

Chapter 4

Classical Civilization in the Mediterranean: Greece and Rome

I. Introduction

A. Mediterranean culture

1. Greece slowed Persian empire, set up a few colonies, but...
2. Rome known for empire
3. New institutions/values that would remain in western culture
4. "our own" Classical past
 - a. U.S. Constitution
 - b. buildings in the U.S.
 - c. founders of the philosophical tradition
 - d. Socratic method

B. Greco-Roman history

1. more dynamic, but less successful
 - * We can clearly recognize the connections and our own debt without adhering to the notion that the Mediterranean world somehow dominated the classical period.
2. Complicated – passed through two centers
 - a. Rome preserved many of Greek achievements

C. Rome vs. Greece

1. Mighty empire vs. inept/Greek city-states
2. Mastered engineering vs. scientific thought
3. western Europe – Greco Roman vs. Eastern Europe – Greek influence
4. Shared
 - a. political ideas
 - b. common religion
 - c. artistic styles
 - d. economic structures

II. The Persian Tradition

A. 550 BCE Cyrus the Great – massive Persian Empire across Middle East

1. Tolerant of local customs
2. Advanced iron technology
3. Zoroastrianism
4. artistic lifestyle
5. Conquered by Alexander the Great
6. Persian language and culture survived into the 20th century

III. Patterns of Greek and Roman History

A. Greece

1. Crete – showed Egyptian influence by 2000
 - a. Monumental architecture
2. 1400 Mycenae – kingdom Trojan War

- a. Indo-Europeans destroyed until 800 – Dark Ages
- 3. Rise from 800-600 strong city-states
 - a. tyrant or aristocratic council
 - b. divided by mountains
 - 1. unified government difficult
 - 2. trade developed
 - c. written language came from Phoenician alphabet
 - d. regular celebrations
 - 1. athletic competitions – Olympic games
 - e. Sparta/Athens rose to the top
 - 1. Sparta – military tradition dominated slaves
 - 2. Athens – commercial state, slaves, artistic/intellectual

leadership

- 3.
- 4. 5th century – Democracy in Athens
 - a. Pericles - most famous political figure
 - 1. No official position, but influence/negotiation
 - b. each citizen participated
 - c. eventually Spartan/Athenian war weakens both sides
 - 1. Peloponnesian Wars – weakened Greece
 - a. Philip II of Macedon came down and took over
 - b. Alexander the Great then kept going to Persia
 - 1. 13 years of conquests – 33
 - 2. Successor kingdoms ruled for centuries
 - 3. Hellenistic period – Greek art/culture merges
 - 4. Trade flourished
 - 5. Scientific centers – Alexandria
 - 6. Greece decline, but legacy carries on

B. Rome

- 1. Started under control of monarchy in 800 – defeated in 509
- 2. Roman republic expanded
 - a. Always fear of invaders, keep extending boundaries
 - b. Across Sicily, conflict with Carthage
 - 1. Leads to Punic Wars – 3 of them
 - a. Bloody defeat by Hannibal – through Gaul
 - b. 3rd Punic War – salted fields – agriculture
- 3. Republic replaced by powerful generals
 - a. Caesar first to “Cross the Rubicon” – 45 BCE
 - b. August Caesar takes over in 27 BCE – after rivalry following assassinat
 - 1. Pax Romana – basic structure for Roman Empire
 - a. Until 180 CE Marcus Aurelius – peace to Medit. World
 - b. Empire expanded to Britain
 - c. Gradual fall until 476 when invaders took over

1. economic deterioration – trade loss
2. population loss – declining birth rates
3. government less effective – couldn't take care of empire
4. unable to take over more land to finance empire
5. too spread out – undefendable
4. Diocletian Reforms
5. Constantine – 313 adopts Christianity
6. After the fall
 1. Governments became local in Western Europe – can't control/order
 2. Roman armies needed foreign recruits – why are we fighting again?

IV. Greek and Roman Political Institutions

A. Introduction

1. Politics crucial – polis – Greek city-state – similar to China
 - a. "Good life" included political service, military
2. Did not try to administer local regions
3. Unlike China, never had single set of political institutions/bureaucracy/emp
4. Like India diverse forms
 - a. Monarchy – not preferred – tried to abolish
 - b. Individual strongman – tyranny – quite common – some effective

B. Greece – demos – the people

1. General assemblies – all vote – direct democracy – not a republic
2. Executive officers chosen by lot – similar to jury duty
3. ½ citizens – slave/foreigners – women excluded > 25% participate
4. Negatives of democracy – Peloponnesian Wars
 - a. Lower class citizens want power – recommend stupid military choices
5. Most preferred – aristocratic assemblies – aristocracy – rule of the best

C. Rome

1. Constitution – relied on aristocracy – election of magistrates
2. Senate – held executive offices – two consuls shared power – public speaking
 - a. Dictator during emergencies
3. Ample political theory – Cicero main guy
 - a. Political ethics
 - b. Duties of citizens
 - c. incorruptible service
 - d. key political skills – oratory
 - e. Diff. than China – not so much on hierarchy, obedience, bureaucracy
4. Roman Empire – preserved Senate – relatively useless
5. Local autonomy prevailed – accept times like Jewish rebellion 63 CE
 - a. tolerance local customs, religion
6. Strong military organization
7. Well-crafted laws – Twelve Tables 450 BCE – restrain upper class
 - a. Rules, not personal whim, should govern people
 - b. regulated property, commerce

- c. similar to Chinese bureaucratic structure
- 8. Focused on law courts, military force
 - a. Not so much on commerce, but...
 - b. Rome...roads, harbors – military transport, commerce
 - c. Public baths, stadiums – “bread and circuses”
- 9. Supported official religion – civic festivals, but not imposed
 - a. Religions tolerated as long as didn’t conflict with state
 - 1. Problem w/ Christianity, state not first

D. Key elements

- 1. Localism, political focus, diversity of political systems, aristocracy, law
- 2. Lacked specific individual rights, instability showed system was flawed

V. Religion and Culture

A. Religion

- 1. Christianity spread, but not a product of Christian/Roman Culture
- 2. Greco-Roman religion – nature > gods and goddesses
 - a. Different names/interacted w/ mortals/whims/soap opera
 - b. Patrons of nature/human activities
 - c. god stories used to illustrate human passions/foibles – literature
 - d. lacked spiritual passion – lower class attracted to “mystery religions” M. East
 - e. Upper class – didn’t allow for method systematic inquiry
- 3. Many thinkers/philosophers searched for explanations/model for ethical behavior
 - a. Aristotle – Golden Mean – balance
 - b. Stoics – moral independence – discipline/personal bravery
 - c. Socrates – question – accused of undermining – poison
 - d. Plato – understand three forms – True, Good, Beautiful
 - e. Importance – human ability to think, not human spirituality
 - f. Similar to Confucianism, but more skeptical and focused on abstract questions

B. Rational inquiry

- 1. Few inventions, many theories, classification
 - a. Many theories wrong
 - b. Some geometry, anatomy, incorrect astronomy
- 2. Romans more practical – engineering – roads/aqueducts

C. Art and literature – far more important

- 1. Official religion inspires artist expression – temples, statues
- 2. Realistic depiction of human form
- 3. Poetry, music, dance – not as preserved
- 4. Drama – comedy and tragedy – trilogy – focused on human flaws
 - a. Sophocles – Oedipus complex
 - b. Not just for upper class
 - c. Romans known more for athletic performances – charioteers/gladiators
- 5. Greek literature – epic tradition – Homer – Iliad/Odyssey – links

mythology/history

6. Sculpture – heroic/realistic tradition
7. Architecture – columns – Doric, Ionic, Corinthian – classical architecture
 - a. Rome – dome/stadium – heavily adorned public buildings/monuments

VI. Economy and Society

- A. Tendency for large landowners to squeeze out small farmers > feudalism later
 1. Much tension comes from farmers trying to keep independence, get out of debt
 2. Difficulty in farming – geography, topography
 - a. Forced olives, grapes – but these need capital, patience – 5 years

landlord

3. Commercial agriculture led to need for empire
 - a. Supervised grain trade, public works, storage facilities
 - b. Manufactured products less advanced – exported animals/skins,

metals

- B. Merchants – better in Mediterranean than China, but ambiguous
- C. Slavery – key component – agriculture – from military expansion
 1. Free farmers couldn't compete w/ slave/tenant labor
 2. Hurt technological innovation – behind India/China in production technology
- D. Tight family structure – women inferior/diff. laws – not as bad as China, but infanticide
- E. Not the period of “human race was most happy or prosperous” – idealized in Western

world

1. Urban achievements not everything

VII. The Fall of Rome – fell in parts, not all at once

- A. No central religion
- B. Classical Mediterranean life not fully carried on

VIII. Global connections

1. Outsiders as barbarians
2. Alexander the Great expanded
3. some Romans saw Greek literature/philosophical focus as a waste of time
4. Rome expanded to Germanic tribes – trade/war
 - a. Tolerant of local customs, but built Roman monuments
5. Believed there was little to learn from beyond their own borders

IX. Classical Mediterranean in Comparative Perspective

1. China, India, Medit. All have agricultural economy, empires
 - a. Secular Medit. similar to Confucian
2. Politics don't speak of deference, bureaucratic training
3. Greeks more into theory
4. Each had social hierarchy and laws to justify/protect upper class
 - a. Aristocracy – India – priests, China – bureaucrats, Medit. – aristocrats
5. Social mobility

- a. India's caste – little
 - b. China – few talented bureaucrats could move up
 - c. Medit. – some non-aristocrats could move up, military
- 6. Lowest class
 - a. India – untouchables
 - b. China – “mean people”
 - c. Medit. – slavery
 - a. Farmers/property important – but scorned manual labor > slavery
- 7. United by different reasons – social unrest, rebellions in all
 - a. India – Hinduism
 - b. Medit. – military force, local authorities
 - c. Chinese – Confucianism – obedience, self-restraint
- 8. China/India more successful in convincing poor of legitimacy of class structure
 - a. Medit. focused on aristocracy, tried to give some political rights to others