries, as the people settled mainly in the more accessible north; the Sanskrit language never really took root in the south, where four non-Indo-European Dravidian languages are still spoken.
- Many historians tried to link the collapse of Indus Valley Civilization to the Aryan migrations, and thus characterized their movements as a sudden and destructive invasion. Recent work suggests a more gradual and scattered series of little migrations in which the new groups intermingled with the old, creating an Indo-Aryan fusion.

## What the Vedas Reveal

- Much remains mysterious about the Aryans, including their exact geographic origins, but what is more certain are some of the main characteristics of their culture and what they contributed to later Indian history: A new language, a new set of gods, a patriarchal and patrilineal social system, and a rigid social structure.

- The Aryans did not construct large cities but lived in small, scattered settlements and villages. They did not use bricks and built no permanent structures. Thus very little archaeological evidence and few material objects such as pottery and weapons remain from the period 1500–1000 B.C.
- Our main source for this period is a huge body of poetry written in Sanskrit, consisting mainly of religious prayers and hymns, as well as several lengthy epic poems relating the deeds of gods and heroes. The Aryans themselves appear to have been illiterate; these verses were transmitted orally and written down centuries later.
- The writings are known as the Vedas, thought to have been composed between 1500 and 600 B.C. The oldest and most important is the *Rig Veda* (literally, “the verses of knowledge”), 1,017 Sanskrit poems mostly addressed to their gods.
- To the Rig Veda would eventually be added three later Vedas, the great epic poems the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and religious texts known as the Upanishads and the Puranas. Collectively, these run to hundreds of thousands of verses and millions of words.
- From these texts, we can glean that the Aryans were organized into tribal, kin-centered groups consisting of a local warlord and his retainers. Their economic life was centered on cattle. As they settled down, they lived in small villages and preserved a semi-nomadic lifestyle combining hunting, herding, raiding, and some agriculture.
- In later Vedic society, there was increasing specialization of professions. The vast majority of women were involved in textile work, such as spinning, weaving, embroidering, and dying.

## **Military and Political Life in Vedic India**

- The Aryans were a warlike culture who enjoyed an edge in battle due to their mastery of horses and chariots. Unlike some ancient warriors, they had developed spoked wheels, which gave them a distinct advantage in speed and maneuverability.
- The chariots were drawn by one or two horses; they carried a driver and an archer or spear thrower. In addition, the Aryans employed bronze axes and swords. In the Vedas and epics, the chariot is portrayed as the vehicle of the gods, reflecting the high status of the human warriors able to afford them.
- The epics contain detailed and very lengthy accounts of battles, and one's status in this society was clearly often dependent on one's military prowess. The gods encourage the display of bravery and skill on the battlefield, and the overall impression is of a warlike, boisterous, hard-living, male-dominated culture.
- Also typical of these poems, however, is a constant concern with spirituality. By 500 B.C., the Ganges Valley was a populous region studded with villages. Many small rival states emerged, but little is known about specific political developments and actual historical events.
- The Vedas and epics tend to focus on religious and philosophical issues or the exploits of heroes, gods, and demons. Perhaps the transitory nature of these little kingdoms rendered their stories insignificant; perhaps a religion that espoused the importance of rita, or universal order, did not find disorderly, disruptive conflicts between petty chieftains all that compelling.

## The Social Order

- The caste system began to develop during this era. Exactly when the final version of this social structure emerged is uncertain, but it seems to have solidified gradually over time, incorporating aspects from several existing social institutions.
- People were born into specific social classes, called varnas, which they could not change. At the top were the Brahmins, composed of the educated philosophers, scholars, and priests; next came the Kshatriyas, the warriors, politicians, and civil authorities; the third class was the Vaisyas, comprising merchants, peasants, and farmers; and the fourth was the Sudras, the common workers and servants. At the lowest stratum were the untouchables, who literally stood outside the caste system.
- The idea of ritual pollution, which played a key role in later Indian history, was already present in Vedic culture. Members of the higher varnas were not allowed contact with Sudras or their food. Sudras could not perform sacrifices, and a holy teacher could not even look at a Sudra. Untouchables had to live outside villages, wear old garments, bear marks of identification, and have no social intercourse with their “better.”
- The Rig Veda explains that the varnas emerged from different parts of the original cosmic man’s body: The Brahmins issued forth from the mouth; the Kshatriyas from the arms; the Vaisyas from the thighs; and the Sudras from the feet.
- The caste system provided stability to Indian society and gave individuals clearly established roles to play. While the discrimination practiced against the lower classes may seem harsh, the system also acted as a kind of support structure since members of each class were obligated to look after one another.

## The Birth of Hinduism

- Out of this era and these contexts developed the religion we refer to as Hinduism. Hinduism actually encompasses a wide range of sometimes divergent practices, customs, rituals, and beliefs. At its core are the Vedas, particularly the Rig Veda.
- Another influential text is the Bhagavad Gita, a section of the Mahabharata. It is sometimes called Hinduism's main ethical text because it offers a straightforward description of the duties and obligations of humans with respect to the gods and describes the nature of the eternal soul.
- The Bhagavad Gita takes place during a great war fought between cousins. Prince Arjuna is preparing for battle but is deeply troubled at the prospect of killing his relatives. His charioteer—actually the god Krishna in disguise—explains to Arjuna that going to war is just, based on two main points:
  - Bodily death does not kill the eternal soul, which will be reborn (the tenet of transmigration of souls, or reincarnation).
  - One must always act in accordance with duty, which is determined by caste and family (the idea of dharma, or selfless devotion to duty).
- The gods, too, have dharma, which they must perform correctly to keep the universe in balance and running smoothly, in accordance with rita. This balance is a delicate one that is constantly threatened by demons of falsehood and human sins.
- Closely connected with dharma is the idea of karma, or the consequences of one's actions. Following dharma will lead to good karma. When one is reborn, one's behavior and deeds in one's previous existence determines one's form in the next life.

- One can view the theory of transmigration of souls as a response to the immobility of the caste system: One's caste is the result of one's own merits or faults in a previous life. By following your dharma and accumulating good karma, that you can better your lot in the next life.
- Concepts like transmigration, karma, and dharma, evolved toward the end of the Vedic period. Earlier beliefs placed greater emphasis on religious ritual, especially prayer, meditation, and, sacrifice.
- Over time, the priestly Brahmans came to dominate religious observances and the performance of sacrifices, and more and more emphasis was placed on following the correct ritual. Spiritual and moral questions were neglected, and Brahmans developed a stranglehold on religious affairs, further elevating their status.
- This gradually led to resentment and ultimately to people questioning and criticizing the path that religious worship had taken. Over the next several centuries, a reaction developed against this ritualization, resulting in the emergence of a number of variants of Hinduism as well as several new and influential religions, such as Buddhism and Jainism.

### Suggested Reading

Bryant and Patton, eds., *The Indo-Aryan Controversy*.

Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*.

O'Flaherty, trans., *The Rig-Veda*.

Thapar, *Early India from the Origins to AD 1300*.

Wolpert, *A New History of India*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Considering the Aryan migrations, do you think large numbers of immigrants to an area usually destroy or enrich existing cultures?
2. Evaluate the caste system as a form of social organization in terms of its advantages and disadvantages for those who live under it. How does it compare to the forms of social organization seen in other early civilizations?

# Mystery Cultures of Early Greece

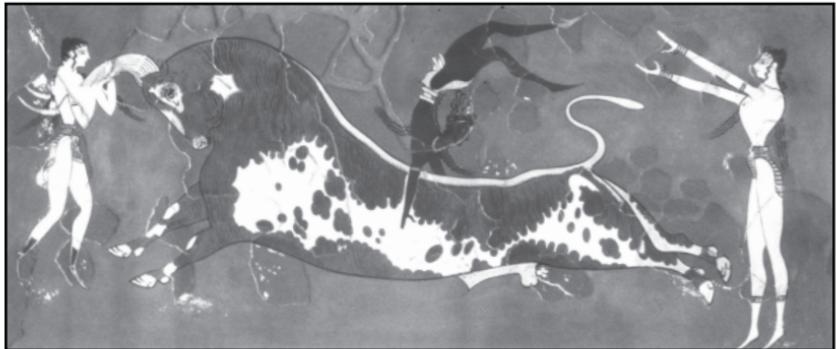
## Lecture 8

Two cultures dominated the Greek and Aegean world before the classical Greek culture with which we are familiar: the Minoan and Mycenaean.

The Minoans were an island-based culture that appeared to have a strong naval and trading empire; the bull imagery found throughout their art may have religious significance. The Mycenaeans were a collection of city-states scattered across the Peloponnese. Their imposing architecture and the battle scenes that dominate their art imply a warlike culture. Both civilizations had fallen by about 1100 B.C., leading to the prolonged Greek Dark Ages.

### Finding Facts among the Myths

- We know a lot about Greek civilization from roughly 750 B.C. on because that is when the first surviving written documents that we can read fluently were composed. Up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our knowledge of Greek history before 750 B.C. was almost nonexistent. The only information we had came from myths.
- One of these myths was the story of King Minos of Crete, whose wife Pasiphae gave birth to the Minotaur, which Minos imprisoned in the Labyrinth. In 1899, an English aristocrat named Sir Arthur Evans became obsessed with the idea that there was a historical basis for this myth.
- Evans self-funded a dig at Knossos, Crete, and uncovered the remains of a large palace in which there were numerous depictions of bulls and bulls' horns, and, astonishingly, what appeared to be a labyrinth in the basement.
- As a result of Evans's discoveries and those that followed, we have learned there were significant civilizations in Greece before 750 B.C. We call the two most important the Minoans, after the mythical king, and the Mycenaeans, after Mycenae, one of its largest cities.



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Scholars still debate the precise religious and cultural meaning of the Minoan bull dance, seen in this fresco.

## The Minoans—An Island Empire

- As with the Indus Valley Civilization, it is difficult to interpret Minoan because all that survives is material evidence. They began building large urban centers around 2000 B.C. on the island of Crete and over the next 600 years spread to other islands in the Aegean.
- It remained almost exclusively an island-based civilization. Knossos is the largest known Minoan center. Another major site was located on the island of Thera (modern Santoríni) and included the city of Akrotíri.
- Minoan palace structures are characterized by dozens of interconnected rooms clustered around a large, central, open courtyard. There do not appear to be walls around Minoan cities, few weapons have been found, and, with one exception, their art does not depict warfare.
- One obvious interpretation of these facts is that the Minoans were a peaceful society; however, another reading of the evidence is that the Minoans possessed a powerful navy that dominated the eastern Mediterranean and thus had no need for walls around their cities.

- The interior palace walls are covered with frescoes showing the inhabitants engaged in leisure activities. There are many nautical scenes; the Minoans appear to have been accomplished sailors who traded their wares at least as far as Egypt.
- There is abundant evidence of wealth. Most Minoan palaces included numerous storerooms containing pithoi, or giant storage jars. Evans's labyrinth at Knossos, in fact, turned out to be a set of storerooms.

## Minoan Religion and Society

- The bull seems to have been a very important symbolic animal to the Minoans. They appear frequently in frescoes and in sculptures, and the most ubiquitous symbol at Minoan sites is a stylized depiction of bulls' horns.
- A well-known fresco depicts young men and women grasping the horns of bulls and vaulting acrobatically over their backs. Whether this is a form of sport or a religious ritual is unknown.
- A famous statuette found at Knossos is of a bare-breasted woman in elaborate clothing holding two snakes in her outstretched arms. This has been interpreted by some as a depiction of a goddess, whereas others think her a priestess.
- The apparently peaceful nature of the Minoans and the frequent depiction of women in art lead some scholars to speculate that women held positions of power in Minoan society, but in the absence of texts confirming this, such conclusions must remain hypothetical.
- The Minoans did have a system of writing, called Linear A. The language it records is not related to Greek, however, and the texts we have remain undeciphered.

## **Minoan Collapse**

- Unfortunately for the Minoans, the islands they lived on were prone to natural disasters. Major earthquakes shook Crete repeatedly, flattening large sections of Knossos, but each time, the city seems to have been rebuilt.
- Around 1500 B.C., Thera was destroyed in a cataclysmic volcanic eruption. The entire middle of the island literally blew up and flew away to Akrotiri, which was on the coast, was buried in mud and thus was preserved, much like a Minoan version of Pompeii.
- By 1200 B.C., Minoan civilization seems to have collapsed. The population plummeted; cities were abandoned and, in some cases, show signs of violent destruction. Whether the cause was external invaders, internal dissension, natural disaster, or some combination remains unknown.

## **The Mycenaean—Mainland Warriors**

- The term “Mycenaean” gives the false impression of one nation. In reality, this civilization comprised dozens of small, independent kingdoms that shared a similar culture and language, of which Mycenae was the largest.
- Mycenaean civilization arose around 1600 B.C. on the Peloponnese, the southern section of the Greek mainland. In many ways, this civilization seems to have been the opposite of Minoan.
- Mycenaean cities were heavily fortified, and their culture seems to have been dominated by military concerns. Their cities were always in defensible locations, usually on a hilltop, and surrounded by massive walls. There were no central courtyards; instead, each palace was centered on an enclosed throne room called a megaron.

- Almost all Mycenaean art shows battle or hunting scenes. In addition, it demonstrates a concern with symmetry and order, perhaps reflecting a society run along the structured lines of a military organization. Whereas the bull was the emblem of the Minoans, Mycenaean art featured lions, which, as we saw with the Assyrians, are often associated with warriors.
- Much of the best evidence for Mycenaean civilization comes from the excavation of its tombs. The earliest tombs were located inside city walls, suggesting that even the dead were not safe from raiders outside their protection. These tombs contained gold jewelry and death masks and weapons of all kinds.
- The overall portrait of Mycenaean culture is of lots of little city-states ruled over by local warlords and constantly fighting with their neighbors. The territory covered by each city-state was quite small, and here geography plays a key role. Unlike Mesopotamia, mainland Greece consists of small valleys surrounded by rocky hills that can be hard to cross; thus it was hard to conquer and hold a large amount of territory.
- Each valley tended to be its own separate political entity. Later on, this geographic pattern had profound implications for Greek political and philosophical development.
- The other important aspect of Greece's geography is that almost everywhere is close to the sea: 72 percent of Greece lies within 25 miles of the shoreline. This would predispose the Greeks to be sailors.

## Linear B

- More than 4,000 clay tablets inscribed with the writing of the Mycenaeans have been found. Scholars call this language Linear B. Just as with Minoan Linear A, initially no one could decipher them.

- A breakthrough came in 1952, when a young English architect and self-trained linguist named Michael Ventris announced that he had deciphered Linear B, and to everyone's amazement, he was correct. At the age of 14, he attended a lecture given by Sir Arthur Evans, and from that point on, deciphering Linear B became his passion.
- Linear B turned out to be a direct precursor to Greek phonetically, although it used a different alphabet. The decipherment of Linear B raised hopes that we would now learn much more about the Mycenaeans, but just as with the Mesopotamians, most of the surviving tablets turned out to be tax records.

## **The Collapse of Mycenaean Greece**

- The fate of most Mycenaean cities was violent death. Most Mycenaean sites show evidence of having been destroyed and burnt between 1200 and 1100 B.C. No one is quite sure what happened, although nomadic invaders may have played a role.
- With the collapse of this civilization, Greece entered the Dark Ages (1200–800 B.C.). Cities disappeared. The population plummeted. Communication ceased. Travel and trade collapsed. Even pottery, always a good gauge of the material prosperity of a culture, became ugly in this period. The very ability to write was forgotten.
- Around 1000 B.C., for unknown reasons, things gradually improved. Around the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., there was a rapid increase in population. Cities began to form again. People began to move from place to place, and merchants started to transport and sell goods again.
- Most importantly, writing was rediscovered. Spoken Greek had remained more or less the same, but Linear B had been forgotten, so the Greeks adopted and adapted the script used by the Phoenicians. As the Phoenician alphabet was itself derived from the earlier alphabets of the Near East, there is a continuous chain linking the first alphabets of Mesopotamia to modern English.

- In 776 B.C., the first Olympic Games were held. Perhaps more than anything else, this symbolized that Greece had finally and fully emerged from the Dark Ages, and from this point on, we can truly speak of Greek history rather than pre-Greek cultures such as the Minoans and Mycenaeans.

## Suggested Reading

Chadwick, *The Mycenaean World*.

Finley, *Early Greece*.

Fitton, *Minoans*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Compare and contrast Minoan and Mycenaean civilization and consider why they were so different despite being so close in geography and time.
2. Based on Indus Valley Civilization and the Minoans, what do you think are the strong points and weaknesses of using purely archaeological evidence to analyze a culture?

# Homer and Indian Poetry

## Lecture 9

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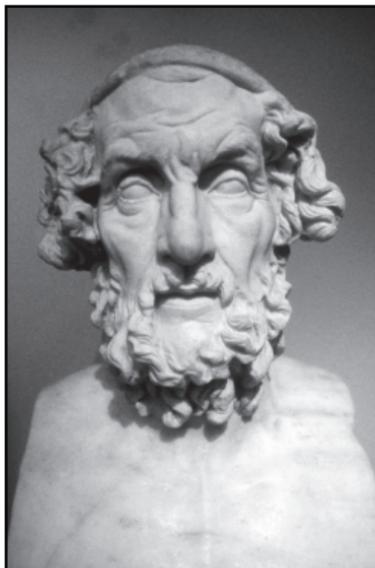
**H**omer's epics and Vedic poetry form the cornerstones of classical Greek and Greek and Indian civilizations, respectively. As such, it is perhaps not surprising how much these sets of texts have in common: Both were originally part of oral traditions that looked back to a bygone golden age. Both were concerned with military matters and the acts of gods and heroes. But there are important differences between these bodies of work; most importantly, while Homer's poems touch on ethics, only the Vedas are considered scripture.

### Poetry at the Heart of Two Cultures

- Archaeologists have found 1,596 different works of ancient literature preserved on papyri in Egypt. Over half of these are copies of Homer, translations of Homer, or commentaries about Homer's works. To put this in a modern perspective, imagine if half the books in your local library were by or about just one author.
- There is nothing in our culture that compares to the significance of Homer for the Greeks, not even the Bible or Shakespeare. In Greece, education itself consisted primarily of memorizing and discussing Homer.
- In ancient India, the Vedas and epics occupied a similarly central role. One could argue that they were even more important since the Vedas are also sacred texts.
- There are a number of surprisingly specific similarities between the societies and cosmologies outlined in these works. These are probably not because one set of epics directly influenced the other but rather an example of two societies going through analogous stages of development.

## The Development of the Greek Epics

- During the Greek Dark Ages, about the only people who traveled were wandering storytellers. Their tales were not written down. These poets knew the basic outlines of their stories and would improvise their performances by combining stock phrases with new material.
- These epics were not set in the time they were composed but in the Mycenaean era. People knew very little about what had come before them, and the Mycenaean era had taken on the aura of a glorious, heroic age; the people of that time had turned into mythical, larger-than-life figures.
- Some of these oral epics were written down after the rediscovery of writing around 750 B.C. The two most important were the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which are traditionally ascribed to a poet named Homer. Whether Homer was a real individual or a composite of different storytellers is debated.
- Homer's poems are a mixture of historical memories and myths, fleshed out with contemporary details. For example, Homer knew that the Mycenaeans used chariots in warfare, but these were no longer in use at his time, so he did not understand how. In the *Iliad*, the warriors mostly use chariots as taxis to travel to the battlefield, after which they jump out and fight on foot.



Homer, the purported author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

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- Between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad* was the more important poem to the Greeks, the cornerstone of their literature and culture. Set during a great war in which all the Greek city-states joined to attack the city of Troy, it may be based on a historical conflict that took place around 1200 B.C.
- While today we focus on Homer's complex characterizations or the moral questions his works explore, the *Iliad* is first and foremost a war poem. Long stretches of the text are devoted to describing battles in graphic detail.
- The *Iliad* also provides a lot of information about Greek religion. The gods are not morally superior to humans. They are neither omnipotent nor omniscient, and they possess all the same emotions and behaviors, good and bad, as humans.
- The *Iliad* offers models for how to interact with the gods. The Greek gods intervene in mortal affairs. They manipulate events, causing weapons to hit or miss their targets and saving favored humans from certain death. They impersonate humans and even engage in battles.

## Comparing Homer and the Vedas

- The Vedas and epics such as the Mahabharata, like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were originally composed orally and written down centuries later. Like the Greek epics, they were also set in an earlier, glorified, heroic age.
- The Mahabharata, like the *Iliad*, also tells the story of a great war between two powerful factions. In it, the Indian gods influence events both through advising characters and by direct intervention. The gods disguised themselves as mortals or even animals and had favorites among the humans.

- Both the *Iliad* and the Indian epics describe societies organized into smallish tribal kingdoms in which warlords and their retinues vie with one another for supremacy and status. These are male-dominated societies; women hold subordinate legal and social status.
- Male status is gained and maintained through warfare, carried out with swords, spears, bows, shields, and chariots—although the Indian heroes also employ war elephants. Much of the fighting centers around besieging and capturing fortified towns. Just as the Trojan War may preserve the memory of a real siege during the Mycenaean era, the Indian epics may reflect real events during the Aryan migrations into India.
- In both epic traditions, squabbles over real or perceived insults and longstanding family feuds motivate much of the action. Another common plot device is that the heroes frequently compete in feats of strength and skill in order to assert their dominance or to gain prizes, often a coveted woman to marry.
- Just as the *Iliad* is fundamentally a war poem, so too the dramatic centerpiece of the Mahabharata is the cataclysmic 18-day battle known as the Kurukshetra War. Both works contain dramatic descriptions of the fighting, but the Indian epics tend to be a bit more poetic, and the *Iliad* more gritty and realistic.
- Another aspect of war emphasized by both poems is the berserker frenzy that can sometimes take over a warrior. Achilles's growing rage, which peaks with the death of Patroclus, forms the central plot of the *Iliad*. In the Mahabharata, a warrior named Bhima is consumed with a desire to avenge an insult to his wife committed by the enemy prince Dushasana.
- Achilles's and Bhima's respective rages lead both men to acts that even their compatriots regard as beyond what is acceptable, even in a time of war. Achilles slaughters 12 innocent Trojan youths and mutilates the Trojan prince Hector's corpse; Bhima drinks the blood of the defeated prince Dushasana.

## Where Homer and the Vedic Epics Diverge

- While many interesting parallels can be drawn between these Greek and Indian epic poems, there are also significant differences. One is simply the scale and range of subject matter.
- The Mahabharata is roughly 20 times longer than the *Iliad*. The Greek poems are fairly narrowly focused in content and tell cohesive narratives, while the Indian poems are sprawling epics that alternate storytelling with long stretches of religious instruction and prayers.
- Many of the Indian poems, such as the *Rig Veda*, are exclusively concerned with issues of spirituality and with discussions of theology. The *Iliad* does contain portraits of the gods and descriptions of Greek religious rituals, but there is little or no concern for spirituality. Homer's epics simply do not have the status of sacred text.
- Whatever their religious significance, there is no doubt that the epic poems of Greece and India were transformational within their respective parts of the ancient world, and even today, these works continue to inspire and be read by millions of people who look to them both for entertainment and for enlightenment.

### Suggested Reading

Fowler, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*.

Homer, *The Iliad*.

Smith, trans. and abr., *The Mahabharata*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What are the most fundamental differences in the cultural values expressed by Homer and Vedic poetry?
2. Why is it important that all of these works arose out of oral traditions?

# Athens and Experiments in Democracy

## Lecture 10

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**A**ncient Greek history as we usually think of it began around 750 B.C. with the rediscovery of writing and the era of colonization. The geography of the Aegean once more led to the development of many scattered city-states, and Athens emerged as one of the regions two leading powers, in part because of the people's willingness to experiment with different forms of governance. Two of Athens' most important political figures were Solon, who rescued an economy drowning in debt, and Cleisthenes, the father of Athenian democracy.

### Panhellenic Oracles

- As Greece emerged from the Dark Ages, the city-states' populations grew rapidly. Because arable land was scarce, the Greeks looked to the sea, and between 750 and 550 B.C., most Greek states got rid of their excess population by establishing colonies.
- At least 150 Greek cities were founded in this period between the shores of the Black Sea and the coasts of Spain and France. In Sicily and southern Italy, these Greek colonies were so dense that the region became known as Magna Graecia, or Bigger Greece.
- Throughout the colonies, Panhellenic sanctuaries developed. These religious centers belonged to no one city but rather served as gathering places for all the Greek city-states. The centerpiece of many of these sanctuaries was an oracle.
- The most famous of the oracles was the one established at Delphi. It remained in continuous operation for more than 1,000 years, from around 800 B.C. to A.D. 391, when it was finally closed down due to pressure from Christians.

- The Greeks believed that Delphi was located at the exact center of the world. You can still see a stone in the Delphi museum that the Greeks believed marled the omphalos, or the bellybutton of the world.
- Both state officials and individuals would travel to Delphi to ask questions of the oracle. Several hundred of these questions and responses survive, revealing much about the concerns of the day.

## The Rise of the Tyrants

- Most Greek city-states went through periods when they were ruled by dictators who seized control of the state by force, the so-called tyrants. Note, the Greek word *turannos* meant “strong man” and only later acquired the sense of a cruel or oppressive leader it has today.
- Many tyrants came to power as a result of popular revolutions. The poor or lower classes, feeling exploited by the rich, would stage a revolution, putting a popular leader in charge.
- Bad tyrants could be identified by two characteristics: They were always surrounded by bodyguards and were prone to arbitrary actions. Eventually most tyrants were overthrown.

## Solon—Athens’s Benevolent Tyrant

- Athens was the most populous and wealthiest city-state during this period. It is also the best known, because it produced the most writers whose works have survived. It, too, was ruled by tyrants for a time, although the first few attempts at tyranny were unsuccessful.
- Athens was troubled by steadily increasing tension between the classes. For a variety of reasons, the poor were unable to make a living, accumulated a great deal of debt, and were unable to repay it. Meanwhile, the wealthy non-aristocrats were frustrated because they were not allowed to hold high government offices.

- By 594 B.C., Athens seemed on the verge of a civil war, so the Athenians selected Solon, the man they considered their wisest citizen, and gave him broad powers to make any reforms necessary to try to correct the situation.
- Solon enacted a number of sweeping reforms. First, he abolished most debts relating to land and claims on a person's labor. Second, he divided all citizens into four new classes according to levels of wealth, and anyone in the top two classes was eligible to be an elected official.
- Solon created a new law court, the Heliaia, and established that all citizens had the right to bring a lawsuit and to appeal to a jury of their peers. Now all citizens had recourse to the law for protection.
- While no one was completely pleased with Solon's reforms, everyone did get something. Solon made everyone swear a solemn oath not to change his laws until 10 years had passed; then he left Athens and spent the rest of his life traveling around the east.

## The Last Athenian Tyrants

- Pisistratus made two attempts to seize power in Athens. The second was successful because he tricked the citizens into believing that a regal-looking peasant girl was the goddess Athena and sent her into the city, proclaiming him as her choice as to rule. Pisistratus ruled as a reasonably popular tyrant for several decades.



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**Solon had absolute power in Athens and surrendered it of his own free will.**

- Pisistratus had two sons, the elder of whom, Hippias, became a tyrant on his father's death. In 514 B.C., the younger son, Hipparchus, became attracted to a young Athenian man named Harmodius. However, Harmodius already had a boyfriend, Aristogiton, and he rejected Hipparchus.
- Hipparchus took revenge by publicly insulting Harmodius's family, and Harmodius and Aristogiton decided to assassinate Hippias and Hipparchus. They succeeded in killing Hipparchus, but Hippias escaped and Harmodius and Aristogiton were killed by Hippias's bodyguards.
- Although the incident seemed resolved, it later served as a rallying point for those opposed to the tyrants and resulted in a revolution in which Hippias was expelled from Athens. The Athenians were then inspired to establish a political system which, for the first time that we know of, was based on the people wielding primary power in the state.

## Cleisthenes and the First Democracy

- In 508 B.C., the Athenians decided to repeat their Solon strategy and turned over all government power to one man, Cleisthenes, who would set up what would be the first real democracy.
- Cleisthenes realized the biggest obstacle was that Athenian society was geographically fragmented: There were hill people, coast people, and city people, each with different economic interests. He solved this problem by assigning each citizen randomly to 1 of 10 tribes, so people had to cooperate with people from other geographic regions.
- He then established the Council of 500, which became the main legislative body of the state, responsible for most major decisions and endowed with the ability to ratify legislation. Each year, each of the 10 tribes would send 50 people to serve on the council.

- Unlike our representative democracy, these council members were chosen at random from among all the citizens, making Athens a true democracy, since every citizen had an equal chance of serving in the government. Statistically, chances were that each person would serve on the council twice in his lifetime.
- The Athenians introduced one more type of election—a kind of antielection. Once a year, Athenians could vote for the person they hated the most. If more than 6,000 votes total were cast, the person who got the most votes would be banished from Athens for 10 years.
- This type of election, called ostracism, first occurred in 487 B.C. The name is derived from the fact that each vote was cast on a broken bit of pottery called an ostrakon.
- While you often hear praise heaped upon the Athenians for their democratic form of government, it should be remembered that it was really only a democracy for people who qualified as citizens, and many people living in Athens did not qualify: Women, children, slaves, and foreign-born permanent residents.
- While none of the various forms that Athenian democracy went through lasted for very long, the real political legacy of Athens rests in their experiments with various ways of sharing power more broadly in a society. In many respects, the Athenian system represents a direct and deliberate reaction against Near Eastern tradition of god-kings.

## Suggested Reading

Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*.

Murray, *Early Greece*.

Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*.

Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*.

Rhodes, ed., *Athenian Democracy*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What are some possible drawbacks of the Athenian form of direct, participatory democracy?
2. How did the colonization movement and the development of the Delphic Oracle affect and influence one another?

# Hoplite Warfare and Sparta

## Lecture 11

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Sparta was unique in many ways. Unlike its fellow Greek city-states, it erected no monuments, made no art, amassed no wealth, and engaged in no intellectual pursuits. Its single, overwhelming focus was warfare. To this end, it developed a social system whereby male children were taken from their mothers at the age of seven and trained to be the perfect soldiers, and all female children were raised to breed soldiers. Ironically, in focusing on martial strength, the Spartans neglected the social and biological functions that keep societies functioning.

### The Hoplite Revolution

- In Greece, beginning around the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., there was a change in military equipment and tactics that would have far-reaching effects. This has been labeled the hoplite revolution. The hoplite was a heavy infantryman, a foot soldier equipped with protective armor and powerful offensive weapons for hand-to-hand combat.
- The hoplite's most important piece of equipment was his shield—a heavy, circular, concave, wood-and-bronze construct measuring a full three feet in diameter. The hoplite wore a bronze helmet; a breastplate made of bronze, leather, or laminated linen; and greaves to protect his shins. He carried a six- to nine-foot bronze-tipped spear and, as a weapon of last resort, a two-foot sword.
- The hoplite's equipment was extremely expensive since it used so much precious bronze. It might have represented something akin to the investment one would need today to buy a car.



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**The entire Spartan social system was aimed at a single goal: producing the Spartan military.**

- Along with this new equipment came a new way of fighting. In the Homeric era, combat was a muddle of one-on-one duels. Now, hoplites formed lines with their shields slightly overlapping. Thus each protected his neighbor, and from the front, they presented a solid wall of metal punctuated by spear-points.
- Usually multiple rows of hoplites would be arranged one behind the other, forming a solid mass of men. Such a formation was known as a phalanx. As long as there was no gap in the phalanx, they were almost impossible to harm. The ideology of the phalanx was that all hoplites were equally valuable, all did the same thing, and all were interchangeable. This placed a new emphasis on drill and discipline.
- Hoplite battles were brutal, physical affairs where the entire goal was to kill as many of the enemy as possible. Some historians have argued that the Greeks set the model for what has been called “the western way of war.”

## Sparta—The Martial City-State

- From the beginning, Sparta was unusual in being located fairly far inland and was extremely isolated due to steep mountains on all sides. Whereas other states solved the problem of overpopulation by forming colonies, Sparta invaded the neighboring territory of Messenia, conquered its inhabitants, and stole their land around 730 B.C. in the First Messenian War.
- The Messenian people were reduced to the status of slaves, called Helots. Each Spartan citizen was assigned one or more Messenian farms, and the Helots were required to give over half of everything they produced to their Spartan owner. Aside from this, however, the Helots were left largely undisturbed.
- The Helots revolted around 650 B.C. and several more times thereafter. As a result of the constant threat of Helot revolt, the Spartans became preoccupied with maintaining a very high level of military strength.
- Sparta traced its constitution to a man named Lycurgus, who may well be mythical. At the top of the political system were two kings drawn from separate royal families who served as the generals of Sparta's armies. When Sparta was at war, one king would lead the army and the other would stay at home to ensure that both could not be lost in a single disaster.
- There was a council of elders called the *gerousia* (literally, “the old guys”) composed of 28 men over the age of 60 plus the 2 kings.

## Spartan Military Training

- What was really distinctive about Sparta was its social system, which had the single goal of producing fanatical, identical, and superbly trained hoplites.

- When a male Spartan child was born, the *gerousia* would inspect the baby for any deformities or signs of weakness. If they perceived any flaws, he would be exposed to the elements to die. If he was deemed healthy, he would live with his mother until the age of seven.
- At seven, the boy would be taken away and enrolled in a communal school. There the boys were divided up by age, with each age group known as a herd. The boys spent all their time in athletic training, sports, gymnastics, and military skills.
- The boys were only given a single cloak for clothing and no shoes; they had to run barefoot over stony ground or through the snow. They were not given beds but were allowed once a year to gather some reeds that they could lie on for the next year.
- The children were constantly forced to compete against one another in sports to hone their aggressiveness, and those who lost too many times were savagely humiliated and mocked, often causing them to commit suicide.
- They were deliberately underfed. At first glance, this seems counterproductive; the reasoning behind it was to force the boys to fend for themselves by sneaking into the forest to hunt or by stealing food. If they were caught, they were whipped. But the Spartans felt that this made the boys immune to hardship and taught them valuable skills.
- Boys stayed in these schools until they were 20. During the last 5 years of school, they were encouraged to form a homosexual relationship that served as a kind of mentoring program. In the last year or two of their schooling, they joined the Krypteia, the Spartan secret service that spied on and assassinated Helots.

- As a kind of final exam, young men were sent on a mission to assassinate a Helot. He was sent out unarmed. He had to cross the mountains, live off the land, find the Helot, strangle him in the night, and make it back to Sparta. If successful, he became a full Spartan citizen.

## The Adult Spartan Man

- At the age of 20, Spartan men joined one of the clubs, known as *syssitia*. These clubs of about 15 members would be the center of their lives. They would live there, eat there, and continue to practice for war with their club mates. When the army marched off to war, each *syssitia* comprised a unit. Sparta was unique in Greece in having a professional standing army.
- It seems that sexual relationships were encouraged between the older and younger men in the *syssitia* on the grounds that if your fellow soldier was also your lover, you would be less likely to run away in battle.
- Spartan men could not get married until about the age of 30, and for the first five years of marriage, husbands and wives were forbidden to meet openly. For most of their lives, even married men spent the majority of their time at the *syssitia*. At the age of 60, they became eligible to join the *gerousia*.

## The Women of Sparta

- For Spartan women, life was similar to that of men. They, too, were inspected at birth, and unpromising girls were discarded. At the age of 7, they went to a girls' school where, like the boys, the emphasis was on physical fitness. At the age of 18 or 20, instead of entering the secret service, Spartan girls were assigned to a husband and began producing children.

- Although the life of a Spartan woman may not sound appealing by modern standards, in some ways, Spartan women had much more freedom and power than women in the other Greek states. They were not restricted to the house and in fact probably managed the Spartan farms and had a great deal of independence and responsibility.
- Perhaps because so many children were exposed at birth, Sparta suffered from a shortage of women, and it was not uncommon for one woman to have multiple husbands. Very often, a set of brothers would share one woman as their wife.

## The Scarcity of Spartan Art

- Spartans disapproved of luxury and commerce in general and did not conduct trade with other cities. They were forbidden to possess gold or silver. Sparta did not produce any coins, and if any sort of economic transaction had to be made, they used iron rods as money.
- Sparta produced no literature, no plays, and very little art, and the only known Spartan poet, Tyrtaeus, wrote poems exclusively about how wonderful war was.
- In keeping with their philosophy of simplicity, Sparta built no large, impressive public buildings. The only hint of ostentation in Spartan society was that both Spartan women and men wore their hair long. Before battle, Spartan warriors would ritually comb each other's hair, rub perfume into it, and bind it up so that an enemy could not grab it.
- Since the perfect hoplite was identical to and interchangeable with all the others in the phalanx, Spartan society was set up to stress the group over the individual, and the Spartans took pride in this, calling themselves the *homoioi*—literally “the equals.”
- The attitude of the other Greek states toward Sparta was a mixture of puzzlement, admiration, and fear, but no one could deny that the system turned out Greece's most fearsome warriors.

- However, there was a fatal flaw in the system. By exposing so many babies, keeping the men and women apart, and not allowing marriage until relatively late in life, the Spartan system simply failed to sustain its population.

## Suggested Reading

Hanson, *The Western Way of War*.

Talbert, ed., *On Sparta*.

Whitby, ed., *Sparta*.

## Questions to Consider

1. It has been argued that, in some ways, Sparta was actually more democratic than Athens. Do you agree or disagree?
2. In what ways is the Spartan educational system similar to or different from the methods used by modern armies to train their recruits?

# Civilization Dawns in China—Shang and Zhou

## Lecture 12

**C**hina has been labeled the oldest continuous civilization in the world. Although isolated from the other great ancient civilizations and thus developing independently, Chinese culture shared many features with Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, from its flood-plain agriculture to the development of writing and divination to the use of chariots in warfare—the last of which may be evidence of some contact with the Indo-Europeans. It was certainly the largest ancient civilization, in terms of both size and population, and can boast a remarkable catalog of achievements.

### China's External Geography

- Chinese civilization is nearly as old as Egyptian or Mesopotamian but developed in an even greater degree of isolation from other major early civilizations. This has given China a unique culture and an independent path of development.
- In terms of China's geography, there are two important, basic points to remember: First, China possesses natural borders that simultaneously encourage a single culture to fill the space and provide it with protection and isolation. Second, within that space, geography and climate separates the country into two distinct parts, north and south.
- The core of China is a squarish region stretching roughly 1,000 miles from north to south and 1,000 miles from east to west. It is defined on the north by the Gobi Desert, to the east by the China Sea, to the west by the Tibetan Plateau, and to the south by the jungles of southeast Asia.

- Perhaps partly due to this geographical isolation, the Chinese developed a view of their civilization as unique. It was so large that the Chinese tended to consider their country as constituting the entire world and, accordingly, as the site of all cultural advancements.
- There is a good bit of truth to this stereotype, since China was indeed the originator of systems of agriculture, writing, philosophy, literature, politics, social institutions, and art forms that had a huge impact on the other civilizations of East Asia. Even when the Chinese gained an awareness of other countries, they regarded them as fringe regions, the wild edges of civilization.

## China's Internal Geography

- China's most internal significant feature is its strong natural north-south divide. Each of these zones centers on one of two great rivers: the Yellow River to the north, and the Yangtze River to the south.



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**The Yangtze River was one of two great river valleys that gave rise to early Chinese civilization. The Yellow River, to the north of the Yangtze, was the other.**

- The regions are dramatically different in climate, temperature, soil, topography, and rainfall. The Yellow River region is colder, drier, flatter, and has a type of soil best suited to growing wheat and millet. The Yangtze River region is wetter, hotter, hillier, and is ideal for growing rice. Among other differences, this has led to a distinctive north-south divide in Chinese regional cuisine to this day.
- These two great rivers were vital to the existence of Chinese civilization because their floodplains provided the food that fed China's populace. Only 12 percent of the land in China is suitable for agriculture; almost all of this arable land is located along the river valleys.
- As we have seen in Mesopotamia, however, such well-watered river valleys can be dangerous places to live due to the threat of floods. The Yellow River is especially prone to violent, destructive flooding; as recently as 1931, a flood of the Yellow River caused the deaths of 4 million people.
- The Yangtze River is navigable, which made travel and transportation much easier in the south than in the north. Unfortunately, the hotter southern climate had its own dangers, as it fostered deadly illnesses such as malaria.

## The Shang Dynasty

- Regarding China's earliest civilizations, it is hard to separate legend from fact. Archaeological evidence reveals that by at least 2000 B.C., the Lungshan culture was constructing walled towns, using a script that was a precursor to modern Chinese, weaving silk, casting complex bronze objects, and creating pottery. These sophisticated cultural achievements seem to have developed independently in China.

- In Chinese legend, many of these advances are ascribed to five sage-emperors: Shen Nong, “the divine farmer”; Yu, the father of irrigation; Fu Xi, “the ox-tamer”; Yao, who established the calendar; and Huang Di, “the Yellow Lord,” a polymath who invented the bow and arrow, writing, ceramics, silk, carts, and boats.
- The first dynasty for which there is solid archaeological evidence is the Shang Dynasty, which arose around 1600 B.C. along the Yellow River floodplain. Perhaps their greatest contribution to China was their writing system, which had over 3,000 known pictographic characters, a number of which are still used today.
- The Chinese were the only culture in East Asia to create an original written language, and it in turn was either copied by or became the inspiration for the written languages of other Asian civilizations.
- Most of Shang writing is known from its appearance on thousands of surviving oracle bones. Over 200,000 of these oracle bone fragments are extant.
- By 1200 B.C., and possibly much earlier, Shang civilization had domesticated horses and light, spoke-wheeled chariots. As in Egypt, India, and the Near East, chariots quickly became the dominant weapon in warfare, and their introduction to China might reflect contact with an Indo-European culture.
- The tombs of the Shang rulers were elaborate affairs: Wood-framed chambers up to 40 feet deep covered up with mounds of rammed earth. Within these tombs many artifacts have been found, including bronze pots, weapons, boxes, tools, drums, bells, and animal figures.
- The Shang were a strongly centralized state, with the king wielding absolute power from his capital city. The site of the capital shifted several times, but the final one, Anyang, was an impressive construct with walls 30 feet high enclosing an area of more than four square miles.

## The Zhou Dynasty

- Around 1150 the Shang Dynasty was supplanted by the Zhou, which would prove to be the longest dynasty in all of Chinese history, lasting until 221 B.C. Under the Zhou, the Chinese developed the concept of the king ruling by the “Mandate of Heaven.”
- The Zhou instituted a social and economic system that has sometimes been described as a Chinese precursor to European feudalism. At the top was the king. He divided the land among a group of hereditary aristocrats, who exercised local power on his behalf.
- At the bottom of the order were the peasant majority who worked the land and were usually bound to it like serfs. The arable land was frequently organized into a central field that the peasants worked on behalf of their lord surrounded by tiny individual plots that they could farm for themselves.
- Under the intensive cultivation practiced in this period, the population rose, reaching a level of perhaps 20 million people by 600 B.C. The economy also developed, and although much trade and taxation was conducted by barter, copper coins began to be used.
- Zhou rulers erected sizable cities and palaces surrounded by solid walls, but because the main building components were timber and packed earth, the archaeological remains of these structures are minimal.

## The Warring States and the Hundred Schools

- In the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Zhou power declined, and China fragmented into a dozen or more independent kingdoms fighting for dominance. This era lasted from about 500 B.C. until 221 B.C. and is sometimes referred to as the Warring States period.

- In the Warring States period, massed infantry played a greater role and chariots lost their old supremacy on the battlefield. War became more professionalized, and for officers, military ability became more important than aristocratic birth, giving talented individuals more social mobility.
- There was also a sense that government administration had become corrupt. This time of confusion would give birth to an era of intensely creative new philosophical ideas called the Hundred Schools of thought. Three of these schools would become highly influential in later history: Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.
- In what appears to be an astounding coincidence, this exact sort of philosophical questioning was also taking place in each of the other major civilizations that we have been examining in these lectures between the years 700 and 500 B.C.

### Suggested Reading

Loewe and Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*.  
Thorp, *China in the Early Bronze Age*.

### Questions to Consider

1. In what ways were the motivations for and methods of Mesopotamian divination, the Delphic Oracle, and Shang oracle bones similar and different?
2. Compared to ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Indian civilizations, how much effect do you think the particular geography and environment of China had on its earliest cultures?

# Confucius and the Greek Philosophers

## Lecture 13

**A**n era of philosophical and spiritual questioning seemed to arise almost simultaneously in the Mediterranean, the Near East, India, and China between about 700 and 500 B.C. In this lecture, we will focus on thinkers who addressed concerns of the physical world—both how it works and how best to live in it. In China, the schools of Confucianism and Legalism responded to the chaos of the Warring States period with codes of behavior and ethics. Meanwhile, on the coast of Asia Minor, the Ionian Rationalists were taking the first tentative steps toward true science.

### A Revolution in Human Thought

- The years between 700 and 500 B.C. was a time of great and original thinkers, such as the Buddha in India, Confucius in China, Zoroaster in Persia, and a group of innovative philosophers in Greece. One distinction that can be drawn among them is that some focused on this life and others focused on existence beyond the physical one.
- In the first category can be placed those whose interests lay in investigating and explaining the natural world, as well as those who sought a better way to organize society and regulate human behavior. The second group was more concerned with god or the gods, the afterlife, and exploring spiritual and mystical aspects of human nature and consciousness.
- In reality, most of the belief systems derived from these thinkers incorporated some elements of both approaches, but this lecture will look at some of the thinkers whose main focus was on this world and pragmatic issues. The next lecture will consider their more mystically and spiritually inclined counterparts.

## Confucius—Hierarchy and *Ren*

- During China’s Warring States period lived a man named Kung who would eventually became known as Master Kung, or in Chinese, Kung-fuzi, which was later Latinized by Jesuit missionaries into Confucius.
- Confucius was born into a low-level aristocratic family that had fallen on hard times. He pursued a career as a political advisor and spent most of his life traveling from court to court, seeking a ruler who would put his ideas into practice. In this career, he was a failure, but he recorded his thoughts in the *Analects*, and after his death, his teachings became hugely influential.
- Confucius’s personal disappointments seem paralleled by his dissatisfaction with the time in which he lived. He witnessed much inhumane behavior that distressed him but perhaps also inspired him to encourage others to become more moral and to do good.
- Confucius looked back to the early Zhou period as a template for proper behavior and social structure, an era of order, stability, justice, and contentment. He found order in the ordinary rituals of domestic life, and he embraced these as a cornerstone of his ideal society.
- A strongly hierarchical family structure had always been central to the Chinese ethos. One was expected to honor and obey one’s parents. Ancestor worship followed strict rituals and extended this respect even after death. Confucius saw these traditions as crucial to upholding society.
- Confucius had a basically positive concept of human nature in which individuals were inclined to be good. He also believed that social harmony could be cultivated and maintained if those in positions of authority and power set a good moral example for others.

- A key concept of Confucius's philosophy was *ren*, roughly "civility," "goodness," or "humaneness." If only everyone cultivated *ren*, then the result would be a tranquil, orderly, and happy society.
- Confucius urged always maintaining an attitude of modesty, loyalty, and respect, as well as keeping one's emotions firmly under control. Several times in the *Analects*, Confucius advocates versions of the Golden Rule as a useful guide to proper behavior.
- Although Confucius did not deny the existence of gods or spirits, the focus of his philosophy was very much on this world. When asked about the existence of an afterlife, Confucius declined to give a concrete answer, stating that it was impossible to know what truly happened after death.

### Legalism—Order and Discipline

- Whereas Confucius believed human beings were basically good, if needing guidance by example, the Legalists, who were more or less his contemporaries, maintained that humans were fundamentally evil and selfish. The only way humans could be made to behave properly was through strict laws and coercion.
- Legalistic scholars called for a powerful, centralized state and stressed order and discipline at the expense of individual liberty and rights.
- Confucianism and Legalism can both be seen as emphasizing order, but Confucianism taught that this could be achieved through positive examples and incentives, whereas Legalism advocated the use of force and threats. Over time, Chinese officials often ended up practicing a combination of the two approaches.

## The Ionian Rationalists—The Nature of the World

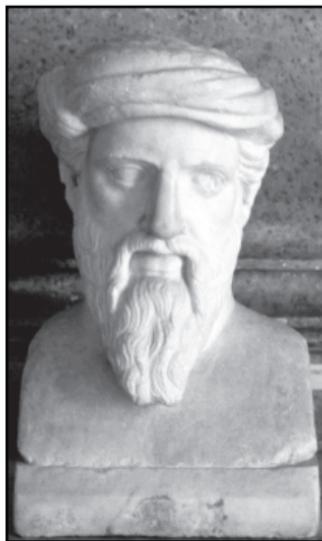
- In Greece at the same time, there emerged a group of inventive philosophers who, rather than being concerned with how to organize society, focused their attention on explaining the natural world. Today they are called the Ionian Rationalists, or the Pre-Socratic philosophers.
- These thinkers are called Rationalists because they were among the first people to look for logical, versus mythological, explanations for natural phenomena—explanation we would today label scientific. This was truly radical at the time; to their contemporaries, their ideas were sacrilegious.
- The inquiries of these men led them in a number of different directions. Those who concentrated on explaining the natural world became particularly interested in measurement, standards, mathematics, and geometry. Others, whose focus was on more abstract concerns such as the fundamental nature or organization of the universe, developed the disciplines of logic, reason, and critical thinking.
- Skepticism—an insistence on proof—was a major component of the Rationalists' approach and led to an emphasis on personal observation. The logical next step was to conduct experiments to test hypotheses. Again, these were revolutionary ideas.
- The movement embodying these characteristics began and thrived in a region called Ionia, on the coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), then a part of the Greek cultural world. This was the crossroads of the major trade routes that joined East and West, where Egyptians, Persians, Jews, Medes, Phoenicians, and Greeks all intermingled in the streets.

- The political life of Ionia was volatile; the territory was claimed by both the Greeks and Persia, and it was troubled internally by factionalism, civil war, and class strife. In this way, Ionian Rationalism emerged out of a chaotic political context just like Confucianism and Legalism.

### Some Important Ionian Rationalists

- Thales of Miletus is usually considered the first of the Ionian Rationalists. He was a merchant who had travelled to Egypt, where he probably was exposed to Egyptian and Chaldean mathematics and astronomy.
- One of Thales's most famous achievements was to predict a total eclipse of the sun in 585 B.C., but his biggest contribution was simply questioning the traditional Greek explanations of the natural world by posing two questions: What is the world made of? What is the basic unit that composes all other things?
- Thales argued that “the antecedent of all things” or “the first element” was water, because all things appeared to be nourished by water. He also speculated that the earth was a flat body that floated on top of water like a raft.
- Thales was plainly moving away from the traditional pagan concept of the gods. He believed that god or the divine was in everything, that people possessed souls that were linked to all other souls, and that all beings were thus related to one another.
- One of Thales's students, Anaximander, expanded on his teacher's theories. He is the first individual known to have made a map of the world. He believed the earth was originally covered in water that dried up under the heat of the sun. He speculated that humankind therefore was descended from fish-like creatures.

- Another important Ionian Rationalist was the poet Xenophanes. He challenged conventional notions of the anthropomorphic Greek gods, calling this concept egotistical. Instead, he posited a single divine being who was all sight, all mind, and all hearing, and who remained unmoving but moved all things by thought.
- Xenophanes believed that the world experienced alternating cycles being dry or covered in water. He based this on the observation that fossils of fish could be found in the mountains. When it came to the prime element, Xenophanes leaned towards earth as being the most likely.
- One of the most colorful and important figures of the next wave of Ionian Rationalists was Pythagoras. He liked to call himself a lover of wisdom, or *philo sophos*—a philosopher. He, too, is alleged to have traveled widely and thus may have picked up elements of Eastern thinking.
- Pythagoras's ideas fall into the categories of mathematics and mysticism, although he did not see these as being different. He devised many of the cornerstones of geometry, including the Pythagorean theorem and thought that the first element was “number.”
- Pythagoras made important advances in astronomy regarding the movements of the planets. He believed the universe was put together along mathematically precise lines and that mathematics and music were interrelated.



**Pythagoras was both a mathematician and a mystic.**

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- Pythagoras was also very superstitious. In terms of religion, he was a strong believer in transmigration of souls.
- Living during similar circumstances of political and social uncertainty, Confucius and the Ionian Rationalists responded by confronting the failings and the uncertainties of this world head on, offering new visions of society and the physical world.
- While Confucius embraced tradition, the Rationalists challenged it, but underlying both approaches was a basic confidence in human thought.

## Suggested Reading

Confucius, *The Analects*.

Curd and Graham, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Presocractic Philosophy*.

Dawson, *Confucius*.

Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vols. 1–2.

Warren, *Presocratics*.

## Questions to Consider

1. If Confucius had not existed, what aspects of Chinese society would have been most affected?
2. Which term best describes the interests of each of the Ionian Rationalists, and why: philosopher, mystic, or scientist?

# **Mystics, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians**

## **Lecture 14**

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This lecture looks at the more mystically minded philosophers of that great worldwide intellectual age between 700 and 500 B.C. In India, among the many responses to Vedic Brahmanism, two ascetic movements developed into major religions: Jainism and Buddhism. In China, Daoism offered an antiauthoritarian alternative to the rules and hierarchies of Confucianism and Legalism. In the Near East, a man named Zoroaster had a series of visions and founded the monotheistic, dualistic faith of Zoroastrianism. Like their companion social and scientific philosophies, each of these belief systems developed in a context of cultural unrest.

### **Anti-Brahmanism and the Indian Ascetics**

- Unlike Confucius and the Ionian Rationalists, some thinkers of the era between 700 and 500 B.C. looked beyond the physical world for solutions. They sought enlightenment in the spiritual realm and, in the process, created a number of new religions.
- As the Vedic Age developed, Indian religion became dominated by Brahman priests, who put more and more emphasis on following correct ritual. Since they were the only ones who performed these rituals, they thereby enhanced their own status and an almost mechanical view of religion.
- Inevitably, the Brahmins' monopoly on power led to discontent and resentment. By around 700 B.C., this dissatisfaction began to manifest in the form of mystics and sages rejecting the system and living as hermits, pursuing their own spiritual and intellectual paths. These holy men attracted followers, creating a kind of counterculture.

- These mystics stressed the role of meditation and reflection on the inner meaning of religion rather than the correct practice of its form. Their ideas were collected in a body of texts called the Upanishads, literally “to sit down in front of,” composed between 800 and 400 B.C.
- The Upanishads advocated asceticism and meditation but also contained speculations about the nature of the universe and the role of humans within, mirroring the inquiries of the Ionian Rationalists. Perhaps the most significant concept to emerge from the Upanishads was the idea of the transmigration of the soul.
- The Upanishads introduced the idea that it was the cumulative sum of your behavior—in other words, your karma—that mattered. These teachings by no means rejected earlier religion; it was more of a shift of emphasis, with a greater attention on inner concerns rather than outward ritual.

## Mahavira and Jainism

- India of the late Vedic age was a time of political disunity, and out of this era emerged not only the Upanishads but dozens of new religions. Two survived to become longstanding and influential faiths: Jainism and Buddhism.
- The founding figure of Jainism was Mahavira. Born a minor prince of a wealthy Indian family, at the age of 30 he abandoned his comfortable lifestyle to become a wandering ascetic. After a decade of wandering, he began teaching his new way of life.
- The central duty in Jainism is to avoid causing pain or harm to others. This is articulated as *ahimsa*, or nonviolence. All life is regarded as sacred, and to kill or even harm any creature with a *jiva*, or soul, would create terrible karma. This is complicated by the fact that all beings have souls, and beings include not just humans and animals but also insects, plants, and even rocks.

- *Ahimsa* leads devout Jains to wear masks over their mouths so that they do not accidentally inhale insects. They always carry a whisk to brush away invisible creatures in their path and clear a safe space before sitting down. They practice strict vegetarianism and do not eat any food that requires killing the plant to harvest the edible part. They often practice severe fasting.
- Jains do not worship a god or gods who might grant salvation; liberation of the soul is the individual's responsibility through passionlessness and right conduct. A series of increasingly rigorous vows guides the Jain toward monkhood or nunhood: nonviolence, truthfulness, nonstealing, chastity, and nonattachment.
- Perhaps because of its strict physical demands, Jainism never had as many followers as some other religions, but intellectually it was an influential belief system, especially in regard to its emphasis on nonviolence.

## Siddhartha Gautama and Buddhism

- At roughly the same, another young prince of northern India experienced a life-changing moment around the age of 30 that led him to reject his wealth, abandon his home, and become a wandering ascetic. His name was Siddhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha.
- For six years, Siddhartha attempted a lifestyle very similar to Jainism, but it did not bring the kind of spiritual fulfillment he was seeking. Then one night, while meditating beneath a banyan tree, he experienced a moment of enlightenment during which he developed the key concepts that would form the core of Buddhism. The name Buddha literally means “one who has woken up.”



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**Siddhartha Gautama, the Indian prince who became the Buddha.**

- The Buddha's four central insights were that the main feature of human existence was suffering; that the cause of all suffering was desire; that it was therefore possible to eliminate suffering by training oneself to lose all desire or cravings; and that the way to do this was by following the Noble Eightfold Path, a series of actions and attitudes designed to eliminate desire.
- Buddha taught this belief system for 45 years, attracting numerous disciples. The Buddhist philosophy became known as the Middle Way, representing an alternative path between extreme asceticism as practiced by the Jains and the ritual-centered religion of the Brahmins. It appealed particularly to members of the lower castes and to women.
- Buddhism quickly fragmented into a number of different sects; the most significant are Theravada Buddhism, in which the Buddha is regarded as human and individuals are responsible for their own enlightenment, and Mahayana Buddhism, in which the Buddha is worshiped as a kind of divinity and he and other enlightened figures played a more active role in assisting ordinary people to find enlightenment.
- Buddhist monks traveled extensively, teaching and converting; indeed, the Buddha had encouraged them to do this. Early Buddhism spread from India to China, Korea, Japan, and throughout southeast Asia. Ironically, however, it fizzled out in the country of its birth.

## **Lao Zi and Daoism**

- Meanwhile, in China, Daoism took shape as a more spiritually focused counterpart to Confucianism. Like Confucianism, it was a reaction to the chaos and warfare of the Warring States period, but the two systems were vastly different in their approaches and goals.

- The name Daoism derives from *dao* (literally “the way”). Confucius used the concept of *dao* to talk about behavior and ethics; in Daoism, the *dao* acquires a more abstract, metaphysical sense separate from the actions of humankind; it is the Way of the Universe or the Way of Nature.
- In Daoism, everything in the universe springs from the *dao*. It is mysterious, formless, beyond words, nameless, and impossible for humans to comprehend fully. In it, opposites are reconciled. One cannot understand the *dao* intellectually, so the goal is to feel it intuitively.
- An individual can only achieve oneness with the *dao* by cultivating a state of emptiness, inactivity, silence, and receptivity. Rather than actively searching, one should “let go” and allow oneself to “go with the flow,” pursuing and striving for nothing. As you can imagine, the Daoists often looked on the Confucianists as uptight, always trying to shape and improve on life rather than letting it take its course.
- Daoism is traditionally traced to a figure known as Lao Zi (“Old Master”), about whom practically nothing concrete is known. He advocated withdrawal from the corrupt, chaotic society of his time, rejecting human institutions (such as government) as unnatural, and advocating living in harmony with nature.
- Over time, Daoism split into two strands: the original system of philosophical Daoism and an offshoot, religious Daoism. The latter, more popular form acquired many of the trappings of religion, such as priests, temples, monastic orders, and a pantheon of many gods.
- Daoism had a long-lasting effect on Chinese art, particularly landscape paintings. These commonly feature towering mountains and roaring rivers, against which human beings are depicted as tiny, ant-like figures, reflecting Daoist ideas of the insignificance of humans compared with the power and mystery of nature.

- Many Chinese do not view Confucianism and Daoism as mutually exclusive beliefs, leading to the stereotype of the “weekend Daoist” who is a Confucian as he works at his government post but devotes his time off to Daoist meditation and art.

## Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism

- Several explicitly monotheistic religions arose in the ancient Near East around this time. Zoroastrianism arose in the mountains of northeastern Iran, in what was then part of the Persian Empire.
- Its founder, Zoroaster (the Greek version of his Persian name, Zarathustra) at the age of 30 (like so many of the sages) had recurrent visions of a monotheistic god, whom he called Ahura Mazda.
- The Avesta is the holy book of Zoroastrianism, although it was not written down until many centuries later, around the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It includes liturgical texts, prayers, and hymns.
- Ahura Mazda is the creator of Heaven and Earth and a friend to humanity, but he is locked in perpetual combat with Ahriman, the embodiment of evil. Ahura Mazda created a pure world, but Ahriman has infected it with impurity.
- This complete separation between good and evil is known as Dualism. It can be divided into two types: cosmic dualism on a universal scale and moral dualism in an individual’s mind. One can follow the path of evil or the path of righteousness. People possess free will and must choose for themselves.
- As in Buddhism, a central concern of Zoroastrianism is human suffering, but where Buddhism sees this as caused by worldly desire, Zoroastrianism sees it as the result of bad choices made by human beings.

- The Zoroastrians did not see a division between body and soul in the way that early Christianity did; rather, they form a unity, and asceticism and sensual overindulgence are equally bad. Zoroastrianism teaches that people should care for the body, since health is a gift from God that gives people the strength to do good works.
- Why did this astonishing burst of intellectual activity take place in such disparate geographic regions at the same moment? There is no definite answer to this question, although it is intriguing to note the similar circumstances of political and social instability prevalent in Ionia, India, and China at this time.

### Suggested Reading

Parrinder, ed., *World Religions*.

Robinson et al., *The Buddhist Religion*.

*Upanisads*.

### Questions to Consider

1. To what degree do each of the belief systems presented in the last two lectures reflect the specific cultures that produced them versus how much their concerns address universal issues?
2. What are the most important differences in the ways that these various belief systems answer the basic question, How should one live a good life?

# Persians and Greeks

## Lecture 15

The Persian Empire of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was by far the mightiest state the world had yet known. Yet a handful of Greek city-states—with the help of some gifted generals and Greece's unique geography—were able to repel a Persian army bent on crushing them. Culturally, this victory ushered in Athens's golden age of art and architecture; politically, it was the seed of Greek national unity, but also a seed of discord, pitting democratic (yet domineering) Athens and its allies against oligarchic Sparta and its allies.

### The Mighty Persian Empire

- In the century following the year 500 B.C., Greece came into conflict with the most powerful state of that era: Persia, the latest and perhaps greatest Mesopotamian-based Near Eastern empire—arguably the first great world empire, stretching from the frontier of India to the edges of Greece. Even once-mighty Egypt had fallen under its control.
- Persia was the largest, richest, most culturally sophisticated, and most powerful state yet seen. It comprised dozens of languages, ethnic groups, and cultures. All the Greek states together controlled about one or two percent of the territory of Persia and a similar percentage of population and military resources.
- The Persian king was an absolute ruler who justifiably called himself the King of Kings and was regarded as a living god. Actually governing this vast empire, however, was a challenge. One creative and effective strategy the Persians used was an advanced road system that facilitated communication as well as the movement of armies and the king's spies.

- The empire was organized into districts called satrapies under regional governor called satraps. Each satrap was like a local king—collecting taxes, commanding armies, and living in a luxurious palace. The biggest weakness of the empire was frequent revolts by its subject peoples and equally frequent civil wars between different candidates for the throne.

## The Battle of Marathon

- In 499 B.C., the King of Kings was Darius of the Behistan Inscription mentioned in Lecture 1. The Ionian cities of Asia Minor had recently been conquered by Persia and, probably encouraged by the ideas of the Rationalists, they rose in revolt, appealing to the cities of mainland Greece for help.
- Most of the Greeks refused to help, but Athens sent 20 ships. Darius eventually brought in his army, suppressed the rebellion, and restored order. When Darius became aware that Athens had assisted the revolutionaries, he decided to teach them a lesson.
- The Persian forces landed on the mainland of Greece in 490 B.C. and camped on an open stretch of land near Athens called the plain of Marathon. The Athenians, realizing they needed help, sent a runner to Sparta. Ever the isolationists, Sparta made their excuses not to fight. Athens and a few minor allies faced the Persians alone.
- To everyone's complete astonishment, the Athenians won the battle. According to legend, the Greeks sent a runner back to Athens to announce the news, and as soon as he had proclaimed the victory, he collapsed and died. The distance from Marathon to Athens was 26.25 miles—commemorated in the length of the modern marathon race.
- Only 192 Greeks were killed at Marathon in contrast to 6,400 Persians. This was at least partially because the hoplite warfare tactics of the Greeks gave them a distinct advantage over the more lightly armed Persians.

- While the victory was huge for the Greeks, only Persia's pride was wounded. It was clear that Darius would have to send another army to crush the Greeks utterly. The invasion was delayed for 10 years for various reasons, including Darius's death, giving Athens and the Greeks time to prepare.

## The Battle of Thermopylae

- During this reprieve, Athens had another stroke of luck: They discovered a rich silver mine. Initially, they planned to distribute the new income equally among all its citizens, but a leader named Themistocles persuaded the Athenians to invest the money in building a fleet of 200 war ships known as triremes.
- In 480 B.C., the Persians came back, with the new King of Kings, Xerxes, at the head of a gigantic army—many times larger than all the Greek forces combined. The Persian juggernaut rolled down from the north, and the northern Greek states quickly fell.
- In a panic, the Greeks turned to the Delphic oracle. They were not encouraged, when the priestess who delivered the oracles screamed, “Run away to the ends of the earth!” and dashed out of the temple. The delegation, however, refused to leave until they “got a better oracle.” Finally, the priestess said, “Trust in the wooden walls.”
- To invade central and southern Greece, the Persian army had to come through the narrow mountain pass of Thermopylae where their superiority in numbers would not matter. Someone needed to stay behind to hold the Persians here while the rest of the Greeks escaped.
- The Spartans had suffered shame for the past 10 years for their failure to participate at Marathon, so the Spartan king, Leonidas, volunteered to hold the pass with his 300 Spartans, even though this would make their own survival very unlikely. In the end, his men were overwhelmed and killed, but the Battle of Thermopylae became the classic example of Spartan bravery.



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**At the Battle of Salamis, the Greeks lured the Persian navy through a narrow strait and destroyed most of their fleet, defeating the invasion once and for all.**

## The Battle of Salamis

- The Persians then descended on central Greece, and the Greeks were forced to retreat. Even Athens had to be abandoned, and the Persians sacked and burned the city.
- The Greeks debated their options, and Themistocles argued that the oracle's reference to wooden walls meant that they should rely on their navy. He persuaded the Greek fleet to gather near the island of Salamis where he hoped to repeat the Thermopylae strategy: Only a few of ships could enter the straits between Salamis and the mainland at a time.
- In the ensuing Battle of Salamis, the Greeks once again scored an upset victory and sank much of the Persian navy. With the loss of so many ships, the Persians could not continue to supply their large land army, and Xerxes, along with the greater part of his army, returned to Persia.

## The Aftermath of the Persian Wars

- After the defeat of the second Persian invasion, Greece was left with a new sense of power and unity. Because Persia was still the world's superpower, the Greek states formed a mutual defense league. It was called the Delian League because its treasury was placed on the sacred island of Delos.
- The Delian League started out as a union of equals, but as the state with by far the most powerful navy, Athens assumed a leadership role in military campaigns. Sparta retreated into its usual policy of isolationism and never joined the league at all.
- Soon the Greek unity that had brought such spectacular success against Persia began to break down. In 467 B.C., the island of Naxos wished to withdraw from the Delian League. Athens refused to let Naxos withdraw and blockaded the island, eventually forcing them to surrender.
- This incident set the precedent that Athens would use military force against its own allies. What had begun as a mutual defense league of equals had been transformed into an Athenian Empire, with subject states forced to pay tribute to Athens. The treasury moved from the neutral ground of Delos to Athens itself.
- Athens built a series of walls, called the Long Walls, connecting Athens with its port at Piraeus, several miles away. This act ensured that as long as the Athenian fleet controlled the sea, no enemy could surround Athens and starve it into submission.
- Domestically, Athens flourished under the influence of a particularly wise politician named Pericles. He guided the Athenian Empire to both great political success and economic prosperity. He directed much of the other states' tribute money toward cultural projects, and Athens embarked on a frenzied building program, constructing temples and subsidizing sculptors and artists.

- Athens's behavior, however, was increasingly arrogant and imperialistic, feeding resentment among their supposed allies. As a result, a coalition of Greek states centered around Sparta formed in opposition to Athens. This group was known as the Peloponnesian League.
- The atmosphere in the 440s and 430s B.C. was very much like that of the cold war in the 1950s and 1960s, centered on two powerful military alliances with dramatic ideological differences. Athens was not only a democracy; it was trying to export democracy and to back democratic factions in other states. Sparta was the champion of oligarchy, and they encouraged and supported oligarchies in other states.
- There was a general feeling that, as each state trespassed on the other's sphere of influence, war was inevitable, although just when and where it would break out, no one knew.

### Suggested Reading

Curtis, ed., *The World of Achaemenid Persia*.

Green, *The Greco-Persian Wars*.

Samons, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Pericles*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What values and attitudes of the Greeks and Persians fundamentally clashed with one another? Did this make conflict between them inevitable?
2. Was the formation of the Athenian empire a betrayal of Athenian principles of democracy?

# Greek Art and Architecture

## Lecture 16

Greek achievements in art—particularly those of the classical Athenians of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.—were among the most remarkable in all of history, and their influence endures to this day. Two art forms in particular stand out: sculpture and architecture. Greek sculptors were obsessed with capturing the perfection of the human form, particularly the male human form. The archetypal Greek building was the temple, which evolved from humble wooden structures into grand marble ones like Athens's Parthenon. Greek art and architecture reflect many of their core values, from their idea of beauty to their rationalism and scientific curiosity.

### The Enduring Forms of Greek Art

- Ancient Greek art and architecture deserve special attention for several reasons. First, they have been particularly influential on later history, shaping the ways that we think about these subjects down to the present day. Second, they nicely embody many of the core values of classical Greek civilization and thus serve as a good way to explain the role of these values in Greek culture.
- The Greeks had many art forms, but this lecture focuses on sculpture as the form that best exemplifies classical Greek ideas about beauty and the human body. Similarly, in architecture, this lecture focuses on the classical Greek temple because it is the most stereotypical and influential form of classical Greek architecture.
- There are three main chronological periods of ancient Greek art. This lecture addresses the first two: the archaic period, from roughly 650 to 500 B.C., and the classical period, from about 500 to 400 B.C.

## **Archaic Greek Sculpture**

- Many of the developments in Greek sculpture can be interpreted as a quest to find the perfect male body, the ideal form, and the perfect proportions. Men were almost always depicted in the nude in Greek art, and the Greeks were used to male nudity. They exercised naked and competed in the Olympics naked.
- The typical statue of the archaic period is called a kouros: a naked male youth, standing with one foot slightly in front of the other and his weight evenly distributed. His head faces forward, his arms are at his sides, and his shoulders are in line with his hips.
- Many kouros sculptures survive, and they all look almost identical. They are not naturalistic portraits of individual men but stylized representations with generic faces. When seen side-by-side with earlier Egyptian sculpture, it is easy to see how Egyptian art influenced the Greeks.
- In contrast, sculptures of women in archaic Greek art (called kore) are clothed in robes. There are far fewer of these; Greek culture was far more interested in the male form.
- One of most obvious characteristics of both the kouros and the kore, particularly in the later archaic period, is a slightly mysterious smile.

## **Classical Greek Sculpture**

- The classical style was the most influential style of Greek art. In this era, Greek artists developed what they believed was the perfect male body as defined by a set of mathematical proportions. This form was epitomized by the work of Doryphorus, who flourished around 450 B.C.

- Classical sculpture broke the rigid stance of the kouros. The figure put its weight on one leg, with the other hip thrown out to the side, a pose later called contrapposto. This was a much more realistic and natural pose that added personality and individuality to a sculpture.
- Once the Greeks discovered perfection, they repeated it over and over again. They made lots of statues with these proportions and a contrapposto stance.
- One of things that later generations admired in Greek art was how it captures contradictory impulses expressed as tensions—tension between emotion and restraint and between movement and immobility. Their statues look calm but have sense of something held back, about to burst into movement.
- The contrapposto stance and classical body proportions were hugely influential on later art; other cultures agreed that the Greeks had found perfection and copied it. Michelangelo's *David* is a perfect example.
- Having found the perfect body and stance, sculptors felt free to experiment with more radical poses to express motion. They depicted male athletes throwing, running, walking, driving chariots, and so forth.
- Most classical Greek statues were marble some were bronze. Most bronze statues were later lost or destroyed; bronze was valuable, so they were melted down. The examples that do survive did so by accident because the piece was lost. One of the best modern sources of bronze statues is shipwrecks, which are only available thanks to 20<sup>th</sup>-century diving technology.
- Women were still rarely featured in classical Greek art, and they were also still clothed. However, their clothing now appeared to be damp and clinging to the body to show off the perfection of form.

## Greek Architecture—The Temple

- The story of Greek architecture is largely the story of Greek temples. The key to understanding their many unique features is to understand that the earliest temples were built of wood. Gradually over time, the wood was replaced by stone, but the builders kept the shapes and forms of the wooden structures.
- The first thing we think of when we think of temples is columns. Columns were originally just tree trunks. The wooden beams holding up temple roofs would stick out above the columns; so, too, would the later stone beams.
- The first columns were in the style called Doric. They had short, thick proportions, and their tops and bottoms were plain squares.
- The next generation architects got bolder and tried making thinner columns. The result was called Ionic, with more slender proportions of width to height and decorative scrollwork at the top.
- Finally, near the end of the classical period, architects introduced Corinthian columns. These were very tall and skinny and topped with an elaborate design of curling acanthus leaves.
- At the front and back of a temple, above the columns, are triangular areas called the pediments. These are usually decorated with statues and sculptures of the gods. Between the pediments and the columns are bands of square panels called metopes. These were frequently decorated with scenes of Greek battle victories.
- When you see ancient Greek sculpture in a museum, often it is removed from its original context. To understand its form, you need to understand its original setting. For example, the corners of pediments are hard spaces to fill. That is why many of these figures are shown lying down or leaping.



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**Although still a remarkable structure, the Parthenon as it looks today is ultimately deceptive. It looked very different in its original form.**

## The Parthenon

- Many of the most famous works of Greek architecture sit on a rocky hill in the center of Athens called the Acropolis. This is where, during the age of Pericles, so much of the wealth of the Athenian Empire was channeled.
- The Parthenon—the Temple to Athena Parthenos, patron goddess of Athens—on the Acropolis is often regarded as the most perfect Greek temple. It displays a brilliant understanding of architecture and optics. Its columns tilt inward slightly and bulge slightly in middle; its floor is a little bit higher in middle than at the ends. This gives the structure a balanced feel.
- Inside the temple was a gigantic gold and ivory statue of Athena Parthenos. This type of statue was called chryselephantine.

- Note that our standard image of Greek sculpture as pure white is based on a mistaken assumption. Nineteenth-century art critics praised this quality, seeing it as restrained, tasteful, and serious. In fact, Greek temples and statues were originally painted in hideous and garish colors, but most of the paint has worn off over time.
- The Parthenon has interesting later history. It almost survived intact until the present day. It was converted into a church, then later to a mosque; these acts preserved the basic structure and even its sculpture.
- The problems began in 1687 when Greece was occupied by the Ottoman Turks, who stored gunpowder in the Parthenon. During an attack by the Venetians, the gunpowder exploded. This blew off the roof and knocked down the columns on one side.
- In 1806, an Englishman named Lord Elgin bribed the occupying Turks to let him steal many of the Parthenon's sculptures. Now known as the Elgin Marbles, they presently reside in the British Museum in London.

### Suggested Reading

Beard, *The Parthenon*.

Boardman, *Greek Art*.

Dinsmoor, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How do Greek art and architecture reflect the concerns and values of Greek philosophy and culture?
2. In what ways do Greek attitudes toward the body and proportion still affect our aesthetic values today?

# Greek Tragedy and the Sophists

## Lecture 17

We think of classical Greek theater as the ancestor of Western drama, but it was very different from what we see on the modern stage. Much of what we know of Greek drama comes from the surviving works of three great Athenian playwrights: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, who used figures from myth to explore contemporary moral and political issues. This mirrored the philosophical trends of the day, where Sophists like Socrates turned their attention from the natural world to more abstract issues like human behavior, ethics, politics, history, and psychology.

### The Classical Greek Theater

- The 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was the high point of Greek civilization, and an amazing number of significant and influential cultural achievements came out of that century, particularly Greek theater—especially tragedy—and the second wave of Greek philosophers.
- A theatrical performance in ancient Athens was a very different experience from what we are used to today. There was much less acting; the performers mostly stood still and chanted their lines, and most physical action took place offstage and was reported in these chants.
- All the actors were male. Actors wore large stylized masks. There was very little in the way of props or scenery. Overall, Greek theater was much more formal and stylized in tone, and not at all naturalistic.
- An important feature of Greek theater was the chorus—about a dozen actors who sang commentary on the play’s events. The earliest plays consisted of a single actor who would chant a line and a chorus who would respond.

- A key moment in the development of Greek theater came when a second actor was introduced. This made dialogue possible. Eventually the Greeks added a third actor, but in classical Greek theater, there were never more than three speaking characters on stage at the same time.
- Greek plays were almost always performed as part of a religious festival. Staging and watching plays was a form of honoring the gods. Athens put on an annual state-sponsored religious festival known as the Dionysia, named after Dionysus, the god of wine and theater.
- Each Dionysia was also a theatrical contest. Each year, three playwrights were selected to compete. Each would be required to submit a cycle of three tragic plays followed by a comic satyr play. The satyr plays were not part of the tragic cycle. They were shorter and featured crude humor, dancing, and singing.

### Aeschylus and the *Oresteia*

- Fifth-century Athenian tragedy is important not just for coming at the beginning of the Western theatrical tradition but because of the societal function it served. The authors used mythological settings to explore contemporary concerns and investigate ethical questions.
- Tragedy became a mechanism by which the Greeks could question fundamental values and confront its deepest fears. It showed the Greeks’—particularly the Athenians—willingness to challenge the status quo and to consider new ways of thinking.
- One of Athens’s great authors was Aeschylus (c. 525–456). He won first place at the Dionysia an amazing 13 times. He also fought at the Battle of Marathon; he was so proud of this fact that he asked that this be listed on his tombstone rather than his accomplishments as a playwright. One famous cycle of his plays is the *Oresteia*.

- A characteristic theme in Greek plays is that one bad deed leads inevitably to another, causing a chain of interrelated disasters. Over the course of the *Oresteia* cycle, we witness a father killing his daughter, which leads to a wife killing her husband, which leads to the son killing his mother. The plays pose a question: How can one stop such terrible violence once it has begun?
- Despite the rather bleak plot description, the ending of this cycle of plays is positive, because as a result of all these tragedies, the first law court is established at Athens. The play ultimately asserts the importance of humans establishing rules of justice to bring order to society.

### Sophocles and *Antigone*

- The second of Athens's great tragedians was Sophocles (496–406 B.C.). He wrote 123 plays; regrettably, only 7 of these survive. He won the Dionysia 18 times and never placed worse than second.
- Perhaps the most famous of Sophocles's plays is *Antigone*. In this play, a woman named Antigone wants to give a proper burial to her recently deceased brother, but the king has declared her brother a traitor because of his participation in a recent civil war, and therefore he is denied burial rites. Antigone is torn between her duty to her family and the laws of the state.
- This conflict touches off a whole series of disasters. Antigone is the fiancée of the king's son, so when she buries her brother, the king condemns her to death, and she hangs herself, the king's son commits suicide, which in turn causes the king's wife to commit suicide, and so on.
- This play tackles some of the basic issues every society and individual must struggle with. Which is more important: the good of the state as a whole or the rights of the individual? Does the individual owe a greater allegiance to society or to his or her family? What happens when religious beliefs conflict with the laws of the state?

## Euripides and *Medea*

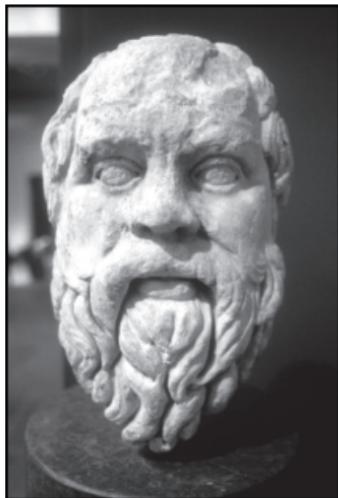
- The youngest of the three tragic playwrights was Euripides (c. 485–c. 406). He was the most dramatic, or perhaps melodramatic, of the three and the least popular, only winning the Dionysia four times. One of his themes was what happens to people in situations of extreme emotional pressure.
- The protagonist of *Medea* is a woman, but she is a foreigner, not a Greek. Moreover, Medea is extremely intelligent and a powerful sorceress. Before the play begins, she has fallen in love with a Greek hero, Jason, and for the sake of this love sacrificed everything—abandoning her family, betraying her country, and killing her own brother.
- As the play opens, Jason declares that he has decided to leave Medea and marry a Greek princess. How will a woman who has given up everything for love react when a man spurns that love? Since this is a Greek play, you know the answer will not be good.
- Medea is set on revenge, but she decides it would be too easy to simply kill Jason; she wants to see him suffer. She begins by murdering Jason’s new bride in a particularly gruesome fashion, in the course of which she accidentally kills the girl’s father as well. Then to really make Jason suffer, she murders her own children.
- The play is much more than an investigation of what could drive a mother to kill her own children, however. Its underlying themes include Greek men’s fear of women and paranoia about foreigners, and it even challenges the Greeks’ self-image of rational beings.

## Sophist Philosophy

- Another major area of accomplishment in 5<sup>th</sup>-century Greece was philosophy. The earlier wave of Greek philosophers was the Ionian Rationalists, who concentrated on the natural, physical world. A second significant group of philosophers were the Sophists who focused on the internal world of the human mind.
- Most of the Sophists earned a living by teaching debate skills to the young men of Athens and other states. Particularly in cities like Athens, whose government encouraged citizens to speak at public assemblies, such oratorical skills could lead to political power.
- These teachings made them very unpopular with many, particularly those of a more traditionalist, conservative mindset. Their critics viewed the Sophists as parasites and tricksters who advocated moral relativity. Their rhetorical techniques were seen as trickery and their complex theories as argument for argument's sake.
- Their reputations were not helped by the esoteric nature of their philosophical arguments. A good example of this is a work by Gorgias. He demonstrated through lengthy and complex logical arguments that it was not possible to prove that anything really existed; that if anything did exist, we could properly comprehend it; and that if we could understand it, we could not accurately communicate about our knowledge.
- To the average person, the Sophists' abstract theorizing seemed neither comprehensible nor particularly helpful, and therefore the segment of the populace most drawn to the Sophists were young, idle, rich men who liked the idea of challenging their elders.

## Socrates and Eternal Questioning

- Fifth-century Athens also boasted one of the greatest thinkers of all time—Socrates. Socrates never accepted money from students and may well have disputed the notion that he was a teacher. He wrote nothing himself but is entirely known to us through the writings of others, chiefly Plato.
- Socrates viewed himself as on a divinely sanctioned quest for knowledge and is famous for developing a methodology of inquiry entirely composed of asking questions—the Socratic method. He would begin by posing a seemingly innocent question to a supposedly wise man and would keep asking questions that challenged his subject's assumptions of his subject matter until his poor victim became trapped in a maze of contradictions and was compelled to admit his ignorance.
- Socrates's form of instruction was based not on giving answers but on forcing people to reach their own conclusions and to rethink their convictions. It also made him very unpopular with a great many people.
- Another favorite rhetorical technique of Socrates was to use analogies to make arguments or help others grasp difficult concepts. The Socratic method and the use of analogy are paralleled by the teaching methods found in the Upanishads and accounts of the Buddha.



**Socrates is widely regarded as the West's greatest thinker.**

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## Plato—Socrates's Main Legacy

- In marked contrast to Socrates, his student Plato wrote a great deal, and his works profoundly influenced the subsequent course of Western philosophy. Plato developed an influential and distinctive view of existence.
- In brief, Plato posited that the world we perceive with our senses is not reality. There is a second world of perfect forms that can only be reached through pure thought. All we sense in this world are pale, imperfect shadows of those ideal forms.
- Plato's ideas stress order and unity, such as his rather totalitarian image of an ideal state. He represents a turn away from the experimentation and natural science of the Ionian Rationalists and toward a form of philosophy focused purely on abstract thought.

### Suggested Reading

Benson, *A Companion to Plato*.

Easterling, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*.

Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Is it good for society when artists such as the Greek playwrights question and challenge the government and social conventions? How do we respond to similar actions today?
2. Whose philosophical inquiries were more original and/or important: the Ionian Rationalists or the Sophists?

# The Peloponnesian War and the Trial of Socrates

## Lecture 18

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**N**ow that we have examined the highpoints of Greek culture, we will look at some of its low points, including the disastrous Peloponnesian War and the shameful trial and execution of Socrates. After Athens's naval superiority and Sparta's land superiority caused a decade-long stalemate, Athenian arrogance finally led to their downfall and, ultimately, the end of Athenian democracy. With their society and self-image left in tatters, Athens turned on its own greatest intellect, Socrates, who made his own death into his final philosophical lesson.

### Origins of the Peloponnesian War

- In the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the unity of the Greeks led to astonishing political successes that in turn sparked great cultural achievements. But by century's end, disunity brought it all crashing down, culminating in one of the most shameful episodes in Greek history.
- At midcentury, Athens was at the height of its power, controlling more than 200 cities. Its increasingly arrogant and imperialistic behavior created resentment among the other Greeks, leading to a rival coalition centered on Sparta.
- In 431 B.C., in a situation a bit reminiscent of the beginning of WWI, one of Athens's allies came into conflict with one of Sparta's. Both proxy states appealed for military aid, causing Athens and Sparta to mobilize their armies, which led to both leagues mobilizing. The war would ultimately last for nearly 30 years and involve the entire Greek world.

## The Early War—Stalemate

- The Athenians entered the war with a complacent confidence in their abilities and their ultimate success founded on a number of significant advantages. They had enormous wealth, a superb fleet, and the savvy leadership of Pericles.
- Sparta and its allies did not have wealth, nor did they possess much in the way of a navy. Their main assets were the small but extremely well-trained Spartan army and a general resentment against the Athenians, even among their allies, due to their arrogance.
- Pericles wanted to play to Athens's strengths—its wealth and its navy. He wisely believed that Athens should avoid fighting a land battle and reasoned that the longer the war lasted, the weaker Sparta would get, since it had no reserves to draw on.
- In the first year of the war, Sparta and its allies immediately invaded Athenian territory. Following Pericles's counsel, the Athenians crowded inside the city walls and refused to fight. The Spartans marched back and forth, burned some farms, but were helpless since they could not break through the walls.
- In turn, Athens sent out its fleet, which sailed to the Peloponnesian and conducted little raids in which they would land, burn a few things, and then retreat back to the ships before the Spartan army arrived. Thus there was a stalemate, with Sparta supreme on the land, and Athens at sea. One historian has described the situation like an elephant at war with a whale.
- In 430 B.C., with the entire Athenian population crammed into the city, a plague broke out and more than a quarter of the populace died. Most notable among the victims was Pericles. This created a leadership vacuum that would be filled by a group of men known as demagogues who used their verbal skills to stir up the people's emotions. The most prominent demagogue was Cleon.

- Eventually, the demagogues convinced the Athenians to abandon Pericles's strategy. After several misfortunes, Cleon scored a significant military coup when he captured a large group of Spartan soldiers. Given the Spartan manpower shortage, the Spartans were desperate to get these soldiers back.
- The war seemed to be turning Athens's way. However, around this time, Sparta also came up with a new leader with bold new ideas named Brasidas. He decided that the way for Sparta to win the war was to cut Athens off from its resources.
- In 424, Brasidas seized the town of Amphipolis, which controlled Athens's silver mines. Cleon led an army to recapture Amphipolis. The outcome of the battle was indecisive, but both Cleon and Brasidas were killed in the fighting.
- With the most prowar leader on each side gone and each side tired of nearly 10 years of war, a brief truce was agreed on. Athens got back Amphipolis, and Sparta got back its captured soldiers.

## The War's Middle Years

- Soon, new demagogues emerged and caused the resumption of the war. In particular, a talented, wealthy young man of good family named Alcibiades came to power in Athens. He was extremely charismatic, attractive, athletic, and a marvelous public speaker. He was also impulsive, obnoxious, and enjoyed drinking and spending money on luxuries.
- In 415, Alcibiades began urging the Athenians to undertake a Sicilian military expedition that he promised would decisively win the war. The Sicilian expedition called for expanding the empire into the western Mediterranean by conquering the powerful city of Syracuse located on the island of Sicily.

- The night before the expedition set sail, Athens's herms were mutilated. A herm is a tall stone column with the head of the god Hermes on top and a large stone erection protruding from the front. Many Athenians had herms in front of their houses to ward away evil. Someone had knocked off all the herms' members.
- This was a sacrilegious act, and suspicion fell on Alcibiades and his friends. The Athenians were afraid to accuse him while he had the army with him in Athens, so they waited until the expedition left and then recalled Alcibiades to Athens to stand trial. Instead, he fled to Sparta and became an advisor to the Spartan kings.
- Alcibiades's replacement was a cautious, superstitious, ailing man named Nikias. For over a year, the Athenians tried in vain to capture Syracuse. Just as they realized the situation was hopeless, a lunar eclipse took place, and Nikias insisted they wait for the ritual period of three times nine days before they retreat.
- By the end of this time, it was too late, and all the Greeks were slaughtered or captured. Nikias was executed, and the survivors were flung into a pit to work in the mines. The only reason the Syracusans spared any lives was because they enjoyed Athenian theater, so those who had memorized some plays were allowed to live.

### The Peloponnesian War Ends, the Culture War Begins

- Athens surrendered unconditionally in 404. The peace terms imposed on Athens included the destruction of the Long Walls, limiting the Athenian navy to 12 ships, and the dismantling of the democracy. A group of men known as the 30 Tyrants were installed as Athens's new government, ruling with absolute power.
- The years following the Peloponnesian War were a period of great disillusionment at Athens. It was also the time of a culture war.

- On one side were traditionalists who blamed democracy and the Sophists for the defeat and advocated a return to traditional attitudes, religion, and values. Opposing them was a faction composed mostly of young men who had been taught by the Sophists and who were rebellious and openly contemptuous of traditional religion.
- The most extreme antitraditionalists formed a club called the Seekers of Ill-Fortune. Their goal was to prove that the gods did not exist by intentionally performing shocking, sacrilegious acts.

## The Trial of Socrates

- It was in this highly charged environment that the last and most shameful act of 5<sup>th</sup>-century Greek history took place: the trial and death of Socrates. In 399, Socrates was formally put on trial at Athens for two charges: impiety and corruption of the youth.
- In Athenian trials, a jury of 501 citizens was chosen at random. The prosecution would make a speech, and then the defense would make a speech. After hearing both of these, the members of the jury would vote: guilty or innocent.
- Our knowledge of Socrates's trial comes primarily from two written accounts; the more famous is Plato's *Apology*, which records Socrates's defense speech but not the prosecution's speech. We can infer their argument from Socrates's response.
- Several years earlier, Athens had passed a law saying that it was illegal to deny the existence of the gods or to teach new explanations for natural phenomena. Socrates did not deny the existence of the gods, but his concept of the gods was not the same as that of a traditionally-minded Greek. He had also toyed with explaining natural phenomena in his youth, but not for many years.



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**Socrates's execution was arguably an act of suicide—and of political defiance. He might easily have escaped punishment but stood by his principles.**

- Against the charge that he had corrupted Athens's youth, Socrates replied that he had never accepted money from students and thus should not be considered a teacher. He admitted to having young followers, but he argued that it was a free country. He was not responsible for others' actions.
- One factor that may have influenced Socrates's jurors was that among the prominent men who had followed Socrates were a number who had turned traitor during the Peloponnesian War, most prominently Alcibiades. They found him guilty by a very narrow margin.
- In Athenian legal procedure, there was a second phase in which the prosecution proposed a punishment, the defense suggested an alternative punishment, and the jury voted for one of the two. Now the prosecution proposed the death penalty.

- Socrates shocked everyone by saying that since he had been providing a useful service to the state through his questioning, he should be rewarded with free dinners for the rest of his life at state expense—the highest honor that could be awarded to an Athenian citizen.
- Offended, the jury then voted overwhelmingly in favor of the death penalty. Note that those who voted for his death probably did not expect that he would actually die, since there was a tradition at Athens of allowing such prisoners to escape and flee into exile.
- Socrates's disciples did arrange for his escape, but he refused to go. He stated that he had always obeyed the laws and was not going to make an exception now. Thus, when the jailer presented him with the cup of hemlock, he willingly drank it, and he died.
- The trial and death of Socrates are conventionally thought of as marking the end of the Golden Age of Greek civilization. This episode came to be viewed as a stain on the reputation of classical Athens, since the city put to death the greatest thinker it ever produced.

### Suggested Reading

Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War*.

Tarrant, ed., *The Last Days of Socrates*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Was war between Athens and Sparta inevitable, and should Athens have won the war?
2. If Socrates were alive today and acted in the same ways, how would we react to him?

# Philip of Macedon—Architect of Empire

## Lecture 19

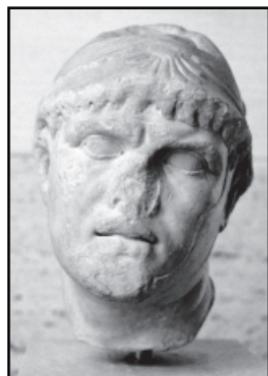
In the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, Macedon grew from an obscure land of sheep herders to a powerful state under the dynamic leadership of King Philip II and his successor, Alexander. Although Alexander's accomplishments often overshadow his father's, it was Philip who created the mighty Macedonian army, formed powerful diplomatic and military alliances, captured the wealth of the weakened Greek city-states, and conceived of the plan to conquer the western Persian Empire that Alexander would later take to such staggering extremes.

### The Great Man Theory of History

- What forces drive historical events and determine the course of history? The number of answers is probably equal to the number of historians. One that is no longer trendy but that enjoyed considerable popularity for a long while is known as the Great Man theory of history.
- The Great Man theory states that every so often, individuals come along whose actions are so significant that they create a major moment of historical change and set the course of history in a new direction.
- There are many problems with the Great Man theory, but the individuals who form the subject of the next four lectures provide some of the most compelling evidence in support of it. In this lecture, we will look at two such men: the Macedonian father-son kings, Philip II and Alexander the Great.

## The Rise of Macedon under Philip

- After the trauma of the Peloponnesian War, all the Greek city-states were exhausted. The war was extremely destructive in terms of the human and financial cost. The Spartans were ill-suited to run an empire, and their efforts soon collapsed. The next half of the century was a time of constantly shifting alliances.
- Just north of Greece lay the kingdom of Macedonia, or Macedon, a backward country of rural farmers and herders with no major cities. It was ruled by a king and a group of nobles, and the king's control was often tenuous.
- In about 358 B.C., Philip II came to the throne. He proved to be one of the most dynamic and creative rulers in history. The first problems he addressed were Macedon's internal instability and weak central rule.
- Philip rebuilt the capital city of Pella, turning the rustic village into a first-class modern city. He brought in Greek architects and artists and had them build the structures, such as temples and theaters, that one would find in Athens.
- Philip brought Greek philosophers to Macedon and established them at an educational institution where young Macedonians could learn about Greek culture. Philip sent his own children and invited the Macedonian noblemen to send their sons there for free.
- Here we see the first signs of Philip's trademark craftiness: What looks like generosity was actually an act of aggression. Philip effectively had taken an entire generation of Macedonian nobility hostage at Pella. Also, these young noblemen all grew up with longstanding bonds of friendship to Philip's son, Alexander.



Philip epitomized a “great man” of history.

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- Philip was also a master of using marriages for political effect. He arranged marriages between various distant relatives of his and noblemen he wanted to tie to himself to strengthen his position, maintain peace, or gain loyalty.
- Philip needed money both to pay for Pella and to reform the Macedonian army. He took advantage of the weakness and political confusion of Greece to steal some of the silver mines near Amphipolis.

## Philip at War

- Philip transformed the Macedonian army into a new and highly effective fighting machine in a way that constituted another military revolution. He adopted the basic Greek phalanx, but each soldier carried an extra-long 12- to 15-foot spear called a sarissa, giving him a reach advantage over any enemy.
- The sarissa required more training than the shorter spear; thus Philip made the Macedonian army a professional one. Philip's army, like the Spartans', trained year-round for war.
- Philip also made the new Macedonian military a mixed army, composed of different types of soldiers armed with different sorts of weapons: the sarissa-bearing phalanx, lightly armed skirmishers, archers, light and heavy cavalry, and so on. This put a premium on good generalship and rewarded creative tactical ability.
- Philip immediately put his new army to use and, one by one, began to conquer his neighbors. He employed marriage alliances and diplomatic treaties to make peace with all states except his intended victim. Once that state was conquered, he started the cycle again until he conquered all his neighbors.
- Philip then began to eye targets farther afield; the obvious next one was Greece. He befriended some Greek states to keep them from uniting against him and even managed to get himself a seat on a council previously composed only of Greeks.

- The key battle for the fate of Greece took place at Chaeronea in 338 B.C. Philip's new military system proved superior. It is possible to view the Battle of Chaeronea as the endpoint of Greek independence in the ancient world.
- The most powerful nation in the world was still Persia, and Philip began to formulate his most daring plan yet: to invade the westernmost fringe of the Persian Empire and wrest territory away from Persian control.
- In 336 B.C., while still organizing his expedition, Philip was planning a wedding to cement yet another alliance when he was assassinated by one of his own bodyguards. It was never clear who had hired him to kill Philip; much suspicion fell on one of his wives, Olympias.

### Alexander Takes the Throne

- The heir to the throne was Olympias's son, Alexander, who at that time was just 20 years old. He had been tutored by the great philosopher Aristotle, who had inculcated a love of Greek culture in Alexander. Alexander also received a thorough military education. At the age of 18, he was already in command of a section of his father's army at the Battle of Chaeronea.
- Alexander appears to have been an extremely charismatic individual, able to arouse intense adulation and loyalty. He was supposedly extremely attractive as well to both men and women. He enjoyed carousing with his friends, the Companions, and spent many nights engaged in raucous bouts of drinking.
- Alexander faced many of the same problems that had confronted Philip on his own accession: A variety of external enemies threatened Macedon, and Alexander's own position as king was insecure because there were two rival candidates for the throne, although both were still children.

- The news of Philip's death was greeted with joy among the states conquered by Philip, and many Greek city-states, including Thebes and Athens, revolted at once. Alexander acted decisively and boldly. His strongest support came from the Macedonian army, who immediately acclaimed him as king.
- Alexander had his two rivals put to death, then marched on Greece before resistance could be organized. He then marched north and in a lightning campaign reasserted control over Macedon's neighbors.

### Alexander's First Asian Campaign

- Not content with this, picking up where his father had left off, Alexander now turned his attention to the expedition against Persia. He crossed the Hellespont into Asia Minor at the head of approximately 40,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry.
- The satraps of Asia Minor gathered their troops to oppose Alexander. The two armies met at the River Granicus. In defiance of standard military strategy, Alexander crossed the river up a slippery embankment and defeated the Persians.
- Alexander personally led the charge, suffering minor injuries, including one blow that split his helmet—narrowly avoiding death thanks to the timely intervention of one of his Companions. It is interesting to speculate how history might have been different if Alexander had met a premature end on the banks of the Granicus.
- This victory left Alexander in control of Asia Minor. He marched along the coast, capturing various cities, until he reached Cilicia, at the extreme northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea.
- There was probably a general expectation that Alexander would return to Greece and rule over what would have been the largest Greek empire yet seen. Instead, he continued eastward, heading towards the core of the Persian Empire. Such a challenge could not go unanswered.

## Suggested Reading

Hammond, *Philip of Macedon*.

Worthington, *Philip II of Macedonia*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How broadly applicable do you think Philip's methods for building up a state's power are?
2. What was the most important legacy that Philip gave to Alexander?

# Alexander the Great Goes East

## Lecture 20

**A**lexander the Great's career of conquest briefly united the Mediterranean, Egypt, and the Near East politically. While his political empire did not last, some of his actions had long-term effects. He effectively ended the Persian Empire and ensured that Greek culture would predominate in the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world for centuries to come. By stretching the boundaries of his empire from Greece to India, he united previously disparate regions of the world. Although after his death, they would be politically separate entities, their ties of trade and communication would endure.

### Alexander Becomes the King of Kings

- After his first Asian successes, Alexander would no longer be following in Philip's footsteps but began carving his own path. Darius III, alarmed by Alexander's victory at Granicus, decided to take the field against Alexander himself. The armies came together on the plain of Issus in November 333.
- Alexander was outnumbered but undeterred. Frightened by the ferocity of the Macedonian charge, Darius fled to the rear of his army. The Persian army was routed. Alexander captured the Persian baggage train, which included Darius's wife, children, and mother. Darius escaped.
- Darius attempted to limit his losses offering peace if Alexander would march no further and return Darius's family. Alexander's ego and ambitions appear to have grown. His advisors all urged him to accept the terms, but Alexander rejected Darius's offer and taunted him, saying:

In the future, whenever you communicate with me, send to me as king of Asia: Do not write to me as an equal. If you wish to lay claim to the title of king, then stand your ground and fight for it; do not run away, as I shall chase you wherever you may go.

- At this point, Alexander turned south along the coast of the Mediterranean. The Persian fleet still controlled the eastern Mediterranean, threatening Alexander's supply lines and the stability of Greece.
- Alexander had to destroy the fleet before he could continue his pursuit of Darius, but he had no fleet of his own. Rather than challenge the Persian fleet at sea, Alexander overcame it by capturing their bases along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean.
- Alexander then proceeded to Egypt and founded a city at the mouth of the Nile that would prove to be one of his most lasting accomplishments. The not-very-modestly named Alexandria would become one of the largest and most important cities in the ancient Mediterranean.
- Late in 331 B.C., Alexander crossed the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and marched into Mesopotamia. Darius had not been idle. He had collected a gigantic army that outnumbered Alexander's several times over and prepared a special weapon for the upcoming battle—chariots with sword blades attached to the wheels.
- Darius carefully selected a location for the battle—a vast, flat plain called Gaugamela, where he hoped to use his chariots to best effect and where his superior numbers could surround and overwhelm Alexander's army.
- In his previous battles, Alexander had always attacked at once, but confronted by this enormous force, Alexander camped for the night to rest his troops, scouted out the terrain, and planned his strategy.

- Gaugamela turned out to be Alexander's finest victory. He managed to neutralize the scythed chariots by opening lanes in his phalanx through which they passed harmlessly and were then overwhelmed with his light troops.
- When a crack finally opened in the Macedonian phalanx, Alexander once again personally led a charge at Darius, who once again fled. Demoralized by the cowardice of their king, the Persians were defeated. Alexander was now the King of Kings.

### Alexander beyond Persia

- Alexander spent several more years mopping up pockets of resistance and chasing Darius around the mountains, where Darius eventually died. But after Gaugamela, the Persian Empire was effectively his. He captured the royal cities of Persia and seized the royal treasury.
- Alexander was still not content. He marched north to the Caspian Sea and east to the mountains of Bactria and Sogdiana, in modern-day Iran, Afghanistan, and central Asia. He then turned south and crossed the Hindu Kush into what is now Pakistan and northwest India.
- In 326 B.C., at the Hydaspes River in northern India, he fought the last of his four great battles, defeating an Indian rajah named Porus.
- Alexander founded many more cities, in which he settled some of his aging veterans. He named more than a dozen of these Alexandria. These cities were thoroughly Greek in plan and construction. In the long term, this spreading of Greek culture was the most significant effect of his campaigns.
- Finally, in India, Alexander's own army mutinied. They said they had earned enough glory and wealth and now wanted to return home and enjoy it. Alexander flew into a rage and sulked in his tent for three days, but the troops were adamant, and Alexander was forced to turn back.

- Alexander spent the next two years marching back to Susa and Babylon along the coast of the Arabian Sea, conquering the areas he passed through and enduring a horrible march across the desert during which a large part of his army died.
- Once back in Babylon, Alexander began planning a new campaign against Arabia. However, after an all-night drinking binge, he fell ill with a fever which steadily worsened until, after about two weeks, he died. At the time of his death, he was only 33 years old.



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**Alexander conquered Persia, but his great legacy was cultural, not political.**

## Alexander's Legacies

- A recurrent issue in Alexander's rule was the tension created by Alexander's multiple roles. To the Macedonians, he was their king and general; to the Greeks he was simply the leader of a joint expedition; to the conquered Persians, he became the new King of Kings.
- Compounding this was the variety of cultures he came to represent. Technically he was a Macedonian—a barbarian, by Greek standards—but he presented himself as a Greek. After his conquests, he began to adopt some Persian customs.
- Alexander faced the dilemma of how to rule such a vast and culturally disparate empire. He founded cities whose populations were a mixture of Greeks, Macedonians, and Persians and similarly attempted to integrate Persian units into his army.

- One of his boldest steps was to actively encourage marriages between Macedonians and Persians. He married Roxanne, a Bactrian princess, and later a daughter of Darius. He also wed 80 of his Companions to the daughters of Persian nobles.
- He arranged for 30,000 Persian boys to be taught Greek and to be trained in Macedonian military tactics and weapons. It has been argued by some that Alexander had a grand vision of creating not only a single global empire, but a single universal culture.
- His policy of social integration created some serious problems. In particular, the assignment of Persians to important positions in the Macedonian army caused severe resentment among Alexander's veterans. The Persian custom of proskynesis, the practice of prostrating oneself before the King of Kings that Alexander tried to adopt, also offended his Macedonian subjects.
- Alexander's plan to combine the Macedonians and Persians was ultimately unsuccessful. His spreading of Greek culture was much more lasting, especially around the Mediterranean. One great weakness of his achievements was that the empire he created was held together by personal ties to himself. He failed to appoint a successor, and this ensured the immediate fragmentation of his empire.
- We do not know for sure what his long-term plans for his empire were. Some ancient sources relate grandiose schemes for future campaigns and projects, such as the conquest of the western Mediterranean and the construction of many lavish temples and monuments. It is possible that he had no long-term strategy other than to continue conquering until he ran out of enemies.
- No one can deny Alexander's military genius. He combined careful preparation with boldness in combat. In the end, perhaps one of Alexander's most lasting, yet dubious, achievements was that he inspired generations of later would-be conquerors to emulate him.

- Under Alexander, the separate worlds of the Mediterranean, the Near East, and parts of India briefly became one. His actions did link these widespread civilizations more closely together and established routes of trade and communication that would not be forgotten.
- If you agree with the Great Man theory of history, it is easy to see the careers and effects of Philip and Alexander as proof of its validity, since it is hard to imagine that Macedonia would have risen from obscurity to dominance without them. On the other hand, one could perhaps argue that the broader effects that resulted from their actions, such as the fall of the Persian Empire or the spread of Greek culture, were inevitable and would have happened whether or not Alexander ever existed.

## Suggested Reading

Fox, *Alexander the Great*.

Heckel and Tittle, eds., *Alexander the Great: A New History*.

Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Would Alexander's conquests have been possible if he had not had Philip's actions to build on?
2. What do you think were Alexander's true motivations and character?

# Unifiers of India—Chandragupta and Asoka

## Lecture 21

The two most important rulers of India's Mauryan dynasty were Chandragupta, a great conqueror in the mold of Alexander the Great, and his grandson Asoka, who transformed from a brutal conqueror to an adherent of nonviolence and universal justice. Chandragupta was a tough-minded and ruthless empire builder who, with the help of his brilliant advisor Kautilya, carved a substantial empire out of the disparate states of northern India. But Asoka had a broader vision of what an empire could be—not just a political entity, but a cultural one.

### From Alexander's Ashes

- Chandragupta Maurya and his grandson Asoka would create the largest Indian empire the world had yet seen, one that would remain until the establishment of the modern nation of India in 1947, beginning shortly after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.
- After Alexander's death, his vast empire immediately fragmented, with each of his generals grabbing as big a chunk of territory as he could and setting himself up as its ruler. The core of the Persian Empire in Mesopotamia and neighboring regions was taken over by a general named Seleucus, who founded the Seleucid dynasty. Northern India reverted to a number of smallish kingdoms ruled mostly by indigenous leaders.
- There are many conflicting stories about Chandragupta's youth; while most seem like legends, it seems that, by young adulthood, Chandragupta had already embarked on a successful career of conquest.

- According to at least one historical source, Alexander met with a group of local princes while in India, including Chandragupta Maurya. Some scholars have argued that Alexander’s empire provided the inspiration for Chandragupta.
- Chandragupta’s empire was centered on the Ganges River Valley and expanded to encompass the Indus River Valley. Eventually, virtually the entire Indian subcontinent fell under his sway. In the north, he pushed into regions controlled by Seleucus.
- After a major battle, Chandragupta and Seleucus signed a peace treaty in 305 B.C. It established their border at the Hindu Kush—a territorial gain for Chandragupta. Chandragupta also married one of Seleucus’s daughters, and Seleucus received 500 Indian war elephants.

### Kautilya and the *Artha-shastra*

- Chandragupta’s success has been partially attributed to his prime minister, an older Brahman named Kautilya, who wrote an influential work known as the *Artha-shastra*. This text is one of the earliest known examples of an advice manual for rulers.
- Much of the *Artha-shastra* consists of ruthlessly practical advice. It discusses how to rule with wisdom and justice as well as aspects of power politics. It examines how a prince should be educated and trained, as well how to control his subjects, particularly those who might seek power of their own, such as his ministers.
- The ruler is counseled to employ spies to watch out for internal enemies. Chandragupta appears to have enthusiastically followed this advice, organizing a vast network of spies throughout India.
- The *Artha-shastra* emphasizes that the greatest evil is anarchy, and therefore it is a firm advocate of strong, centralized authority. In this way, it advocates a doctrine similar to Chinese Legalism.

## Chandragupta's Organized Empire

- The Mauryan capital, Pataliputra (near present-day Patna), was a huge, sophisticated, cosmopolitan city of perhaps half a million inhabitants. It stretched for eight miles along the Ganges River and was protected by a 900-foot-wide moat, backed by a wooden wall 21 miles in circumference boasting 570 towers and 64 gates.
- Pataliputra had a famous university and library and was graced with gardens, parks, temples, and sumptuous palaces. A Greek ambassador who visited the capital described a complex and flourishing economy.
- Organization was a strong point of the Mauryan Empire. It had a centralized administration. Roads linked its major cities, and these highways were marked with milestones and had rest stations at regular intervals. State-planted mango trees supposedly provided shade and sustenance for travelers.
- Mining, shipbuilding, spinning and weaving, armament manufacture, and prostitution were all state-owned and state-controlled industries. Currency and weights and measures were regulated. There were large state farms and granaries, and the state owned all the forests as well.
- The empire's enormous army was composed of a mixture of infantry, cavalry, chariots, and thousands of war elephants. To maintain the bureaucracy and the army, the emperor levied taxes on all forms of wealth, including crops, land, gold, animals, and commerce.
- Both Chandragupta and his successors maintained firm economic and diplomatic links with Alexander's successors. The pockets of Greek culture left behind by Alexander seem to have had a few influences on Indian culture, most notably in art.

- Chandragupta left behind a large, well-organized empire. The details of his death are uncertain; one popular legend claims that toward the end of his life, he voluntarily handed over the throne to his successor, and retired to the wilderness to live his final years as a Jain ascetic.

## Asoka the Great

- Chandragupta's son and successor added little to his empire, but his grandson Asoka, like Alexander, earned the epithet "the Great." Asoka's deeds were forgotten until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when British archaeologists took note of inscriptions erected by Asoka throughout his empire. Together, they constitute roughly 5,000 words inscribed on at least 18 different rocks and 30 pillars.
- Asoka emerged as the victor from a group of rival claimants to the throne by killing at least six of his own brothers. For several years, he continued the pattern of conquest established by Chandragupta. He was ruthless, and many of his military expeditions resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of people.
- The turning point in Asoka's life occurred during the particularly bloody conquest of Kalinga. After witnessing the terrible suffering produced by this campaign, he had an abrupt change of heart, renounced warfare, converted to Buddhism, and embraced the concept of nonviolence.



**Asoka's lion pillars form the basis of the modern Indian flag.**

By Hyogushi Hidemaki KAMON.

- He sought to spread Buddhism and the idea of nonviolence throughout his empire. He was interested in preventing the killing of humans and animals and in alleviating suffering. Accordingly, he instituted a sort of universal health care.
- Asoka expressed a newfound determination to look kindly upon all his subjects, whom he referred to as “my children.” However, he did not abandon the principles of order and hierarchy. In his edicts, he cautions his so-called children, especially the conquered, that he still possesses both the will and the power to punish.
- Numerous officials were charged with the spreading and enforcement of dharma, the performance of one’s duties. These men traveled throughout the empire, ensuring that local officials acted righteously and in full accordance with Asoka’s edicts and wishes.
- Asoka also sent missionaries to spread Buddhism throughout Asia, including his own son and daughter. Despite his desire to spread Buddhism, Asoka dictated tolerance of other religions.

### After Asoka

- Asoka kept the Mauryan Empire unified during his lengthy reign, but it did not long outlast his death. Much as Alexander’s generals fought over his empire, Asoka’s many sons argued over who should succeed him, and the empire declined.
- As power fragmented and territories reasserted their independence, long-standing feuds among regions revived. In 184 B.C., the last ruler bearing the Mauryan name was murdered by one of his own generals.
- While Asoka’s dream of unification faded, his pillars remained as bold religious and artistic statements. Known for their polished, glossy surfaces and the animal statues that frequently surmounted them, some rose an impressive 40 feet high and weighed up to 50 tons.

- The best and most famous Asokan column capital from Sarnath consists of four noble-looking lions sitting atop a circular platform. This rests on an inverted lotus base. Today, these lions are the official emblem of the modern Republic of India.
- Asoka was a remarkable ruler for his attempt—mostly successful during his lifetime—at governing a large, ethnically and geographically diverse empire in an ethical manner. His guiding principles are concisely expressed in a Buddhist riddle found among his edicts: “The dharma is excellent. But wherein consists the dharma? In these things: little impiety, many good deeds, compassion, liberality, truthfulness, and purity.”
- A cynical observer might note that it was easy for Asoka to advocate these high-minded principles after he had already brutally eliminated all who opposed him. Nevertheless, for an absolute ruler to actively endorse such virtues on a society-wide basis is relatively rare.

### Suggested Reading

Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*.

Wolpert, *A New History of India*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Did the stability and cultural benefits brought by Chandragupta’s rule justify his aggressive conquests?
2. To what degree is it possible for an absolute ruler to embrace a philosophy of compassion and nonviolence?

# Shi Huangdi—First Emperor of China

## Lecture 22

Shi Huangdi was the first and, arguably, the most remarkable emperor of a unified China. He unified a multitude of disparate kingdoms, both large and small; instituted a meritocratic bureaucracy; constructed great public works; and standardized everything from China's written language to its system of weights and measures. But he had a darker side as well. His penal system was remarkably harsh, and he resorted to book burning and the torture and execution of Confucian scholars who disagreed with his policies. Nonetheless, without him, there might never have been a single China.

### The Greatest of the Great Men?

- Like Philip of Macedon, Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China, completely reformed and unified his nation. Like Chandragupta, he conquered vast territories. Like Asoka, he created a new, coherent vision for society. Like Alexander the Great, he accomplished all of this in a relatively short lifespan.
- Shi Huangdi furthermore exceeded all these rulers because he was the father of his nation. He set the model for Chinese political structures for almost a millennium. He codified the Chinese written script. He built the two most famous archaeological monuments in China: the first Great Wall, and the army of terra-cotta warriors.
- He was both widely reviled for his cruelty, which included book burning and the murder of hundreds of scholars, and greatly admired for creating a strong, unified China. In addition to all these deeds (which are historically attested), he is the focal point of many colorful legends which may well be based in truth.

## Shi Huangdi's Rise to Power

- Toward the end of the Warring States period, the region that would ultimately become China was divided into seven main kingdoms and an assortment of minor principalities. One of these seven was Qin. The chief advisor to the Qin king was an ambitious former merchant named Lu Buwei.
- When a boy named Zheng ascended to the throne at the age of 13, Lu Buwei became regent and chancellor, but Zheng's grandmother, the dowager queen, still wielded considerable influence. She, however, was famous for her sexual appetites, so Lu Buwei found a particularly handsome man named Lao Ai to be her lover. Together, Lu Buwei, the dowager queen, and Lao Ai ran Qin in Zheng's name and began a policy of expansion into neighboring territories.
- As the years passed, Zheng began to resent the control exercised by this group. Tensions increased until 238 B.C., when Zheng was 22. Lu and his faction, fearing a loss of control, may have plotted to depose Zheng and elevate one of his half-brothers to the throne.
- Zheng ruthlessly sent the dowager queen into exile; killed Lao by having him torn apart by chariots; and had Lu exiled, where he committed suicide. Zheng also executed hundreds of their followers and put all of his half-brothers to death.
- Now the sole power in Qin, Zheng embarked on an ambitious program of foreign conquest and internal reorganization. In just 11 years of constant warfare, he attacked and succeeded in subduing each of the other six major kingdoms, one after the other, by 221 B.C. The area encompassed by his conquests still defines the borders of the core of the modern nation of China.
- Zheng adopted a new, descriptive name: Qin Shi Huangdi. “Shi” means “first,” “Huang” is usually translated as “emperor,” and “di” denotes a supernatural or divine power—thus the name meant roughly “the first august Qin emperor.”

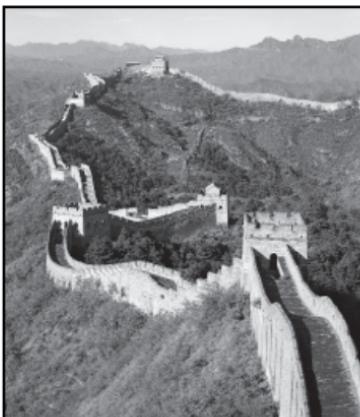
## Shi Huangdi's Reforms

- The emperor survived several assassination attempts by those who resented his destruction of the old kingdoms. To prevent such attacks, access to him was severely restricted, and it was nearly impossible for anyone to approach him.
- Shi Huangdi rejected the Confucian precepts that had dominated previous kingdoms and embraced the ideas of Legalism. He did not shy away from using violence and repression in running his empire. The Legalist advocacy of centralized power also clearly appealed to him.
- Shi Huangdi's standardization of the law code eroded the position of the once-powerful hereditary aristocracy. In the military, he promoted people who showed talent, rather than those merely born into the aristocracy, and he moved his rapidly growing bureaucracy in a more meritocratic direction.
- The new legal system he instituted may have been fairer and more just, but the laws could be harsh, with execution a common punishment, along with mutilation, tattooing, head shaving, and condemnation to forced labor.
- An extensive police force was established and a secret service of spies watched for suspect behavior. People were encouraged to inform on one another, even on their own families.
- Shi Huangdi attempted to impose regulations on everything under the sun. The old hodge-podge of different weights and measures used in the seven kingdoms was replaced by a single universal system. He regularized and enforced a single written form of the Chinese language. He reorganized the empire into 36 administrative districts. He even regulated the lengths of cart axles, so that all wheels would roll along the same ruts in the roads. While all this might seem excessively controlling, these measures actually helped to bring cohesion to a large, patchwork kingdom.

- The emperor organized workers on a massive scale, employing forced labor and gangs of convicts on an ambitious program of public projects: building bridges, dams, canals, and roads. The roads in particular aided communication, travel, and trade.
- Among his most significant public works was the first version of the Great Wall of China. Since it was made of packed earth and timber, little of it remains, but it was the forerunner of today's famous stone structure.

## Oppression and Censorship

- Although many of Shi Huangdi's actions had positive effects, his methods were coercive and this resulted in resentment. Many commoners were angered by the heavy taxation and forced labor. Intellectuals and scholars—especially Confucians—were unhappy with the Legalist government.
- Shi Huangdi came to view intellectual inquiry and the study of the past as seditious activities that incited rebellion. This tension resulted in two of Shi Huangdi's most controversial actions: a book burning and an execution of scholars.
- All records by pre-Qin historians were obliterated, as well as collections of literature and poetry and the works of the scholars of the Hundred Schools. Exemptions were made for texts about practical subjects such as medicine, agriculture, and divination. According to the ancient Chinese historian Sima Qian, “This was done so that no one should use the past to criticize the present.”



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**Shi Huangdi was the first emperor to build a wall on China's border.**

- Strictly speaking, not all banned books were completely destroyed, since copies were kept by the emperor's official scholars.

## Shi Huangdi and Mysticism

- The emperor's practical actions were really just one component of an overarching and astonishingly ambitious attempt to create a whole new cosmic order. The previous Zhou dynasty had been associated with the element of fire. Shi Huangdi therefore adopted water as his element on the rationale that water extinguishes fire.
- The color associated with the element of water was black, so black became the color of imperial flags and banners and of official clothing. The number associated with water was six; Shi Huangdi accordingly used six as the basis for many of his organizational schemes, from the 36 administrative districts to the diameter of his officials' hats.
- Shi Huangdi took a series of grand tours around his empire both to inspect his domains and as a symbolic assertion of domination. Their focal point was a sequence of religious sacrifices and rituals he performed. These were a direct imitation of one of the semidivine founders of Chinese legend.
- Shi Huangdi erected a series of stone monuments inscribed with his edicts and descriptions of himself and his actions. These inscriptions stress his total control over his empire and his almost god-like power.
- Shi Huangdi describes his own reign as one in which all people are “pacified,” “unified,” “standardized,” and “controlled,” and, what is more, they are pleased about it. Everyone obeys; everyone submits. Order and conformity are paramount.
- Shi Huangdi wanted to continue exerting power even in the afterlife, prompting the construction of his amazing tomb and its attendant army of terra-cotta warriors.

- He developed an obsession with avoiding death altogether and devoted great effort and expense to searching for a magical elixir which would grant him immortality. He also employed a team of alchemists who concocted pills that would supposedly prolong his life. Unfortunately, a key ingredient in many of these pills was mercury.

### **Shi Huangdi's Legacy**

- Shi Huangdi died during one of his grand tours in 210 B.C. at the relatively young age of 49. His retainers were so afraid that his death would spark a civil war that, for several weeks afterwards, they pretended that he was still alive. The Qin dynasty did not long survive him and was soon supplanted by the Han.
- Shi Huangdi left a mixed legacy. He was a true innovator who was the first to unite China, and he established a model of government that would last 800 years, while his standardization of script, culture, and economy bound together the country.
- On the other hand, his repressive tendencies have earned him lasting enmity, especially among the powerful class of Confucian scholars. For good or ill, it is hard to deny his long-lasting influence.

### **Suggested Reading**

Portal, ed., *The First Emperor*.

Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*.

### **Questions to Consider**

1. Whose achievements were the most impressive—Philip, Alexander, Chandragupta, Asoka, or Shi Huangdi—and why?
2. Whose achievements were the most influential—Philip, Alexander, Chandragupta, Asoka, or Shi Huangdi—and why?

# Earliest Historians of Greece and China

## Lecture 23

Three of the world's pioneering historians—two from Greece, one from China—had different ways of defining history, different ideas about its purpose, different methods of research, and different methods for writing it. Herodotus, a Greek from Asia Minor, is often called the father of history; he is known for presenting multiple eyewitness perspectives and for thematic organization. Thucydides, an Athenian and former military man, is the father of chronological history and offered a single perspective. Sima Qian, the first great historian of China, aimed at preservation rather than explanation of the past.

### Who Were the First Historians?

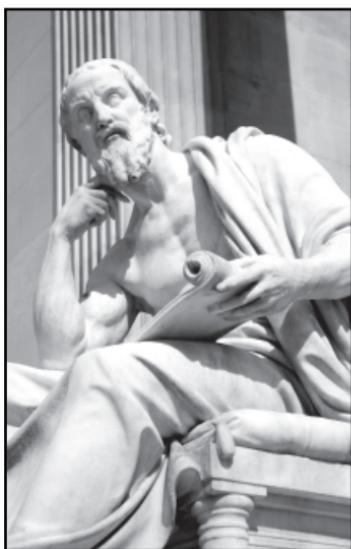
- The first person ever to write a work of history had to answer four fundamental questions: 1) What exactly is history? 2) What are its purposes and goals? 3) How should one do research? 4) How and in what form should one present it to the reader?
- Three men stand at the beginning of the historical tradition: Two Greeks, Herodotus and Thucydides, who lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and Sima Qian, who lived during China's Han dynasty in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.
- Herodotus wrote a history of the Persian Wars, Thucydides wrote about the Peloponnesian War, and Sima Qian authored a comprehensive history of China up to his time, the most famous part of which is our main source for the actions of Shi Huangdi.

## Herodotus—The Father of History

- Herodotus helpfully begins his work by addressing some of our questions:

These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he publishes in the hope of preserving for all time the memory of what men have done; so that the great and noteworthy deeds of both Greeks and non-Greeks shall never lose their proper glory; and to record here the origins of their conflict.

- The word translated as “researches” is the ancient Greek word *historia*. In Herodotus’s time, this meant something like “inquiries,” but Herodotus here gave it a new meaning, the one it still holds today: an account of the past.
- Herodotus has elected to provide a record only of what he considers the most important events. In addition, he states that his history will be a universal history, encompassing the actions of all nations.
- A further dimension to Herodotus’s definition of history is an analysis of causation. This takes it beyond a mere record of actions; he will also include interpretation of those events and how they relate to and affect one another.
- For him, the primary purpose of history writing is to “preserve the memory of what men have done.” The historian, therefore, is a recorder of important events, an interpreter of the past, and a preserver of glorious memories.



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**Herodotus is called the father of history, and rightly so.**

- Herodotus identifies himself as being from Halicarnassus, in Ionia, the region where a few generations before the Ionian Rationalists had lived, and their ideas clearly made a deep impression on him.
- In keeping with the Rationalist emphasis on personal observation, Herodotus traveled extensively. He visited the various cities of Greece and Asia Minor and went as far east as Babylon, south to Egypt, north to Scythia, and west to Italy.
- Herodotus carefully distinguishes between information derived from his own observations and that which he obtained secondhand. He strongly believed in gathering all versions of an event rather than just relying on one side's perspective.
- Herodotus routinely offers his own assessment of the material and does not hesitate to declare which version he finds most plausible, but because he passes along the raw data itself, he leaves the final interpretation up to the reader.
- Herodotus liked to arrange information thematically. Rather than relating occurrences in chronological order, Herodotus grouped series of stories that illustrate a certain theme, an aspect of human nature, or a type of event. These tales were often drawn from different cultures, places, and eras.
- Underlying this approach is Herodotus's firm belief that certain overarching themes are found repeatedly throughout history. Two examples are his beliefs that history is cyclical and that fate often controls what happens.
- Herodotus presents information in the form of entertaining stories. His history is not a dry, stuffy chronicle but an engaging, lively narrative bursting with memorable characters and striking incidents. Sometimes his desire to entertain takes precedence over strict chronology or clarity.

- Herodotus sometimes digresses from the primary narrative to offer entertaining descriptions of a foreign nation or people. The longest of these so-called ethnographic excurses—on the people, land, and customs of Egypt—amounts to more than 100 pages in standard translations.

## Thucydides—History as Chronology

- Thucydides lived slightly after Herodotus and was a native Athenian. He was a general during the long and bitter Peloponnesian War, charged with defending an important Athenian colony. He failed miserably and was exiled from Athens. Forced into early retirement, he decided to turn his energies to writing the history of the war.
- As with Herodotus, the opening passage of Thucydides's work is a key one:

Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war in which the Spartans and the Athenians fought against one another ... believing that the war would be greater and more memorable than any previous one. ... The Peloponnesian War, if estimated by the actual facts, will certainly prove to have been the greatest ever known.

- Thucydides both identifies the subject of his work and presents a justification for why the events are worthy of being recorded. This passage also reveals several of Thucydides's core beliefs—that it is possible to identify indisputable historical facts, and that one can objectively analyze such facts and draw concrete conclusions from them.
- Thucydides's definition of history focuses on the accurate recording of facts and the logical analysis of why they happened. His writing heavily emphasizes politics and the military and has little room or patience for colorful asides or the ethnographic excursions. Herodotus and Thucydides do share an interest in understanding the origins of events.

- Thucydides claims that he has only recorded either his own observations or what he learned from others after “making the most careful and particular inquiry.” He expresses confidence in his critical analysis skills to lead him to the correct interpretation. For him, the purpose of history is to provide an accurate account of the past so that people can better predict the future.
- Thucydides adopts a strictly chronological structure. He proceeds with a rigid year-by-year account, describing events as they unfold. Whereas Herodotus always gives multiple versions of events and identifies their origin, Thucydides does neither.
- The most controversial aspects of his work are the frequent speeches given by various personages. While Thucydides reports these speeches as direct quotations, he also admits that he invented much of their content. He often uses these speeches to incorporate his own analysis and interpretation.

### Sima Qian—The Dutiful Historian

- Sima Qian lived a few centuries after Herodotus and Thucydides but was working without any knowledge of them; thus he was just as much an innovator as they were. Sima Qian’s father had begun composing a history of the world but died with the work unfinished. On his deathbed, Sima Qian’s father forced his son to promise to complete it.
- Sima Qian eventually became attached to the court of a Han dynasty emperor but offended him and was sentenced either to pay a large fine or death by suicide. Since he was unable to afford the fine, he should have killed himself, but that would leave his oath unfulfilled. Bound by filial duty, Sima Qian had to accept castration.
- In some respects, Sima Qian combined elements found in Herodotus and Thucydides, while in other areas he took a third path.

- Like Herodotus, his history adopts a broad, inclusive perspective describing the deeds of great leaders and the local customs of various peoples. He had also traveled widely to gather information and drew on eyewitness accounts, official documents, letters, songs, and inscriptions.
- Whereas both Greek historians were fixated on trying to explain causation, Sima Qian was a Confucian, and in his view, Confucius had already explained what motivated people. Instead, Sima Qian concentrated on the “what” of history—the events.
- He was most interested in recording examples of both good and bad behavior to offer admirable models to emulate and shameful ones to avoid. For him, the purpose of history was to promote moral behavior and preserve traditions.
- Sima Qian had a unique solution to organizing his writing, combining aspects of Thucydides’s chronological structure with Herodotus’s storytelling. He divided his history into five sections.
  - The first two, called “Basic Annals” and “Chronological Tables,” give a chronologically arranged overview of events.
  - The next section, called “Treatises,” offers thematic treatments of a wide array of topics.
  - The last two, “Hereditary Houses” and “Biographies,” present individual biographies of a wide range of people and groups, from emperors to famous assassins to cruel officials to wandering swordsmen.
- The same person or event was often described in more than one section of Sima Qian’s work. While this structure might at first glance seem awkward, it actually permitted him to create a complex and nuanced history.

- Just as Herodotus frequently ended a section by giving his own interpretation, Sima Qian often concludes parts of his work with a similar sort of analysis prefaced by the third-person phrase “The Great Historian remarks. . .”
- Sima Qian was an innovator in his use of biographical history, and fully 70 of the 130 chapters of his work are straightforward biographies. This approach lends itself to vivid storytelling and, like Herodotus, Sima Qian is renowned and remembered for the colorful and entertaining tales.
- Also like Herodotus, Sima Qian includes mythical legends and stories in his work. A final similarity shared by both Herodotus and Sima Qian is their insertion of ethnographical sections.
- In the manner of Thucydides, Sima Qian’s history features a number of famous speeches by historical figures, and again like Thucydides, he seems to have invented the text of many of these himself.

## Suggested Reading

Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*.

Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Herodotus*.

———, *The Landmark Thucydides*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How would you answer these basic questions: What is history? What is its purpose? How should it be researched and written?
2. Of the three writers, whose approach to history writing do you prefer and why?

# The Hellenistic World

## Lecture 24

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The new political world created by Alexander quickly crumbled after his death, but the cultural effects lingered in a lively exchange of ideas and several burgeoning scientific, philosophical, and artistic movements. The Epicureans, Stoics, and Cynics grappled with the new political and ethical realities of the post-Alexander West. Aristotle rejected some of his mentor Plato's teachings and made observation of the real world the core of his philosophy. Alexandria became the center of knowledge and learning in the Mediterranean. Hellenistic artists, reflecting the turmoil in their world, reached new heights of drama, emotion, and virtuosity.

### The Hellenistic Era

- At the time when Asoka was ruling in India and Shi Huangdi in China, the Hellenistic period of Western history had begun. Alexander's former generals now exercised political control over a set of kingdoms stretching from Greece to the borders of India, and Greek culture dominated throughout these regions.
- The Hellenistic period was a time of constant warfare and hereditary monarchies. Absolute rulers such as Antigonus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy fought wars to a 300-year stalemate, causing widespread suffering and mass enslavement. There was therefore little development in Hellenistic politics.
- However, there were dramatic and creative new developments in the realms of philosophy, science, and art. The political confusion and oppression of the Hellenistic era seemed to spark an intellectual response in the form of several new schools of philosophy concerned with how to live a moral or proper life during troubled times.

## Philosophies of Turmoil

- Epicureanism—named after its founder, Epicurus—held that the goal of existence was to achieve a state of tranquility free from pain and fear. This was accomplished by avoiding things that caused pain and unpleasantness, and seeking pleasurable experiences. Today, the word Epicurean carries connotations of excess, particularly in regards to food, but a key aspect of ancient Epicureanism was moderation.
- Epicurians believed in withdrawing from society, not being active in politics, and living a quiet, intellectual life. This was the very opposite of the earlier Greek emphasis on active civic involvement, but it reflects the new political realities of the Hellenistic era.
- Stoicism, founded by a man named Zeno, had a very different response to the same problems. The Stoics were more pessimistic and believed that the world was probably a bad place but that one had to endure whatever one encountered and press on in the face of adversity.
- The Stoics had a strong ethos of helping others; thus Stoicism was an outward-facing philosophy that taught that it was one's duty to stay involved in society and do the best one could, even when such actions were futile or doomed to failure.
- The key concept for the Stoics was virtue. Virtue was the highest good; it was acquired through positive actions, and if one had it, one could achieve contentment.
- The beliefs of the third major new philosophical school, Cynicism, were by far the most radical. The Cynics advocated a life of unreserved, brutal honesty that led them to reject all forms of authority, government, and everyday social structures and conventions, which they held to be artificial and unnatural.

- The Cynics maintained that people were basically animals and that to pretend otherwise was pure hypocrisy. They also shunned all the material products of civilization, including personal possessions and usually were encountered homeless and in a state of nakedness.
- The most famous Cynic was Diogenes. There are many stories about him that illustrate the Cynic mindset. One tells of the time Diogenes was lying in the sun by the side of the road and Alexander the Great and his entourage rode by. Recognizing Diogenes, Alexander stopped and said that he desired to reward the famous philosopher. Diogenes merely asked Alexander to move along because he was blocking the sunlight.
- The philosophy and lifestyle of the Cynics were reminiscent of both the Upanishadic mystics of India and some of the Daoist sages of China. There is even a story concerning a famous early Daoist named Chuang Tzu and a local king that mirrors that of Diogenes and Alexander.

## Aristotle and the Great Hellenistic Scientists

- The most famous Hellenistic philosopher of all lived at the very beginning of this period—Aristotle, who had been Alexander’s tutor. In his youth, Aristotle was a student of Plato, but developed different interests from those of his teacher.
- Aristotle devoted enormous effort to a close study of the world around him. He was interested in virtually everything, and he wrote groundbreaking and influential treatises about a dazzling array of topics, including politics, ethics, physics, biology, literature, music, rhetoric, zoology, theater, logic, and metaphysics.



**Aristotle diverged from  
Plato’s teachings in  
several important ways.**

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- Many philosophers at this time were also what we would consider scientists, and the Hellenistic era witnessed important new inventions and discoveries in the fields of science, medicine, engineering, and mathematics. Euclid, known as the “Father of Geometry,” lived and worked in Hellenistic Alexandria. His *Elements* laid out all the basic principles of geometry.
- One of the most brilliant scientists and inventors of the era was Archimedes. He lived in Syracuse on the island of Sicily and was an inveterate tinkerer who crafted numerous ingenious machines, including pumps, pulleys, and a variety of military devices. He was a talented mathematician, establishing the value of pi and calculating the area and volume of complex shapes.
- Other inventions of Hellenistic scientists include cogged gears, pulleys, the screw, glass-blowing, hollow bronze casting, surveying instruments, an odometer, the water clock, and a musical instrument known as the water organ.
- Often, Hellenistic scientists’ ingenuity was not applied to practical concerns but to trickery, the kinds of things used by magicians or illusionists. The Greek word *mechane*, from which the word “mechanic” is derived, originally meant “a trick.”
- The source of funding and patronage for many inventors was the rulers of the Hellenistic kingdoms. They were fond of staging lavish public spectacles. Ptolemy II of Egypt organized a parade in Alexandria that puts modern counterparts such as the Rose Bowl Parade to shame. It included not just his army but immense floats carrying larger-than-life-sized mechanical statues of gods and heroes that moved their limbs.

## Alexandria—The Cradle of Hellenistic Knowledge

- The city of Alexandria was a center of learning. It boasted the famous Library of Alexandria, which aimed to acquire a copy of every book in existence. It may well have contained half a million scrolls. All ships that docked at Alexandria were searched by customs officials; if they found a book not yet owned by the library, it was confiscated until a copy could be made.
- Attached to the library was the Museum, literally “the house of Muses.” This functioned as both a collection of interesting objects and a center for advanced research that attracted scholars from all over the world. They would collect data, perform experiments, and write treatises on their findings.
- Their research reached a high level of sophistication and soon began to attract the timeless criticism directed at scholars that their work focused on hopelessly obscure topics with no practical applications.
- The Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt funded the library and took great pride in it. Being intensely competitive, the other Hellenistic kings soon established their own competing libraries, and a war of books developed to see who could own the most. All of this intellectual and diplomatic activity made Greek the common international language of the era.

## Hellenistic Art

- The Hellenistic era had its own distinctive style of sculpture that possessed three main characteristics.
  - First, it depicted incidents of extreme drama and intense emotion, as in the frequent images of the Dying Gaul.

- Second, rather than focusing on idealized bodies, it had a newfound fascination with realism; a popular genre was portraits of elderly, homeless people in which every wrinkle and sagging muscle was carefully and vividly rendered. Perhaps also as part of the new realism, women were finally depicted nude.
- Third, it often displayed an astonishing technical virtuosity, as if the sculptors were self-consciously showing off their skill at carving stone.
- If Hellenistic art had a morbid fascination with scenes of despair and death, it is tempting to view art as reflecting the reality of the times, inspired by or in response to the sometimes unpleasant aspects of the historical situation.

### Suggested Reading

Bugh, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World*.

Green, *Alexander to Actium*.

Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Technological innovation often seems to thrive in times of war. What conditions tend to foster such scientific creativity?
2. Do you agree with the interpretation that Hellenistic art and the various schools of Hellenistic philosophy all constitute reactions to the conditions of the time? Why or why not?

# The Great Empire of the Han Dynasty

## Lecture 25

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China's Han dynasty was founded by a one-time peasant whose unlikely rise to power was assisted by a period of turmoil and his own talent for choosing advisors and inspiring loyalty. He combined the Legalist bureaucracy of the Qin dynasty with a kinder, gentler Confucian philosophy that made life easier for the peasants and allowed greater social mobility among the middle and upper classes. Later Han emperors were more militaristic, and the empire reached its greatest extent under Wudi. It also made great technical, artistic, and economic strides.

### Empires East and West

- Around the eastern Mediterranean Sea, in India, and in China, we have traced events up to around 200 B.C. In all these areas, brief but geographically vast empires have collapsed, leaving in their wake a confused political landscape.
- At this point, in China and the western Mediterranean, a single political power would emerge that would not only unite the entire area under its control but would establish a relatively stable empire that would last for at least 400 years: the Han Empire and the Roman Empire.
- China's Han dynasty and the Roman Empire were about the same size in terms of both population and geographic extent. Even after they fell, they continued to exert considerable influence by becoming, in their respective parts of the globe, the dominant image of and model for an empire—the yardstick by which all subsequent empires would be judged.

## Liu Bang—The Peasant Emperor

- After Qin Shi Huangdi's death in 210 B.C., things rapidly deteriorated. His son could not control the power struggles among his advisors, and he had to be even more oppressive than his father. The common people were fed up, the intellectuals and the upper classes stewed with resentment, and the treasury was empty.
- The country began to erupt with rebellions, some led by aristocrats and some by peasants. After several confused years, a rebel leader named Liu Bang arose from the chaos to found a new dynasty, the Han, named after a tributary of the Yangtze River.
- Liu was an extremely unlikely emperor. A peasant, as a youth he was known as lazy, uneducated, unemployed, and overly fond of wine and women. Somehow, he reformed his ways, became village headman, and finally a general in one of the armies of rebellious peasants.
- Liu was a poor general; he lost every battle he personally commanded except one. His real talents lay in knowing how to choose subordinates, delegate authority, and mediate disputes. Ultimately, this was enough.
- Liu was illiterate and had to rely heavily on scholars in his bureaucracy, and he retained a certain peasant's contempt for these effete men of abstract learning. Nevertheless, he understood their importance and brought about a sort of golden age of Chinese culture and civilization.

## The Han System of Government

- Liu's stable government started with the strong, centralized state of Shi Huangdi but took on a kinder, gentler form. He attempted to combine the Confucian model of the compassionate, virtuous ruler who cared about his subjects with the efficiency and order of Legalism.

- He addressed the peasants' unhappiness by cutting down on forced labor and temporarily reducing taxes. He appeased intellectuals and upper class landowners by rescinding the Qin ban on Confucian and Zhou classics and encouraging intellectual pursuits.
- The bureaucracy was highly ordered and hierarchical but not hereditary. Those wishing to enter government service had to pass an elaborate system of examinations which were based on knowledge of Confucian classic texts.
- The rulers established a national university to teach the Confucian texts for these exams. In theory, the exam system rewarded merit; in practice, the system naturally favored sons of landowning families, who had greater wealth and time to devote themselves to study.
- The country was divided into 100 administrative regions that were subdivided into 1,500 districts. A multilayered bureaucracy of 20 levels and an estimated 130,000 individuals oversaw everything from the collection of taxes to the construction of public works.
- The Han rulers did away with the Qin restrictions on travel, books, and thought. They also continued some Qin policies, such as conscription, the use of forced labor to build canals and roads, and standardization of weights, measures, currency, and writing.

## **Wudi and the Late Han Dynasty**

- Early Han emperors continued in the vein of benevolent Confucian rulers. But by the time the emperor Wudi came to power in 141 B.C., the balance began to shift back toward the more centralized and heavy-handed model of Qin rule.

- Wudi was known as the martial emperor because he pursued an aggressive policy of military expansion. He also favored a more powerful, centralized form of government in which a number of important industries, including iron, salt, copper, and liquor, were taken over by the state and regulated the food supply, establishing the “ever-normal granary system.”
- Wudi mustered enormous armies of more than 100,000 soldiers, which were dispatched in several directions. In the south, what today is northern Vietnam was brought under Chinese control. He also conquered southern Manchuria and Korea and pushed China’s western borders into central Asia.
- Wudi’s greatest military challenge was to the north, where he repeatedly mounted expeditions against the nomadic steppe nomads known as the Xiongnu. There is a debate among scholars about who they were; some identify the Xiongnu with the people later known as Huns.
- The Chinese historian Sima Qian described the Xiongnu thus:

They move about in search of water and pasture and have no walled cities or fixed dwellings, nor do they engage in any form of agriculture. ... Even the little boys start out learning to ride sheep and shoot birds and rats with a bow and arrow. ... Their only concern is self-advantage, and they know nothing of propriety or righteousness.

- Wudi mounted several expensive campaigns against the Xiongnu, but as nomads, they could not be pinned down and simply rode away if they did not feel like engaging the Han armies. Wudi eventually managed to drive the Xiongnu out of Chinese territory and built a series of fortified garrisons along the northern frontier. Such efforts were only partly successful, and barbarian incursions would be a recurrent theme throughout later Chinese history.

- The people eventually grew tired of Wudi's constant military campaigns. Instead of responding with greater repression, however, Wudi apologized, expressed regret for past mistakes, and promised to be a better ruler in future. He halted expansionism and warfare and spent the rest of his life promoting agriculture and trade.

## Late Han Cultural Achievements

- One of the most significant aspects of the Han economy was the silk trade. This fabric was a Chinese monopoly much coveted not only within China but among all civilizations that were exposed to it. The result was the famous Silk Road linking China with the outside world and extending across all of Asia to Europe.
- By 100 B.C., silk was known to the Romans, who became avid consumers of it, but no direct contact seems to have been established between the governments of Rome and China. Indeed, there is evidence that some of the middlemen in this trade, such as the Parthians, deliberately kept Rome and China in ignorance of each other so that they could continue to profit from the trade.
- The economic prosperity of the Han Empire fostered both cultural and technological achievements. True paper made from wood pulp was first invented around A.D. 100. Other practical but far-reaching inventions included the horse stirrup, the spinning wheel, the horse collar for plowing, the wheelbarrow, ships with multiple masts, sternpost rudders, and magnetic compasses.
- More abstract advances included the calculation of the value of pi and the discovery of the circulation of blood, something that was not realized in Europe until William Harvey's work in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- In the decorative arts, the type of fine porcelain now known as china was first produced during the Han dynasty. One invention of this era that combined both science and artistry was a kind of primitive seismograph.

- One famous scholar of the period—a historian, astronomer, and mathematician—was a woman named Ban Zhao. She received an education atypical for women at that time and is best known having authored a book called *Lessons for Women*, an influential text on the proper role of women in society.
- *Lessons for Women* reflects Confucian doctrine in the sense that Ban Zhao accepted traditional gender roles, but she also said that women should be educated and respected. She believed that such harmony could best be achieved between intellectual equals.

## The Fall of the Han Dynasty

- The Han dynasty is traditionally broken into two phases: the Early, or Western, Han (c. 206 B.C.–A.D. 9) and the Later, or Eastern, Han (A.D. 25–220). During the 14-year gap between them, a number of colorful figures led popular uprisings.
- Like Wudi, the Later Han rulers expended a great deal of time and resources dispatching armies to contain the ever-menacing Xiongnu and to recapture rebellious border regions. These border regions were valuable in themselves and also acted as buffer zones, protecting China from foreign invasion.
- In the final decades of the Later Han period, many of the same old problems began to rear their heads again. Oppressive taxation sparked peasant revolts, court intrigues weakened the central government, generals broke away and became local warlords, northern barbarians became more aggressive, and the economy labored under the various strains. Eventually these forces became overwhelming, and the last Han emperor abdicated the throne in A.D. 220.

## Suggested Reading

Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires*.

Twitchett and Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1.

## Questions to Consider

1. Compare and contrast the Han approach to running China with that of the Qin. Which dynasty's method do you think was better and why?
2. What elements of Han society encouraged the cultural and intellectual achievements of the era?

# People of the Toga—Etruscans, Early Rome

## Lecture 26

Before the Romans, the Etruscans ruled the Italian Peninsula, and many of the cultural features we think of as quintessentially Roman were actually traits the Romans adopted from them. Once they overthrew their sometimes tyrannical Etruscan overlords, Rome quickly expanded to dominate the Western Mediterranean more through dogged persistence and generosity to the conquered than military might. By 264 B.C., Rome's unique geographic and cultural position had poised the budding empire to dominate the Hellenistic world and beyond.

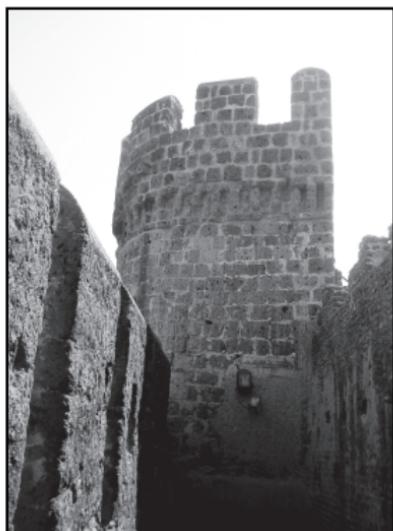
### The Geography of Ancient Italy

- The Italian peninsula is surrounded by water on all sides except to the north. Italy has more miles of coastline than any European country except Greece.
- Two mountain chains played significant roles in the development of the Italic peoples: the tall and formidable Alps that separate the peninsula from the rest of Europe and the Apennine Mountains that run north to south almost the entire length of the peninsula like a spine.
- Because of the Apennines, all the large expanses of flat farmland are found on Italy's coasts. There are three important arable expanses: one around Rome called Latium, one in the south around the Bay of Naples called Campania, and one to the north of Latium called Etruria.
- Between Italy and Africa is the island of Sicily. Both southern Italy and Sicily had been heavily settled by Greek colonists. Compared to the rest of early Italy, these regions were rich, powerful, and culturally sophisticated.

- The city of Rome is located 15 miles inland from the sea at the first natural ford across the Tiber River; thus it occupies a key transportation node. Rome is roughly in the middle of the Italian Peninsula, and Italy is roughly in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, Rome was in an ideal location to dominate first Italy and then the whole Mediterranean.

## Early Rome and the Etruscans

- The traditional date for the founding of the city of Rome is April 21, 753 B.C. Subsequent Roman history is divided into 3 periods by form of government: the monarchy (753–509 B.C.), the republic (509–31 B.C.), and the empire (31 B.C. onward).
- Archaeological evidence tells us the site of Rome has been inhabited since at least 1000 B.C. The most famous foundation legend tells of twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, allegedly the offspring of the god of war, Mars, and raised by a friendly she-wolf.
- As adults, the twins decided to build a city on the spot where the wolf had found them, but they argued over who should be king. Romulus murdered Remus and named the new city after himself. In a sense, this legend is entirely appropriate, as much of Roman history will involve ambitious men fighting for control of Rome.



**The Etruscans predate the Romans, and the Romans owe much to them.**

By Verity Cridland.

- In reality, Rome was a tiny village of thatched huts, one among hundreds similar, undistinguished Italic communities. Another extensive, powerful, and sophisticated civilization dominated the northern half of the Italian peninsula: the Etruscans, based in the region of Etruria.
- Early in their history, Rome fell under Etruscan yoke; almost half of the seven legendary kings of Rome have Etruscan names. This experience deeply engrained in the Romans a distrust of any one man (such as a king) holding supreme power and made them paranoid about being controlled by foreigners.
- The Etruscans are a bit mysterious. No Etruscan histories survive to tell their story; we know them only through their enemies' writings and through archaeological evidence. Despite their resentment, the Romans copied many things from the Etruscans, including the toga, gladiatorial combat, temple architecture, and divination through the examination of animal organs.

### Rome Becomes a Republic

- The seventh king of Rome was Tarquinus Superbus, meaning Tarquin the Proud, an arrogant Etruscan tyrant. In 509 B.C., one of Tarquin's relatives raped Lucretia, the wife of a Roman nobleman. She committed suicide. This outrage sparked a general rebellion against the Tarquins, and they were expelled from Rome.
- The leader of this uprising was a man named Brutus, who swore a famous oath over the woman's dead body to never let another king rule Rome. Brutus's oath established a familial tradition of opposition to kings that would have profound consequences 500 years later.
- The Romans set up a new government, the Roman Republic, in which political power was spread among a hierarchy of officials elected by an assembly of all citizens. Even the highest office in the new system, the consulship, was held by two men who each had equal power. Brutus was elected as one of the first two consuls.

- All Roman magistrates served for one-year terms. Originally, these positions could only be held by members of a hereditary aristocracy, known as the patricians. Over time, these restrictions were relaxed. Once you had held any of these posts, you automatically became a member of the Roman Senate for the rest of your life.
- Later, as the common citizen began to feel the patrician class was monopolizing and abusing power a tribune of the plebs was created to defend the rights of nonpatricians. Tribunes had the ability to veto and to propose new legislation.

## Roman Ambition and Power

- The ambition of all Roman patricians was to move up the ladder of offices, known as the *cursus honorum*, or the “course of honor.” Rome was an intensely competitive society. This competition for status, or *dignitas*, was crucial for much of Roman history.
- The ways one could gain *dignitas* were myriad: Being elected to an office, winning a military victory, building a public work, becoming wealthy, winning a legal case, delivering a good speech, marrying into a prestigious family, giving charity to the poor, and many more. But *dignitas* was fleeting and constantly had to be renewed. It was also a zero-sum game, meaning that if you gained some, somebody else had lost some.
- Between the founding of the Republic and roughly 250 B.C., Rome went from being one of hundreds of Italic cities to being the dominant power in all of Italy. This was a long, gradual process, during which Rome was almost constantly at war with one or more of its neighbors. Rome often had to fight the same enemy multiple times before subduing it.

- As Etruscan faded, the Romans claimed Etruria. Rome's immediate neighbors in central Italy were a group of cities called the Latin League, cosignatories to a treaty that placed them all on equal footing. To the south was another powerful federation of cities, the Samnites. The Romans fought three major wars against the Samnites and eventually subdued them.
- To facilitate the rapid movement of troops, the consuls began building the great Roman road system. The main north-south road is the Appian Way, named after the consul who constructed it. The roads also became the visible symbols of Roman domination.
- The Romans had an unusual way of treating the people they conquered. The normal procedure in the ancient world was that the defeated city would be sacked and its inhabitants would be killed or sold into slavery. Instead, the Romans granted the local aristocrats—and, on occasion, even entire cities—full Roman citizenship.
- More commonly, cities were given half-citizenship, which meant they had the private rights of citizens, such as legal protections, but not the public rights, such as voting. Other cities became *Socii*, or allies of Rome. The one universal obligation imposed on the conquered was to provide troops for the Roman army.
- Rome could be a generous overlord, but they could also be savage, particularly if a city revolted. Then they might raze the city and enslave or slaughter the populace.
- Rome did not enjoy any notable military superiority. They often suffered terrible defeats. But the Romans did develop a kind of dogged persistence. Romans also became accustomed to the idea that being at war was a normal condition. Between the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century and late 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., there were fewer than 10 years during which Rome was not at war with someone.

## The Pyrrhic Victory at Tarentum

- The final set of wars Rome fought during this period was against the wealthy Greek cities of southern Italy. The most powerful of these was Tarentum. In 280 B.C., Tarentum hired a mercenary general named Pyrrhus of Epirus and his nearly 30,000 combat-hardened Greek mercenaries and 20 war elephants.
- In the subsequent battle, the Romans were wiped out, although they inflicted heavy casualties on Pyrrhus's army. The normal procedure would be an exchange of envoys, a peace treaty, and for Rome to pay a fine. But the Romans refused to negotiate raised a second army.
- In an exact repeat of the first battle, the Romans were soundly defeated but took a significant number of Pyrrhus' troops with them. After this battle, Pyrrhus famously commented, "If I win another victory like these, my army will be finished."
- Once again, the Romans summoned their reserves, mustered new armies, and sent them south. At this point, Pyrrhus simply gave up and took the remnants of his force back to Greece, having decisively won all the battles, but lost the war.
- Rome moved into southern Italy and brought all its cities under their control. By 264 B.C., Rome had conquered nearly the entire Italian peninsula, including roughly 3 million people, of whom 1 million possessed some form of citizenship. The city of Rome had swollen to around 150,000. The stage was now set for Rome to cross the seas.

### Suggested Reading

Borrelli et al., *The Etruscans*.

Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*.

Warren, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What were the most significant legacies and influences of the Etruscans on the Romans (in both a positive and negative sense)?
2. Is there any equivalent to the key Roman value of *dignitas* in modern society?

# The Crucible—Punic Wars, Roman Imperialism

## Lecture 27

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Rome's success in conquering the Mediterranean world stemmed from the crucible of the Punic Wars and the defeat of their greatest enemy, the Carthaginian general Hannibal. In the First Punic War, Rome was forced to become a great naval power and captured its first province, Sicily, taking its first steps toward becoming an empire. In the Second Punic War, Rome faced Carthage on the European mainland; Hannibal brought the war to the city's gates before his slow, dispiriting defeat. But Rome's spectacular external successes resulted in self-destructive internal tensions, including unequal distributions of wealth and *dignitas*.

### What Was Carthage?

- During the next several centuries of the Republic, Rome took over most of the Mediterranean basin region, starting with a series of conflicts pitting Rome against the other major, young, growing powers in the western Mediterranean—the city-state of Carthage.
- The resulting Punic Wars were the closest Rome ever came to total defeat, yet they were also the stepping stone to Rome's ultimate success. In 264 B.C., the year Rome captured the last independent Italian city, marks the beginning of the First Punic War.
- Carthage and Rome shared a number of interesting similarities: Both cities were founded around the same time; both were strategically located (Carthage was almost due south of Rome, on an excellent harbor on the African coast at the Mediterranean's narrowest point); both cities were centers of a young empire; and both were ruled by aristocracies with aggressive, expansionist outlooks.

- Unlike Rome, Carthage did not incorporate its conquered territories but forced them to pay tribute. While the early Romans were primarily farmers, the Carthaginians were merchants. They possessed a huge navy; when they needed an army, they hired mercenaries. Their political structure was an odd mixture of oligarchy (primarily the wealthy merchant families) and a democracy.

## The First Punic War

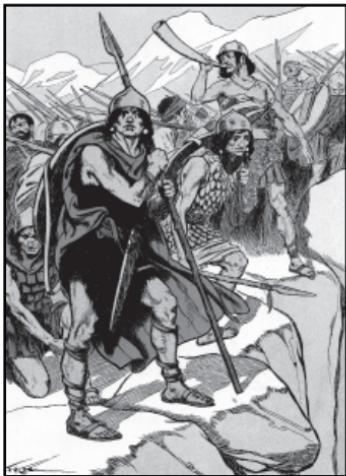
- When one looks at a map of the Mediterranean, it is clear that strife between the expanding rival empires of Rome and Carthage was inevitable. Geography also dictates and explains the place where this war broke out—the island of Sicily, a key transportation choke point both empires wanted to possess.
- The Romans had one serious problem: they had no navy. In fact, the Romans were generally suspicious of the sea and were terrible sailors. Nonetheless, they decided to build a fleet. Luckily, a Carthaginian ship fell into their hands, so they used it as a model.
- The goal of naval battles at the time was usually ramming the enemy's ships. This strategy favored nautical skill. Realizing that they could not match the seamanship of the Carthaginians, the Romans invented a long, movable gangplank with an iron spike on the end and used it to nail their ships to the Carthaginian ones. The Roman marines then ran across the gangplank onto the Carthaginian ship, effectively turning a naval battle into a land one.
- The Romans won several shocking victories and invaded and occupied most of Sicily. Unfortunately, the Romans never learned to be good sailors. Eventually their fleet was caught in a terrible storm that destroyed two-thirds of their ships in a single afternoon.

- With typical Roman determination, they spent the next two years building and training another fleet, which an even worse storm sent to the bottom of the sea. It took them four years to build and train yet another fleet, which they dispatched in 249 B.C. under the command of Publius Claudius Pulcher.
- The Romans were decisively defeated. The surviving ships were caught in another storm and completely wiped out. Meanwhile, Carthage finally had an excellent land commander, Hamilcar Barca, who landed in Sicily and swiftly recaptured most of the cities.
- The Romans' luck finally turned when a political faction that opposed the war took over the government at Carthage. They dismantled most of the Carthaginian fleet and refused to send Hamilcar any supplies or reinforcements. Rome rebuilt its fleet and recaptured most of Sicily. The two sides signed a peace treaty in 241 B.C.
- There were three important effects of the First Punic War: 1) Carthage had to pay a large cash indemnity to Rome. 2) Carthage had to give up all claims on Sicily. 3) Rome formally annexed Sicily, and it became the first overseas Roman province. A Roman governor was appointed, and the Sicilians had to pay taxes. The Sicilians were not granted any form of citizenship.

## **The Second Punic War**

- Despite its defeat, Carthage was still very strong. Since their expansion northwards had been thwarted and there was only desert to the south and Egypt to the east, the next logical place for Carthage to go was Spain. Hamilcar landed there and brought many of the Spanish tribes under his control.

- Meanwhile, Rome began to expand north and west along what is today the coast of France. The Romans and Carthaginians came into conflict over the city of Saguntum, and thus the Second Punic War broke out in 219 B.C. Hamilcar's son, Hannibal was now in charge of Carthage's colonies in Spain, and as it turned out, he was one of the greatest military geniuses of all time.
- Hannibal knew the key to Roman success was their ability to draw on the manpower reserves of the Italian half-citizens and allies, so he conceived of a bold plan to separate Rome from this resource—invading Italy itself, winning a few battles, and inspiring the Italians to turn against Rome.
- To get his army from Spain to Italy, he daringly crossed the Alps—which were high, icy, and infested with murderous hill people—with an army of 40,000 men and 37 elephants. He made it through, arriving in northern Italy with 20,000 men, one elephant, and one eye left.
- The Romans promptly dispatched an army to wipe out Hannibal's small, weakened force, but Hannibal outwitted the Roman commander, and the Romans were slaughtered. The Romans raised a second army, which Hannibal drew into an ambush and wiped out. The Romans then took nearly two years to raise two complete armies, which marched out together under the command of both consuls to confront Hannibal at Cannae in 216 B.C.



Crossing the Alps was only one remarkable feat among many for Hannibal.

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- Normal strategy dictated that Hannibal put his best troops in the center. He reversed this putting his weakest troops at the center and ordering them to slowly give ground before the Roman advance. As the Roman center pressed forward, Hannibal's best troops drove off the inferior Roman flanks and swept around the Roman center. The Romans were completely encircled. Their formations broke down, and the battle turned into a massacre.

### **The Slow Rout of Hannibal**

- The Battle of Cannae was one of the darkest moments in Roman history. It threw the Romans into a frenzy of panic and despair. Hannibal marched to the gates of Rome, but the Romans barricaded themselves in and refused to surrender. Lacking siege equipment, Hannibal was soon forced to depart.
- After the disaster of Cannae, the Romans selected a new leader, a man named Fabius, who adopted a new strategy: Do not give Hannibal the chance to kill more Romans. The Roman armies followed Hannibal everywhere he went, but whenever Hannibal turned to attack, Fabius backed off. He became known as Fabius Cunctator—Fabius the Delayer.
- In the aftermath of Cannae, as Hannibal had hoped, some Italian cities revolted against Rome, but the vast majority remained loyal. It was now that Rome's earlier policy of generosity and inclusivity bore fruit. Hannibal was reduced to roaming up and down Italy, unconquered and undefeated, for the next 12 years.
- Rome sent other armies to Spain under the talented young general Publius Cornelius Scipio. He conquered the Carthaginian territories in Spain and killed Hannibal's brother. Scipio next invaded North Africa, forcing the Carthaginian government to order Hannibal to return to defend Carthage.
- The two great commanders came together in 202 B.C. at the Battle of Zama, and Hannibal was defeated. Carthage surrendered in 201 B.C.

## The Aftermath of the Punic Wars

- There were five important effects of the Second Punic War: 1) Carthage had to pay a large cash indemnity. 2) Spain and North Africa were transformed into several tax-paying Roman provinces. 3) Carthage had to give up its territory and military. 4) The Roman army was transformed from a militia into a professional army with new equipment and tactics. 5) Scipio and his family acquired enormous amounts of *dignitas*.
- Scipio acquired a new name: Scipio Africanus, or Scipio the Conqueror of Africa. In the long run, this last effect may have been one of the most important, as the rough equilibrium among aristocrats began to tilt in favor of just one man, and his family came to dominate affairs at Rome.
- Rome next turned its attention to the kingdoms created by the breakup of Alexander's empire. The East was Greek; it was richer, more urbanized, and more culturally sophisticated. It was also something of an unknown land to the Romans.
- The Roman war machine proved too much even for Alexander's successors. One by one, they were conquered, and Rome reorganized their territories into tax-paying provinces. Scipio's family dominated these governorships as well.
- The Roman conquest of Greece and Asia Minor brought Rome into contact with Greek culture, with its rich tradition of literature, art, and philosophy. It also brought the Greeks themselves to Rome; thousands of them were enslaved and transported to Italy. Many educated Greek slaves became the tutors to Roman children.
- Rome and the Romans became rich as the result of their Eastern conquests. By 167 B.C., all taxes for Roman citizens were abolished, yet the revenue of the Roman state increased by a factor of six. Individual Romans, particularly the generals, became fabulously wealthy.

## The Paradox of the Late Republic

- On the surface, Roman imperialism looked like an unqualified success. But lurking within were forces that would soon result in the collapse of the Roman Republic.
- Dreams of wealth led many poor Roman farmers to sell their farms and join the army. Some soldiers got rich, but most returned to Italy poor and homeless. Thus, an unforeseen long-term consequence of Roman imperialism was the disruption and loss of small family farms.
- Meanwhile, successful generals were returning to Italy with great wealth, but the only real investment option in the ancient world was land. Coincidentally, there were all these small family farms being sold or falling into debt and being auctioned off.
- Land without labor was useless, but Roman imperialism was producing an endless supply of cheap labor—slaves. Meanwhile, more wars produced more poor veterans, rich generals, sold-off farms, and slaves in an endless cycle.
- Roman veterans were resentful because they had done their duty but ended up poor, farmless, and ignored. Roman aristocrats were unhappy because wealth and *dignitas* from the wars were being monopolized by a few men and their families.
- The half-citizens and allies were unhappy because they wanted full Roman citizenship in return for the conquests they had made possible. The millions of foreigners who had been conquered, enslaved, and shipped off to Italy were extremely unhappy and angry for obvious reasons.
- Finally, the political system which the Romans had evolved to run a city was now laboring under the strain of administering a vast empire.

## Suggested Reading

Goldsworthy, *The Fall of Carthage*.

Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Some scholars have characterized Rome's conquest of the Mediterranean world as the result of a deliberate policy of aggression, while others maintain that it largely resulted from a chain of accidents. Which stance do you agree with and why?
2. What do you think were the most significant factors in Rome's emergence as the dominant power in the Mediterranean over its rival states, such as Carthage and the Hellenistic kingdoms?

# The Death of the Roman Republic

## Lecture 28

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Rome's success in conquering the Mediterranean ultimately destroyed the Roman Republic. The murder of the Gracchi brothers by the Senate brought hidden social and economic tensions in the city of Rome into public view, while slave revolts and the Social War exposed problems throughout the Italian Peninsula. But the actions of two military men—Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar—did the most to destroy traditional Republican institutions while simultaneously setting the stage for the empire.

### The Gracchi

- The period from 133 to 31 B.C., known as the late Roman Republic, is also one of the best-documented eras in Roman history. It features many of the most colorful and well-known Romans, including Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar.
- Two brothers, grandsons of Scipio Africanus, became worried about the tensions building in Roman society. The elder, Tiberius Gracchus, was elected tribune in 133 B.C. and he put forward a law to limit the amount of land that could be owned by any one person and to distribute excess government-owned land to poor Roman citizens.
- A number of senators became enraged at this proposal and beat Tiberius and 300 of his followers to death.
- In 123 B.C., the younger brother, Gaius Gracchus, took up where his brother left off. He was elected tribune and promptly put forward Tiberius's proposal, plus a whole slate of additional laws: that the state supply subsidized grain to the inhabitants of the city; that the Latin allies in Italy finally be granted full citizenship; and that more roads be built to help rural farmers.

- The Senate was upset again, but leery of further bad press did not kill Gaius themselves; they let it be known that if anyone else killed him, the Senate would give that person the weight of Gaius's head in gold. Soon enough, Gaius was assassinated, too.
- What was the Gracchi's motivation? Were they really altruistic and idealistic, or were they self-interested, ambitious aristocrats pretending to be the friends of the common people? The ancient sources are split on this issue, as are modern historians.

## The Social War and Slave Revolts

- The first of the resentful groups in Roman society to break with Rome was the Italian allies, or *Socii*. They felt, with considerable justification, that they had earned the right to full Roman citizenship. In about 91 B.C., a confederation of *Socii* revolted.
- The resulting Social War was particularly brutal and bitter, since both sides fought using the same tactics and strategy; it was, in essence, a civil war. It lasted for three long, terrible years, but Rome finally pounded its allies into submission.
- In the peace treaty, the Romans were compelled to bestow full citizenship on all the allies. The Social War is therefore a tragic example of Roman conservatism since, although they won, the Romans had to give the allies what they had wanted in the first place. It was a completely unnecessary and wasteful conflict.
- This era also witnessed massive slave revolts, the most famous of which was led by a Thracian gladiator named Spartacus. These were all eventually suppressed, but not without considerable bloodshed and cruelty.

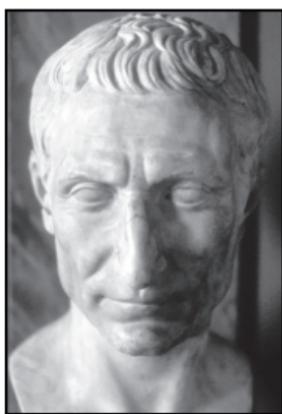
## Pompey the Great

- Pompey, the son of a famous and wealthy general, was an extremely ambitious young man during the Social War but was too young to hold any elected office. Unable to bear missing all the *dignitas* the war offered, he used his family's money to raise a private army and joined the war against the Socii.
- After some further military adventures, he arranged his own triumph—a great and rare honor for exceptional victorious Roman generals. He then schemed to be given additional military commands and won further victories, returning to Rome and celebrating another triumph when he was still only 35 years old.
- Having never held office, Pompey was not a member of the Senate. Despite this, he let it be known he wanted to be consul. Again, he got his way. One of the duties of the consul was to preside over meetings of the Senate, and he was embarrassingly ignorant of procedure.
- Pirates infested much of the Mediterranean, so Pompey arranged for a tribune to propose a law giving him unprecedented powers to suppress the pirates. He was granted a huge sum of money, 500 ships, an army of 120,000 soldiers, and authority over all the waters and coasts of the Mediterranean. This went against both standard appointment procedure and earlier precedents of dividing up the Roman military.
- Next, Pompey again manipulated legislative loopholes to attack and kill a troublesome eastern king named Mithridates. Mithridates escaped and fled into the wilds of central Asia. Pompey's hero was Alexander the Great, and now, like Alexander, Pompey went on a rampage through the east.

- Pompey was heading for Egypt when he got a piece of bad news: Mithridates had keeled over and died of old age. His command was now over, and he had to end his conquests. But he had made both Rome and himself incredibly rich; his fortune and *dignitas* were now incalculable.
- Pompey had gained more power, wealth, and influence than any Roman before him, but in doing so, he had undermined almost every Republican institution. At this point, he might simply have taken over Rome, but he had enough respect for tradition that he disbanded his army and went into semiretirement, exercising power from behind the scenes.

## Julius Caesar the General

- The political career of Pompey's protégé, Gaius Julius Caesar, got off to a fairly conventional start with a number of elected offices. With the older man's connivance, he was elected consul in 59 B.C. His other consul for the year was a man named Bibulus, but Caesar completely dominated affairs and ignored the wishes of his colleague.
- Caesar was next appointed governor of Cisalpine Gaul, a relatively small and peaceful province with only a small army. To the north was Gaul itself, which was a vast, unconquered region roughly equivalent to modern France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.
- Immediately on becoming governor, Caesar began raising a private army. Once it was ready, he launched an invasion of Gaul and spent the next nine years fighting continuously. He amassed a huge personal army of tough veteran soldiers who were completely loyal to him and revealed a true talent for war.



**Julius Caesar proved himself by subduing Gaul.**

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- Caesar's 10 years of campaigning enslaved and killed millions of Gauls. Even the Romans thought Caesar's actions were questionable, and a bill was put before the Senate that Caesar be turned over to the Gauls as a war criminal, but Caesar was careful to always have a tribune or two under his control.
- Finally, the senate ended Caesar's governorship, ordered him to disband his armies, and told him to return to Rome. Deciding that his *dignitas* was more important than the state, he crossed the Rubicon River, and marched on Rome, becoming guilty of treason.
- Surprised, the Senate turned to the only man with the power to oppose Caesar: Pompey. The person who had arguably done the most to undermine the institutions of the Republic now found himself cast as its defender.
- What followed was a colossal civil war fought across the Mediterranean, from Spain to Greece. Pompey was overconfident and was decisively defeated at the Battle of Pharsalus. Pompey fled to Egypt, which was still an independent kingdom, but fearing Caesar's wrath, the Egyptians murdered him the moment he set foot on the beach.

## **Julius Caesar the Dictator**

- Caesar was now the sole ruler of Rome. The problems facing him were how to reward his war veterans and how to rule Rome as something other than a king.
- Caesar settled 80,000 veterans in colonies, granting full or half-citizenship to many. He built public works at Rome and reformed the calendar, bringing it back into alignment with the seasons.
- He began his rule by having himself elected consul over and over again, but eventually this provoked resentment among Roman aristocrats. He then turned to Roman tradition and the temporary post of dictator used in times of extreme emergency. He had himself appointed dictator for life.

- The Romans' resentment was not helped by Caesar's arrogant behavior. He had the Senate decree that everyone must take an oath of allegiance to him personally. He named the month of July after himself. He had statues of himself put in temples. He had priesthoods established in his honor. He was rude to senators, not even pretending they were his peers.
- There was a general sense that Caesar was too much like a king, and in Roman history, when you had trouble with a king, you turned to a member of the Brutus family. One of Julius Caesar's closest friends was a direct descendant of the Brutus who had expelled Tarquin and founded the Republic.
- In 44 B.C., a conspiracy was formed around this Brutus, and on March 15, 44 B.C.—the Ides of March—Brutus and a group of senators stabbed Julius Caesar to death. The Romans were rid of Caesar, but the Roman Republic was locked into a pattern of civil war.

### Suggested Reading

Beard and Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic*.

Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Do you think the Roman Republic could have been saved if the Senate had enacted the reforms of the Gracchi?
2. Whose career ultimately did more to undermine the institutions of the Roman Republic: Pompey or Caesar? Which specific actions were the most harmful?

# Augustus—Creator of the Roman Empire

## Lecture 29

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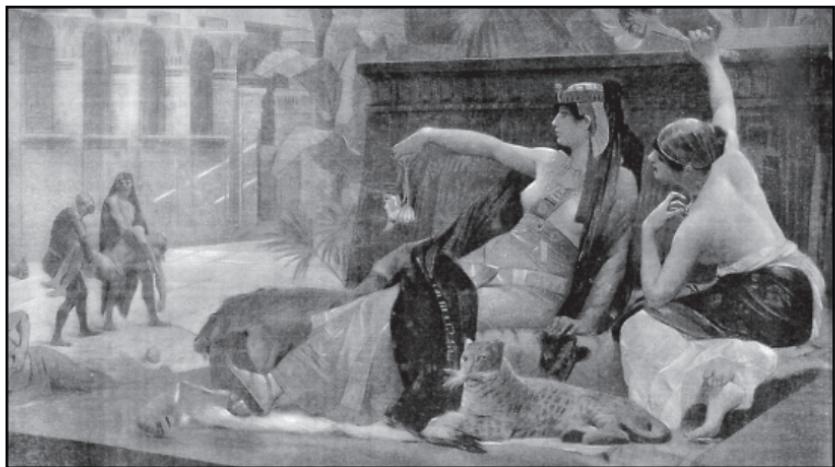
**A**fter the assassination of Julius Caesar, several factions emerged to wrestle for control of Rome. The leading figures were Caesar's friend Mark Antony and his adopted son Octavian. After banding together to eliminate their rivals, they turned on one another. While Mark Antony was the better and more experienced military strategist, Octavian waged a superior public relations war, using Mark Antony's lover Cleopatra as a tool to rouse Romans' xenophobia. Transforming himself into Caesar Augustus, the Princeps ("First Citizen"), Octavian became emperor in all but name and ruled brilliantly in every way but one—choosing his heirs.

### The Would-Be Heirs of Caesar

- Julius Caesar's death created a power vacuum. A number of different men rushed to fill this void. First there were the conspirators—or, as they called themselves, the liberators—who had killed Caesar. Led by Brutus, they claimed their goal was to restore the Roman Republic.
- The most prominent figure to position himself as Caesar's heir was Marcus Antonius, more commonly known as Mark Antony. He had been Caesar's lieutenant and right-hand man. He was also a good soldier and could relate well to Caesar's veterans.
- When Caesar's will was read, it produced a surprise third candidate. He tapped his utterly obscure grand-nephew Octavian as his primary heir and, posthumously, adopted the 18-year-old youth as his son.
- Antony got control of Caesar's money, records, and legions, but Octavian got the legal rights to use Caesar's name—he was now Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus—and all over the Mediterranean, there were tens of thousands of hardened veteran soldiers who were used to loyally following the orders of someone named Gaius Julius Caesar.

## Another Roman Civil War

- At Caesar's funeral, Antony delivered a laudatory oration in the Forum, during which he displayed Caesar's bloody toga as well as a larger-than-life-size wax replica of Caesar's body depicting all the stab wounds. The crowd rioted and burned down the Senate House. The assassins fled Rome and went to the East, where they had loyal troops.
- Octavian amassed a private army of about five legions from Caesar's veterans, and the Senate was so impressed (or frightened) that they allowed him to be elected consul at the age of 19.
- Conflict between Antony and Octavian seemed inevitable, but both wanted time to prepare. Thus they forged an uneasy alliance against Brutus and the assassins. In 42 B.C., the decisive battle was fought. Octavian was defeated in his part of the battlefield, but Antony was victorious and managed to secure an overall victory.
- Still, neither was ready for open war, so they divided the Roman world. Antony chose the richer eastern half; Octavian was left with the western half. To cement their agreement, Octavian married his sister to Antony.
- Now settled in the East, Antony began his famous affair with Queen Cleopatra and sent Octavian's sister back to him. By aligning himself with Cleopatra, Antony gained the use of the large Egyptian army and navy—and more importantly, the vast Egyptian treasury.
- Octavian, outgunned and underfunded, began to wage what, in modern terms, we would call a war of propaganda against Antony. He posed as the champion of the Roman Republic against a dangerous foreign enemy personified by Cleopatra and depicted Antony as a would-be king.



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**Cleopatra's legendary affair with Mark Antony was driven as much by political calculation as by great passion. Antony needed her treasury and armies.**

- Octavian had Cleopatra officially declared a public enemy of the Roman state. This meant Antony had to sever his ties with her and lose his financial backing or remain loyal to her and find himself in collusion with an enemy of Rome. Antony chose to stay with Cleopatra.
- Eventually open warfare broke out. Antony was a far better general than Octavian, but Octavian had a loyal friend named Agrippa who was an excellent military strategist and willing to let Octavian claim the credit for his victories.
- The decisive battle took place off the coast of Greece at a site called Actium in 31 B.C. Octavian spent the battle below decks, stricken with seasickness. Agrippa outmaneuvered Antony and defeated him. Antony and Cleopatra fled back to Egypt, where they both committed suicide.

## From Dictator to Emperor

- While Octavian had gained control of the Roman world, he now faced his greatest challenge: how to rule Rome as one man but avoid looking like a king. Drawing on the negative example set by Julius Caesar, he knew he must not act in an arrogant manner and must not monopolize offices. He also had to respect Republican tradition.
- Much of the success of Octavian's settlement of the Roman state rested on his insight that he could get away with introducing new institutions so long as he preserved the illusion that he was not doing so.
- Initially, like Caesar, Octavian held multiple consulships, but he knew he could not do this indefinitely. He arranged it so that he was given the powers of a consul but not the office itself—he was the power behind the consuls. In fact, he had himself awarded the powers of all the other Roman magistracies as well, including the powers of a tribune.
- Octavian faced one additional problem: what to call himself that suggested his status but did not imply anything like “king.” Eventually, he adopted a whole series of names, none of which seemed that overwhelming or threatening but that collectively clearly indicated that he was the head of the state:
  - Augustus, from a Latin root implying either devotion to the gods or an object with divine qualities. This became his proper name, replacing Octavian.
  - Princeps, meaning “first citizen” or “first among equals,” from which the English term “prince” is derived.
  - Pater patriae, meaning “father of the country,” which to the Romans not only conjured up compassionate, protective images but also a demand for absolute respect and obedience.

- Imperator, a well-established term that was a spontaneous acclamation bestowed by soldiers on a victorious general. It is from “imperator” that the English words “emperor” and “empire” are derived.
- The final element in Augustus’s consolidation of power was that he acted modestly. He lived in a small house, ate simple food, dressed in a humble fashion, and always treated senators courteously and with respect.

## The Early Empire

- After decades of civil war, people were eager for peace. Many were willing to accept, and perhaps even believe, the fiction that the Republic had been restored.
- Augustus’s actions were enormously influential. He single-handedly created a new state and a new government, establishing a model that would be followed for hundreds of years. With him, the era of the Republic ended, and the Roman Empire began.
- Augustus ruled for a long time. He eliminated his rivals by 31 B.C. and ruled until his death in A.D. 14. By the time Augustus died, there quite literally was no one left alive who could remember the days of the true Roman Republic.
- Throughout his life, Augustus continued his clever use of propaganda and manipulation of his public image, patronizing poets who crafted laudatory accounts of his actions, and funding massive construction projects whose artwork and decoration eulogized his reign and sugar-coated his machinations.
- Augustus also wrote an autobiography, entitled, with typical understatement and modesty, the *Res Gestae*, which literally means, “Some stuff I did.” It is a masterpiece of propaganda.

- Augustus all but stopped the rapid expansion of the empire's borders that had characterized the previous centuries. He concentrated more on solidifying what Rome already had than on gaining new lands. Egypt, however, had been turned into another Roman province, and Rome now controlled a continuous ring of territory circling the Mediterranean Sea.
- The one major instance when Augustus tried to expand the empire's borders, a foray across the Rhine River into Germanic territory in A.D. 9, actually resulted in one of Rome's greatest military disasters.
- Augustus' reign was overall a great success. He finally brought Rome peace and stability after a century of discord, and he figured out a way to hold real power in Rome without looking too obviously like he was doing it.
- Historians continue to debate whether Augustus in some sense restored the Republic as he claimed or was the final step in destroying it. Was he a traditionalist who was merely adapting old institutions to fit new realities, or was he an innovator who was creating completely new institutions and disguising them with old labels?
- Despite all his cleverness, one area in which Augustus failed was in finding a way to pass power to the next generation. Part of the problem was the ambiguous nature of the position he had crafted. How do you transfer an office that does not formally exist?
- Perhaps his greatest misjudgment was choosing the next emperor on the basis of heredity. An unexpected drawback to his long lifespan was that Augustus outlived his first four choices for a successor. The living heir at Augustus's death was not an ideal choice—his step-son Tiberius.
- Already 54 years old, Tiberius was grim, serious, and socially awkward. At least initially, Tiberius was not a bad emperor, but later in his life, he withdrew to a palace on the island of Capri, and gave himself up to sexual indulgence and paranoia.

- The next set of emperors features several names notorious for insanity and debauchery, including Caligula and Nero. Augustus's decision to base imperial succession on the principle of heredity and blood relationships would have dire consequences for Roman history.

## Suggested Reading

Levick, *Augustus: Image and Substance*.

Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Is it more accurate to say that Augustus restored the Roman Republic (as he claimed) or that he destroyed it, and why?
2. Was Augustus more of a traditionalist (as he claimed) or an innovator, and in what ways could each of these statements be considered true?

# Roman Emperors—Good, Bad, and Crazy

## Lecture 30

**D**uring its first two centuries, the Roman Empire reached its greatest heights—and, arguably, some of its lowest depths. Augustus's reliance on bloodlines for the succession led to the unstable reigns of the Julio-Claudian emperors, followed by the nearly as disastrous Flavians. Fortunately, the Five Good Emperors—men selected for talent, rather than heredity—rose to the throne and made the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. Rome's most successful period in terms of peace, prosperity, and culture. This success could not last, however, and the arrival of the soldier-emperors signaled the return to chaos.

### The Julio-Claudian Emperors

- The first two centuries of the Roman Empire would see the empire reach the height of its power and wealth and expand to its largest geographic extent. It would witness many of the Romans' greatest cultural and architectural achievements.
- The rulers of this era would feature both Rome's wisest and most conscientious emperors and several of its most notorious and deranged tyrants. The emperor who followed Tiberius to the throne was one of the latter—Caligula. Still quite young when he became emperor, he quickly embarked on a reign of terror and profligate expenditure.
- His favorite saying was “Let everyone hate me, so long as they fear me.” After about four years, Caligula was murdered by the commanders of his own bodyguard. Caligula was the first disastrous result of Augustus's decision to base succession on the principle of heredity, but he would not be the last.

- Caligula had no obvious successor, and while the Senate was dithering, the Praetorian Guardsmen (the emperor's bodyguards) were looting the palace. There they discovered Caligula's uncle, Claudius, in hiding.
- Claudius had never been taken seriously because he had physical handicaps, including a speech impediment, and was regarded as dim-witted. In reality, he had a fairly sharp intellect. On the spur of the moment, the guard proclaimed him emperor. This incident reveals the reality of power in the empire. Whoever had the soldiers' support could be emperor.
- Claudius went through several wives and eventually married his niece and adopted her son, Nero. Claudius ruled a fairly long time, constructing a number of important public works. He died in 54 A.D., possibly as a result of poisoning by his wife and stepson.
- For a few years, while Nero was under the influence of his tutors, including the famous Stoic philosopher Seneca, he was a decent emperor. Soon, however, Nero turned against his mentors, forced Seneca to commit suicide, and seems to have gone insane, embarking on a reign of terror and debauchery.
- In the course of his madness, Nero murdered almost every member of his family. In A.D. 68, he was killed in a palace revolt. This created an interesting moment of crisis: His rampages had been so thorough that there was no obvious heir to the imperial throne.

## The Flavian Emperors

- As usual, the Romans solved this succession crisis by having a civil war. During the year 69 the Romans quickly ran through no less than four different emperors. Finally, a man named Vespasian from a family known as the Flavians emerged as the victor.

- In many ways, Vespasian was like another Augustus. He ruled wisely, lived modestly, and undertook a number of public works. He was also fairly old at the time he took the throne and had a long career as administrator and general.
- Vespasian had a popular son named Titus, as well as a younger son named Domitian. Titus had already successfully commanded the Roman armies, so when Vespasian died, there was a smooth transition to Titus. Titus was a good and popular ruler, but unfortunately died after only a few years.
- The next emperor was Vespasian's younger son, Domitian. Domitian unfortunately turned out to be more in the mold of Caligula and Nero. He put many senators to death and enjoyed terrorizing them. He was assassinated in 96, and his death marked the end of the Flavian dynasty.

## The Five Good Emperors

- In a rare Roman example of breaking with tradition, the next set of emperors came up with the original idea of selecting the person who seemed best qualified for the job, rather than a blood descendant. This would prove to be a wise policy which led to Rome enjoying its most powerful and stable period.
- This series of leaders, who ruled roughly during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., became known as the Five Good Emperors, also known as the Antonines. This century is viewed as the highpoint of the Roman Empire. Rome had grown to encompass about 50 provinces and 50 million inhabitants. The empire stretched from Portugal to Mesopotamia, from Britain to the Sahara desert.
- The first of the Five Good Emperors, Nerva, ruled only a short time. The second was Trajan, and he was notable for being the first emperor from the provinces—namely, Spain. This reflects a similar change in the composition of the senate at this time.

- Trajan had had a substantial, distinguished career before being selected as emperor. His personal life was sober and he was always very respectful to the senate. Interested in expanding Rome's borders, he launched an invasion of Dacia, a region enclosed by a large bend of the Danube River. Conquering Dacia shortened and straightened Rome's frontier.
- Dacia also contained rich gold mines, which were used to construct large and elaborate public works. Next to the original Roman Forum, Trajan built a huge new complex known as the Forum of Trajan, which included Trajan's Column, a Latin library, and a Greek library.
- Trajan acquired a reputation as an ideal emperor and earned the title Optimus Princeps. In later years, the senate would praise emperors by using Trajan as a yardstick.
- Trajan selected as his heir a man named Hadrian, who was another well-qualified choice. Unlike Trajan, Hadrian did not embark on any new military conquests. He was more a patron of the arts. In particular, he loved Greek culture.
- Hadrian's solution to the fact that the empire was becoming too large to be effectively ruled by one man was to travel constantly. Indeed, he spent many years of his reign on a grand tour, visiting every province of the empire. His court was a mobile one that traveled with him.
- The next emperor, Antoninus Pius, proved to be another sound choice, but he was more of a caretaker than an innovator, and simply kept the empire running smoothly.
- Antoninus Pius's successor, Marcus Aurelius, is sometimes known as the philosopher emperor. A Stoic, he wrote a famous book called the *Meditations*, in which he speculates about virtue and the need to do your best even under difficult circumstances.

- Marcus Aurelius had to contend with a number of new external threats, particularly from barbarian groups in the north, and an outbreak of plague that began in the east and spread throughout the empire.

## The Return to Chaos

- When it came time to select a successor, Marcus Aurelius finally made a foolish mistake and chose his biological son, Commodus. Commodus was a spoiled child with delusions of godhood. He thought he was the reincarnation of Hercules and degraded the office of emperor by fighting in public as a gladiator in rigged contests.
- Commodus was eventually strangled in his bath. The next emperor was almost immediately murdered by the Praetorian Guard, and this led to one of the more shameful moments in Roman history: The guard staged an auction for the office of emperor.
- At the auction, Didius Julianus offered the highest price to the Praetorians— 25,000 sesterces per man, about 25 years' salary for an ordinary Roman legionary. They hailed him as emperor and accepted his money, but he was murdered almost immediately.
- At this point, the legions in Syria, Britain, and along the Danube each proclaimed their own governor as the new emperor. The three governors, with their armies, all raced to Rome and fought another civil war. Eventually, the Danubian governor, Septimius Severus, emerged as the victor.
- Severus was the first of what might be called the soldier-emperors— men who became emperor neither through adoption nor selection by the senate but because they could command the most troops. Severus was from the North African town of Leptis and thus the first African emperor as well.

- Severus stabilized the empire and ruled effectively, if harshly, from 193 to 211. From this point on, emperors would mostly gain power by brute force, and internal and external problems would multiply.

## Suggested Reading

Aldrete, *Daily Life in the Roman City*.

Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture*.

Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What factors do you think led historian Edward Gibbon to assess the Roman Empire of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. as “the happiest time in all of history?”
2. Of all the various emperors described in this lecture, which, in your opinion, were the best and the worst, and why?

# Han and Roman Empires Compared—Geography

## Lecture 31

Many similarities, as well as some crucial differences, existed between the Roman and Han empires. Both were centralized, conservative, hierarchical, and status-oriented states; but Rome was a more heterogeneous culture, while China was a monoculture. Perhaps most curiously, the two contemporary powers had only the vaguest awareness of each other's existence. The enormous extent of both empires and the constraints of technology and distance presented particular challenges, which were met with similar responses: Construction of an extensive and well-engineered road network and heavy reliance on water transport.

### Rome and Han China—Similarities

- The Han and Roman empires both flourished from around the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. until the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., when the last Han emperor abdicated and the death of the Roman emperor Septimius Severus ended the period of stable succession in Rome and the beginning of political chaos.
- In terms of size, the two empires were almost precisely equal. The Chinese census of 2 A.D. recorded a population of 58 million people, while the Roman Empire at the same date had approximately 55 million inhabitants. Han China formed a solid squarish shape measuring about 1,200 miles from east to west, and the same from north to south. The Roman Empire formed a ring of provinces encircling the Mediterranean Sea totaling about 1.5 million square land miles.
- Both empires had strong centralized governments and developed multilayered bureaucracies staffed with officials drawn from an educated class of landowners.

- Both constructed impressive road systems and massive hydrological projects to aid internal communication and transport.
- Both were threatened by recurrent invasions of nomadic barbarian tribes on their borders. In response, both maintained large armies and erected extensive networks of defensive walls.
- Both brought economic stability and prosperity to large areas while practicing intensive taxation and active regulation of vital foodstuffs.
- Both spread an elite culture and used social integration into this culture as a mechanism to assimilate outsiders and harness their energies on behalf of the state.
- Both viewed themselves as universal empires with a divine mandate to rule the entire world. Both asserted an ideology claiming that they brought civilization to the regions that they conquered, and used this as justification for conquest and as a means of co-opting local elites.
- Both had to endure episodes of weak or inept leadership and were constantly threatened with fragmentation due to internal political rivalries and factionalism.
- Both struggled with technological limitations in maintaining such geographically vast empires.
- Both eventually fell due to a combination of external threats, internal dissension, economic collapse, new religious movements, and endemic diseases. When they did collapse, both empires split into two halves, one of which was quickly taken over by barbarians while the other persisted and preserved the traditional regime for a considerable time.
- Both empires continued to exert a powerful influence on subsequent states through the strength and persistence of the image of empire that they created, and each served as the inspiration for and the ideal model of a successful empire for future generations.

## Rome and Han China—Differences

- The Roman Empire arose out of the Roman Republic, and aspects of Republican ideology remained highly influential throughout imperial history, such as concepts of participation in government and the idea of citizenship itself, which had important legal and social privileges.
- China had no comparable concepts. In a sense, nearly everyone was a citizen, but this conferred no particular status or ideology of political participation.
- Romans were at least aware of a variety of possible forms of political organization, from Athenian democracy to the Near Eastern god-kings. In China, there was only a single, unquestioned, and universal model of rulership—monarchism.
- What the Han system of government did have that Rome lacked was a clear philosophical underpinning—Confucian and Legalist thought.
- The scale and use of slave labor were much more extensive in the Roman Empire than they were in Han China.
- The Roman world was an ethnically diverse and multicultural one, whereas Han China was a single, uniform monoculture. Individuals who adopted Roman ways usually retained their native language and customs as well, and in fact Greek culture was widely viewed as superior to and more sophisticated than that of the Romans; elite Romans aped and eventually fused Greek culture with their own. In contrast, Chinese culture was not only unquestionably both the dominant and the elite culture, but it was the only one to be found throughout the entire Han Empire.

## **Whispers along the Silk Road**

- Although these two great empires covered large expanses of the globe—and perhaps even more impressively, between them accounted for an estimated one half of the world’s population—they were largely unaware of each other. Their knowledge of one another came primarily from the trade goods that traversed the Silk Road.
- By land, they were separated by 4,500 miles of hostile deserts and mountains. The most direct sea route between them, connecting Egypt and Vietnam, was 6,500 miles long.
- There were a few moments when the two great empires came tantalizingly close to establishing contact. In 139 B.C., Emperor Wudi sent an envoy west to form alliances against the Xiongnu. After many misadventures, the envoy returned with many wondrous tales, including vague accounts of a large, impressive empire even further west—the first time that the Chinese heard about the existence of Rome.
- During the later Han period, several military expeditions brushed up against the border regions of the Roman Empire. In 97 A.D., one Chinese general actually reached the Persian Gulf and brought back information on the lands to the west, including a description of a great empire, but China pushed no further.

## **The Challenge of Geography**

- The size of both empires made them both impressive, but size was also a severe challenge to cohesion. Some of the greatest technological advances of the past 100 years have been in the speed and ease of communication. Without such technology, in the Roman and Han empires, news might take weeks or even months to reach the emperor, and his response would take weeks or months to arrive on the scene.

- The Romans and the Han responded to this challenge in similar ways. Both constructed extensive and sophisticated road networks; both undertook colossal public works projects supporting waterborne transportation; and both set up systems of official couriers to carry government messages.
- In Rome, much of this construction was done by the army, so that when soldiers were not fighting, they were digging. Army units were accompanied by engineering detachments, which provided the direction and expertise to create the road system.
- The main Roman roads were marvels of practical engineering. A deep and solid foundation was excavated; then gravel or sand provided a base; and finally the roads were covered with carefully fitted paving stones.
- Major roads were usually 15 feet wide and crowned so that rainwater flowed off the sides into drainage ditches. The Romans also prided themselves on making their roads straight and level no matter what the terrain, so they became master bridge and tunnel builders as well. At least 350 Roman bridges are still standing, many bearing modern traffic.
- In China, starting during the reign of Shi Huangdi, a network of imperial highways radiating from the capital was built by using conscripted labor. The system included roads, way stations, inns, bridges, and raised causeways.
- No matter how fine the road, in the ancient world, transporting bulk goods by water was always much cheaper than moving them by land, so both empires expended vast resources on facilitating waterborne shipping.
- Most of the food for Rome's inhabitants was transported by water, but for a long time, the city lacked a really good harbor. In 42 A.D., Emperor Claudius tackled this problem by excavating a new artificial harbor called Portus and a series of canals. Trajan improved on Claudius's harbor a few decades later.

- Hundreds of Roman freighters busily plied the Mediterranean, bringing an estimated 600,000 tons of vital grain, olive oil, and wine to Rome's harbors every year.
- In China, the main routes of river communication were the Yellow River in the north and the Yangtze in the south. These and their attendant tributaries provided a good natural foundation for an internal Chinese trade and irrigation network.
- The main problems were that certain regions, particularly in the west, were not reached by these rivers, and both rivers flowed west to east, so there was no route for north-south communication. The solution to both problems was to dig canals.
- The Cheng Kuo canal, excavated under the Qin, opened up 450,000 acres of new land to intensive agriculture. Eventually, many of the existing canals were linked, forming the Grand Canal, which stretches 1,100 miles from Beijing to Hangzhou. This astonishing public work is the longest canal in the world and today serves as a main artery for trade in China.



**China's Grand Canal is the culmination of imperial water-transport projects that began during the Qin dynasty.**

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- Despite all these efforts, the basic technological limitations on movement ensured that the central government could only react sluggishly and with considerable delay to problems arising in distant provinces.
- One of the fastest journeys we know of was made by Julius Caesar, who once achieved a speed of 100 miles per day overland. A more normal rate of travel, as suggested by the average distance between inns along Roman roads, was 16–20 miles per day overland. By sea, the vagaries of wind and weather could obviously greatly affect travel; one study suggests that a journey from the city of Rome to Egypt averaged about 30 days. Thus the optimal time for round-trip communication between Rome and its fringes was at least 2 months.
- This represents an ideal, and does not even take into account that Roman and Chinese highways were infested with bandits and sea travel was perhaps even more dangerous due to pirates, storms, and shipwrecks.
- In China, the roundtrip time for a message from the emperor to reach a border region and get a reply was probably a bit less than in the Roman empire, but it would still have been measured in weeks.

### Suggested Reading

Chevallier, *Roman Roads*.

Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy*.

Mutschler and Mittag, eds., *Conceiving the Empire*.

Scheidel, ed., *Rome and China*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Which of the similarities and differences between the Roman and Han empires do you think are the most important to keep in mind when attempting to compare the two?
2. People like to compare modern states and ancient ones (especially Rome), but given the fundamental technological limitations on communication and travel in the ancient world, how valid do you think such comparisons are?

# Han and Roman Empires Compared—Government

## Lecture 32

**B**oth the Romans and the Han effectively administered vast empires, but they did so by very different means. Han administration was a model of clarity, structure, and hierarchy built on Confucian and Legalist principles, while Roman administration was a study in improvisation based on a combination of Republican tradition and convenient local systems. The Chinese and Roman emperors wielded their greatest power through appointing their top officials. They played different roles in the eyes of their people; the Chinese emperor was remote and distant; the Roman emperor, in the Republican tradition, regularly appeared among the masses.

### Chinese Bureaucracy—The Epitome of Order

- Just what role did a Chinese or Roman emperor play and, more broadly, what did their governments and administrators do for the people who lived within the borders of their empires? Rome and China form an interesting comparison, since both are renowned for successful and long-lasting political hegemony, yet their methods were quite different.
- The most obvious difference is in the size of their imperial bureaucracies. Han China had a formally defined, rigid hierarchy of 120,000 government bureaucrats. Rome had fewer than 200 senior administrators assisted by an informal network of perhaps 30,000 friends, clients, slaves, and local elites. Han China had perhaps one administrator for every 450 people, whereas Rome had one formal administrator per quarter million people.
- Han administration was a paragon of clarity and organization. At the top were the emperor, his family, and his court. Next were three officials known as the Senior Statesmen who served as the intermediaries between the emperor and the rest of the government.

- Below the senior statesmen were the Nine Ministers; each was the head of a different division of government. Beneath them were 20 grades of government officials arranged in a strict hierarchy. Each grade had a specific salary, a specific document seal, and wore a sash of a certain color.
- Chinese officials were career bureaucrats who started at the bottom and hoped to rise through the ranks. Entrance into this hierarchy was gained by passing the civil service examinations. In theory, these were open to all candidates and a route of social mobility. In practice, only sons of the landed gentry could afford the time and leisure to study the Confucian classics that formed the basis of the exams.
- Geographically, Han China was divided into 80 to 100 provinces and subdivided into 1,500 regions. At the lowest level, village officials were responsible for collecting taxes, enforcing edicts, and keeping accurate records.
- Underlying the entire system was an ethical code of conscientious duty derived from Confucian-Legalist doctrine. Its emphasis on selfless service, obedience, and acting as a positive role model served to curb governmental corruption.
- The civil service exams identified individuals with talent and harnessed their abilities and energy in the service of the state. This brought new talent into the government and prevented frustrated individuals from using their skills to undermine the central authority.

### **Roman Administration—Ad Hoc and Organic**

- The Roman bureaucracy developed as Rome expanded and made great use of informal agents. Romans in general were obsessed with tradition and were reluctant to innovate, and for several centuries they labored to run a far-flung empire with a bureaucracy that had been designed to run a single city.

- By the late 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., the Roman Empire consisted of about 50 provinces, each run by a governor figure. There were two types of provinces. In senatorial ones, the governor was called a proconsul and was appointed by the senate. Provinces with a substantial military presence were imperial provinces and were governed by a legate appointed by the emperor.
- Most senatorial provinces also had a quaestor in charge of financial affairs, and some senatorial and imperial provinces had one or more assistants to the governor known as procurators. Obviously, this was not enough administrators to run an entire region.
- Each formal administrator retained a large group of personal assistants drawn from the ranks of his friends, clients, slaves, and freedmen. They also made extensive use of local elites—tribal leaders, town councilmen, and local aristocrats who had been in control before the Romans took over a region.
- Early on, this minimalist approach to administration was also made possible by farming out many governmental functions to private concerns. Particularly in the Roman Republic, the majority of taxes were not collected by government officials but rather by private corporations.
- Fascinating insight into the workings of Roman administration can be gained from a set of more than 100 letters written between Emperor Trajan and Pliny the Younger, a governor in Asia Minor. Pliny seeks Trajan's advice even on seemingly trivial matters, and one at times gets the sense of mild annoyance from Trajan.
- The Roman reliance on local elites and city councils meant that many Roman cities were effectively self-governing. The Roman approach was exactly the opposite of the Chinese one: In Han China, the officials were brought in from distant regions to govern, because outsiders were thought to provide more objective administration than locals.

- Whereas many low-level governmental positions in China such as clerks and record keepers were filled by salaried officials, the same sorts of jobs in the Roman Empire were handled by public slaves owned by a city or community. Otherwise, however, in both China and Rome, most officials were drawn from the landed elite.
- Whereas China's officials might be termed scholar-bureaucrats, Rome's were amateur gentleman administrators, analogous to the well-educated gentleman who later administered the British Empire.
- The ideology that underlay Chinese bureaucracy was Confucianism-Legalism; upper-class Roman administrators were motivated by the old Roman pursuit of *dignitas*. Over time, the Roman administration became more like the Chinese one—larger and more rigid and more logically organized.

## Comparing Emperors

- In both Rome and China, emperors who were energetic, such as Wudi, or even just dedicated, like Vespasian, could exert their authority to dramatic effect. In both empires, perhaps one of the emperor's most influential functions was appointing senior administrators and generals.
- While the theoretical power of the emperors was unlimited, in reality, they were always struggling against the time and distance constraints on communication. The state bureaucracy had to step in and deal with most local issues on its own.
- The inhabitants of the city of Rome often benefited from the emperor's presence through his benefactions: free monthly distributions of grain from the state, colossal public feasts and handouts of money, and extravagant public spectacles.

- On the other hand, proximity to a bad or crazy emperor could be a dangerous situation. The senators were frequent targets for the wrath of such emperors, and even common people in Rome could unexpectedly fall victim to their outbursts.
- Some emperors found their relative lack of control over affairs outside the capital troubling and attempted to do something about it. Emperor Hadrian literally took his court on the road. He spent much of his reign engaged in a series of grand tours.
- Hadrian's travels have an interesting parallel in the grand tours undertaken by Chinese emperors such as Shi Huangdi, who made five of these great journeys during his reign, visiting a different region each time.
- Shi Huangdi's itinerary was largely dictated by his desire to visit various sacred spots and perform rituals at them. Although he traveled widely, he was a remote figure who was almost never visible to his subjects.
- Hadrian's trips, on the other hand, sprang in part from Republican tradition. The people of Rome no longer had the power to elect their ruler, but they still had the power to symbolically approve his legitimacy through their shouted acclamations.



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**Hadrian spent the bulk of his reign touring the empire.**

## Suggested Reading

Alcock et al., eds., *Empires*.

Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*.

Mutschler and Mittag, eds. *Conceiving the Empire*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What are the respective advantages and disadvantages of the Roman and Han systems of bureaucracy, and which in the end do you think was more effective?
2. A striking contrast between Rome and Han China was the way the Roman emperor was expected to be visible and accessible versus the Chinese tradition of seclusion. How does this reflect broader conflicts in fundamental attitudes and values of Roman and Chinese cultures?

# Han and Roman Empires Compared—Problems

## Lecture 33

**A**ncient Rome and Han China each dealt with three major recurrent problems: Weak or insane emperors; incorporating newcomers into the empire; and fending off dangerous tribes on their borders. While incompetent rulers terrorized those in their immediate circles, they had surprisingly little effect on the empires as a whole. Due to the different natures of their cultures, Rome and China had different challenges when it came to integrating conquered peoples, yet they had similar mechanisms for doing so. Both empires built great walls, but these walls did not serve the purposes one might assume at first glance.

### Mad, Bad Emperors

- When an emperor was a wise and conscientious man, his sweeping powers could be an asset, but what happened if he was weak, incompetent, or insane? Such a situation actually occurred repeatedly in both ancient Rome and China, and these instances offer an interesting test of both the extent and the limits of the emperor's powers.
- The behavior of egomaniacal or insane emperors tended to fall into certain patterns. One of the most common was criminal rampages. Nero liked to wander around Rome mugging random people. Wen Xuan was prone to drunken fits in which he would tear off his clothes, run about naked, and kill people.
- Another tendency was for mad emperors to grant extravagant honors to their personal favorites, even animals or inanimate objects. Elagabalus made his favorite dancer Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, and Caligula planned to have his favorite racehorse, Speedy, appointed consul. One northern Qin emperor gave official salaried posts to horses, chickens, and dogs.

- Another recurrent imperial delusion was the power to affect the forces of nature. Caligula once declared war on the ocean. Shi Huangdi once became angry at a mountain and had all the trees on it cut down to punish it.
- Why were so many of Rome and China's emperors seemingly insane? Many of the most popular theories—such as incest and lead poisoning—are not true. One definite pattern, however, is that the overwhelming majority of the most erratic emperors assumed the throne at early ages, often in their teens.
- How much did such behavior affect the empire as a whole? For those who lived directly under the emperor's gaze, perhaps a great deal. However, for those living in the outlying provinces, the emperor's behavior might not have much effect at all. The limitations on communication allowed the bureaucratic body of the state to function smoothly even if its head was inattentive or crazy.

## The Barbarian Problem

- Both Rome and China faced the question of what to do with outsiders. How do you incorporate the people that you have conquered into your empire, and how do you deal with threats from outside the empire?
- Chinese rulers faced a much simpler situation because most areas incorporated into the Han Empire already shared their same basic culture. Even if people spoke regional dialects of Chinese, the standardization of the written script under the Qin ensured that documents could be understood everywhere.
- Since one of the most visible mechanisms for social and economic advancement—government service—depended on knowledge of Chinese classics, there was a strong incentive for ambitious locals to assimilate yet further into the mainstream culture. Thus the Qin's aggressive policy of standardizing helped to culturally unify all of China.

- In the Roman world, it was a very different story. There was enormous cultural diversity within the empire, a bewildering number of different ethnic groups, religions, cultures, and languages that continued and thrived under Roman rule. This diversity was not only acceptable to the Romans but one of the reasons for their success.
- The one group that they did often quite deliberately try to Romanize was the local elite. Often the sons of local chiefs were coercively invited to Rome, where they were raised with aristocratic families, exposed to Roman culture and values, and thus assimilated.
- When they returned to their native districts as the next generation of leaders, they sympathized with Rome, represented Roman interests, and enforced Roman policies. Frequently granted Roman citizenship, within a generation or two their descendants had taken Roman names and had fully adopted Roman customs. They even became senators and had careers as administrators.
- The Romans often justified the brutality of their imperialism by claiming they were bringing the benefits of civilization to the conquered: peace, law, public works, order, technology, culture, and even entertainment. Many locals, especially the elites, embraced this argument.
- The other great mechanism of Romanization in the provinces was the army. In addition to legions composed of Roman citizens was the *auxilia*, made up of noncitizens recruited from the most warlike peoples of the empire.
- The *auxilia* were trained in Roman fighting methods, and at the end of their decades of service, they were granted Roman citizenship. provincials who entered the *auxilia* with their own languages, customs, and cultures emerged as Latin speakers who had adopted Roman ways and beliefs. Retired *auxilia* tended to disperse back to their home villages, where they became local magistrates and representatives of Roman authority and culture.

- This strategy of assimilating and Romanizing provincials was one of the great secrets to the success and longevity of the Roman Empire. It not only redirected the efforts of those who might have fought against Rome into fighting for it, but it also provided a constant source of new talent.
- The frontiers and the fringes of China were more culturally diverse than the core regions, and there the situation was more like that in the Roman Empire, in which locals were seduced into adopting Chinese culture and the army as a mechanism for assimilating outsiders as well as fighting them.
- Another way assimilation took place in China, just as in the Roman Empire, was by employment or incorporation of warlike tribes into the Chinese military. Whether directly conscripted or serving as mercenaries, such warriors often acquired Chinese customs, language, and sympathies.

## The Wall Builders

- Two of the most famous archaeological monuments in the world represent another way both the Roman and Chinese empires dealt with dangerous barbarians on their borders: the Great Wall of China and Hadrian's Wall.
- Hadrian's Wall runs about 70 miles across the width of northern England and, for most of its length, is composed of solid stone blocks. About 10 feet wide and 20 feet high, it had watchtowers spaced at roughly 500-yard intervals, and these were further supplemented with over a dozen full-scale forts.
- The Romans established networks of walls, roads, ditches, outposts, watchtowers, and forts on other dangerous frontiers, including the Rhine and Danube rivers and along the Saharan and Arabian deserts.



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**Hadrian's Wall, in the north of England, probably did little to physically stop invaders. However, it provided the Romans with early warning of raids.**

- There is considerable debate among Roman historians regarding the purpose and function of these fortifications. Even the most solid and continuous of them would not have been sufficient to stop a large or determined barbarian incursion.
- Some historians suggest they were built to deter small raiding parties and to detect and slow down major invasions. Alternatively, they have been interpreted as a means of regulating trade and collecting customs taxes. Others view them as symbolic statements of the limits of empire or even as busywork for the army. The truth is probably some combination of all of these factors.
- In China, defensive walls had a long history, going back at least to the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The earliest walls were built of wood and packed earth, so that little remains of them today.

- The famous extant stone portions of the Great Wall are comparatively recent, dating to the Ming dynasty of the 14<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The original version of this wall may have been yet another project of the energetic Qin emperor Shi Huangdi. How reliable this account is and exactly where this wall ran are topics of dispute, but by the time of the Han dynasty, there seems to have been a well-recognized and extensive wall delineating China's northern frontier.
- Many of the same arguments concerning the purpose and function of Hadrian's Wall exist for the Great Wall of China. Walls were never viewed as a solution in and of themselves. China's policy toward the northern barbarian involved using military force, buying them off with money and gifts, hiring them as mercenaries, and assimilation.
- In both China and Rome, instances of heavy reliance on defensive walls can be interpreted as signs of weakness, since, in stronger moments, both states instead relied on mobile armies for defense.

## Rome and China—A Final Assessment

- These lectures have focused on a few issues, such as administration, leadership, assimilation, and scale, which made for interesting comparisons, but there are many other characteristics of these empires that are worth such analysis, such as economy, law, systems of coinage, and struggles with new religions.
- One final comparison worth making between Rome and China is one of attitude. Both empires came to view themselves as world civilizations and as cultures destined to rule over all others.
- In the great foundational epic of Rome, the *Aeneid*, Virgil stated that the gods granted to Rome “empire without end.” Even Rome’s enemies viewed the Romans as universal conquerors. The Chinese believed their state encompassed “all under heaven,” and that China itself was “the Middle Kingdom,” of which the rest of the world was merely an insignificant fringe.

## Suggested Reading

Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*.

Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*.

Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture*.

Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*.

Whitaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What do you think is the best explanation for the disproportionately high number of crazy emperors of China and Rome?
2. Rome and China both had to incorporate outsiders into their cultures. Which empire do you think was more successful in doing this, and what factors contributed to their success?

# Early Americas—Resources and Olmecs

## Lecture 34

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The earliest North and South American cultures make an interesting contrast with the other great civilizations we have studied so far for several reasons, not least of which is how geography profoundly influenced their development. In particular, the lack of cereal grains and large domesticable animals made certain technologies common to other civilizations far less useful in the Americas. The first major civilization in this region was the Olmecs, a mother civilization to all American cultures. Their legacies included their art, architecture, religion, calendar, and writing system.

### Humans Come to the Americas

- The Americas were among the last portions of the world to be settled by humans. The Atlantic and Pacific oceans acted as effective barriers until glaciers froze up enough water in the Bering Strait to create a bridge between Alaska and Siberia, although exactly when this happened is still much debated.
- These earliest peoples, often termed Amerindians or Paleo-Indians, engaged in a nomadic, hunter-gatherer lifestyle. They fished and hunted game both large and small. About 8,000 years ago, they began to plant some of the foods they found growing wild, such as beans and squash.
- Just as in Mesopotamia, India, and China, the practice of agriculture would profoundly change these peoples; as more and more of their diet derived from farmed crops, the hunter-gatherers settled down. With crop surpluses, villages and small cities arose, and soon followed most of the cultural developments we have been tracing in other civilizations.

- These settlements mostly clustered in two regions: One, called Mesoamerica, stretched from the arid highlands of what is today central Mexico through the jungle regions of the Yucatan peninsula and into Guatemala and Central America. The other was a narrow strip along the northwestern coast of what is today Peru that encompassed portions of the Andes Mountains and the coast.

## Geography and Culture in the Americas

- Mesoamerica contained two basic environments. Central and western Mexico contain a high, arid plateau whose cool valleys were a popular place to settle. To the east and south were grassy savannas and steamy tropical rain forests with lush vegetation.
- The major Mesoamerican civilizations tended to arise either in the highlands or the lowlands, but usually not both. A number of the items most prized by these civilizations were only found in one or the other area as well, such as obsidian or cacao. In practical terms, the early Mesoamerican societies were therefore dependent on one another for vital goods.
- All the cultures that developed in Mesoamerica featured a number of common elements. The crops and animals they subsisted on were also the same. They all used glyphs to write; built temple-topped pyramids; had similar calendars; played a ball game with religious overtones; practiced human sacrifice; wrote on bark paper; used cocoa beans as currency; and worshiped pantheons that included a goggle-eyed water deity and often a feathered serpent god.
- In Peru, there were also two distinct climatic zones. The western slopes of the Andes formed a dry, desert-like region ill-suited for intensive agriculture but had access to the sea and abundant fishing. The high mountain plateaus and the eastern slopes of the Andes received moisture from the prevailing Amazon winds; there, it was possible to farm corn, beans, and potatoes on terraced fields.

- Just as in the Mesoamerica, a vibrant trade developed early on between the low coastal lands and the inland highlands of Peru. Fish and shells were exchanged for corn, potatoes, and beans. Certain distinctive cultural constants developed that spanned all the civilizations arising in this region, including mummifying the dead and religions with prominent sun gods.

## The Slow Rise of American Civilization

- The civilizations of North and South America got going later than those in the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, India, and China. They domesticated crops and animals at least 5,000 years later than in these other parts of the world, and they never developed some of the key technologies that these other regions enjoyed at all.
- There have been a number of attempts to explain these discrepancies among world civilizations. Certainly the people of North and South America were no less intelligent or creative than their counterparts elsewhere, but due to environmental factors, they may simply have been at a great disadvantage, specifically in terms of the plants available for cultivation and the animals available for domestication.
- Cereals grains today contribute more than 50 percent of all calories consumed by human beings. But potential sources of domesticated cereals were not distributed evenly around the globe at the time civilizations arose, and these plants cannot grow in all climates. The Mediterranean, for example, gave rise to highly useful farm crops, whereas Africa and South America were almost completely lacking in potential high-yield grains.
- Of all the large mammals on earth only 5 have proven to be well suited for domestication: cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and horses. All 5 of these can be found in Europe and Asia; none are indigenous to North and South America.

- South America has one marginally useful domesticable animal—the llama. North America has none. This may be why the wheel was never developed for transportation in the New World. The natives had no large animals suitable for pulling wheeled carts or wagons.
- A subsidiary effect of raising large domesticated animals is disease immunity. Some of humanity's major killers have been seven infectious diseases—small pox, influenza, tuberculosis, malaria, plague, measles, and cholera—that originated among large domesticated animals. When the Spanish conquistadors reached Mexico, they brought along this array of pathogens, to which the local population had no immunity.

## Olmecc Civilization

- For almost 2,000 years, New World civilizations evolved in near-total isolation from the rest of the world, and they produced some highly memorable and creative cultures. The earliest Mesoamerican urban culture to emerge was the Olmecs, which emerged around 1200 B.C. along the coast of what are now Veracruz and Tabasco.
- While many aspects of their civilization remain mysterious or debated, the Olmecs are often characterized as a kind of mother culture for the region who established the model for pyramid building, the calendar, the pantheon, and artistic pursuits.
- Almost all of what we know about the Olmecs is derived from archaeological evidence rather than textual or historical accounts. The Olmecs are best known for their huge ceremonial centers and for the art and architecture that adorned them. We know practically nothing about Olmec domestic life.
- The most famous of ceremonial centers is La Venta. It was constructed along a north-south axis with careful attention paid to the geometrical relationships between its various structures. It features a massive earthen pyramid over 300 feet high as well as smaller step pyramids.



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**The colossal head artifacts of Olmec civilization look similar, but each has individual features, suggesting that they represent specific people.**

- Buried in the main courtyard are slabs of jade, granite, and serpentine depicting monster and jaguar heads. These were evidently not meant to be seen, as they were buried right after they were created. Precious offerings such as jade axes were placed in many of the burials.
- It is not known what sorts of rituals were performed by the Olmecs, but it is believed that a priestly elite enjoying the highest social status was in charge of Olmec society. The remains of Olmec ceremonial sites suggest that the designers were skillful engineers with huge amounts of labor at their disposal.
- The most typical and impressive Olmec artifacts are also among the most mysterious, a series of colossal baby-faced basalt heads. About 25 of these six- to nine-foot-tall heads survive, and it is speculated that they may be portraits of Olmec kings. They all have a similar distinctive look, but their scars, blemishes, and gaps in their teeth suggest they represent individuals.

- Atypical Olmec art object are statues of jaguar were-babies eating their mothers while nursing. A later Mesoamerican origin myth says a jaguar mated with a woman, who gave birth to a baby that ate her as she nursed it and eventually became the first ruler. Some scholars believe that the massive rulers' heads might refer to this myth.
- The Olmecs developed an extensive trading network, importing goods such as basalt, obsidian, and iron ore from Mexico's west coast and as far south as Costa Rica. An especially important trade item was jade from Guatemala.
- The Olmecs made jewelry, masks, and ritual objects. Jade was considered the most precious material by Mesoamerican cultures, even more so than gold; later on, the conquistador Hernando Cortes found that he could trade green glass beads for gold.
- The trade links established by the Olmecs no doubt contributed to the cultural homogeneity evident in much of ancient Mesoamerica, especially in terms of religion. Olmec gods, half-human/half-animal supernatural creatures, myths, and religious symbols provided prototypes for later Mesoamerican deities and religious beliefs. The Olmecs also played a ceremonial ball game that would become widespread throughout the region.
- By at least 600 B.C., the Olmecs had created the first known form of writing in Mesoamerica. This was a relatively crude hieroglyphic system that many scholars believe was a forerunner to the Mayan glyphs, but it has yet to be deciphered.
- The Olmecs also are credited with the first calendar in Mesoamerica. Its main application seems to have been to record and track religious cycles.
- For reasons that remain uncertain, Olmec civilization appears to have collapsed or faded away sometime in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. There is evidence of Olmec sites suffering severe depopulation in this period, and some scholars have ascribed this to shifts in climate.

## Suggested Reading

Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*.

Diehl, *The Olmecs*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Would you agree or disagree with Jared Diamond's argument that the availability of domesticable plants and animals gave the civilizations of certain geographic regions a distinct advantage?
2. The Olmec, Minoan, and Indus Valley civilizations are all known mainly through archaeological evidence. What parallels are there in terms what we know (and do not know) about them?

# Pots and Pyramids—Moche and Teotihuacán

## Lecture 35

Of the many civilizations that thrived in South America, two of the most interesting are the Chavín culture, a particularly influential Peruvian civilization, and the Moche, famous for their creative pottery and the spectacular tomb of the Lord of Sipan. The city of Teotihuacán is the most impressive archaeological site in Mesoamerica. It includes a pyramid that rivals those of Egypt and some remarkable iconography, but who built this city and why remains a matter of much mystery and debate.

### Chavín de Huántar and Chavín Culture

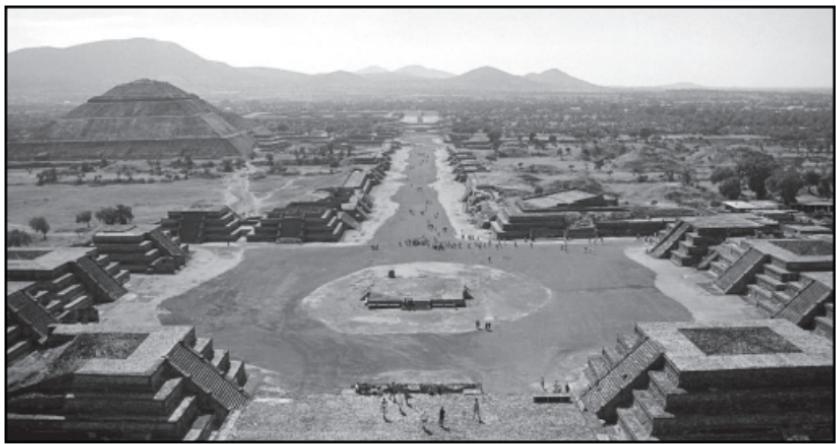
- Beginning around 2000 B.C., people living in northwestern Peru began to produce ceramic pottery, and over the next millennium ceremonial urban centers with monumental structures began to appear. The common feature of these sites was massive earthen and brick terraced platforms arranged around three sides of a courtyard to form a distinctive U-shape, often with a pyramidal structure at the base of the U.
- The most influential early Peruvian culture, roughly contemporaneous with the Olmecs, is known as Chavín culture. This name derives from the most famous such site, Chavín de Huántar, founded about 900 B.C. in the highlands of the Andes.
- Chavín de Huántar is located at a strategic transportation node, near mountain passes offering good access to the coast, and it reflects the lively trade and interdependence between the highlands and the coastal regions.

- Along the stone walls of the inner enclosure are a series of larger-than-life sculpted humanoid heads with snouts and fangs. In the center is a recessed circular plaza whose sides are lined with relief sculptures of jaguars and creatures with human bodies, fangs, and clawed hands and feet. These sorts of animal-human hybrids are common features in Chavín art, and many believe that the supreme deity was such a creature.

## Moche Culture and Civilization

- The best known later civilization of this region is that of the Inca, but they were relative late-comers to the scene, not forming their great empire until around A.D. 1400—well beyond the endpoint of this course. Between the Chavín and Inca were dozens of other cultures, most of whom shared similar architecture, lifestyles, and religious beliefs, including the Moche.
- Archaeologists spend a lot of time looking at clay pots. Ceramic pots last longer than almost any other type of cultural artifact, and almost every culture mastered the techniques making them. Moche pots display a particularly creative and playful streak that makes them especially fun to study.
- Moche culture, based around a series of high Peruvian valleys, flourished between A.D. 100 and 800. They cultivated corn, beans, squash, peppers, and avocados, and fished for fish, crabs, crayfish, and mollusks. Llamas, guinea pigs, and ducks were domesticated and raised as additional food sources.
- This wealth and variety of sustenance enabled the Moche to develop a relatively dense urban culture and be able to devote time and effort to monumental architecture and sophisticated handcrafted objects.
- The Huaca del Sol is a pyramid-like temple composed of an estimated 130 million adobe bricks, making it the largest indigenous clay structure in the Americas.

- Moche potters created an amazing variety of ceramic vessels decorated with fine-line painting that portrays people, animals, plants, supernatural beings, and gods. Moche potters often formed their vessels in the shape of a variety of birds, animals, creatures, and objects. Some pots are cast as portrait busts with nearly as much detail as the famously realistic Roman portrait busts.
- The basic Moche pot is a distinctive design known as a stirrup spout bottle, a roundish vessel from which two hollow tubes form an upward arc. The tubes meet at the top of the arc and fuse into a vertical spout. In more elaborate versions, the vessel itself is cast in the form of a creature or object, or even as multiple figures.
- Even those pots whose main vessels are just standard ovals can have astonishingly complex images painted on them. One scene frequently painted on these pots is a row of realistically portrayed warriors. Sometimes they are shown fighting; other times, they simply parade past in ranks.
- One common category of figure in these illustrations is strange, monstrous beings that mix elements of humans and animals. The designs often seem to have a playful sense of humor in how they anthropomorphize normally inanimate objects. A large body of surviving pots depict beans that have grown limbs, put on armor, and engage in combat.
- In 1987, a spectacular tomb of a high-ranking Moche man was uncovered. Labeled the Lord of Sipán, he was around 40 at the time of death. His high status was indicated by a vast array of expensive grave goods, including fine gold, silver, and copper metalwork inlaid with turquoise and seashells. Six other individuals were buried around him, as well as a dog and several llamas. Nearby were two other tombs, containing a man identified as a priest and another who, as determined by genetic analysis, seems to have been an older relative, perhaps the previous ruler.



By Quipan.

Scholars debate over who built the city of Teotihuacán. It may have been a group effort by many neighboring cultures.

## Teotihuacán and the Descendents of the Olmecs

- Cultures that followed the Olmecs included the Zapotec, Nayarit, and Izapa. The Mesoamerican archaeological site of this era stands out for the sheer scale of its monuments is Teotihuacán. Located just 30 miles northeast of Mexico City, it is one of the most visited tourist sites in Mexico.
- Teotihuacán was a truly gigantic city—three and a half miles long and two miles wide, containing more than 5,000 structures. Around A.D. 500, the city had an estimated population of between 125,000 and 200,000, making it one of the biggest cities in the entire world at that time.
- The city is laid out on a grid along north-south and east-west axes and dominated by two massive stone pyramids, today called the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon. At more than 200 feet high and 600 feet wide at its base, the Pyramid of the Sun occupies a similar footprint to Egypt's Great Pyramid of Cheops, although it is considerably shorter. Both pyramids were originally surmounted by temples.

- The main street, known as the Avenue of the Dead, connects the three main monuments of the site, beginning in the north at the Pyramid of the Moon and running south for over a mile, past the Pyramid of the Sun, all the way to the so-called Temple of Quetzalcoatl.
- Located within a larger complex, the Temple of Quetzalcoatl features a six-tiered step pyramid decorated with huge protruding stone heads. Half of these depict the head of the god Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent. These alternate with heads equipped with fangs and protuberant round eyes—perhaps the water god, Tlaloc. The entire surface of this structure was originally painted in bright shades of blue, red, white, and green.
- The largest stone statue found in Mesoamerica is a 168-ton colossus traditionally believed to represent Tlaloc and associated with Teotihuacán culture. For years this statue lay abandoned in the modern village of Coatlinchan. Today, it stands outside the main entrance of the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.
- Excavations at Teotihuacán have revealed a number of burials, including more than 200 in and under the Temple of Quetzalcoatl complex alone. These are usually interpreted as sacrifices to the gods.
- Evidence of large marketplaces suggests large-scale trade in both local and imported products, including luxury goods such as cacao, shells, rubber, decorative feathers, and foodstuffs. Certain districts of the city seem to have been occupied by craftspeople. A nearby obsidian mine might have been a factor in the choice of the city's location.
- The basic architectural style of Teotihuacán has been labeled *talud-tablero*. Each building starts with a layer that has a sloped outward face known as the *talud*. On top of this is placed another layer with a vertical outward face, called the *tablero*. The alternating layers repeat until the desired height is reached.

- Judging from the surviving art, sculptures, murals, and buildings, the religion of Teotihuacán shared common elements with the Mesoamerican civilizations that came both before and after.
- For all the richness and scale of the archaeological remains at Teotihuacán, many fundamental aspects of this civilization remain mysterious, not least of which is the identity of the people who built it. The name Teotihuacán was given to the site by the much later Aztecs.
- The earliest structures have been dated to around 200 B.C., with the city apparently reaching a peak around A.D. 200–500 and then going into decline, with at least parts of the city showing evidence of having been burned down. By 800 A.D., the city seems to have been abandoned.
- Various scholars have attempted to identify the city's builders, linking them to the Olmec, Zapotec, Maya, Toltec, Totonac, or Nahua. Many now believe that the people were influenced by several or all of these, or were composed of a mixture of different ethnic groups.

## **Colima Pottery**

- Mesoamerica had its share of potters who made creative, beautiful, and entertaining ceramic vessels. One culture whose potters might be compared to those of the Moche lived in the region encompassed by the modern Mexican state of Colima.
- From around 300 B.C. to 300 A.D., these potters cast distinctive pieces in the shape of animals and objects. These do not possess the complex stirrup spout arrangement of the Moche vessels but instead have only a simple opening or single spout at the top.
- The most typical Colima-style vessel is in the shape of a plump little dog. These are often sculpted with a great deal of personality and have been identified as a breed of small, hairless dog called the Xoloitzcuintli.

- There is a darker side to these appealing sculptures. Almost certainly their plumpness is due to the fact that many of them were being fattened up to be eaten by humans.

## Suggested Reading

Burger, *Chavín and the Origins of Andean Civilization*.

Donnan and McClelland, *Moche Fineline Painting*.

Pasztori, *Teotihuacan*.

Stone-Miller, *Art of the Andes from Chavín to Inca*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Using Moche and Colima pottery as examples, what kinds of social values can be learned by examining such images, and is there a danger of projecting our own values onto these images?
2. Sites such as the Lord of Sipán's tomb and Teotihuacán represent enormous expenditure of resources for ritual purposes. Why were these and other civilizations prone to such lavish but impractical displays?

# Blood and Corn—Mayan Civilization

## Lecture 36

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The Maya were one of the longest-lasting, most influential, and geographically dispersed cultures in Mesoamerica. They were also one of the most advanced, the first culture in the Americas who left a written historical record as well as archeological evidence behind. Technically not a single empire, the Maya were a group of city-states covering a large geographic area that shared a common culture. Many aspects of their culture are similar to those of other Mesoamerican groups, including their religious rituals and their system of timekeeping, but they refined the common writing system and were advanced mathematicians and astronomers.

### The Maya—America's First Historical Culture

- On January 16, 378, an ancient Mesoamerican warrior prepared for battle. His name was Smoking Frog, and he commanded the army of the Mayan city of Tikal on behalf of his king, Great Jaguar Paw. On that day, using new weapons and tactics possibly imported from Teotihuacán, he led his army to a great victory over the forces of the rival city of Uaxactún.
- We know Smoking Frog's name, the exact date of his victory, and the details of these events because, unlike most of early North and South American cultures, the Maya had a fully developed system of writing.
- The achievements of the Maya were many because they were among the longest-lasting, the geographically most extensive, and the culturally most sophisticated of all Mesoamerican peoples. We can also call them a historical civilization in the sense not only ample archaeological evidence but their written records survive.

- Mayan civilization arose in the jungle lowlands of what is today southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and eastern Honduras. By the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C., this area was occupied by small city-states who were farming the usual corn, squash, beans, and potatoes.
- The area was also a source of cocoa, a highly sought-after trade product. Chocolate was drunk by the upper classes, and cocoa beans were used as currency. Household gardens supplied herbs, chili peppers, and tomatoes. Pineapples, papayas, guavas, and other fruits grew in orchards. Palm trees were exploited for oil and fronds, which thatched roofs. Copal trees provided resin for incense, which was burnt for the gods.
- Mayan civilization reached its peak, or classic period, between about A.D. 250 and 900. It was not a single unified empire; rather, each local area was ruled over by a hereditary king, who was advised by a council of priests and nobles. Local governments imposed taxes, oversaw justice, administered nearby villages, engaged in foreign policy, conducted war, and constructed ceremonial and monumental structures.
- Skilled craftsmen, scribes, and warriors tended to concentrate around the urban centers, but the vast majority of Mayans were farmers who lived in adobe and thatch huts resembling those used by farmers in the region today.

### The City of Tikal

- Tikal was one of the largest and most important urban centers of the classic period. Located in the central Yucatan in what is today Guatemala, it occupied more than six square miles and was surrounded by a moat and rampart. It was probably the second largest urban center of Mesoamerica after Teotihuacan.

- Tikal was not located along a river, and it had no good source of fresh water. The Maya solved this by constructing a series of enormous cisterns and reservoirs for rainwater collection sufficient to supply 30,000 people during a complete drought lasting 6 months. These were so well constructed that the excavators of Tikal were able to refurbish one and use it for their own water needs.
- Tikal city features five tall step pyramids surmounted by temples with distinctive roof crests. The tallest of these pyramids is roughly equivalent in height to the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan, but the Mayan pyramids have extremely steep sides, giving them a smaller footprint on the ground.
- The ceremonial center at Tikal includes palaces, courtyards, altars, and plazas. These are solidly constructed out of limestone blocks and often adorned with relief carvings and painted plaster. Scattered about the site are many stone steles covered with low-relief images and Mayan glyphs, including ones that tell the stories of king Great Jaguar Paw and his general Smoking Frog.

## The Mayan Ball Game

- Tikal also features a number of specialized enclosures devoted to the Mayan ball game. Throughout Mesoamerica, sacred ball games were played both for entertainment and as a religious ritual. The rules of the game are not known, but artistic representations suggest that players had to direct a hard rubber ball through rings high up on the court's walls, using their hips and shoulders but not their hands.
- The players wore protective padding around their arms and knees and large U-shaped belts on their waists to cushion their ribs and hips. For decoration, they wore elaborate animal headdresses often topped with quetzal feathers and had implements called *hachas* in their belts. Oversized, ornately carved stone belts that have been discovered throughout Mesoamerica may have been awarded to victorious players. The unlucky losers were quite often sacrificed to the gods.

- Reliefs show prisoners with their limbs tightly bound up so that their bodies formed a ball, and in this form, they may have symbolically or literally been employed as game balls. These unfortunates were ultimately sacrificed by being rolled down the steep staircases of the temples to their deaths.
- A ball game between twin sibling heroes and the gods played a crucial role in an important Mayan creation myth. The twins are forced to play in the ball court of the underworld. One of them has his head severed by killer bats, and his head is to be used as the ball. The decapitated twin plays with a substitute head made from a squash.
- While a helpful rabbit distracts the attention of the gods, the twin retrieves and reattaches his real head. The twins win the game, decapitate the underworld gods, and resurrect their father, the god of corn, who was buried beneath the ball court. By playing the sacred ball game, the Maya reenacted this myth and sacrificed their blood to thank the corn god who had sacrificed himself to feed them.

## Mayan Cosmology and Religion

- For the Mayans, there was not a strict division between natural and supernatural spheres but rather constant interaction between them. The universe was made up of three realms—the Upperworld, Middleworld, and Underworld. Gods, spirits, and ancestors dwelt in the Upperworld and the Underworld. They also shared the Middleworld with human beings.
- The four quadrants of the universe were arranged around a central axis and aligned with the four cardinal directions, with a god connected with each one. Symbolically, the four directions and axis each had their own colors, trees, and birds.
  - The primary direction, East, associated with the rising sun, was symbolized by red.

- The West, where the sun sets, was linked with the underworld and the color black.
  - The North, connected with the ancestors and death, was white.
  - The South, associated with the sun, was yellow.
  - The center, through which ran the great axis of creation, was green.
- The Maya were polytheistic, and their pantheon of deities often overlapped with those of other cultures of the region. While more than 250 names of Mayan divinities have been documented, they did not have 250 different gods. Mayan gods were not distinct entities; they had fluid identities and could shift between various aspects, avatars, or manifestations.
  - Gods were even complex in how they were depicted. Sometimes they were shown as humanoid, sometimes as human-animal hybrids, and sometimes as beasts—real or mythical.
  - One of the most important gods was Chac, the rain god, who was often portrayed as possessing the features of aquatic creatures. He was believed to frequent caves, where storms were thought to originate, and was sometimes shown carrying a lightning bolt. Chac appears to be one of the oldest gods of Mesoamerica. He can be associated with Tlaloc of Teotihuacan, who was important to the much later Aztecs.
  - Religion infused all aspects of Mayan life. Priests were high-status individuals in Mayan society, and they played a key role in government, war, and the economy as well as in religion. Education was mainly for priests, who had to read and write as part of their religious observances and use math and astronomy to timing religious ceremonies. The Maya were far more adept at astronomical observations than their European counterparts of the time.

- Bloodletting played a central role in Mayan religious rituals. Human blood was considered a precious substance and thus was the highest sacrifice that could be presented to the gods. Self-inflicted public bloodletting was a standard form of worship.
- Human sacrifice and removal of the heart were also regularly practiced, as suggested by both artistic and archaeological evidence, and decapitation was another common method of sacrifice. Blood spurting from the chest or neck was sometimes portrayed as quetzal feathers, a highly prized trade item, to emphasize the precious nature of human blood.

## Mayan Achievements

- While it is easy to focus on the lurid aspects of Mayan civilization, they were responsible for a number of great intellectual achievements. Foremost among these are their calendar and written language.
- The Maya developed a base 20 mathematical system that included the concept of zero. This system is quite flexible and allowed Mayan mathematicians to calculate sums in the hundreds of millions.
- The Maya were the only Mesoamericans to create a complex form of written language. Their sophisticated system consisted of a mixture of ideographs that represent objects and symbols that represent sounds. Each sign is known as a glyph, and the total number of known Mayan glyphs is around 2,000.
- We have about 15,000 Mayan inscriptions surviving on stone and pottery. The Mayans also wrote on a kind of paper made from bark, but unfortunately, these books were destroyed by the Spanish conquistadors. Only four books survived; perhaps fortunately, these were texts on astronomy and the calendar.

- For a long time, scholars were unable to decipher the Mayan language, but when they noticed the frequent occurrence of symbols for dates in the Mayan calendar, they were able to use these as a starting point for interpreting the glyphs.
- The discovery of a royal tomb in the jungle at Palenque provided an important source for Maya hieroglyphs, which were inscribed all over a huge limestone slab found under the aptly-named Temple of Inscriptions.

## Mayan Decline

- In the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., classical Mayan civilization went into decline. The reason is unknown, but various theories include overpopulation, overcultivation, drought, erosion, deforestation, endemic warfare, and internal rebellions. Most likely it was the result of a combination of these factors.
- There was a dramatic drop in population accompanied by a cessation of new construction and even the wholesale abandonment of many cities in this period. Studies of skeletons from Copán also show pronounced signs of malnutrition and disease between 650 and 850.
- Power shifted to the northern Yucatan peninsula, where newer cities such as Uxmal and Chichén Itzá fared better and Toltec civilization, which flourished for a few centuries and then faded away. These regions would continue to develop in isolation for another five hundred years or so until the arrival of Europeans following Columbus.

## Suggested Reading

Coe, *The Maya*.

Hunter, *A Guide to Ancient Maya Ruins*.

Thompson, *Maya History and Religion*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How do Mayan myths and values compare to others that we have studied, such as those of ancient Greece or Vedic India?
2. Relatively few of the civilizations we have examined practiced large-scale human sacrifice. Why do you think this was such an important part of Mayan culture and not others?

# Hunter-Gatherers and Polynesians

## Lecture 37

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A number of successful and sophisticated cultures around the globe either resisted urbanization or maintained predominantly hunter-gatherer lifestyles for thousands of years in an astonishing range of ecological niches, from arctic regions to deserts to Pacific islands. These nomadic peoples—whether living in the Arctic, in a desert, or in Oceania—share certain social, economic, and dietary similarities. In this lecture, we look at the living hunter-gatherer descendants of such cultures, such as the Inuit and the Australian Aborigines, as well as the artifacts of their ancient ancestors.

### The Basics of Hunter-Gatherer Cultures

- Some ancient societies developed sophisticated cultures but did not build cities. Instead, they continued to pursue a hunter-gatherer lifestyle long after most other peoples had abandoned it.
- *Homo sapiens* have only been farming for about 10,000 years. Today, only a minuscule percentage of humans continue to practice anything approaching the hunter-gatherer lifestyle—some Inuit in the Arctic and some Aborigines of the Australian Outback.
- During the period that this course covers, nearly all humans had already switched over to farming or pastoralism, but there were still a few societies scattered around the globe that pursued the traditional mode of human existence.
- Hunter-gatherer cultures share certain universal characteristics. They derive their caloric intake from nondomesticated plants and nondomesticated animals—mostly nuts, berries, fish, fruits, wild plants, insects, scavenged carcasses, and small wild game.

- Hunter-gatherers are almost always nomadic, following their food resources. This mobility was a double-edged sword; on the one hand, it gave them great flexibility, but on the other hand, it limited their material possessions.
- Hunter-gatherers typically live in smallish bands of 10–40 related individuals. These societies are usually more egalitarian than farming or pastoral communities, without pronounced class or hierarchical structures. There also tends to be more gender equality. These characteristics probably result from the fact that everyone had to contribute to nearly all group activities, including hunting.
- Many hunter-gatherer bands were also matrilineal, meaning that the women were related by blood and individuals trace their ancestry through their mothers. To avoid inbreeding, male members of the group would join the group from other bands to find a mate. Such exchanges were facilitated by the fact that in many hunter-gatherer societies, there is a designated time of year when a number of different bands temporarily form a larger community to hunt or gather a specific foodstuff.

## The Nomads of the North

- Once intensive farming and pastoralism had spread around the globe, the hunter-gatherer groups that survived into the historical era tended to be in locations that were either ill-suited for farming, extremely geographically isolated, or both.
- Regions that fit both criteria were the northernmost fringes of North America, Europe and Asia. The Inuit and Eskimos of North America are descended from such peoples, and they evolved an amazing array of strategies and technologies adapted specifically to their extreme environment.

- In Scandinavia, the forerunners of today's Sami were the Fenni, who seem to have inhabited these areas as early as 2000 B.C. They actually appear in the writings of the Roman author Tacitus, who, in his description, highlights the fact that they do not engage in farming. Today, the Sami herd reindeer, but this practice only seems to have begun 500 or 600 years ago.

## The Nomads of the Deserts

- Inhabiting an equally harsh but completely different landscape are a number of societies that adapted to living in deserts. Of these, two whose descendants continue to live traditional lifestyles into the modern era are the San, or Bushmen, of the Kalahari Desert in Africa, and the Aborigines of Australia.
- The Aborigines have been in Australia for 40,000–50,000 years, making their culture perhaps the oldest continuous one in the world. When they first arrived, the landscape of much of Australia was more hospitable than it is today.
- Aborigines lived in smallish, kin-related groups typical of hunter-gatherers, and many different clans and tribal units have been identified. They spoke more than 250 different languages and 600 dialects, although almost all of these have fallen out of use and been forever lost.
- The Aborigines mainly used stone, wood, and bone to make essential tools. The most famous Aboriginal hunting weapon was the boomerang. The bow and arrow, found in almost every civilization around the world, was not used except in a small northern region that had contact with other islanders. Aborigines did have barbed spears and darts.
- Groups living in the various parts of Australia conducted a flourishing trade with one another. Items such as shells, quartz, pearls, and animal products have been found many hundreds of miles away from any possible point of origin.

- Religious beliefs emphasized a sense of continuity between the past, present, and future. There was a perception that spirits or beings had existed from the time of creation and continued to be present in the world. This notion is embodied in the concept misleadingly translated as the Dreamtime or the Dreaming.
- Australian Aboriginal art is particularly well known for its unique and inventive aesthetic, such as the technique of forming pictures from colored dots resembling the canvases of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century pointillist painters.
- Their art often depicts scenes from everyday life, such as hunting, but much of it also serves as a medium for expressing their rich mythology and spirituality, for illustrating ceremonies and rituals, and for relating histories and stories. Some of their rock engravings date to more than 20,000 years ago, suggesting the antiquity of this artistic tradition.

## The Nomads of the Seas

- The various peoples collectively called Polynesians are genetically related to the Aborigines of Australia. They also constitute one of the more remarkable cultures that perfectly adapted to a specific environment—in this case, Oceania.
- Oceania consists of innumerable islands forming a great arc that starts with the Philippines and Indonesia, continues past Australia with New Guinea and the New Hebrides, and then stretches far out into the Pacific with the Marshall Islands, Fiji, Samoa, the Society Islands, and the Marquesas. The northernmost edge of this region is marked by the Hawaiian Islands, the southernmost by New Zealand, and the easternmost by Easter Island.
- Between 3000 and 1500 B.C., an enterprising, seagoing people anthropologists have labeled the Austronesians began to spread out from Asia through these networks of islands. Genetic analysis suggests that their point of origin was somewhere near modern Taiwan.

- The earliest distinct culture for which we have archaeological evidence is a group labeled the Lapita that by 1500 B.C. had settled Melanesia. Lapita culture is best known from a distinctive style of pottery. From Melanesia, the Lapita expanded into western Polynesia, reaching Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa by 900 B.C.
- The Lapita did not practice true farming but instead created temporary fields using slash-and burn-agriculture. They introduced some domesticated animals to the islands, including chickens and dogs.
- Their descendants set out yet further across into eastern Polynesia and had settled the Cook Islands and Tahiti by 300 B.C., then reached Easter Island and the Hawaiian Islands by A.D. 500. Finally, the last of these oceanic explorers settled New Zealand in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, establishing the roots of Maori culture.
- These islands were not promising zones for intensive agriculture. The only edible indigenous plants were nuts, and most of the plants now associated with these regions, including bananas, coconuts, yams, and breadfruit, were all imported. These volcanic islands often had very poor soil, and hurricanes periodically deposited saltwater across the land, effectively poisoning the soil.
- Luckily, many of these islands were atolls surrounded by extensive reefs that were exceptionally rich marine environments. The inhabitants of these islands became expert fishermen.
- Polynesians did not constitute one political or social entity; each island or part of an island evolved its own variant of the core culture. More than 1,200 different languages have been identified in Oceania as well, although most are closely related linguistically and sometimes mutually intelligible. A chief or king typically ruled over each group, and there was a lively trade and interaction among the islands.

- The key to the spread and success of the Polynesians was their ability as sailors, shipbuilders, and navigators. Without any technological aids, Polynesian sailors crossed thousands of miles of open ocean and found their way to tiny islands. If they missed, they headed off into an endless expanse of ocean and certain death.
- Further complicating this challenge was the fact that they were spreading eastward, but all the main winds and currents moved westward. They had to actively struggle against the forces of nature.
- The Lapita developed sea-going canoes equipped with outriggers that stabilized them. The originals were simply hollowed out logs propelled by paddles and triangular lateen sails that allowed them to tack into the wind fairly efficiently.
- These boats were not large enough to carry the supplies needed for the longer voyages among the more widely spaced islands, so the later Polynesians devised a bigger craft built of planks bound with coconut fibers and glues. These had two hulls linked by a platform on which a superstructure was sometimes even erected. The largest of these craft were over 100 feet long and could carry a substantial crew and cargo thousands of miles.
- The next challenge was navigation, and through a combination of trial and error and the oral transmission of accumulated knowledge, Polynesians learned to use the stars, birds, clouds, currents, and waves to guide their vessels. They could identify land even when it was out of sight by various means, including changes in the ocean's swell, variations in wind and current direction, and the presence of land birds. Sometimes they could even see over-the-horizon landmasses reflected in the undersides of clouds.
- Although the Polynesians built no massive cities, they developed a successful, rich, and long-lasting culture, and in areas such as seafaring and navigation, their achievements are among the most impressive of any civilization.

## Suggested Reading

Berndt and Berndt, *The World of the First Australians*.

Jennings, ed., *The Prehistory of Polynesia*.

Panter-Brick, Layton, and Rowley-Conwy, eds., *Hunter-Gatherers*.

Schrire, ed., *Past and Present in Hunter Gatherer Studies*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Do the hunter-gatherer societies discussed in this lecture disprove the overall argument presented in this course that civilization is an urban phenomenon, or do they merely demonstrate a few exceptions to a generally valid rule?
2. In cultures based on farming, status and power usually depend on the acquisition and storage of objects (food, money, property, etc.). In hunter-gatherer societies, this is impossible. How has this basic difference shaped the cultures and values of both sedentary and nomadic civilizations?

# The Art and Architecture of Power

## Lecture 38

Empires have a near-universal tendency to erect impressive monumental structures and to use art as expressions of power and domination. The Persian King of Kings constructed a tribute relief that demonstrated to visitors his dominion over 23 specific conquered nations. The reliefs of Cerro Sechin, Peru, may have been intended as a mythological reference, a battle memorial, or a threat. The tomb of Shi Huangdi memorialized the emperor's power even into the afterlife. And the city of Rome itself was a living, ever-growing monument to the power of the empire.

### The Apadana of Persepolis

- Across almost every ancient society, those in power shared a predilection for using art and architecture to promote their rule and to publicly illustrate their domination over rivals both internal and external. While such grandstanding might seem arrogant or even distasteful to us, it did produce some of the most impressive, and even beautiful, monuments of the ancient world.
- The centerpiece of the palace of the Persian King of Kings at Persepolis was a structure known as the Apadana. This was a combination throne room and royal reception hall. It was a square 300 feet per side whose roof was held up by 72 magnificent stone columns, each nearly 75 feet high.
- Access to the platform was by sweeping staircases. The walls adjacent to these staircases were decorated with finely carved reliefs of approximately 3,000 human figures, a great parade of the king's subjects. The core of the parade consists of representatives from each of the 23 different lands that had been conquered by the Persians, bearing a staggering array of offerings to place before the feet of the king.

- The basic message of this relief was that all the world bows down before the Persian king. Because of the quality and detail of the carvings, this monument is also one of the most helpful guides for modern scholars to use in identifying the distinctive clothing and jewelry worn by different ancient Near Eastern peoples, but we should not forget that the original purpose of these beautiful artworks was to intimidate and awe.

## The Cerro Sechín Carvings

- About 170 miles from Lima, Peru, is an archaeological site known as Cerro Sechín, built by one of the early civilizations of the Andes and associated with Chavín culture. It features a carved procession that is even more blatant in its message than the one at Persepolis.
- The centerpiece of Cerro Sechín is a raised platform with retaining walls originally inset with about 400 granite slabs. These were covered with carvings of a parade of high-ranking armed warriors who seem to emerge from the central doorway and march around the sides of the structure. Interspersed among these figures is a jumbled confusion of corpses, dismembered bodies, and body parts.
- Considering the amount of effort that went into creating this public display of violence, it must have been intended as an important statement. Scholars are divided over whether the relief should be read as a record of a historical conquest or as a representation of a mythological battle, but it functions as a rather frighteningly effective assertion of the power and brutality of the dominant group. Graphic carvings such as these are actually rather commonly found in South American and Mesoamerican cultures.



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**The Apadana frieze offers details about the dress of ancient cultures.**

## The Tomb of Shi Huangdi

- China's emperor Shi Huangdi is best known for his spectacular burial complex that includes the famous terra-cotta warriors as well as one of the most impressive and mysterious tombs of any ruler throughout all of history.
- Shi Huangdi started building his tomb almost as soon as he took the throne. The scale of the effort was massive. The actual burial chamber itself was concealed beneath a giant earthen mound over 200 feet in height and whose base forms a square 1,000 feet on a side. The tomb lay a further 100 feet below the original ground level.
- Sima Qian records what was placed within it, a fantastic model of the entire world, including the heavens and the earth:

Palaces, scenic towers, and the hundred officials, as well as rare utensils and wonderful objects were brought to fill up the tomb. ... Mercury was used to fashion the hundred rivers, the Yellow river, and the Yangtze, and the seas in such a way that they flowed. Above were set the heavenly bodies, below the features of the earth.

- The terra-cotta warriors were discovered in 1974 in a series of pits located roughly a mile east of the burial mound when the Yang brothers were digging a new well for their farm and began to pull life-size clay heads and body parts from the well shaft. In all, 600 pits were discovered in the vicinity of the emperor's tomb, some containing just a handful of objects and others thousands of them.
- The soldiers were arranged as if they were a real army drawn up for review. They stand at attention facing east, organized by type of weapon. They were equipped with fully functional bronze and wooden weapons, including swords, crossbows, spears, halberds, and arrows. These warriors are one of our best guides to understanding the arms and armor used in China during this period.

- The level of detail and craftsmanship lavished on the warriors is amazing. It has been estimated that 1,000 skilled potters had to work for 12 years in teams of 10 or 12 to create the army. So complex are the figures that each team would have been able to complete only about seven per year.
- Scholars are still debating the purpose of the terra-cotta warriors. Whether the army was supposed to serve the emperor in the next life or express his authority is unknown.
- This was not the only grandiose statement of power indulged in by Shi Huangdi. In his capital city, he symbolically asserted his domination over conquered states by constructing copies of his foes' palaces and filled the halls, walkways, and pavilions with piles of precious objects looted from the original owners.
- As a crowning touch, he inhabited this fantastical landscape with harems of beautiful women, presumably drawn from those regions enslaved by his conquests.

## Rome—The City as a Monument

- The Romans not only built monuments celebrating their power, but one useful way of interpreting the city of Rome is as an enormous trophy case. No matter where you looked, you were constantly reminded of Rome's total domination over the Mediterranean and its peoples.
- The Romans were especially fond of erecting large public monuments to commemorate military conquests. Some of the best-known examples of this were triumphal arches. These probably had their origins in temporary structures through which generals celebrating triumphs passed and over time became a standard form of war monument.
- Such arches were surmounted by a bronze statue group of a four-horse chariot being driven by the person or persons being honored. They were usually decorated with carved reliefs depicting scenes from the campaign.

- There are archaeological remains or literary references to nearly 50 triumphal or commemorative arches in ancient Rome, although only three survive. The surviving Arch of Titus was built in A.D. 81 to celebrate his military victories in Judea, including his suppression of the rebellion of the Jews and the capture of Jerusalem.
- Another common Roman victory monument was a column topped by a statue of the victorious general. By the late Republic, there was a veritable forest of these in Rome, many of them clustering in and around the Roman Forum.
- By far the most spectacular columns were those put up by the emperors Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, both of which are still standing. The entire shaft of each column was carved with a spiraling frieze that illustrated the campaigns from beginning to end and can be read like a modern cartoon.
- The Column of Trajan commemorates a series of military campaigns waged by the emperor in Dacia. The shaft of the column is about 100 feet tall. The spiral carved frieze contains 155 different scenes featuring over 2,600 figures. If this frieze were unraveled and stretched out, it would be over 600 feet long. Trajan frequently appears in these scenes directing the campaign, and he is carved slightly larger than the others to emphasize his status.
- The frieze is unblinkingly accurate and honest in its portrayal of the harsh realities of conquest. There are scenes showing the Romans burning native villages, rounding up women and children to be sold into slavery, and displaying the heads of slain barbarian leaders on poles.
- As time went on, not only was the city crowded with innumerable triumphal arches, columns, and statues, but its public spaces were also decorated with items stolen from all over the Mediterranean. Many temples were stuffed to overflowing with trophies, while the streets, gardens, baths, and even the houses of wealthy Romans were adorned with seized works of art.

- The stones that made up the great public buildings of Rome were highly visible reminders of Rome's status. Colored marble and decorative stone was plundered from every corner of the Mediterranean: fine white marble from Mount Pentelikon, green cippollino from Carystos, yellow and purple veined stone from Asia Minor, and hard purple and green porphyry from Egypt.
- Even Rome's inhabitants were a living tribute to Rome's dominance. Hundreds of thousands of foreigners found themselves shipped to Rome as slaves, where they were compelled to serve the whims of their Roman masters. Their myriad languages, accents, costumes, and appearances would also have served as constant reminders of Rome's power and authority.

### Suggested Reading

Coulston, *All the Emperor's Men*.

Portal, ed., *The First Emperor*.

Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art*.

Samaniego, et al. "New Evidence on Cerro Sechin, Casma Valley, Peru."

Wilber, *Persepolis*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Do you think displays of domination and power such as the Persepolis reliefs, Cerro Sechín, and Trajan's Column are effective tools of persuasion?
2. How do the specific details of Shi Huangdi's tomb and the associated terra-cotta warriors reflect key aspects of his personality and policies?

# Comparative Armies—Rome, China, Maya

## Lecture 39

While almost every culture and civilization engages in warfare, how they organize their armies and how they fight varies widely. Looking at the military systems of the Romans, the Chinese, and the Mayans offers an idea of the great breadth of styles different cultures employed. These groups varied in how they recruited and managed their soldiers; how they armed and armored their troops; and even when and why they chose to fight.

### The Roman Military Machine

- The Roman army was one of the most famous military organizations of all time. From their success record, it is obvious they were doing something right. The Romans often did not enjoy superior technology or numbers compared with their enemies; what they almost always did have was greater organization, discipline, and determination.
- From the time of the Punic Wars on, Rome's army was what we would today call a professional army—that is, made of full-time soldiers. They devoted all of their effort to training and produced much better soldiers.
- Most Roman legionaries were citizen volunteers who enlisted for 25-year terms of service. This is in contrast to many of their contemporary civilizations, which employed mercenaries in their armies.
- The Roman army elevated organization to an art form. All aspects of the soldier's daily schedule were regulated, his equipment was standardized, and he knew exactly his place and role within the army.

- The smallest unit of men was the *contubernia*, which consisted of eight men; *contubernia* literally translated as “those who share a tent.” Ten *contubernia* made up a century, which despite the name contained 80 men, not 100. Six centuries were a cohort (480 men), and 10 cohorts formed one legion (4,800 men).
- In battle, a legion could maneuver as a whole or in independent units ranging from 8 to 480 men. This gave the Romans great flexibility.
- Each legion had a golden eagle on a pole as its standard. The soldier who carried the eagle was known as the *aquilifer*. One of the greatest disgraces that could befall a legion was for its eagle to be captured by an enemy. The eagles and other standards were the focus of religious rituals for the legion.
- Every legion was commanded by a legate, who had to be of senatorial rank. Under him were six senior officers known as military tribunes. Both legates and tribunes were political appointments. This is one of the greatest weaknesses in the Roman military system: The highest-ranking officers were not professional soldiers.



**The eagle was the standard of each Roman legion and the center of many rituals.**

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- Legates and tribunes came and went fairly rapidly, and thus continuity and professionalism were provided by the junior officers, called centurions. Each legion had one centurion per century, or 60 per legion.
- Centurions were promoted from the ranks and thus represented the best and most experienced of the soldiers. Among the centurions, there was a strict hierarchy of seniority. The most senior one, was called the *primus pilus* (“first spear”). In the modern U.S. Army, the centurions would be the equivalent of sergeants. They supervised and trained the men.
- Above all else, soldiers were expected to perform their duty, and if they failed, the penalties were predictably harsh. Offences such as insubordination or falling asleep while on watch were punished by death.
- If any whole unit, from *contubernia* to legion, was derelict in its duty, a lottery was held, and the unit would be decimated—that is, one out of every 10 men would be clubbed to death by his remaining comrades.
- The Roman legionary was what we would call a heavy infantryman. By the early imperial period, they wore body armor called a *lorica segmentata* consisting of bands of steel tied together with leather strips; helmets with cheek guards to protect the face, extensions at the back to cover the neck, and a reinforcing bar across the front; and a large, convex, rectangular shield called a scutum.
- The Roman legionary had two main offensive weapons: a double-edged short sword called the gladius made for combat at close quarters and a set of throwing spears. In battle, the legion would advance to close range, throw their spears in unison, then draw their swords, march forward, and chop their foes to pieces.

- Because of the discipline and organization of the Roman military system, they routinely defeated much larger enemies who battled in less coordinated ways. Roman formations, while similar to the earlier Greek phalanx, were not as rigid, and allowed for flexibility and initiative.
- The Romans also maintained a large group of noncitizen soldiers called the *auxilia*. These were typically not infantry but archers, horsemen, lightly armed skirmishers and other specialty fighters, because certain ethnic or geographic groups within the empire were thought to be especially talented at various specialized forms of warfare.
- *Auxilia* units were organized in groups of either 500 or 1,000. The total number of *auxilia* employed by the Romans was roughly equal to the number of legionaries.

## **China's Army of Bronze**

- Like the Roman army, ancient Chinese armies were primarily composed of well-armed infantrymen. They were also characterized by a high degree of organization. Unlike Rome, more of the Chinese army was made up of forced conscripts and soldiers serving short-term stints.
- In keeping with China's large population, the armies of this period could be massive, perhaps the largest of the ancient world, mustering hundreds of thousands of troops.
- The basic soldier was equipped with a bronze sword and a uniquely Chinese weapon sometimes called a dagger-axe. This was something like a halberd consisting of a long pole topped by a bronze head with both a stabbing point and an axe-like blade. It could be used for thrusting or slashing and was well suited to pulling a cavalryman from a horse.

- Other foot soldiers were armed with powerful crossbows, which the Chinese developed centuries before Western Europe. Unlike a longbow, which requires years of practice to attain proficiency, the crossbow could be mastered quickly, although it had a much slower rate of fire.
- The better-equipped Chinese troops wore metal conical helmets and body armor made by lacing together small plates of toughened leather or metal. Most arms and armor were fashioned of bronze, but by the Han period, weak iron was used as well.
- China employed horsemen to a much greater degree than the Romans, usually as mounted archers, and they also had chariots. Chariots served primarily as transportation for high-ranking officers.
- On the battlefield, Chinese generals tried to exercise a great deal of direct control, and they did this by using complex systems of signal flags, drums, gongs, and bells.
- Chinese armies were heavily conscript armies. How these recruits were obtained varied over time, but a typical approach required every group of five households to supply five men to the army. Five men was also the lowest standard organizational unit in the Chinese army, analogous to the Roman *contubernia*.
- Officers in the army were mainly career professionals. Promotion was based on a combination of skills, performance in battle, and mastery of texts on military theory, such as Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.
- Once nomadic barbarian groups such as the Xiongnu became a serious threat, more attention was given to developing cavalry and fortified frontier outposts. This mirrors the later Roman focus on mobile field armies that could intercept incoming barbarian raids. The Chinese also recruited warlike barbarians or non-Chinese peoples as auxiliaries in their armies, again especially in the frontier regions.

- One aspect of warfare that was always important in China but that played little role in Roman warfare was combat along rivers, which were key strategic boundaries and transportation routes. Many wars among rival Chinese states centered around controlling them. This resulted in combined land/water operations involving fleets of ships and barges.

### **Mayan Combat—The War of the Seasons**

- Mayan combat was greatly affected by the basic level of technology in Mesoamerican society in general. Just as there were no metal tools in Mesoamerica, there were no metal weapons or armor.
- The main hand-to-hand weapons were wooden clubs and short thrusting spears. One uniquely Mesoamerican weapon was a wooden shaft with flakes of razor-sharp obsidian embedded along its edges. This was well-suited for slashing attacks against an opponent's arms or legs. Mayan warriors used slings, javelins, and a type of dart-thrower known as an atlatl as projectile weapons.
- Mayan warriors of the classic period seem to have worn little or no armor, although elites are shown with elaborate feather headdresses. Light shields may have offered some protection. Later Mesoamerican warriors had heavy quilted body armor made of cotton, which may sometimes have been used by Mayan fighters.
- The numerous cities of Mayan culture appear to have engaged in frequent low-intensity warfare consisting of raids and occasional larger assaults. Professional armies seem to have been minimal. Most likely, elite Maya served as officers while the mass of troops was composed of their retainers or conscripted militia.
- Warfare appears to have been fairly common among the Maya. Mayan inscriptions record and celebrate many conflicts. Most warfare seems to have been seasonal, taking place during the dry season from December to May, when farmers could be spared from their fields.

- The scale of Mayan warfare would have been much smaller than that conducted by the massive armies of Rome and China; a large force would have comprised several thousand men rather than tens of thousands.
- Some scholars argue that the main purpose of Mayan warfare was to obtain live captives for sacrifice, and was a significant part of Mesoamerican combat, judging by the nonlethal nature of their weapons. Other scholars contend that Mayan warfare was at times also about territorial conquest or resources and could be just as deadly as elsewhere.

### Suggested Reading

De Souza, ed., *The Ancient World at War*.

Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*.

Peers, *Soldiers of the Dragon*.

Raaflaub and Rosentstein, eds., *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Do you agree with the argument that central aspects of a state's military system (such as the Roman obsession with organization) embody central aspects of that culture itself?
2. How did the goals of warfare and the types of threats they faced affect the sort of equipment and fighting styles favored by the Romans, the Chinese, and the Maya?

# Later Roman Empire—Crisis and Christianity

## Lecture 40

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**D**uring the Crisis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, internal problems and external enemies threatened Rome, but the empire made a surprising recovery under Emperor Diocletian. He changed the very nature of what it meant to be emperor by creating the tetrarchy—or “rule of four”—addressing the problems of the empire’s size and the wars of succession with a single solution. His monetary reforms also shored up Rome’s ailing economy. It was also during this period that Christianity rose from an obscure cult to a recognized and major faith of the empire, thanks to the conversion of Emperor Constantine.

### The Crisis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century

- In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., Roman history entered a chaotic period of great political instability and an extraordinarily high turnover rate of emperors. Many rivals for the throne came and went in a single year. Between 238 and 278, there were 26 official emperors and dozens of usurpers; the only qualification needed to claim the title was the loyalty of many men with swords.
- Things were so bad during this time that historians have labeled this period the Crisis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. Three main factors contributed to this crisis:
  - It was an era of near constant civil war. When an emperor died, generals of the three major frontier armies often bribed their legions to proclaim them emperor. All three armies then converged on Rome to fight it out. Sometimes generals did not even wait for the old emperor to die.
  - There were serious barbarian invasions. New, large barbarian confederations had formed, and when civil war broke out and the Roman armies abandoned the borders, the barbarians saw the opportunity to plunder the empire.

- Due to these two factors, the economy was in a state of collapse. Villages were burnt, people were killed, and crops were destroyed. Merchants were afraid to travel, and bandits and pirates proliferated. Desperate for income, emperors debased the coinage. People were not fooled by this, however, and raised their prices, sparking terrible bouts of inflation.
- Finally, the empire was really too big to be run effectively by one person. It looked like the end was at hand when a series of tough military emperors managed to stabilize the empire and give it another hundred years or so of life.

## Diocletian's Reforms

- The last in this line of military reformers had the longest, most successful reign. His name was Diocletian. He reorganized the army and expanded it to around 600,000 troops, many of them drawn from the barbarian tribes menacing Rome, turning a problem into a solution.
- He also reoriented the armies from a border patrol to a defense-in-depth force in which large, centralized military reserves were posted behind the frontier, from where they could move to intercept and eliminate barbarian incursions.
- He completely separated the civilian and military structures. No longer were legion commanders short-term political appointees; they were now career military men. Governors were now exclusively civil administrators.
- To increase the efficiency of the administration, he split up the provinces into smaller units so each governor had less to do and could concentrate on a more manageable area. Diocletian then combined provinces into a number of larger units called dioceses, each under the control of a vicar. The legions were consolidated into several multilegion armies, each under the command of a dux, from which we got the English cognate duke.

- Realizing that the empire was too big for any one man to govern effectively, he made official what had already happened. He split the empire into four parts, appointing a ruler for each. This system of four emperors was called the tetrarchy.
- To rebuild the people's faith in money, Diocletian issued a new solid gold coin whose purity and weight were guaranteed. Its official name was the solidus. To curb inflation, Diocletian issued the Price Edict, a list of maximum prices for goods and services. Although difficult to enforce, in theory, if you charged more than the price listed, you could be punished with exile or even death.
- Finally, Diocletian explicitly linked the emperors to the gods for the first time. Many emperors had been deified after their deaths or had been unofficially worshiped as gods, but now the emperors began to liken themselves to gods while still alive.

## **DIOCLETIAN AND THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS**

- One consequence of this was that any religious challenge to this practice took on the nature of a political challenge. For the first time, political unity implied religious unity, and Diocletian began to persecute deviant religious cults. Among these was a small group known as Christians.
- From a historical perspective, there were a number of aspects of Christianity that had considerable appeal to the Romans, including the link between good behavior and the reward of immortality and, in particular, that it did not recognize existing Roman legal and social hierarchies but said all humans had value and dignity and were equal in the eyes of God.
- The Romans were normally quite tolerant of other religions but always had trouble with Judaism and Christianity because of their monotheism. They were puzzled by Christianity's secrecy and troubled by its egalitarian views. Nevertheless, Christians' refusal to worship the emperor as a god was the primary cause of conflict and the trigger for widespread persecution.

## The Conversion of Constantine—and the Empire

- Events took an abrupt and unexpected turn early in the next century. Civil wars among rivals for the throne continued. One contender was a man named Constantine. He was known to inspire his troops before battles by claiming that he had had a vision from a god, such as Apollo, promising them victory.
- In 312 A.D., he was attempting to capture Rome at a site called the Milvian Bridge. Constantine's troops were at a disadvantage here—tired and outnumbered. Just before the battle, he claimed to have had a vision in which the Christian god promised victory. His men painted a Christian symbol, consisting of Greek letters chi and rho, on their shields and won the battle
- Constantine took the throne and issued a decree that Christianity was now to be tolerated. Constantine himself converted, but he continued to subsidize pagan temples and sacrifices, to worship the sun god, and to issue coins bearing Apollo's image. Constantine seems to have viewed himself as the head of the Christian church as well as the Roman state, summoning meetings of bishops and presiding over them.
- From this point on, all but one Roman emperor was a Christian. One secular appeal that Christianity had for Roman emperors was to extend the idea of there being only one true god to the concept that there was only one legitimate emperor.
- Administratively, Constantine splits the empire into two halves. He founded a new city to serve as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, naming it Constantinople after himself. He equipped it with most of the architectural features of Rome.
- Just like Augustus, Constantine claimed that he had saved or restored the Republic. The old propaganda of Roman politics was still in use, 300 years after it had obviously stopped being a republic.

## Suggested Reading

Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*.

Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602*.

Lenski, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Of the three categories of problems (civil wars, barbarian invasions, and economic collapse) that plagued Rome during the Crisis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, which do you think was the most dangerous and why?
2. In what ways did Christianity's emphasis on the next world rather than this one, on private rather than public worship, and on the individual rather than the community undermine or conflict with core Roman values?

# The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire?

## Lecture 41

One of the most famous historical questions of all time is when and why the Roman Empire fell. There is a surprising variety of possible answers to these questions. Among the most popular culprits in Rome's fall are the various barbarian tribes on its borders, such as the Goths and Huns, but historians have offered a variety of other explanations as well, from ecological crisis to the rise of Christianity. Part of the difficulty in answering these questions lies in just how we might define the term "Rome."

### The Barbarian Invasions Begin

- One of the first problems encountered when attempting to analyze the fall of Rome is that no one can seem to agree on exactly when it happened. One frequently suggested date is the death of the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180 and the accession of his son, the mad Commodus.
- Another popular date is A.D. 312, which marks the conversion of Constantine to Christianity. Proponents of this date stress that the personal, inward-looking ideology of Christianity was fundamentally antithetical to the outward, public focus of Roman civilization.
- The next set of proposed dates all focus around barbarians. The term "barbarian" was a pejorative label used by the Greeks and Romans to denote almost any group they regarded as less civilized than themselves.
- The barbarians we are concerned with had been present for a long time in Northern Europe. These seminomadic peoples had a social structure organized by kinship and loose tribal groupings. These were largely male-dominated societies in which your status was based on your ability as warrior.

- The people of the time often expressed such differences in terms of diet. To a Greek or Roman, one of the marks being a civilized person was that your diet revolved around the three Mediterranean staples of wheat, wine, and olives. Conversely, you were a barbarian if your diet focused on meat, dairy, and beer.
- In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, small clan groups began to coalesce into much larger units and to migrate out of their traditional homelands. They started to form confederations, and tens or hundreds of thousands of them began to flow across the borders of the Roman Empire.

## The Arrival of the Huns

- Of all the barbarian groups, perhaps the most feared were the Huns. They were truly nomadic, riding small, shaggy, horses, and they fought mainly from horseback using powerful bows. They had an extremely tough, brutal society based on raiding and stealing and could travel vast distances.
- The Huns were excellent warriors. When they invaded, people were often so afraid of them that they would run away rather than fight them. For a long time, historians thought the Huns were the Xiongnu. This is now a matter of great contention, and the scarcity of sources means that we will probably never know for sure.
- In the late 300s, the Huns began to shift westward out of central Asia and toward Eastern Europe. This set up a domino effect: The Huns invaded the territory of the Germanic Ostrogoths. They pushed west into the lands of the Visigoths. When the Visigoths moved westward, they entered Roman territory.
- When the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths began to exert pressure on the borders of the empire, the emperors found it expedient to exchange land for promises that the barbarians would fight for Rome rather than against it. These accommodations frequently broke down due to bad faith on both sides.

- In A.D. 378, disgruntled Goths rebelled against the Eastern Roman Empire. Emperor Valens marched out to suppress the rebellion without waiting for reinforcements; he and his entire army were slain at the Battle of Adrianople. Thus this date is often proposed as marking the fall of the Roman Empire as well.

## The Sacks of Rome

- Throughout this period, the empire was shrinking as various barbarians carved off bits off the dying empire's carcass. The Vandals took Spain and invaded North Africa. They eventually settled in Carthage, became pirates, and cut Rome off from many of its main sources of food.
- The next date frequently put forward as the moment when Rome fell is A.D. 410, when a band of Visigoths under the able leadership of King Alaric invaded Italy, captured the city of Rome, and sacked it. This was the first time in 800 years that foreign enemy had set foot in the heart of the empire.
- The physical harm to the city was relatively minor; the Visigoths quickly departed, and the administration of what remained of the Western Empire continued unimpeded. The psychological scars were much deeper.
- Finally, the Huns arrived, united under Attila. An unlikely coalition formed to oppose him, consisting of the Western Roman Empire, the Visigoths, the Franks, the Burgundians, and some Celts. In 451, they fought a bitter battle in Gaul which ended in a stalemate.
- In 452, Attila marched on Rome, but in a rather mysterious episode, the pope went out to meet him. They had lunch together on the banks of a river and to everyone's astonishment, Attila announced that the Huns were going back to Gaul.

- Fortunately for Rome, Attila decided to get married. He held a huge drunken feast to celebrate his nuptials and, at some point during the night—whether from too much food, too much alcohol, or too much girl—Attila the Hun died. The Huns splintered into small groups and would never again pose as serious a threat.
- In A.D. 455, the Vandals, led by King Gaiseric, swept through Italy and sacked the city of Rome once again. This time, the damage was much more extensive and destructive, and Rome did not recover. For these reasons, A.D. 455 and the second sack of Rome are often suggested as indicating the end of Roman power.
- The Western Romans continued to create emperors until A.D. 476, when the last of these, the boy Romulus Augustulus, was kicked off his throne by the barbarian king Odoacer and was not replaced. Therefore, this is most commonly cited as the definitive moment when the Roman Empire ceased to exist.
- While the Western Roman Empire had certainly fallen by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the Eastern Roman Empire showed surprising resilience. An unbroken succession of emperors ruled from Constantinople for almost 1,000 years—up until 1453, when the city fell to the Ottoman Turks.

### **Not When But Why?**

- Quite reasonable arguments can be made for A.D. 180, 312, 378, 410, 455, 476, and 1453, and these by no means exhaust the range of possible dates that can be (and have been) proposed as the end of the empire. But why did the empire fall?
- We have already encountered several possible answers: that poor leadership fatally weakened the empire, that Christianity undermined its values, and that Rome was simply overrun by hordes of barbarians.

- Another set of explanations concentrates on economic factors. Some scholars hypothesize that there was a decline in arable land or in available workers. Others have suggested that the soil became exhausted or that climatic changes diminished crop yields. Still other scholars see evidence of a growing inequality between rich and poor or economic stagnation due to overreliance on slave labor, while others assert that there was a shortage of new slaves to provide adequate labor.
- One popular explanation pointed the finger at a supposed descent into moral degeneracy. This argument has both methodological and chronological flaws since it is usually based on atypical anecdotes.
- In the end, the question of why Rome fell may not have a single answer but can legitimately yield various different answers depending on which aspect of civilization or history one is most interested in.

### **Not the Dark Ages but Late Antiquity**

- All these interpretations center around a core assumption: that a powerful civilization fell and that this era was a melancholy period of decline ending in a 1,000-year-long abyss of barbarism and squalor. In recent decades, this basic assumption has been challenged.
- The alternate perspective frames the period between A.D. 200 and 600 as a time of invigorating changes, bold new ideas, and stimulating interactions that transformed the stagnant classical world. It was an era of cultural and intellectual experimentation and innovation that included many of the greatest thinkers in the Eastern and Western traditions; gave birth to new religions, states, and social forms; and laid the foundations for the modern world.

- The traditional view, given influential expression in Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, has become the dominant basic interpretation. The second view is more recent, dating to the 1970s, and has quickly gathered momentum. It offers a way to look at this period that is positive as well as negative and that sees areas of growth as well as decay.
- Some of the key aspects in the reconceptualization of the Dark Ages as late antiquity were to obsess less over the parts of Roman culture that were destroyed and to center more on the new cultures that were created. The focus shifted from decline to change and from fall to transformation. One topic of special emphasis was the study of religious developments.
- In the last few years, this positive interpretation of late antiquity has provoked a reaction among some scholars who argue that the pendulum has now swung too far. They assert that many of the so-called barbarian "migrations" were real invasions accompanied by killing and devastation. They claim that, at least in the west, a sophisticated civilization really was destroyed that there was substantial drop in the overall quality of life.
- Perhaps it is possible to see late antiquity as a distinct and important period while at the same time acknowledging the real destruction and violence of the period.

## Suggested Reading

Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*.

James, *Europe's Barbarians AD 200–600*.

Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns*.

Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Which date do you think best marks the end of the Roman Empire, and why do you favor that one over the others?
2. Do you think that the period of late antiquity is better characterized as a time of violence and collapse or of change and renewal and why?

# The Byzantine Empire and the Legacy of Rome

## Lecture 42

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The long-lived Byzantine Empire carried on the legacy of Rome for 1,000 years after the collapse of the empire in Europe, and some of its greatest achievements survive to this day. One of the most important of these was the Roman law code as recorded by Emperor Justinian, which has influenced legal systems around the world. The city of Constantinople was a marvel of architecture and military defense; in its modern incarnation of Istanbul, it is still home to the great Hagia Sophia.

### One Empire, Two Names

- By the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the Western Roman Empire centered on Rome had fallen, or at least transformed into something that was no longer Roman. On the other side of the Mediterranean, the Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital at Constantinople, most certainly did not fall.
- Although they viewed themselves as simply the Romans, later historians have labeled this empire the Byzantine Empire, after the original name of the old Greek colony, Byzantium, where Constantinople was built. Today, this is the city of Istanbul, Turkey.
- Constantinople sits exactly on the geological border between Europe and Asia—a horn-shaped peninsula jutting out from the western shore of the Bosphorus, the narrow strip of water that links the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea. Constantinople commanded a vital economic and strategic crossroads.
- This was also a wonderfully defensible site. The city was built on a stretch of high ground and surrounded on three sides by water. It could only be approached by land on its western side, and its inhabitants constructed some of the most massive fortifications of antiquity along this one vulnerable approach.



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**The city of Constantinople was a marvel of architecture and military defense.**

- When Constantine established Constantinople as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, he equipped it with all the same structures, institutions, and amenities that were found in Rome. It had a senate and a senate house, an imperial palace, a grain dole, and huge entertainment complexes.
- The entertainment complexes provided a venue not only for games but for the public interactions and massed applause and acclamations that were so vital to the legitimacy of a Roman emperor. They were also decorated with great artworks stolen from all over the empire.
- The fortifications, by the 6<sup>th</sup> century, were 36 feet high and 17 feet thick, with 96 great towers spaced along them. A massive ditch in front of the walls added another formidable obstacle. A second, taller set of walls was nested inside the first.

- One architectural aspect of Constantinople was different from Rome, but equally impressive. Rome was supplied water by its famous system of aqueducts; Constantinople, built with more concern for attack, required an internal supply of fresh water. The solution was enormous underground cisterns, eventually holding some 86 million cubic gallons of water.

## The Reign of Justinian

- Of the approximately 95 emperors who ruled over Constantinople, the most significant of the earlier ones was Justinian. He embarked on an energetic program of building, organization, and conquest.
- Justinian came from a military family and was something of an outsider among the aristocrats of Constantinople. Thus he appointed a number of people to important positions based more on energy and ability than on aristocratic connections. This gave him a core of talented subordinates, but it also earned the enmity of the old aristocracy.
- Justinian also married a woman several decades his junior named Theodora, who apparently came from the lower classes. There were rumors that her father was a bear wrangler and that she had been a prostitute. It is difficult to assess the accuracy of any of these accusations. She seems to have been an intelligent and strong-willed woman who took an active role in government, which was likely to stir resentment in itself.
- Early in his reign, Justinian faced a crisis that almost deposed him from office. In the hippodrome the traditional racing factions, the Greens and Blues, had always engaged in a fierce rivalry that not infrequently resulted in riots and violence. Around this time these factions had become associated with certain rival sects of Christianity.

- When Justinian refused to pardon two criminals, one from each faction, the Blues and Greens joined forces and rioted. The subsequent urban violence spilled out of the hippodrome and into the streets. These riots were known as the Nika riots, after one of the traditional shouts at chariot races. (“Nika” means victory.)
- Much of the city was burnt to the ground, and the rioting continued for a week. Justinian suppressed the rioters and reasserting his authority by calling in the army. Allegedly 30,000 people were killed by the troops.
- Despite this unpromising start, Justinian and Theodora had some impressive achievements. They nearly succeeded in reuniting the eastern and western empires. Justinian had a particularly skilled general named Belisarius who led several successful military expeditions and recaptured most of Italy, including Rome itself.
- As glorious as Justinian’s reunification appeared at the time, it would be both short lived and relatively inconsequential. Soon after Justinian’s death, almost all of the western Mediterranean territories were once again lost to various barbarian kingdoms.
- Justinian embarked on a great building program, particularly after the destruction of the Nika riots. Among the buildings erected at this time was one of the most impressive of all of history: the Hagia Sophia.
- The architects were two mathematicians, Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles. Not only was this a massive structure; it was also an architectural and artistic marvel that remains one the world’s great buildings. When Constantinople was captured by the Ottoman Turks, it was converted into a mosque. Today it is officially a museum.
- At Justinian’s command, another great project was accomplished that would have long-term effects on the entire world: the compilation of the Code of Roman Law. This was a definitive edition of the accumulated centuries of Roman legal precedent. It has survived to become, either directly or indirectly, the source for many of the world’s current legal systems.

## Christianity in the Late Empire

- With Christianity now Rome's dominant religion, the Mediterranean world was racked by disagreements over theological doctrine. The Byzantine Empire developed its own version of Christianity and split off from the West, forming the Greek Orthodox Church.
- Many other disputes arose around questions such as the exact nature of Christ and the relationship between him and God. These disputes were often very intense and bitter, even leading to violence.
- One particularly bitter fight that raged during the 300s was called the Arian controversy. The Arians, following a man named Arius, believed that Jesus Christ was created by God the Father—separate, inferior, and subordinate to him. Their opponents maintained that Christ was equal to God the Father.
- After nearly 50 years of debate and 18 church councils, the official view was that “Christ and God contained the same divine essence” This is the basis for the concept of the holy trinity. This was but one of many such debates during the early centuries of Christianity.
- Justinian ruled until 565. He was succeeded by his nephew, and their line ruled all the way through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. While still considering themselves Romans, the Byzantine empire in many ways would revert to the underlying Greek roots of the East.
- The power and reach of the empire declined, but safe behind its great walls, the city of Constantinople itself persisted. Finally, after a series of determined attacks and fatally weakened by the Fourth Crusade, Constantinople was captured by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II on May 29, 1453.

- For those who enjoy arguing about the date of the fall of the Rome, an excellent case can be made for 1453. If this seems like a stretch, consider this: Charlemagne, the first great king of Medieval Europe, crowned Charles Augustus, Emperor of the Romans, on Christmas Day 800. One of the most coveted titles throughout the Middle Ages was that of Holy Roman Emperor, and there was a continuous string of such emperors until 1806. The Russian title tsar was a corruption of “Caesar,” and the last tsar ruled until 1917. Even the United States has a governmental body called the Senate, and the architecture of Washington DC looks very much like the buildings of ancient Rome.

## Suggested Reading

Harris, *Constantinople*.

Herrin, *Byzantium*.

Norwich, *A Short History of Byzantium*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Why should (or should not) the Byzantine Empire be considered a legitimate extension of the Roman Empire?
2. How does Justinian compare as a leader to some of the other figures we have encountered?

# **China from Chaos to Order under the Tang**

## **Lecture 43**

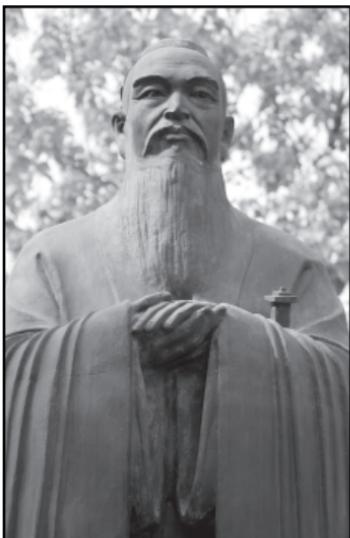
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**L**ike Europe after the fall of Rome in the West, China went through a period of turbulence after the collapse of the Han Empire. This is known as the Three Kingdoms era. The Sui and Tang dynasties eventually reunified and restored order to China. A number of famous rulers of this period stirred both controversy and admiration. Many parallels can be drawn between the acts of the Sui and Tang and their predecessors, the Qin and Han, respectively.

### **The Decline and Fall of China**

- We left the historical narrative of China around A.D. 200, with the dissolution of the Han Empire. Mirroring the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, China dissolved into a number of warring states, some of them controlled by groups that the Chinese would have regarded as barbarians.
- The three and a half centuries that followed constituted the longest stretch of disunity in all of Chinese history. The period 221 until 589 is known as the Era of Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties. In fact, there were many more than six dynasties, but they came and went so quickly that many are hardly worth noticing.
- Not only was there internal dissention during this period, but the external threats posed by nomadic barbarian groups such as the Huns continued to intensify. Gangs of bandits proliferated and roamed throughout China attacking travelers and villages.

- Northern and southern coalitions of states formed around the river networks of the Yellow River in the north and the Yangtze in the south. This was a split that might well have become permanent, especially considering the marked geographical and cultural differences between the two regions, just as Rome permanently split along east-west lines.
- This chaotic and dangerous time later became an extremely popular setting for stories. For the people living through it, the dangers and economic disruption were no cause for amusement. Census data suggests that China suffered a significant decline in population over this period due to war and disease.
- As during other periods of chaos and uncertainty, this time also spawned new philosophical and religious yearnings. Confucianism had flourished under the stability of the Han but was not as well suited to the Three Kingdoms era, and many an escape from the harsh realities of existence.
- Buddhism was such a belief system. It had reached China at least as early as A.D. 64, but it was not until the chaotic 4<sup>th</sup> century that it grew popular, especially among the poorer, disempowered classes. Buddhist monasteries provided islands of stability and calm in stormy seas.



**In the chaos of the Three Kingdoms period, Confucius's philosophy fell out of favor.**

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- Many artists and intellectuals rejected the ordered society of Confucianism, which seemed to have failed them, and adopted Neo-Daoism, which focused on abstruse metaphysical questions. Along with this sometimes came a freer, more unfettered lifestyle. A group of 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. Neo-Daoists were known as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove.
- More traditional Confucians and the government authorities did not appreciate the Neo-Daoists' eccentric behavior. In an incident reminiscent of the trial of Socrates, in 262, one of the Seven Sages was executed on charges of perversion of public morals.
- Over several centuries, an eventual fusion of the belief systems of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism took place.

## **The Sui Dynasty**

- Towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., much as Diocletian did in the Roman West, in China a family of tough, pragmatic emperors with military backgrounds came to power. They drove out the barbarians, stabilized the borders, reunited the empire, and founded the Sui dynasty.
- Although it would only last for three generations, the Sui dynasty laid the foundation for a glorious rebirth of Chinese civilization under the subsequent and longer-lasting Tang dynasty.
- The Sui were analogous to the Qin dynasty—they were not popular rulers, nor ones renowned for their empathy and kindness, but were a harsh, pragmatic regime that used force to reestablish unity.
- They raised taxes and exploited the peasantry, but they were also large-scale builders and supporters of the arts. They established the largest library in the world at the time (containing 400,000 books), constructed many Buddhist temples, expanded the network of roads, and rebuilt the Great Wall.

- Using the forced labor of an alleged 6 million workers, they excavated more canals and completed the first version of the Grand Canal connecting the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers. Solidly-built bridges spanned the canals and some of these have lasted up until modern times.
- The Sui emperors were highly organized and warlike, deploying an effective imperial army to conquer territory as well as a centralized government and civil service to administer it. But the Sui dynasty overextended itself, and it overworked and exhausted the Chinese people, who suffered from food shortages and were driven to rebellion.

## The Tang Dynasty

- After a brief civil war, the Sui general Li Yuan emerged as emperor and founded the Tang dynasty. He was not from an aristocratic family but from the frontiers. Some sources say that he was of mixed Chinese and so-called barbarian ancestry.
- Just as the Han followed, reacted against, and built on the Qin dynasty, so the Tang dynasty succeeded and echoed the Sui. They responded to the harshness and oppression of the previous regime by reviving the Confucian ideal of the benevolent ruler. The Tang dynasty is considered by many historians as the greatest Chinese dynasty, which served as a model, both politically and culturally, for all its Asian neighbors.
- Li Yuan's rule did not last long; his son, Taizong, staged a coup in 626, during which he killed his brothers and threw his father in prison. Despite this questionable beginning, he enjoyed a subsequent reputation as a wise and conscientious emperor who stabilized the northern and western borders; ruled for over 20 years; and instigated many of the administrative reforms and policies that subsequent Tang emperors would follow.

- The next Tang emperor, Gaozong, resembled his father. He supported education and cultivated an administrative system staffed according to merit. Taizong had unsuccessfully attacked northern Korea, but Gaozong achieved this conquest. He is also known for having the Tang legal code revised.
- The next Tang ruler was one of the more amazing figures in Chinese history, the only woman to officially rule as emperor: Wu. She had been one of Taizong's minor concubines. When Gaozong succeeded his father, Wu steadily acquired more influence over Gaozong, eventually becoming his number two wife.
- When Gaozong suffered a stroke, Wu became a dominant figure at court. After Gaozong's death, she manipulated affairs as the real power behind the scenes while allegedly acting on behalf of her own young children. Finally, she usurped the throne in 690 and proclaimed herself emperor—assuming the male title.
- Wu is a controversial figure, and it is hard to ascertain the truth of her actions. The only surviving sources for her reign are hostile, including the usual accusations leveled against powerful female rulers. How true any of these stories are is impossible to tell. It seems accurate that she could be ruthless; she also must have been exceptionally intelligent and talented as well to have succeeded in such an atmosphere.
- To counterbalance the power of her enemies in the administration, she set up an inner court composed of scholars who favored her. Perhaps to gain a powerbase independent of the Confucian establishment, she favored Buddhism and practiced it herself, becoming a nun. Her enemies finally caught up with her in 705. She was forced to abdicate the throne and died shortly thereafter.
- The next ruler to come to power adopted the title Xuanzong. During his 44-year reign, China grew to unprecedented wealth and population. Towns and trade flourished, and the arts underwent a renaissance. The south saw particular gains in population and prosperity.

- The long reign of Xuanzong would often be looked back on as a golden age, but toward the end of his life, Xuanzong fell under the spell of one of his son's concubines. She and her family ended up running the empire—poorly—and things deteriorated.
- After the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the Tang dynasty went into decline. At the Battle of Talas (near Samarkand) in 751, Arab warriors defeated the Tang, whose military dominance began to fade. Uighur Turks took over Mongolia. Internal enemies also menaced Tang power.
- Although the Tang dynasty lasted another 150 years, it would never achieve such heights of power and culture again. In 907, the Tang dynasty came to an inglorious end when a general sacked the capitol city and forced the last Tang emperor from the throne. However, the model of imperial stability and unity that had been established by the Han and Tang had taken firm root.

### Suggested Reading

Lewis, *China Between Empires*.

Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What similarities and differences were there in the problems facing Rome and China in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and why did Rome ultimately fail to solve them, whereas China did?
2. Given the surviving sources' obvious hostility towards Empress Wu and Theodora, is it possible to accurately assess these women and their actions, and how might this be done?

# The Golden Age of Tang Culture

## Lecture 44

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Tang civilization was not only an era of political stability; it was a great flowering of cultural and technological achievement. The two most important aspects of Tang culture that allowed this to occur were urbanization, which encouraged people from as far as the shores of the Mediterranean to bring goods and ideas to China, and a cultural openness that delighted in what was exotic and new. Among the areas in which the Tang excelled were horse breeding, printing, chemistry, and sculpture.

### Chang'an—The Heart of Tang Culture

- At its high point in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., Tang China was a geographically vast empire consisting of 50 or 60 million subjects. This period is also commonly regarded as one of the cultural pinnacles of Chinese civilization.
- One of the characteristics of the Tang empire was that it possessed an unusual number of large cities. The Tang capital of Chang'an (modern Xi'an) was probably the largest city in the world, with a population that may have approached one million people. It was also a highly cosmopolitan, cultured, diverse place that drew artists, merchants, students, and pilgrims from all corners of Asia.
- The city encompassed some 30 square miles, and was surrounded by a strong wall made of packed earth and pierced by 12 gates. Taking up much of the northern quadrant was a great walled complex. This was the Imperial Palace and Imperial City, home of the emperor and his court. If you were an ordinary resident of the capital, you could never set foot within these precincts.

- The remainder of Chang'an was given over to commercial, residential, and religious structures. Just inside the main eastern and western gates were two great marketplaces. The city formed the eastern terminus of the Silk Road, so trade goods from all over the world poured into it. Arabs, Indians, Jews, Turks, Japanese, Tibetans, Cambodians, Vietnamese, and others all mingled in the markets.
- The southern sections of the city were residential neighborhoods laid in grid patterns. Each ward was surrounded by its own miniature earthen wall. At sunrise and sunset, drums were beaten announcing that the gates were being opened or closed, and these rhythms marked the start and end of the business day for many of the city's inhabitants.
- The main streets were also laid out in a grid. The largest of these, labeled the Avenue of the Vermilion Bird, was over 300 feet wide and served as the boundary between the eastern and western halves of the city.
- Near the Eastern Market could be found a number of schools where hopeful students feverishly prepared to take the civil service examinations. Restaurants, inns, taverns, and brothels also clustered in this district. Many of the patrons of these establishments were the young men studying for the exams.
- Religious schools, institutions, temples, and shrines abounded in the city and were scattered throughout it. One Japanese visitor reported that there were 300 Buddhist temples in the capital, and a particularly large Buddhist monastery occupied the entire southwest corner. The city hosted at least three dozen major Daoist sites plus buildings serving the adherents of Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam.

## Tang China's Economy

- Cities such as Chang'an served as points of stimulus for the economy. An increase in China's agricultural and industrial production, including iron casting, silk processing, porcelain manufacture, and the newly discovered craft of papermaking, stimulated a brisk trade along the Grand Canal, the Silk Road, and the sea.
- Trade led to the development of Tang civilization's most characteristic trait: an openness to other cultures. The Tang are considered among the most outward-looking of all Chinese dynasties.
- Other nations sent tribute to the Tang court, including animals. Foreign music and musicians were extremely popular. Tea, originally from Southeast Asia and used primarily for medicinal purposes, grew widely available and became China's national drink. Another new item, the chair, likely came from the Middle East.
- Two of the most famous Tang obsessions were exotic horses and flowers. Emperor Xuanzong had over 40,000 horses in the imperial stables, and he even had paintings made of his favorites. In fact, there were artists who specialized in nothing but horse portraits. Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of this horse obsession was the emperor's dancing horses.
- Foreign-bred horses were also employed as part of another hugely popular import from Persia: polo. Tang paintings depicting these polo matches reveal that sometimes women played alongside men. The quality of one's polo horses and trappings functioned as a status symbol.
- Tang pursued a craze for flowers, especially peonies. Every year, at the time of peony blossoming, hordes of carriages bearing China's elites would descend on places renowned for their peony gardens. Individuals competed to cultivate the most luxuriant blossoms and acquire plants that produced unusual colors.

- Such luxury hobbies were supported by a vibrant economy. The Tang economy was highly regulated. The government had monopolies on salt, liquor, and tea. It controlled grain shipments from the Yangtze Valley to the capital, and employed licensing to put a stop to illegal business practices.
- The innovation of long-distance credit was fostered by the increased trade (especially in tea) between northern and southern China. Bills of exchange known as “flying money” could be used to pay for goods throughout China. State-run public granaries stockpiled excess grain to prevent famine in times of bad harvests.
- Among the scientific developments of the period were gunpowder, wood-block printing, water pumps, a forerunner to the magnetic compass, and the use of coal as a heating fuel.
- In the fine arts, painting, poetry, and music thrived. The arts were avidly pursued by educated dilettantes as well as professional artists. The practice of calligraphy made a poem as beautiful to look at as it was to listen to.
- Of the thousands of known Tang era poets, several are especially renowned. Du Fu, a socially conscious Confucian, wrote anti-war poems and worried about man’s cruelty to man. Li Bo often struck a less serious note, but his poetic persona could also be antiauthority, idealistic, romantic, and occasionally melancholy.
- While we know the names of famous painters from this time, very few examples of Tang painting managed to survive, except for a few wall paintings in tombs. The most common surviving Tang art objects are the beautiful glazed pottery figurines often found in tombs.
- While some poets gave themselves up to indulgence in physical pleasures and fine living, others believed that artistic creation and physical suffering went hand in hand. The common thread that links all of these disparate artists together is the intensity of their passion for their creative activity, whatever the accompanying lifestyle might be.

## Suggested Reading

Benn, *China's Golden Age*.

Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How did the relative openness of Tang China to outside influences contribute to the cultural and intellectual flourishing of the Tang era?
2. How does the description of the physical layout and districts of the Tang capital of Chang'an reflect various core aspects of Tang culture?

# The Rise and Flourishing of Islam

## Lecture 45

From its surprising origins among the nomads of the Arabian Desert, Islam spread rapidly through spectacular military conquests during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates oversaw a powerful dynasty where culture, trade, and learning flourished. At its greatest extent, Islamic dominance reached the border of modern Spain and France in the west, the Indian states in the east, pressed against the walls of Constantinople in the north, and reached into sub-Saharan Africa to the south. In those southern African regions, it encountered the developing kingdoms of Axum and Ghana.

### Out of the Desert, a Kingdom

- Despite all the disruptions of the previous centuries, in the year 600, the Mediterranean world remained a place of great empires. In the former Roman West were a number of barbarian kingdoms; in the Mesopotamia was the Sassanian Empire, heir to the Persians and Parthians; and in between was the Byzantine Empire.
- A set of seminomadic desert tribes had lived in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries. These peoples, sometimes called Arabs or Bedouins, lived a hard life on the edges of civilization. They were proud, clannish, aloof, pagan, and possessed no overarching political organization but instead clumped into small familial groupings.
- Within 100 years of their conversion to the last of the three great monotheistic religions to arise from the Mediterranean basin, however, these nomads would sweep out of the desert, toppling kingdom after kingdom, until they had conquered fully half the Mediterranean world.

- In the process, they would permanently shatter the former unity of that world, spin its constituent parts onto divergent paths, and establish religious, linguistic, and cultural boundaries that still exist today.

## The Origins of Islam

- This remarkable conquest begins with an unlikely source: a middle-aged businessman who lived in the town of Mecca at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This man began roaming the wilderness, often meditating in a cave.
- There, in 610, he experienced a vision in which the angel Gabriel appeared to him and taught him a revelation from God. Over the next 20 years, more than 100 further revelations followed, and these collected lessons became known as the Qur'an.
- The religion established by Mohammed advocated a stark form of monotheism in which the primacy of God as the one and only deity was stressed and nothing was allowed to come between God and the worshiper. Acknowledgment of God's omnipotence and submitting oneself to his will were all-important; this concept is reflected in the word "Islam" itself, which means "submission."
- Mohammed identified God (in Arabic, Allah) as the same God who was worshiped by the Jews and the Christians. Biblical figures such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were venerated as human prophets who had received earlier divine revelations. Mohammed was the last in this long line of prophets who had been granted the fullest and most accurate version of God's message.
- Early Islam had little formal church structure, with no equivalent of priests or other intercessors between God and his worshipers. Islam stressed that each person would have to stand alone before God and be judged. The Islamic concept of heaven was a paradise of lush green gardens with lots of water—the very opposite of the harsh desert they lived in.

- Islam is based around a set of moral injunctions similar to those found in Judaism and Christianity as well as the Five Pillars of the faith: (1) that Allah is the only god, and Mohammed is his prophet; (2) to pray five times every day while facing Mecca; (3) to fast during the holy month of Ramadan; (4) to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in your life; and (5) to give alms to the poor and assist the needy.
- Mohammed's teachings were initially not very popular among the urban populace of Mecca. Rising tensions with these people peaked in 622, so he and his followers fled to the nearby city of Yathrib, now called Medina, meaning "city of the Prophet." This event is known as the Hejira, literally "the flight." It marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.
- Islam took hold among the hardy Arab tribes of the surrounding desert. Under the leadership of Mohammed's four caliphs (or successors), the tribes exploded into the Mediterranean world and conquered vast territories. In a sense, these expeditions were a continuation on a grand scale of the raids that had always been part of the lifestyle of these desert nomads.

## Islam Becomes an Empire

- Egypt fell to these raids in 642, and the southern Mediterranean coast, encompassing what is today Libya and Tunisia, soon followed. The entire Middle East was overwhelmed. Syria and Mesopotamia were overrun, and the Sassanian Empire was toppled. Jerusalem, the most sacred city in Christendom, fell in 636.
- Over the next several generations, the Umayyad caliphate pushed even further, capturing North Africa through the modern borders of Morocco, crossing the straits of Gibraltar and seizing the Spanish Peninsula. The frontier extended into central Asia to the borders of India.

- In the eastern Mediterranean, the great wave of conquest slowed and eventually stopped by the stubborn resistance of the Byzantine Empire, culminating in the defeat of a Muslim naval expedition before the walls of Constantinople in 717. In France, the Battle of Tours in 732 fixed the high water mark of invasion in the west.
- In a little more than 150 years, these campaigns had fundamentally changed the map of the world, creating new political, religious, linguistic, and ethnic boundaries.
- One special weapon that gave the Muslim armies an edge, particularly in the desertlike regions of North Africa and the Middle East, was the camel. Able to go almost a week without water and carry heavy loads long distances, it could traverse dry terrain in which horses would falter and die.
- These conquests benefited from their timing. The Byzantines and Sassanians had exhausted one another over centuries of conflict and were thus unable to mount an effective or strong defense, and many of the other states around the Mediterranean were weak and disorganized.
- As conquests go, these invasions were relatively non-destructive. Islamic lords were generally tolerant of other religions and left most existing social and political structures in place; they simply took over the top level of administration and collected taxes.
- The Umayyadic capital of the Islamic world was moved from Mecca to Damascus. The Umayyads would not get to enjoy their empire for long. They were overthrown and replaced by the Abbasids around 750.

## Baghdad—The Cultural Capital of Islam

- The Abbasids were Persian converts to Islam, and with their ascendancy, the capital of the Islamic world shifted eastward. The new capital city of Baghdad was founded in 762. The lone survivor of the Umayyads escaped to Spain, where he established a cultural center at Cordoba that would thrive for another three centuries.
- Baghdad's location, in a well-irrigated, fertile farming region where important trade routes intersected, allowed it to grow rich and flourish. Goods and ideas from all over the known world arrived and were then passed on to Europe and other parts of Asia. Islam spread along the trade routes.
- Crops from far-flung places, such as rice, sugar cane, lemons, watermelons, spinach, and cucumbers, were planted in this agriculturally productive area and became part of the Muslim diet. Later, the Crusaders would bring some of these foodstuffs back to Europe, from where they eventually diffused throughout the Americas.
- Surplus food fueled rapid population growth and urban expansion. By 900, Baghdad had developed into one of the world's largest cities. Its cosmopolitan atmosphere was enhanced by the presence of many foreign traders, who were shown tolerance by the Abassid rulers and allowed to practice their own religions.
- A large Jewish community arose there, and Persians, many of whom attained high-ranking government posts, exerted a strong influence. Sophisticated economic tools such as banks, joint-stock companies, and bills of exchange (or checks, another Arabic word) further encouraged investment and trade.
- In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, papermaking was brought from China, which was a crucial step in the diffusion of ideas and scholarship. The manufacture of paper also meant that copies of the Qur'an could be more readily produced, further helping to spread Islam.

- Libraries and universities were established in most large cities. The University of Al-Azhar in Cairo became so renowned that it served as a model for some of Europe's medieval universities.
- The Abbasid caliphate, which lasted for several hundred years, is often regarded as constituting an Islamic golden age. Knowledge, scholarship, and science were highly prized and encouraged. Islamic scholars preserved the intellectual heritage of prior civilizations, both eastern and western, including Egypt, Persia, and classical Greece and Rome.
- Muslim scholars excelled at the synthesis of their ideas with knowledge derived from ancient Greece, Persia, and India. Medicine was pursued with particular zeal. Hospitals, medical schools, and pharmacies were established, and the state required that doctors pass exams before they could legally practice medicine.
- Persian scholar Ibn Sina (or Avicenna) took the writings of ancient Greek physicians such as Hippocrates and Galen and combined these texts with the medical knowledge of the Islamic world. Translated into Latin, this became the primary medical text used in Europe through the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- Observatories allowed Muslim astronomers to make detailed observations of the sky, and which honed the accuracy of their calculations of the solar year's length and their predictions of eclipses. Alchemists established the first chemical laboratories.

## The Growing Civilizations of Africa

- Even after the initial wave of conquests was over, Islam continued to spread, often along trade routes. This was particularly true in parts of Africa, where the first large, urbanizing kingdoms began to appear in sections of Africa outside of the narrow corridor stretching along the Nile.

- Central and southern African cultures had been heavily influenced by the Bantu migrations, which began around 500 B.C. Most African cultures shared a seminomadic lifestyle that combined slash-and-burn agriculture with some herding and advanced iron-working skills.
- The most notable early sub-Saharan African kingdom was Axum, which arose near the mouth of the Red Sea around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Geographically positioned to control the Red Sea trade, it was also a point from which Mediterranean and Eastern merchants could access the goods of Africa, such as ivory, frankincense, myrrh, and slaves.
- At exactly the same time when the Constantine was converting to Christianity, the king of Axum also became a Christian—in this case, the Coptic form of the religion practiced in Egypt.
- In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic conquests began to push the declining Axum empire away from the rich coastline. Axum was displaced to the highlands of the interior, where it continued to flourish for several more centuries.
- In western Africa, the most important rising kingdom was Ghana, based in the upper Niger River Valley (not in the same location as the modern Ghana). It seems it began developing as early as the late 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and reached a peak in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.
- The foundation for its wealth was gold, and it enjoyed control over some of the richest mines in Africa. By 800, it was a large, powerful kingdom with several substantial cities. Gold was exchanged with the Mediterranean via trade routes and caravans that crossed the Sahara.
- Muslim merchants crossed the Sahara, transporting loads of precious gold, ostrich feathers, ivory, and animal hides. Ghana would be followed in the next few centuries by other powerful mercantile West African kingdoms, such as Mali, which ruled the fabled markets of Timbuktu.

## Suggested Reading

Brockopp, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*.

Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How do the basic tenets of Islam compare with other religions we have observed such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Confucianism?
2. What similarities and differences are there in the achievements and attitudes of the Islamic Golden Age compared with those of the Tang at the same time?

# Holy Men and Women—Monasticism and Saints

## Lecture 46

Christianity dominated almost every aspect of life in medieval Europe. During late antiquity, one of medieval Christianity's most important institutions was formed in the deserts and forests of the Mediterranean: monasticism. In its earliest form, it was an ascetic, individual movement whose practitioners were not unlike the Upanishadic monks of India. Later, under the guidance and rule of Saint Benedict, communal monasticism took on the form that persisted throughout the Middle Ages and is familiar to Christians today.

### Saint Jerome—Between Two Worlds

- Before Islam came onto the scene, the late antique Mediterranean world was one in which many religions, cultures, and ethnicities uneasily coexisted and competed with one another. In such a fluid and liminal time, individuals often found themselves slipping back and forth between various worlds.
- One such individual was Jerome, the son of a wealthy Christian family on the northern Roman frontier in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. He received a thoroughly traditional Roman classical education and was particularly enamored of Cicero but was troubled by whether or not it was possible to be a good Christian while admiring the intellectual achievements of pagans.
- In his late 20s, he had a dream or vision in which Christ appeared before him, and asked, “Who are you?” He answered that he was a Christian, to which Christ declared “You lie! You are a Ciceronian, not a Christian!” This incident prompted a rededication to his religion.

- Jerome spent much of the rest of his life applying the linguistic skills acquired in his classical education to religious writings. He learned Hebrew and Greek and translated the Old and New Testaments of the Bible into Latin. This version, known as the Vulgate, became the standard text used in Europe during the Middle Ages and thus formed the basis of the modern Bible.

## The Desert Monks

- By the end of the Middle Ages, hundreds of thousands of men and women all over Europe would be living in monasteries and convents as monks and nuns. Thus, monasticism constitutes not just a religious movement but also one of the largest and most important social and economic developments of the period.
- Although today we think of monasticism as a form of communal living, this is not how the phenomenon began. The original monks were individuals who sought to separate themselves completely from other human beings.
- The story of monasticism starts in late 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Egypt with a young man named Anthony, another young Christian from a wealthy family. He focused on the passages of the Bible where Christ gives direct instructions to his followers, specifically Matthew 19.21: “Go, sell all that you have, give to the poor … and follow me.”
- Anthony took this directive literally, gave away his wealth, donated it to the poor, and wandered out into the fierce Egyptian desert to give himself over to a life of prayer and extreme asceticism. He would ultimately spend 70 years out in the desert, at one point living in complete isolation for 20 years.
- Anthony’s deeds proved to be an example that many others would be inspired by and would emulate. In fact, the very extremeness of his actions, especially the sensational way in which he dwelled alone in poverty in the inhospitable desert, ended up making him famous. People started to seek him out to ask his advice or to get his blessing.

- Three times he moved deeper into the desert seeking isolation, but the more extreme his lifestyle grew, however, the more his fame increased. Later followers would take certain elements of his example and intensify them even more.
- Thus was born the ascetic movement, in which monks practiced severe fasting and enduring conditions of excessive heat and cold. The monk in the desert is quite analogous to the Upanishadic forest hermit or the Jain or Buddhist ascetic.
- For some European monks, it was not much of a leap to reason that if the body was a negative thing that distracted you with its desires, then perhaps it should not merely be ignored, but instead actively punished.
- The eastern Mediterranean and Syria had a reputation as the home of some of the most spectacularly dedicated ascetics. Simeon Stylites was determined to escape the crowds of admirers who kept pestering him. He eventually climbed up a 60 foot pillar to live in a basket set atop it for 37 years. His actions inspired a fad of other pillar sitters.
- The monastic movement spread across the Mediterranean. One source notes that, by the early 400s, there were supposedly nearly 20,000 women in Egypt alone pursuing this lifestyle.

### Communal Monks and the Rule of Benedict

- As time went on, the authority that these men and women gained by virtue of their dedication to their faith led them to assume important roles in local communities. Some embraced this leadership role and took over some of the traditional functions of the pagan oracles—curing diseases, averting droughts, putting curses on the wicked, bestowing blessings on the devout, and fighting against the forces of evil.

- Tension developed between the monk's desire to live alone and devote himself or herself to spiritual contemplation and the obligations many of them felt to help their local communities. The solution to these contradictory impulses of isolation and service would be found in Italy in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.
- There lived a man named Benedict who, like Anthony, came from a wealthy Roman family. He wandered off into the remote highlands along Italy's mountainous spine and attracted followers and advice seekers.
- Instead of attempting to flee further into the wilderness, he decided to create a new type of society that was organized around religious principles. At Monte Cassino, which had been the location of a pagan temple, he established a community of monks living and praying together rather than as individuals.
- There had already been some attempts at communal monasteries in the eastern Mediterranean, but Benedict added a document called the Rule of Benedict that laid out the guidelines for how the community would run and how the monks would spend each minute of their lives.
- This would prove to be an incredibly influential document over subsequent centuries. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people would have their lives ordered by Benedict's Rule or similar monastic rules.
- Benedict's monastery was, in a sense, an early attempt at a utopian society. It was conceived as a classless zone—the monks were supposed to all be equals. The one exception was the leader, known as the Abbot. He had sweeping powers to enforce discipline, but he was also accountable to God for his own sins and those of all the monks under his management.

- On a day-to-day basis, monks devoted themselves to manual labor in the fields of the monastery, to contemplation and prayer in their cells, and to communal worship. They engaged in prayer at seven appointed times of the day and night.
- Initiates who wished to join the community had to take a series of vows, including ones of chastity, humility, poverty, and obedience. All private property was forbidden. For clothing, they wore simple robes fastened with a piece of rope.
- Meals were basic, with no more than two cooked dishes and a pound of bread sufficing for the entire day. Red meat was banned, except for the sick or very weak.
- The centerpiece of the Rule is a series of directions called the 12 Degrees of Humility. These include a number of obvious basic injunctions relating to obedience and simplicity of lifestyle and religious practices like confession of their sins to the Abbot.
- The Degrees of Humility go on to discourage not merely speech, but laughter; enforced low self-esteem; and forbidding the exercise of free will. The emphasis is on conformity and obedience. The group mattered more than the individual, and the monks were meant to be anonymous, obedient, unthinking cogs in a smoothly running machine.
- One could make a good argument that, of all the societies that we have studied in this course, the one that was most similar in structure to the monastery was that of ancient Sparta. As monasticism developed, different orders of monks and nuns evolved, each with its own slight variations in practices.
- While monasteries started out as islands of poverty, over time, they began to amass wealth, as well-meaning people donated items or land to their local monastery. Due to the increased wealth, the lifestyle in some monasteries lost a bit of its harsh, ascetic quality.

## The Cult of the Saints

- Although monasticism was perhaps the most widespread religious movement of the Middle Ages, another important phenomenon was the cult of the saints. Many martyrs of early Christianity, as well as holy men such as Anthony and Benedict, became elevated to sainthood. They were seen as accessible figures to whom one could pray for assistance or guidance.
- This in turn gave rise to the idea of patron saints, by which certain professions, places, or problems became associated with specific saints who were seen as specialists in solving particular problems.
- An offshoot of the cult of saints was the cult of relics, in which objects connected either with saints or with the life of Christ became the focus of veneration. The most common relics were bones of saints, and soon every church was competing to acquire a finger of Anthony, a rib of Bernard, or a thigh bone of Catherine.
- All of these religious movements and figures vividly testify to the vibrancy and creativity of Christianity during this early formative period. From this point, at least in Europe, Christianity would continue to hold a dominant place in life for the next 1,000 years.

### Suggested Reading

Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Which version of monasticism—the solitary life of the desert hermit such as Anthony or the communal existence of Benedict’s monks—best embodies the directive of Christ that inspired them?

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2. In what ways do you think life as a monk according to the Rule of Benedict and the Spartan social system of training hoplites are similar, and in what ways are they fundamentally different?

# Charlemagne—Father of Europe

## Lecture 47

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The first great European empire to arise after the fall of Rome in the West was the empire of the Frankish king Charlemagne. Charlemagne was truly a larger-than-life personality whose many accomplishments included military conquests, excellent diplomatic relations with the Roman Catholic Church and the caliphs of Baghdad, and sponsoring an intellectual and artistic renaissance. His kingdom, like that of many great rulers we have studied, did not long outlast his reign, but in many ways he truly built the foundations of the Middle Ages.

### Building an Empire, Step by Step

- In Europe by about 750 A.D., the wave of Islamic conquest had been stopped. Europe now consisted of dozens of smallish kingdoms ruled over by various barbarian peoples. One of these nations was a group known as the Franks, from whom the modern country of France got its name.
- It would prove to be the Franks who would give rise to the first great empire of the Middle Ages. The Franks had a series of strong kings who aided their rise. Among these, the most important dynasty was the Carolingians. The pivotal figure was a man named Charles the Great—in Latin, Carolus Magnus, known today as Charlemagne.
- Charlemagne was an effective warlord, and he expanded the borders of the Frankish Empire. He did not suddenly annex huge territories through enormous, set-piece battles. Instead, he practiced incremental warfare. He set a limited goal for each campaign, acquired only the targeted area, and consolidated it into his kingdom.

- He took the field nearly every year, year after year, and he tended to keep what he had conquered. It has been estimated that, over the course of his lifetime, Charlemagne personally led no fewer than 54 distinct military campaigns.
- By the time of his death, Charlemagne's kingdom encompassed most of the modern countries of France, Germany, Belgium, and significant portions of Italy, the largest empire seen in Europe for the next 900 years.
- These campaigns typically employed around 8,000 soldiers. Compare this to some of the epic battles of ancient Rome, India, and China, which could number up to 100,000 troops per side. This reflects a general trend, as we move from the classical era to the Middle Ages, of everything being on a reduced scale.
- While perhaps not as flashy as someone like Alexander the Great, Charlemagne was an extremely competent general who won victory after victory. Given his overall record, it is a bit unfair that the most famous battle associated with him was a defeat.
- In 778, he led an army into Spain at the invitation of one Arabic leader to fight against another. The expedition proved unsuccessful, but as his army was retreating across the Pyrenees, the rearguard protecting the baggage train was ambushed by local Basque tribes and massacred.
- In military terms, this was an insignificant if unfortunate incident, but it has attained fame all out of proportion to its importance because it became the subject matter for one of the first great works of medieval literature, *The Song of Roland*.

## From Classical to Medieval Europe

- The warfare of the Carolingian era can be regarded as marking the rise to dominance of the heavily armed and armored horseman over infantry. This is a trend that would culminate later in the Middle Ages in the figure of the knight, completely encased in plate armor.
- Charlemagne's administration prefigured elements of feudalism. The basic government system was a hereditary monarchy, with the king, at least in the abstract, wielding total power. In practice, his empire consisted of 300 administrative districts. Each was ruled by a count.
- Each count was like a miniature king responsible for ruling the territory and collecting taxes. The counts were obligated to provide the king with troops. In certain frontier regions, Charlemagne established districts called marches, which served as buffer zones.
- Charlemagne seems to have been successful, on the whole, at keeping his counts loyal. To bolster this loyalty, he had a system of personal envoys who circulated around his empire. They kept an eye on the counts, and the counts could use them to relay their concerns back to Charlemagne. These envoys were known as *missi dominici*, or literally, “messengers of the lord king.”
- Charlemagne appears to have been a devout Christian, and he was careful to cultivate a good relationship with the pope and the religious establishment. He both constructed and restored a number of churches and other ecclesiastical buildings, and he encouraged his subjects to tithe a part of their income to the Church.
- When the Pope became entangled in an internal dispute at Rome, Charlemagne actively supported him. The payback for these actions came on Christmas Day, 800, when Pope Leo III personally crowned Charlemagne and bestowed upon him the title “Charles Augustus, Emperor of the Romans.”

- In this act, the three strands of Roman history came together to form the early medieval world: A Christian pope crowned a barbarian king and gave him a Roman title. It is also a measure of how powerful a grasp the image of the Roman Empire retained on the European political landscape.
- From this point on, Charlemagne was indisputably the greatest leader in Western Europe, and other kings sent representatives and offerings to acknowledge his status. So eminent had Charlemagne become that even the caliph of Baghdad, who was a much more powerful ruler, sent gifts to Charlemagne.

## The Carolingian Renaissance

- Charlemagne was a generous and enthusiastic patron of the arts. This period is sometimes termed “the Carolingian Renaissance.” The focal point of his labors was the capital he established for his empire in the city of Aachen, today located in Germany.
- Charlemagne liked to refer to Aachen as the New Rome. The city was an old Roman one that had been laid out on a grid pattern derived from Roman legionary camps.
- Charlemagne’s architect, a man named Odo of Metz, retained this basic layout and constructed a number of buildings within it. Of these, the only one that survives today was Charlemagne’s chapel, known as the Palatine Chapel.
- At the other end of the palace from the chapel was the great council hall, which was modeled after a Roman basilica. Nearby was another reminder of the Roman past: an old Roman bath complex renovated for Charlemagne’s use.
- Fueling the Carolingian Renaissance were the intellectuals whom Charlemagne invited to reside in Aachen from all over Europe. Charlemagne also promoted education, and he established a number of schools, mostly limited to clergy.

- Thousands of manuscripts were meticulously inked by hand by Carolingian monks and scribes. A large portion of extant Greek and Latin classical texts only survive because the perishable originals were copied by Carolingian monks during this era.
- Above all, they produced copies of the Bible and other writings important to Christianity. These manuscripts were not only intellectual treasures, but they soon developed into works of art as well. The monks drew pictures and decorations in the margins. Such adorned texts are called illuminated manuscripts, and over 8,000 of these survive from Carolingian monks.
- The copyists of Charlemagne's time wrote on parchment, made from sheepskin, as they did not know about paper and the Muslim conquest of Egypt had cut off the supply of papyrus. To produce a single copy of the Bible in the largish size that was common at the time took somewhere between 300 and 400 sheep.

## **Charlemagne the Person**

- Later monarchs, especially in France and Germany, would look back to Charlemagne as a model of the ideal king, in the way that the later Roman emperors were always comparing themselves to and emulating Augustus.
- One of the main sources for Charlemagne's life is a biography written about him by a man named Einhard. Einhard was a courtier at Aachen, and he knew Charlemagne personally.
- Einhard's biography is quite hagiographic in tone, and he is obviously giving us an idealized version. Recent scholarship has challenged the veracity of portions of this text, but nevertheless, it provides some intriguing details.

- One thing that may have contributed to Charlemagne's success as a leader was his physical appearance. At 6'3", a height that was supposedly confirmed by an examination of his bones, he looked like a king, exuding dignity and eliciting respect.
- In addition to swimming and warfare, he delighted in horseback riding and hunting, both of which the Franks were expert in. Once again, we find this link between hunting and royalty that we first saw among the Assyrians.
- He seemingly took pride in his Frankish heritage, since he was known to wear the native Frankish costume, consisting of a linen shirt and pants, a bordered tunic, leggings, and an otter-skin vest, and carried a sword at all times.
- While he plainly projected a tough, manly image, especially among the Franks, he also embraced learning and intellectual pursuits, not just as a patron but also as a practitioner. He was a skilled public speaker, made an effort to learn foreign languages, and even acquired some understanding of Greek and Latin. He enjoyed befriending foreigners, whom he entertained lavishly at his court. Thus, although he was proud to be a Frank, he also cultivated a cosmopolitan, worldly atmosphere around him.
- Charlemagne's great European empire did not persist for long after his own lifetime. It seems to have been his personal charisma and abilities that held it together.

### Suggested Reading

Barbero, *Charlemagne*.

Riché, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne*.

Story, ed., *Charlemagne*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How would you assess and compare the methods used by Charlemagne as an empire builder to those of Philip of Macedon and Chandragupta?
2. How did various aspects of Charlemagne's personality contribute to his success as a king?

# Endings, Beginnings, What Does It All Mean?

## Lecture 48

In the West, we have followed the history of global civilizations through the Islamic conquests and the first true European empire as represented by Charlemagne. In the East, we have traced developments through the Tang dynasty of China. So why does this course end here, and how does the ancient world help us understand the world we live in today? Simply put, the 9<sup>th</sup> century was the moment of transition, when the world was set on the course to become our modern world. Yet many of the ancient developments we have examined are still with us today.

### The Historian's Crystal Ball

- If you were a historian living sometime in the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D., which states do you think would seem likely to emerge as dominant powers in the future?
  - In India, you would see numerous squabbling dynasties, none of which could gain a foothold over the other.
  - In North and South America, you would find many culturally complex societies limited by a Stone Age level of technology.
  - In Africa, large kingdoms were only starting to emerge.
  - Looking at Europe, you would probably be impressed by the substantial empire momentarily created by Charlemagne, but Europe was also sliding into the long era of technological and economic stagnation.
  - The Byzantine Empire recalled the past accomplishments of the Roman empire, but it was clearly a civilization on the decline.

- Tang China would have appeared a geographically enormous yet culturally united empire of seemingly unlimited potential.
- The intellectual glories of Baghdad would have clearly placed that city at the vanguard of scientific and technological advancements and unstoppable military forces.
- We tend to look at history through the lens of hindsight and to see its course as inevitable, but to someone able to survey the 9<sup>th</sup> century world without knowing what came next, surely he or she would assumed that only China or the Muslim Near East could become a dominant global power.

### **Europe's Unlikely Hegemony—The Pirenne Thesis**

- As we know, the territory that actually achieved this was Europe. As late as the early 1400s, China continued to hold the inside track. Enterprising Chinese admirals began voyages of exploration well before European navigators.
- All this changed when the ill-advised isolationist policies of the Hongxi emperor in the mid-1400s abruptly put a stop to these expeditions and turned the focus of China inwards, with disastrous effects.
- Similarly, the lead gained during the great era of intellectual and scientific flourishing of classical Islamic civilization in Baghdad was frittered away when the Islamic world lost its unity through infighting among rival political powers.
- One view of how Europe became a distinct region in its own right and how it freed itself from its long subordination to the cultures of the Mediterranean was the theory of a brilliant Belgian historian of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century named Henri Pirenne.

- Pirenne was a prominent historian who was writing a multivolume history of his country when World War I intervened and he was incarcerated by the Germans. During his incarceration, he devised the Pirenne thesis, later published in a book called *Mohammed and Charlemagne*.
- Before Pirenne, most historians had used the supposed fall of Rome to Germanic barbarians in 476 as the dividing line between antiquity and the Middle Ages. The Pirenne thesis proposed that the real moment of rupture occurred when the Arabic conquests split the Mediterranean into two halves—a northern Christian one and a southern Islamic one.
- Pirenne's thesis was actually based less on religion than on economics. He argued that the Islamic conquests effectively cut off the north-south and east-west trade that up until then had linked together all the shores of the Mediterranean.
- The takeover of the Western Roman Empire by barbarian kingdoms was not as important as had been assumed, according to Pirenne, because the barbarian tribes simply adopted and imitated most aspects of Roman culture and did not disrupt trade across the Mediterranean.
- The really clever part of Pirenne's thesis, however, was the way in which it explained subsequent European history. Throughout antiquity, the most important developments had all happened around the shores of the Mediterranean. The Arabic conquests broke the unity of the Mediterranean and in so doing shattered the coastal regions' domination over the hinterlands.
- Those once-subordinate regions were free to develop themselves. So it was that the Franks, a thoroughly Europe-based and inland empire, could only rise to power once Europe was no longer held in thrall to the Mediterranean-based Roman Empire.

## Does Pirenne's Thesis Hold Up?

- Consider the location of the region's great cities before the Arabic conquests: Constantinople, Alexandria, Rome, Carthage, Antioch, and Alexandria—all coastal. The capital cities of the first empires that arose after 700—Baghdad and Aachen—are hundreds of miles from the coast of the Mediterranean, and both empires were oriented inland. The situation is similar for London, Paris, Florence, Madrid, Damascus, and Cairo.
- The Islamic conquests separated what used to be one world into three separate worlds—Europe, Africa, and the Middle East—situated on three different continents. Each of these new worlds now turned their backs on the Mediterranean Sea.
- The six-word formulation of Pirenne's thesis is “Without Mohammed, Charlemagne would have been inconceivable.” Pirenne is suggesting that, if Mohammed had never come along and sparked the Arabic conquests, then Europe would have remained merely an adjunct to the Mediterranean.
- Pirenne's thesis was immediately influential and also immediately controversial. The part of his thesis that has fared most poorly is probably his contention that the Islamic conquests killed most of the trade in the Mediterranean in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. More recent scholarship has shown that while Europe was indeed cut off from some goods, but there was still much that was being bought and sold across this boundary.
- What remains a powerful and compelling argument is his underlying assertion regarding the shattering of the unity of the Mediterranean and the subsequent individual reorientation of Europe, Africa, and the Near East inwards on themselves.

- The cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries that shape the world we live in were laid down at this key moment. The modern borders between the countries around the Mediterranean that are Christian, versus those that are Muslim, are almost exactly those established in the 8<sup>th</sup> century
- The same goes for those countries that speak Arabic, as opposed to one of the Romance or Germanic languages. Only one country that was part of the initial Arabic conquests is not an Arabic-speaking, Muslim country today—Spain, which in 1492, after 800 years of occupation, expelled the Moors. But Spain is really the exception that proves the rule.
- Today, Charlemagne is widely hailed as the founder of Europe as a discrete entity. But if Pirenne was right, then perhaps it would be more correct to say that the real father of Europe was not Charlemagne but Mohammed.
- Most courses on the ancient world tend to end with the supposed fall of the Roman Empire. By extending this course into the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the formation of Charlemagne's empire, we can fully perceive not only the true end of the ancient world, but also the crucial formation and birth of the modern one, with the major national, linguistic, cultural, and religious boundaries that we see around us today already established.
- The focus on the formation of Europe is not meant as an endorsement of a Eurocentric view; it is simply an acknowledgement of the global impact that the era of European colonization in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries would exert on the history of the entire world. Whether you view that influence as positive or negative, there is no denying that it happened.

- Ending the course in the 9<sup>th</sup> century allows us to see how all the main areas of the world initially developed and, in most cases, evolved the distinctive culture or cultures that still characterize those regions today. We are able to directly connect that world with the modern one, but that world still constitutes a distinctly different one from our own.
- The ancient world is still alive and around us in everything that we do and in everything that we are. The influence of the ancient world is present in our modern customs, religions, laws, art, architecture, games, calendars, superstitions, education, clothing, buildings, foods, jobs, holidays, entertainments, governments, and beliefs.
- If you want to understand who you are, and why you do the things you do, in the way that you do them, you have to know about the ancient origins of the beliefs, institutions, and cultures that shape your life.

### Suggested Reading

Havighurst, ed., *The Pirenne Thesis*.

Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe*.

Marcus and Sabloff, eds., *The Ancient City*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Do you agree or disagree with the Pirenne thesis and why?
2. In what ways has this course on ancient history given you a better understanding of the world we live in today?

## Timeline

### B.C.

- c. 3100 BC ..... Sumerian Civilization begins; first cities in Mesopotamia develop; Narmer (a.k.a. Menes) unites Upper and Lower Egypt and becomes the first pharaoh.
- c. 3000–1500 ..... Indus Valley civilization; Austronesians spread from Asia into Oceania.
- 2686–2181 ..... Egypt's Old Kingdom.
- c. 2630–2611 ..... Imhotep designs the Step Pyramid of Zoser.
- c. 2560 ..... Great Pyramid of Khufu completed.
- c. 2400 ..... Sargon establishes the Akkadian Empire and the concept of the Near Eastern god-king.
- 2181–2041 ..... Egypt's First Intermediate period.
- 2040–1782 ..... Egypt's Middle Kingdom.
- c. 2000 ..... Aryan migrations out of south-central Asia
- c. 2000–1600 ..... Babylonian Empire; Code of Hammurabi; Epic of Gilgamesh written.
- c. 2000–1200 ..... Minoan civilization in Crete.

- c. 2000–1000..... Construction of Cerro Sechin in Peru.
- c. 2000 B.C.–250 A.D..... Pre-classical period of Mayan civilization in Mexico and Central America.
- c. 1800..... Aryans reach India.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium..... Hebrews establish the states of Israel and Judah; Old Testament formulated.
- 1782–1570..... Egypt's Second Intermediate period; Hyksos tribe gains control in Egypt and Egyptians copy their war chariots.
- c. 1700–1500..... Cities of the Indus Valley civilization are abandoned.
- c. 1600–1100..... Mycenaean civilization in mainland Greece.
- c. 1600–1150..... Shang dynasty in China.
- 1570–1075..... Egypt's New Kingdom.
- c. 1500..... Volcanic eruption of the Aegean island of Thera.
- c. 1500..... Lapita culture settles in Melanesia.
- c. 1500–1200..... High point of the Hittite Empire.
- c. 1500–600..... Vedas, Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Upanishads are composed in India.
- c. 1500–500..... Aryan and Vedic eras in India.

- c. 1279–1212 ..... Reign of Pharaoh Rameses II.
- 1274 ..... Battle of Kadesh—Pharaoh Rameses II versus the Hittites.
- c. 1200 ..... Phoenicians create a coastal empire on the western Mediterranean; Shang civilization has domesticated horses and light, spoke-wheeled chariots.
- c. 1200–1100 ..... Major Mycenaean sites are destroyed.
- 1200–800 ..... Dark Ages in Greece.
- c. 1200–400 ..... Olmec civilization in Mexico.
- c. 1200–300 ..... Chavín culture in Peru.
- c. 1150–221 ..... Zhou dynasty in China.
- 1075–332 ..... Egypt's Third Intermediate period.
- c. 1000 and 600 ..... Life of Zoroaster (Zarathustra), Persian religious leader.
- c. 900 ..... Lapita culture reaches western Polynesia.
- c. 900–600 ..... Assyrian Empire.
- 8<sup>th</sup> century ..... Greeks rediscover writing; cities and trade revive; population increases rapidly.
- c. 800–400 ..... Upanishads collected.

- c. 800 B.C.–391 A.D. .... Delphic Oracle is in continuous operation in Greece.
- 776..... First Olympic Games held.
- 753..... Traditional date for the founding of the city of Rome; starting point for the Roman calendar.
- 753–509..... Era of the Roman monarchy.
- c. 750..... Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* written down; Carthage founded.
- 750–650..... 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty—the Kushite pharaohs rule Egypt.
- c. 750–550..... Era of colonization in Greece.
- c. 700–509..... Etruscan civilization dominates Italy.
- c. 700–500..... Era of questioning and challenging tradition in India, China, Persia, and Greece.
- c. 650–500..... Archaic style of Greek sculpture.
- c. 626–539..... Babylonian Renaissance; the New Babylonian Empire; the Chaldean Empire; the Hanging Gardens of Babylon; the Tower of Babel; the Ishtar Gate; astrology.
- c. 600..... Emergence of Ionian rationalists and pre-Socratic philosophers; earliest coins minted in Lydia.

- 6<sup>th</sup> century..... Life of Lao Tzu, to whom the origins of Daoism are traditionally traced.
- 594..... Athens chooses Solon to make reforms.
- c. 563–480..... Life of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha.
- 551–479..... Life of Confucius.
- c. 550..... Mahavira founds Jainism in India.
- c. 550–330..... Persian (Achaemenid) Empire.
- c. 525–456..... Life of Aeschylus, first great Greek tragedian.
- c. 522–486..... Reign of Darius I; construction of the tribute procession relief at Persepolis, Persia.
- 509–31..... Roman Republic.
- 508..... Cleisthenes sets up the first real democracy at Athens.
- 5<sup>th</sup> century..... High point of ancient Greek civilization; classical style of Greek sculpture.
- c. 500..... Bantu migrations begin in Africa.
- c. 500–221..... Warring States period in China; era of the Hundred Schools of Chinese philosophy.
- c. 496–406..... Life of Sophocles, the second great Greek tragedian.

- 490.....Battle of Marathon.
- c. 490–430.....Life of Zeno of Elea,  
founder of Stoicism.
- c. 484–425.....Life of Herodotus.
- c. 485–406.....Life of Euripides, third  
great Greek tragedian.
- 480.....Persia invades Greece; Battles  
of Thermopylae and Salamis.
- c. 469–399.....Life of Socrates.
- c. 460–395.....Life of Thucydides.
- mid-5<sup>th</sup> century .....Golden age of classical  
Athens; the Athenian Empire  
at the height of its power.
- 431–404.....Peloponnesian War.
- c. 427–347.....Life of Plato.
- c. 412–323.....Life of Diogenes, the  
most famous Cynic.
- 4<sup>th</sup> century.....Life of Daoist philosopher Chuang Tzu.
- 4<sup>th</sup> century–3<sup>rd</sup> century.....Emergence of Legalism in China.
- 399.....Trial and death of Socrates.
- 384–322.....Life of Aristotle.
- 358–336.....Reign of Philip II, king of Macedon.

- 356–323..... Life of Alexander the Great.
- c. 341–270..... Life of Epicurus, founder of Epicureanism.
- 334..... Alexander invades Persia; Battle of Granicus.
- c. 325–265..... Life of Euclid.
- 323–31..... Hellenistic era.
- c. 322–300..... Reign of Chandragupta Maurya in India.
- c. 322–184..... India's Mauryan Empire.
- 305..... Chandragupta Maurya and Seleucus, Alexander's one-time general, sign a peace treaty.
- c. 3<sup>rd</sup> century..... Rise of the sub-Saharan African kingdom of Axum.
- c. 300..... Polynesians reach the Cook Islands and Tahiti.
- c. 300 B.C.–300 A.D..... Mexico's Colima culture.
- c. 287–212..... Life of Archimedes.
- 269–232..... Reign of Asoka in India.
- 264..... Rome captures the last remaining independent Italian city.
- 264–241..... First Punic War.

- 259–210..... Life of China’s first Qin emperor, Shi Huangdi.
- 219–201..... Second Punic War.
- 216..... Battle of Cannae.
- 206 B.C.–220 A.D..... China’s Han dynasty.
- 206 B.C.–9 A.D..... Early (or Western) Han dynasty.
- c. 200 B.C.–800 A.D..... Mexico’s Teotihuacán civilization.
- 184..... Last Mauryan king is murdered and the Mauryan Empire falls apart.
- c. 145–86..... Life of historian Sima Qian.
- 141–87..... Reign of Wudi, China’s “Martial Emperor.”
- 133–31..... Late Roman Republic.
- 133..... Tiberius Gracchus elected Roman tribune.
- 123..... Gaius Gracchus elected Roman tribune.
- 106–48..... Life of Roman statesman Pompey the Great.
- 100–44..... Life of Julius Caesar.
- 91–88..... Social War between Rome and its Italian allies.
- 31..... Battle of Actium.

	<b>A.D.</b>
31 B.C.–14 A.D.	Reign of Augustus as the first Roman emperor.
31 B.C.–476 A.D.	Roman Empire.
14–37	Reign of Roman emperor Tiberius.
25–220	Later (or Eastern) Han dynasty.
c. 33	Crucifixion of Jesus.
c. 33–57	Ministry of Saint Paul.
37–41	Reign of Roman emperor Caligula.
41–54	Reign of Roman emperor Claudius.
54–68	Reign of Roman emperor Nero.
64	Great Fire of Rome.
c. 64	Buddhism reaches China.
69–79	Reign of Roman emperor Vespasian.
81–96	Reign of Roman emperor Domitian.
2 <sup>nd</sup> century	Reigns of the Five Good Emperors (the Antonines); high point of the Roman Empire.
98–117	Reign of Roman emperor Trajan.
c. 100–800	Peru's Moche culture.

- 113..... Dedication of the Column of Trajan.
- 117–138..... Reign of Roman emperor Hadrian.
- 122..... Construction of Hadrian's Wall begins Britain.
- 161–180..... Reign of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius
- 180–192..... Reign of Roman emperor Commodus.
- 193–211..... Reign of Roman emperor Septimius Severus.
- 200–600..... The period of late antiquity in Europe.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> century..... Period of China's Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove.
- 221–589..... Era of the Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties of China.
- 224–651..... Sassanian empire
- c. 250–900..... Classic period of Mayan civilization.
- c. 251–356..... Life of Saint Anthony Abbot
- 284–305..... Reign of Roman emperor Diocletian.
- c. 285..... Saint Anthony begins the monastic movement.
- 306–337..... Reign of Roman emperor Constantine.

- 312.....Conversion of Constantine to Christianity.
- 324–1453.....Byzantine Empire.
- c. 325.....King of Axum (northern Ethiopia) converts to Christianity.
- c. 347–420.....Life of Saint Jerome.
- c. 5<sup>th</sup> century.....The Avesta, the holy book of Zoroastrianism, is written down.
- 410.....Visigoths capture and sack Rome.
- 434–453.....Attila rules over the Huns.
- 455.....Vandals capture and sack Rome.
- 476.....Romulus Augustulus, the last Roman emperor in the West, is deposed.
- 480–547.....Life of Saint Benedict
- c. 6<sup>th</sup> century.....Block printing developed in China.
- c. 500.....Polynesians reach Easter Island and Hawaii.
- 527–565.....Reign of Byzantine emperor Justinian; code of Roman law is compiled.
- c. 529.....Saint Benedict establishes the first Christian monastery at Monte Cassino.
- c. 570–632.....Life of Mohammed.

- 589–618..... China’s Sui dynasty.
- 609..... First version of China’s Grand Canal is completed.
- 618–907..... China’s Tang dynasty.
- 622..... The Hejira—Mohammed flees from Mecca to Medina; year 1 of the Islamic calendar.
- 626–649..... Reign of Chinese emperor Taizong.
- 632–738..... Arabic (or Islamic) conquests.
- 661–750..... Umayyad caliphate.
- 690..... Empress Wu usurps China’s imperial throne.
- 712–756..... Reign of Chinese emperor Xuanzong; the golden age of the Tang era.
- 717..... Defeat of the Muslim naval expedition at the walls of Constantinople.
- 732..... Battle of Tours stops the Muslim expansion towards the West.
- 738..... Rajahs of northern India stop Muslim expansion to the East.
- 750–1517..... Abbasid caliphate.
- 751..... Arabs defeat the Tang at the Battle of Talas.

- 762.....Baghdad is founded as the capital of the Abbasid caliphate.
- 768–814.....Reign of Charlemagne.
- 786–809.....Reign of Harun al-Rashid.
- 800.....Charlemagne crowned Holy Roman emperor by the pope.
- c. 865–925.....Life of al-Rāzī (a.k.a. Rhazes).
- c. 980–1037.....Life of Ibn Sīnā (a.k.a. Avicenna)
- 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.....Decline of classical Mayan civilization.
- 1453.....Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II captures Constantinople.
- 1492.....The Reconquista: Spain expels the Moors; Columbus reaches the Americas.
- 1687.....Parthenon, being used for gunpowder storage by Ottoman Turks, blows up.
- 1806.....Lord Elgin takes the Parthenon sculptures to Britain.
- 1806.....Last Holy Roman Emperor is deposed by Napoleon.
- 1827.....Charles Masson discovers the ruins of the Indus Valley civilization.
- 1899.....Sir Arthur Evans discovers the Palace of Knossos on Crete.

- 1917.....Last tsar is deposed by the Russian Revolution.
- 1924.....Howard Carter discovers Tutankhamen's tomb
- 1952.....Michael Ventris deciphers Linear B
- 1974.....The six Yang brothers discover Qin Shi Huangdi's terra-cotta warriors.

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Thapar, Romila. *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*. Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. An updated edition of an old but classic book by an influential Indian historian. Particularly strong on Asoka's edicts.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Early India from the Origins to AD 1300*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002. Up-to-date overview of civilizations in India. Goes beyond the ancient period, but contextualizes it well.

Thompson, J. Eric S. *Maya History and Religion*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970. Detailed study that is particularly strong on Mayan mythology and religious beliefs.

Thorp, Robert. *China in the Early Bronze Age: Shang Civilization*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. Solid account of Shang history and culture.

Twitchett, Denis, ed. *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 3: Sui and T'ang China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979. A somewhat dated but comprehensive account of this period in Chinese history. A good reference work.

Twitchett, Denis, and M. Loewe, eds. *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Exhaustive (if somewhat dry) account of Han history, with an emphasis on political and religious history. Weaker on social and cultural history.

*Upanisads*. Translated by Patrick Olivelle. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Recent translation of the text, with commentary.

Waldron, Arthur. *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Excellent, comprehensive survey about not only the Great Wall but also earlier Chinese defensive walls. Particularly strong on debunking popular myths about the Great Wall.

Ward-Perkins, Bryan. *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. An engaging book that sparked the most recent round of debates over the fall of the Roman Empire by arguing that there indeed was a destructive decline. A good starting point for the entire debate, since it reviews earlier perspectives.

Warren, Allen M., Fritz M. Heichelheim, and Cedric A. Yeo. *A History of the Roman People*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2009. College textbook that provides a solid and up-to-date survey of all aspects of Roman history and culture.

Warren, James. *Presocratics*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. Narrative account of the main Pre-Socratic philosophers and their beliefs.

Whitby, M., ed. *Sparta*. New York: Routledge, 2001. A collection of scholarly essays on Sparta. Addresses a good cross-section of topics, from military to social.

Whittaker, C. R. *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. A study of the interactions on the Roman frontiers, especially from a social and economic perspective.

Wilber, Donald. *Persepolis: The Archaeology of Parsa, Seat of the Persian Kings*. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1989. Nice popular account of the art and architecture of Persepolis, with good detail on the tribute procession.

Wolpert, Stanley. *A New History of India*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Aging but influential standard survey text on Indian civilization.

Worthington, Ian. *Philip II of Macedonia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. Good, up-to-date biography of Philip.

Wright, Rita. *The Ancient Indus: Urbanism, Economy, and Society*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Up-to-date treatment with focus on urbanism, environment, and economy.

Zanker, Paul. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990. Ground-breaking exploration of Augustus' use of art and architecture as propaganda.