

# 5

## Classical Civilizations in the Middle East and Mediterranean

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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

5.1 Why was the rise of Persia such an important development in the early part of the classical period? p. 97

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**It is one of the most** famous stories in history: In 490 B.C.E., the Greeks, under Athenian leaders, defeated a huge Persian army at Marathon. Fear of the Persians had run strong, and news of victory was accordingly sweet. According to legend, a Greek soldier named Pheidippides ran 26 miles to bring the word to Athens and, having delivered the message, collapsed and died. The first modern Olympic Games, in 1896, featured a long-distance endurance race called the “marathon” in memory of that great feat. Pheidippides’ run reminds us not only of a great military victory and strong emotion, but of the Greeks’ powerful devotion to the public good of the cities they loved.



**FIGURE 5.1** This famous statue depicts Pheidippides, the Athenian soldier who, according to legend, ran 26 miles to bring his fellow citizens news of victory at the Battle of Marathon and died as he made the announcement. The 26-mile endurance run was named the “marathon” to commemorate Pheidippides’s heroic feat.

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The Persian invasion of Greece began as a punishment for the revolt of several Greek city-states against Persian rule—a revolt the Persians easily put down. Immediately following the Greek victory at the Battle of Marathon, the Persians tried to attack Athens by sea, but the Athenian soldiers had hurried back to defend their city. Vowing revenge, the Persians returned to Asia.

A new Persian king, Xerxes, took personal charge of the plan to conquer the Greeks. By 480 B.C.E. he had amassed an army and fleet that outnumbered Greek forces by two to one. Many Greek states held back, assuming the Persians would win this time. Even the Greek priests, trying to foretell the future, urged surrender. To make matters worse, a Greek traitor showed the Persians a pass that would lead them to Athens, which was indefensible. Most Athenians were evacuated to an island, where they watched the Persians set fire to their temples on the hill of the Acropolis. But Themistocles, the Athenian leader, realized that the huge Persian navy could not move fast. If it could be led into a narrow strait, where its numbers did not count, it could be defeated. Themistocles sent a slave to trick Xerxes, telling him that the Greeks were quarreling among themselves. Thinking that this was their chance to finish off the Greeks, the Persians rowed into the narrow strait of Thermopylae. There, instead of the divided and weakened opponent they were expecting, they found a united force ready to fight them. Xerxes watched the battle from a hill overlooking the strait, where he had thought he would be able to see and reward the bravest of his warriors. Instead he saw his navy virtually destroyed, and he fled. ■

History is full of might-have-beens. It is important to consider what would have happened if the normal advantage in military strength had prevailed and the Persians had won and what difference this would have made to world history.

One point is sure. The battle highlighted the developments of not one but two major civilizations in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. The classical civilizations that sprang up in Persia and on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea from about 800 B.C.E. until the fall of the Roman empire in 476 C.E. rivaled their counterparts in India and China in richness and impact. Two centers were involved, separately although in contact; briefly merged; then separate once more. Developments in the Middle East and the Mediterranean built directly on precedents established by the river valley civilizations not only in Mesopotamia but in Egypt. But different centers generated different emphases—the nature of Persian politics, for example, differed noticeably from that of Greece; and with Greece and Rome, civilization also extended westward, to other parts of Africa and to southern Europe. Both Persian and Mediterranean civilizations met the criteria of classical civilizations, in relying heavily on territorial expansion and empire and in founding institutions and cultural systems that would wield influence even after the classical period had ended.

A massive Persian empire developed, spurred initially by the kind of outside invasion that had earlier produced various Mesopotamian empires. But the Persian empire grew far larger, illustrating the new capacities of the classical period. Durable political and cultural traditions were established that persisted in and around present-day Iran well beyond the classical period.

Centered first in the peninsula of Greece, then in Rome’s burgeoning provinces, a new Mediterranean culture centered in southern Europe. Although less significant at the time, Greece rebuffed the advance of the mighty Persian empire and established some colonies on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, in what is now Turkey. Rome came closer to conquering the Middle East but even its empire had to contend with strong kingdoms in Persia. Nevertheless, Greece and Rome did not merely constitute a westward push of civilization from its earlier bases in the Middle East and along

2000 B.C.E.      1000 B.C.E.      500 B.C.E.      250 B.C.E.      1 C.E.      250 C.E.

<p><b>1700</b> Indo-European invasions of Greek peninsula</p> <p><b>1400</b> Kingdom of Mycenae; Trojan War</p>	<p><b>800–600</b> Rise of Greek city-states; Athens and Sparta become dominant</p> <p><b>c. 700</b> Homeric epics <i>Iliad</i>, <i>Odyssey</i>; flowering of Greek architecture</p> <p><b>550</b> Cyrus the Great forms Persian empire</p> <p><b>509</b> Beginnings of Roman Republic</p>	<p><b>470–430</b> Athens at its height: Pericles, Phidias, Sophocles, Socrates</p> <p><b>450</b> Twelve Tables of Law</p> <p><b>431–404</b> Peloponnesian Wars</p> <p><b>359–336</b> Philip II of Macedonia</p> <p><b>338–323</b> Macedonian empire, Alexander the Great</p> <p><b>300–100</b> Hellenistic period</p> <p><b>264–146</b> Punic Wars</p>	<p><b>49</b> Julius Caesar becomes dictator in Rome; assassinated in 44</p> <p><b>27</b> Augustus Caesar seizes power; rise of Roman empire</p> <p><b>c. 4</b> Birth of Jesus</p>	<p><b>c. 30</b> Crucifixion of Jesus</p> <p><b>63</b> Forced dissolution of independent Jewish state by Romans</p> <p><b>101–106</b> Greatest spread of Roman territory</p> <p><b>180</b> Death of Marcus Aurelius; beginning of decline of Roman empire</p>	<p><b>313</b> Constantine adopts Christianity</p> <p><b>476</b> Fall of Rome</p>
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the Nile—although this is a part of their story. They also formed new institutions and values that reverberated in the later history of the Middle East and Europe alike.

For most Americans, and not only those who are descendants of European immigrants, classical Mediterranean culture constitutes “our own” classical past, or at least a goodly part of it. The framers of the American Constitution were extremely conscious of Greek and Roman precedents. Designers of public buildings in the United States, from the early days of the American republic to the present, have dutifully copied Greek and Roman models, as in the Lincoln Memorial and most state capitols. Plato and Aristotle continue to be thought of as the founders of the Western philosophical tradition, and skillful teachers still rely on some imitation of the Socratic method. Our sense of debt to Greece and Rome may inspire us to find in their history special meaning or links to our own world; the Western educational experience has long included elaborate explorations of the Greco-Roman past as part of the standard academic education. But from the standpoint of world history, greater balance is obviously necessary. Greco-Roman history is one of the several major classical civilizations, more dynamic than its Chinese and Indian counterparts in some respects but noticeably less successful in others. The challenge is, first, to identify leading features of Greek and Roman civilization and next to compare them with those of their counterparts elsewhere. We can then clearly recognize the connections and our own debt without adhering to the notion that the Mediterranean world somehow dominated the classical period.

Classical Mediterranean civilization is complicated by the fact that it passed through two centers during its centuries of vigor, as Greek political institutions rose and then declined and the legions of Rome assumed leadership. Roman interests were not identical to those of Greece, although the Romans carefully preserved most Greek achievements. Rome mastered engineering; Greece specialized in scientific thought. Rome created a mighty empire, whereas the Greek city-states proved rather inept in empire formation. It is possible, certainly, to see more than a change in emphases from Greece to Rome, and to talk about separate civilizations instead of a single basic pattern. And it is true that Greek influence was always stronger than Roman in the eastern Mediterranean, whereas western Europe encountered a fuller Greco-Roman mixture, with Roman influence predominating in language and law. However, Greek and Roman societies shared many political ideas; they had a common religion and artistic styles; they developed similar economic structures. Certainly, their classical heritage was used by successive civilizations without fine distinctions drawn between what was Greek and what was Roman.

For several centuries, the Persian empire far surpassed Greece in significance, certainly in the Middle East but also in the eastern Mediterranean more generally. The empire also established significant traditions that shaped a strong Persian political and cultural presence, still visible in present day Iran. And the empire generated one of the significant religions in the world history, in Zoroastrianism. The Greek tradition was largely separate, but Greek and Persian influences interacted not only in mutual warfare, but as a result of Alexander the Great’s conquests and his efforts to merge cultural strands in the vast territory that briefly came under his control.

## THE PERSIAN TRADITION

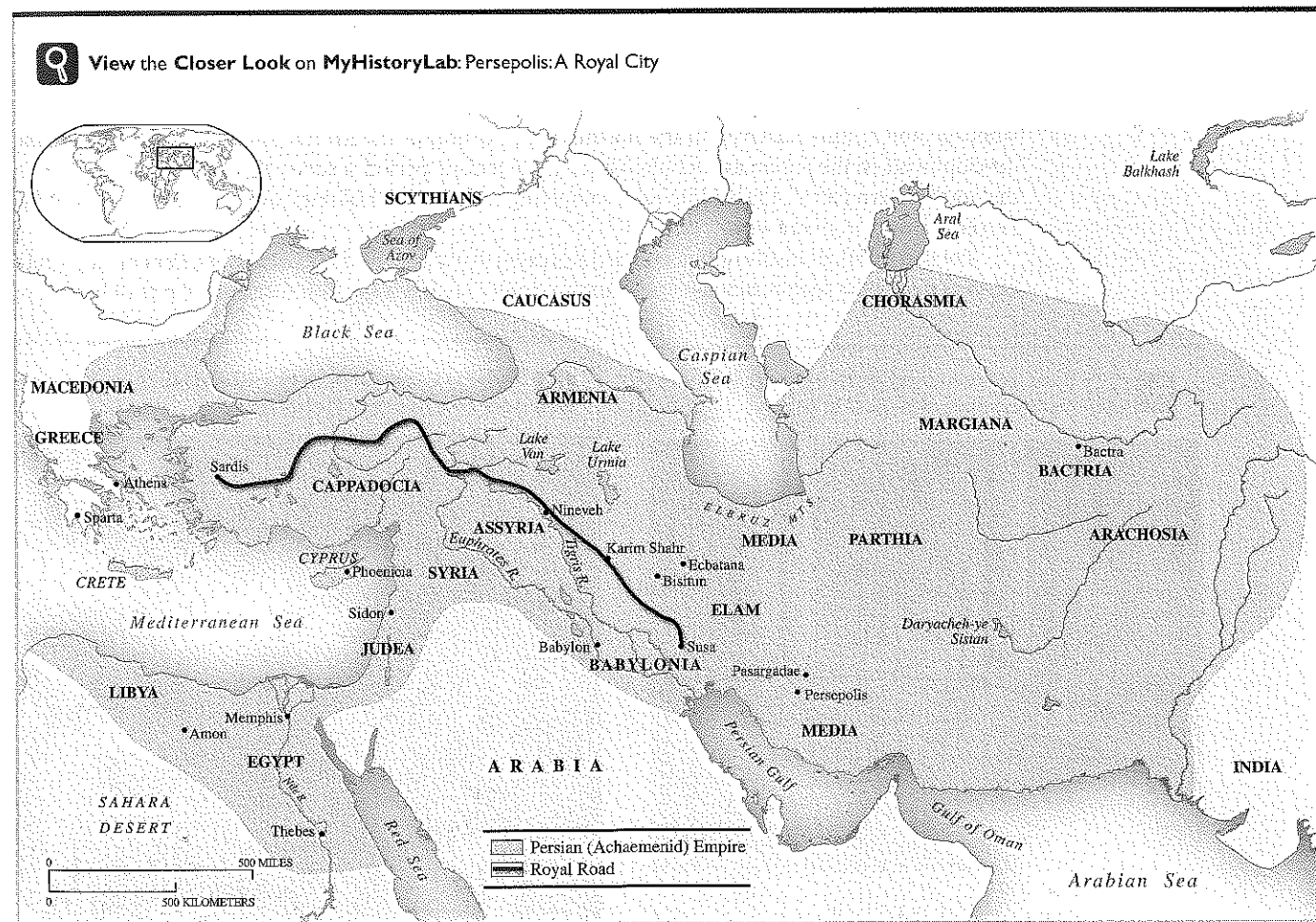
**5.1** Why was the rise of Persia such an important development in the early part of the classical period?

After the fall of the great Egyptian and Hittite empires in the Middle East by 1200 B.C.E., much smaller states predominated the area. Then new powers stepped in, first the Assyrians and then an influx of Iranians (Persians). A great conqueror emerged by 550 B.C.E. **Cyrus the Great** established a massive Persian empire, which ran across the northern Middle East and into northwestern India. The new empire was the clearest successor to the great Mesopotamian states of the past, but it was far larger (Map 5.1). The Iranians advanced iron technology in the Middle East.

Persian politics featured several characteristics, the first of which was tolerance. The Persian empire embraced a host of languages and cultures, and the early Persian rulers were careful to grant considerable latitude for this diversity. Second, however, was a strong authoritarian streak. Darius, successor to Cyrus, worked hard to centralize laws and tax collection. The idea of wide participation in politics was rejected (Figure 5.2). Third, and related to the centralization process, Persian rulers developed a vital infrastructure for the whole empire. A major system of roads reduced travel time, although it still took 90 days to go from one end of the empire to the other. An east-west highway, largely paved, facilitated commerce and troop movement from the Indian border to the Mediterranean, and another highway reached Egypt. The Persians established the first regular postal service, and they built a network of inns along their roads to accommodate travelers. These achievements would help connect the Middle East to trade routes coming from central and eastern Asia, a vital step in the growth of new commercial connections.

The Persians worked quickly to unify their vast empire. Persia established durable political and cultural traditions.

**Cyrus the Great** Established massive Persian empire by 550 B.C.E.; successor state to Mesopotamian empires.



**MAP 5.1 The Persian Empire in Its Main Stages** At its height the Persian empire stretched through much of the Middle East to the shores of the Mediterranean, into Egypt, and into the northeast part of the Indian subcontinent.



Persian emperors, particularly Darius, who worked hard not only to expand but to integrate his vast territories, developed a substantial bureaucracy. This existed alongside earlier military nobility. The central government introduced several measures to control the activities of officials assigned to distant provinces. Tax collection was carefully regulated, and spies were sent out to make sure regional officials remained loyal to the central government, rather than allying with local political forces.

Persia was also the center of a major new religion. A Zoroastrian religious leader, Zoroaster (c. 630–550 B.C.E.), revised the polytheistic religious tradition of the Sumerians through the introduction of monotheism. He banned animal sacrifice and the use of intoxicants. He introduced the idea of individual salvation through the free choice of God over the spirit of evil. Zoroaster, and the growing group of Zoroastrian priests (the *Magi*) saw life as a battle between two divine forces: good and evil. Zoroastrianism emphasized the importance of personal moral choice in picking one side or the other, with a Last Judgment ultimately deciding the eternal fate of each person. The righteous would live on in a heaven, the “House of Song,” while the evil would be condemned to eternal pain. Zoroastrianism influenced Persia’s later emperors and spread widely in the population as a whole. A Greek traveler, Herodotus, noted that the Persian religion was much more spiritual than that of the Greeks, for the Persians did not believe in humanlike gods.

Indeed, the Persian religious influence would prove far greater than that of the Greeks, although Greek culture had wide impact in other respects. Only small groups of Zoroastrians survive in the world today in Iran and through migration in a few other places, including the United States. But the religion retained a wide hold for a considerable period of time and its ideas and beliefs strongly affected Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Religion did not consume all of Persian cultural energies. An important artistic tradition also emerged with distinctive styles of painting and architecture (Figure 5.3).

Later kings expanded Persian holdings. They were unable to conquer Greece, but they long dominated much of the Middle East, providing an extensive period of peace and prosperity. Conquests also extended into North Africa and the Indus River valley. At its height, Persia embraced at least 14 million people. The population of Persia proper (present-day Iran), at 4 million people, had doubled under imperial rule. Ultimately, the Persian empire was toppled by Alexander the Great, a Greek-educated conqueror. Persian language and culture survived in the northeastern portion of the Middle East, periodically affecting developments in the region as a whole. After the Hellenistic period, a series of Persian empires arose in the northeastern part of the Middle East, competing with Roman holdings and later states and reviving Persian identity in many ways.

Persian political institutions strongly impressed Alexander and his successors. Persian art would affect not only the region, but also India and the wider Middle East. Zoroastrianism, one of the major

belief systems of the classical period, would ultimately fade in its competition with Islam, but its hold and influences continued well beyond the classical centuries.

## PATTERNS OF GREEK HISTORY

5.2 What changes occurred between the Greek and Hellenistic periods in the eastern Mediterranean?

### Greece

Even as Persia developed, a new and initially much smaller civilization took shape to the west, building on a number of earlier precedents. The river valley civilizations of the Middle East and Africa had spread to some of the islands near the Greek peninsula. The island of Crete, in particular, showed the results of Egyptian influence by 2000 B.C.E., and from this the Greeks were later able to develop a taste for monumental architecture. The Greeks were an Indo-European people, like the Aryan conquerors of India, who took over the peninsula by 1700 B.C.E. An early kingdom in southern Greece, strongly influenced by Crete, developed by 1400 B.C.E. around the city of Mycenae. This was the kingdom later memorialized in Homer’s epics about the Trojan War. Mycenae was then toppled by a subsequent wave of Indo-European invaders, whose incursions destabilized the peninsula until about 800 B.C.E.

The rapid rise of more complex societies in Greece between 800 and 600 B.C.E. was based on the creation of strong city-states, rather than a single political unit. Each city-state had its own government, typically either a tyranny of one ruler or an aristocratic council. The city-state served Greece well, for the peninsula was so divided by mountains that a unified government would have been difficult to establish. Trade developed rapidly under city-state sponsorship, and common cultural forms, including a rich written language with letters derived from the Phoenician alphabet, spread throughout the peninsula. The Greek city-states also joined in regular celebrations such as the athletic

Greek culture reached its height during the 5th century B.C.E.; its empire spread through the empire of Alexander the Great. Rome was greatly influenced by Greek tradition as it developed its Republic and its empire.



MAP 5.2 Greece and Greek Colonies of the World, c. 431 B.C.E. On the eve of the Peloponnesian War, Greek civilization had spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

**Zoroastrianism** [zohr-oh-AS-tree-uh- NIH-zuhm] Animist religion that saw material existence as battle between forces of good and evil; stressed the importance of moral choice; righteous lived on after death in “House of Song”; chief religion of Persian empire.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: The “Cyrus Cylinder”

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Darius the Great: Ruler of Persia (522 B.C.E.)

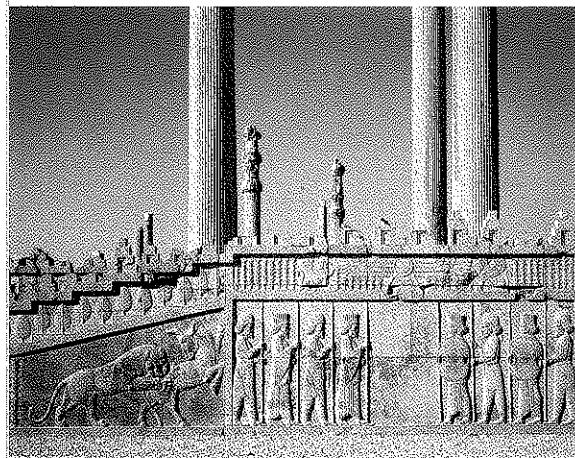


FIGURE 5.2 Using ceremonial styles similar to those of earlier Mesopotamia, the Persian empire celebrated its powerful kings. This wall relief is on the great ceremonial stairway leading to the royal audience hall of Darius and Xerxes.

View the Closer Look on MyHistoryLab: Zoroastrianism: An Ancient Religion in Modern Times

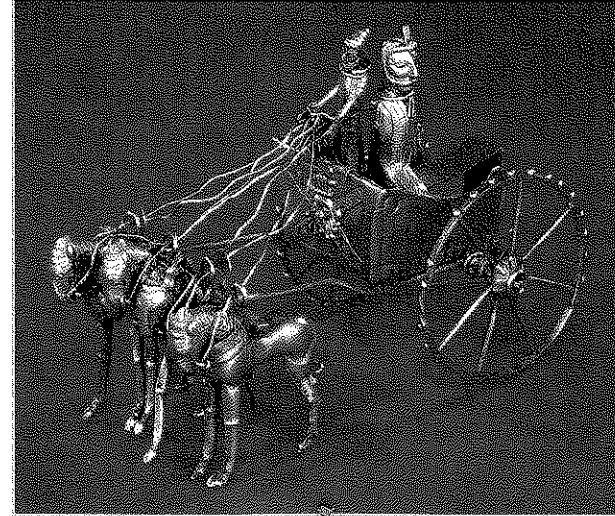


FIGURE 5.3 Persians established a distinct artistic tradition including fine craftwork, as shown in this chariot.

**Olympic Games** One of the pan-Hellenic rituals observed by all Greek city-states; involved athletic competitions and ritual celebrations.

**Pericles** [PEHR-uh-kleez] Athenian political leader during 5th century B.C.E.; guided development of Athenian empire; died during early stages of Peloponnesian War.

**Peloponnesian Wars** [PEL-uh-poh-nee-zhun] Wars from 431 to 404 B.C.E. between Athens and Sparta for dominance in southern Greece; resulted in Spartan victory but failure to achieve political unification of Greece.

**Philip of Macedonia** Ruled Macedonia from 359 to 336 B.C.E.; founder of centralized kingdom; later conquered rest of Greece, which was subjected to Macedonian authority.

competitions of the **Olympic Games**. Sparta and Athens came to be the two leading city-states. The first represented a strong military aristocracy dominating a slave population; the other was a more diverse commercial state, also including the extensive use of slaves, justly proud of its artistic and intellectual leadership. Between 500 and 449 B.C.E., the two states cooperated, along with smaller states, to defeat a huge Persian invasion. It was during and immediately after this period that Greek, and particularly Athenian, culture reached its highest point. Also during this period, several city-states, and again particularly Athens, developed more colonies in the eastern Mediterranean and southern Italy, as Greek culture fanned out to create a larger zone of civilization (Map 5.2).

It was during the 5th century B.C.E. that the most famous Greek political figure, **Pericles**, dominated Athenian politics. Pericles was an aristocrat, but he was part of a democratic political structure in which each citizen could participate in city-state assemblies to select officials and pass laws. Pericles ruled not through official position, but by wise influence and negotiation. He helped restrain some of the more aggressive views of the Athenian democrats, who urged even further expansion of the empire to garner more wealth and build the economy. Ultimately, however, Pericles' guidance could not prevent a tragic war between Athens and Sparta, which depleted both sides. In the **Peloponnesian Wars** (431–404 B.C.E.) the two leading city-states, along with many allies, battled for supremacy, with both sides emerging severely damaged, although Sparta was technically the victor.

Political decline soon set in, along with widespread poverty. Ambitious kings from Macedonia, in the northern part of the peninsula, soon swept through the Greek peninsula. **Philip of Macedonia** won the crucial battle in 338 B.C.E., and then his son Alexander extended the Macedonian empire through the Middle East, across Persia to the border of India, and southward through Egypt (Map 5.3). Alexander the Great's empire was short-lived, for its creator died at the age of 33 after a mere 13 years of breathtaking conquests. However, successor regional kingdoms continued to rule much of the eastern

Mediterranean for several centuries. Under their aegis, Greek art and culture merged with other Middle Eastern forms during a period called **Hellenistic**, the name derived because of the influence of the Hellenes, as the Greeks were known. Although there was little political activity under the autocratic Hellenistic kings, trade flourished and important scientific centers were established in such cities as Alexandria in Egypt. In sum, the Hellenistic period saw the consolidation of Greek civilization even after the political decline of the peninsula itself, as well as some important new cultural developments.

The Hellenistic period also provided an important opportunity for interregional contacts. Greek-Indian interactions in the kingdom of Bactria were unusual for the time. More significant was the further exchange between Greek and Persian traditions and between Greek and Egyptian as well. Alexander himself, marrying a Persian princess, hoped for a fusion of Persian and Greek politics and culture. His political achievements highlighted an authoritarian strain that meshed with Persian precedents. Art and science benefited from creative exchanges among scholars in many parts of the eastern Mediterranean. The advances in science and philosophy that resulted provided a shared intellectual legacy for the whole region, even after the Hellenistic political kingdoms collapsed.

Alexander's conquests highlight the connections between Greece and the Middle East, where a combined heritage would prove influential even under Islam. Relationships could be tense, however. Many Greek military leaders resented Alexander's policy of conciliating the Persians (Alexander even married the daughter of the last Persian emperor). In one passage, in 328 B.C.E., Alexander flew into a drunken rage against one of his best friends, Cleitus, possibly because of the Persian dispute, and actually killed him on the spot—later deeply regretting his impulse.

**Hellenistic** That culture associated with the spread of Greek influence as a result of Macedonian conquests; often seen as the combination of Greek culture with eastern political forms.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Plutarch on Alexander the Great

Greece and Rome were ruled by aristocrats but also introduced some democratic elements. The Roman empire encompassed a huge territory and population.

## PATTERNS OF ROMAN HISTORY

### 5.3 What were the causes of Roman expansion?

The rise of Rome formed the final phase of classical Mediterranean history. At the same time, Rome's advance greatly extended Mediterranean civilization to the west, over a wider stretch of southern Europe as well as North Africa. And Rome added important and distinctive contributions to the Greek and Hellenistic heritage, even as it ultimately subjugated Greece and many of the Hellenistic kingdoms.

The Roman state began humbly enough, as a local monarchy in central Italy around 800 B.C.E. Roman aristocrats succeeded in driving out the monarchy around 509 B.C.E. and established more elaborate political institutions for their city-state. The new **Roman republic** gradually extended its influence over the rest of the Italian peninsula, among other things conquering the Greek colonies in the south. Thus, the Romans early acquired a strong military orientation, although initially they may have been driven simply by a desire to protect their own territory from possible rivals. Roman conquest spread more widely during the three **Punic Wars**, from 264 to 146 B.C.E., during which Rome fought the armies of the Phoenician city of **Carthage**, situated on the northern coast of Africa. These wars included a bloody defeat of the invading forces of the brilliant Carthaginian general **Hannibal**, whose troops were accompanied by pack-laden elephants. The war was so bitter that the Romans in a final act of destruction spread salt around Carthage to prevent agriculture from surviving there. Following the final destruction of Carthage, the Romans proceeded to seize the entire western Mediterranean along with Greece and Egypt.

The politics of the Roman republic grew increasingly unstable; however, as victorious generals sought even greater power the poor of the city rebelled. Civil wars between two generals led to a victory by **Julius Caesar**, in 45 B.C.E., and the effective end of the traditional institutions of the Roman state. Caesar's grandnephew, ultimately called **Augustus Caesar**, seized power in 27 B.C.E., following another period of rivalry after Julius Caesar's assassination, and established the basic structures of the Roman empire.

For 200 years, through the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius in 180 C.E., the empire maintained great vigor, bringing peace and prosperity to virtually the entire Mediterranean world, from Spain and North Africa in the west to the eastern shores of the great sea. The emperors also moved northward, conquering France and southern Britain and pushing into Germany. Here was a major, if somewhat tenuous, extension of the sway of Mediterranean civilization to western Europe (Map 5.4). Rome's overall holdings obviously compare strikingly to the Han empire in China, covering almost the same amount of territory with only a slightly smaller population. Rome handled its empire somewhat differently from the Han, with less centralization, more tolerance of different local political units along with emphasis on common legal principles. In both empires, however, effective government and substantial

**Roman republic** The balanced constitution of Rome from c. 510 to 47 B.C.E.; featured an aristocratic Senate, a panel of magistrates, and several popular assemblies.

**Punic Wars** Fought between Rome and Carthage to establish dominance in the western Mediterranean; won by Rome after three separate conflicts.

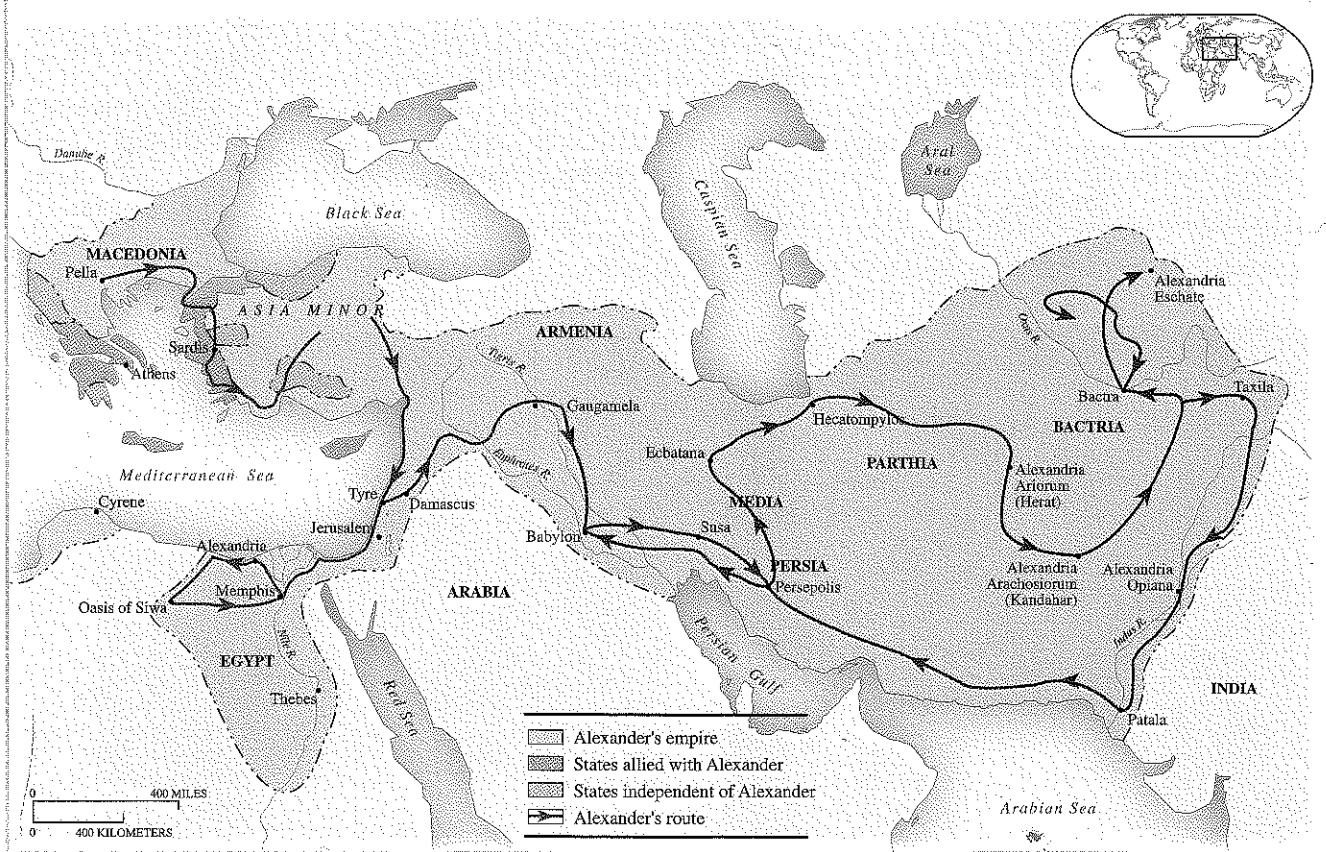
**Carthage** Originally a Phoenician colony in northern Africa; became a major port and commercial power in the western Mediterranean; fought the Punic Wars with Rome for dominance of the western Mediterranean.

**Hannibal** Great Carthaginian general during Second Punic War; successfully invaded Italy but failed to conquer Rome; finally defeated at Battle of Zama.

**Caesar, Julius** Roman general responsible for conquest of Gaul; brought army back to Rome and overthrew republic; assassinated in 44 B.C.E. by conservative senators.

**Caesar, Augustus** (63 B.C.E.–14 C.E.) Name given to Octavian following his defeat of Mark Antony and Cleopatra; first emperor of Rome.

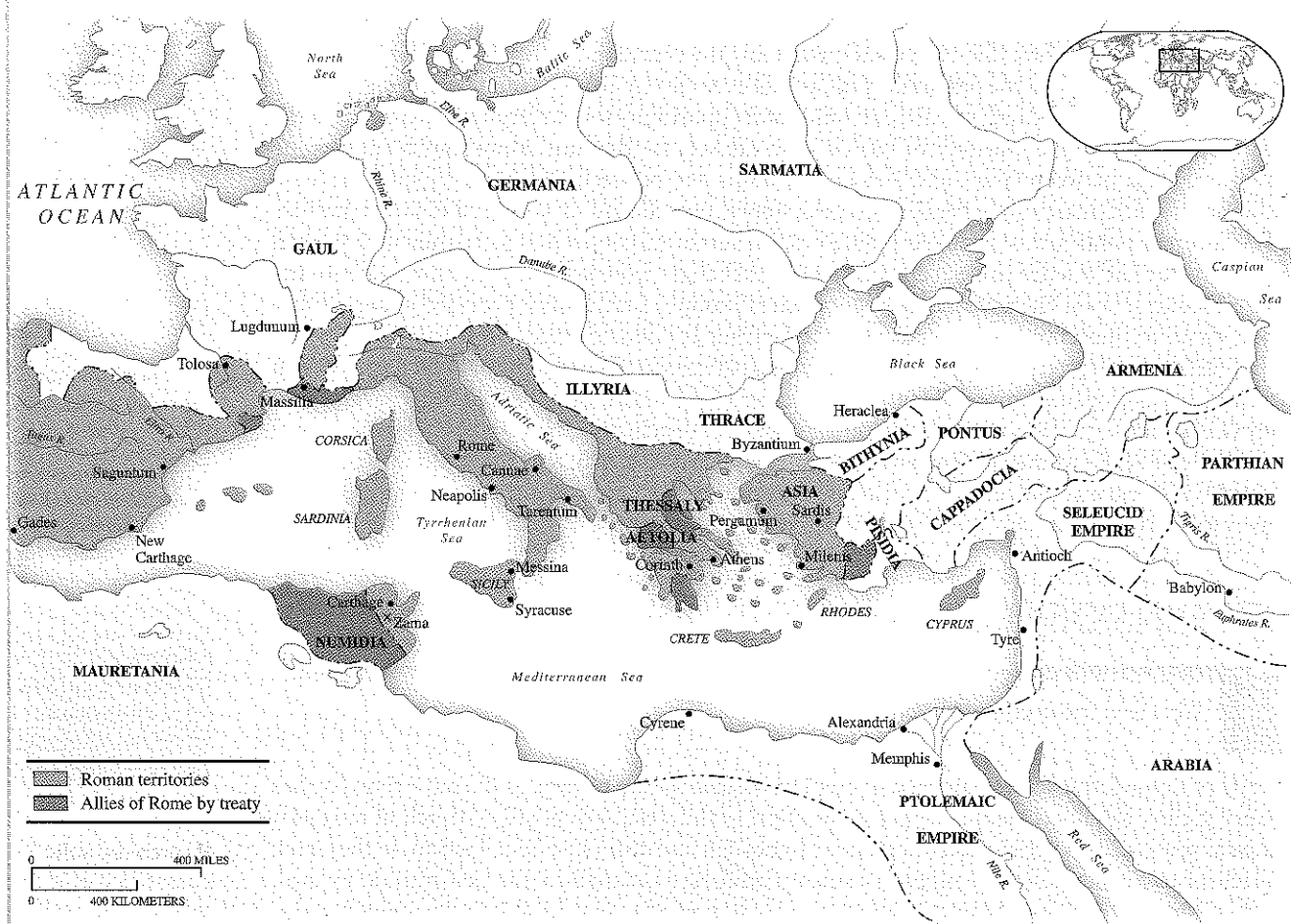
View the Closer Look on MyHistoryLab: Alexander and Darius at the Battle of Issus



MAP 5.3 Alexander's Empire and the Hellenistic World, c. 323 B.C.E. Note the movement through Persia and other parts of the northern Middle East, and into the Indian subcontinent and North Africa.



View the Closer Look on MyHistoryLab: A Roman Warship



MAP 5.4 The Expansion of the Roman Republic, 133 B.C.E. By the end of the Punic Wars, Rome dominated much of the Mediterranean world.

military force helped assure substantial stability and prosperity, creating a striking impression at the time and in later memory.

Roman expansion brought new contacts between Persian and Mediterranean society. A Persian empire, Parthia, had emerged from the fragmentation of Alexander the Great's conquests. Rome at various points, pushing strongly into the Middle East, sought to reconquer this territory. In 113 C.E., Emperor Trajan mounted the most ambitious campaign to invade Parthia, and his victories brought Rome into Mesopotamia and also Armenia. However, internal troubles forced him to pull back and Parthia soon regained considerable territory. Wars with Parthia and its successor, the Sassanid empire, dotted the later history of the Roman empire, with mutually inconclusive results.

After 180 C.E., the Roman empire suffered a slow but decisive fall, which lasted more than 250 years, until invading peoples from the north finally overturned the government in Rome in 476 C.E. The decline manifested itself in terms of both economic deterioration and population loss: both the trade levels and the birth rate fell. Government also became generally less effective, although some strong later emperors, particularly **Diocletian** and **Constantine**, attempted to reverse the tide. It was Emperor Constantine who, in 313 C.E., adopted the then somewhat obscure religion called Christianity in an attempt to unite the empire in new ways. However, particularly in the western half of the empire, most effective government became local, as the imperial administration could no longer guarantee order or even provide a system of justice. The Roman armies depended increasingly on non-Roman recruits, whose loyalty was suspect. Then, in this deepening mire, the invasion of nomadic peoples from the north marked the end of the classical period of Mediterranean civilization—a civilization that, like its counterparts in Gupta India and Han China during the same approximate period, could no longer defend itself.

To conclude: The new Mediterranean civilization built on earlier cultures along the eastern Mediterranean and within the Greek islands, taking firm shape with the rise of the Greek city-states after 800 B.C.E. These states began as monarchies but then evolved into more complex and diverse political forms. They also developed a more varied commercial economy, moving away from a purely grain-growing agriculture; this spurred the formation of a number of colonial outposts around the eastern Mediterranean and in Italy. The decline of the city-states ushered in the Macedonian conquest and the formation of a wider Hellenistic culture that established deep roots in the Middle East and Egypt. Then Rome, initially a minor regional state distinguished by political virtue and stability, embarked on its great conquests, which earned it control of the Mediterranean, with important extensions into the Middle East and into western and southeastern Europe plus the whole of North Africa. Rome's expansion ultimately overwhelmed its own republic, but the successor empire developed important political institutions of its own and resulted in two centuries of peace and glory.

## GREEK AND ROMAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

### 5.4 What are the main issues in defining the Greek and Roman political legacy?

Politics were very important in classical Mediterranean civilization, from the Greek city-states through the early part of the Roman Empire. Indeed, the word *politics* comes from the Greek word for city-state, *polis*, which correctly suggests that intense political interests were part of life in a city-state in both Greece and Rome. Greeks who visited Persia contrasted their political values with the more authoritarian structures of their neighbor. The “good life” for an upper-class Athenian or Roman included active participation in politics and frequent discussions about the affairs of state. The local character of Mediterranean politics, whereby the typical city-state governed a surrounding territory of several hundred square miles, contributed to this intense preoccupation with politics. Citizens believed that the state was theirs, that they had certain rights and obligations without which their government could not survive. In the Greek city-states and also under the Roman republic, citizens actively participated in the military, which further contributed to this sense of political interest and responsibility. Under the Roman empire, of course, political concerns were restricted by the sheer power of the emperor and his officers. Even then, however, local city-states retained considerable autonomy in Italy, Greece, and the eastern Mediterranean—the empire did not try to administer most local regions in great detail. The minority of people throughout the empire who were Roman citizens were intensely proud of this privilege.

Strong political ideals and interests created some similarities between Greco-Roman society and the Confucian values of classical China, although the concept of active citizenship was distinctive in the Mediterranean cultures. However, Greece and Rome did not develop a single or cohesive set of political institutions to rival China's divinely sanctioned emperor or its elaborate bureaucracy. So in addition to political intensity and localism as characteristics of Mediterranean civilization, we must note great diversity in political forms. Here the comparison extends to India, where various political forms—including participation in governing councils—ran strong. Later societies, in reflecting on classical Mediterranean civilization, did select from a number of political precedents. Monarchy was not a preferred form; the Roman republic and most Greek city-states had abolished early monarchies as part of their prehistory. Rule by individual strongmen was more common, and the word *tyranny* comes from this experience in classical Greece. Many tyrants were effective rulers, particularly in promoting public works and protecting the common people against the abuses of the aristocracy. Some of the Roman generals who seized power in the later days of the republic had similar characteristics, as did the Hellenistic kings who succeeded Alexander in ruling regions of his empire.

### Greece

Democracy (the word is derived from the Greek *demos*, “the people”) was another important political alternative in classical Mediterranean society. The Athenian city-state traveled furthest in this direction, before and during the Peloponnesian Wars, after earlier experiences with aristocratic rule and with several tyrants. In 5th-century Athens, the major decisions of state were made by general assemblies in which all citizens could participate—although usually only a minority attended. This was **direct democracy**, not rule through elected representatives. The assembly met every 10 days. Executive officers,

Greece and Rome did not generate a major religion.

**polis** City-state form of government; typical of Greek political organization from 800 to 400 B.C.E. (pl. poleis).

**direct democracy** Where people participate directly in assemblies that make laws and select leaders, rather than electing representatives.

## THINKING HISTORICALLY

### The Classical Mediterranean in Comparative Perspective

THE GREAT CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS LEND THEMSELVES to a variety of comparisons. The general tone of each differed from the others, ranging from India's otherworldly strain to China's emphasis on government centralization, although it is important to note the varieties of activities and interests and the changes that occurred in each of the three societies. Basic comparisons include several striking similarities. Each classical society developed empires. Each relied primarily on an agricultural economy. Greco-Roman interest in secular culture bears some resemblance to Confucian emphasis in China, although in each case religious currents remained as well. But Greco-Roman political values and institutions differed from the Confucian emphasis on deference and bureaucratic training. Greek definitions of science contrasted with those of India and China, particularly in the emphasis on theory. Several focal points can be used for comparison.

Each classical civilization emphasized a clear social hierarchy, with substantial distance between elites and the majority of people who did the manual and menial work. This vital similarity between the civilizations reflected common tensions between complex leadership demands and lifestyles and the limited economic resources of the agricultural economy. Groups at the top of the social hierarchy judged that they had to control lower groups carefully to ensure their own prosperity. Each classical society generated ideologies that explained and justified the great social divisions. Philosophers and religious leaders devoted great attention to this subject.

Within this common framework, however, there were obvious differences. Groups at the top of the social pyramid reflected different value systems. Confucian bureaucrats in China can be compared with the aristocrats in Greece and the Roman republic. The status of merchants varied despite the vital role commerce played in all of the classical civilizations.

Opportunities for mobility varied also. China's bureaucratic system allowed a very small number of talented people from below to rise on the basis of education, but most bureaucrats continued to come from the landed aristocracy. Mediterranean society, with its aristocratic emphasis, also limited opportunities to rise to the top, but the importance of acquired wealth (particularly in Rome) gave some nonaristocrats important economic and political opportunities. Cicero, for example, came from a merchant family. Various classes also shared some political power in city-state assemblies; the idea of citizens holding basic political rights across class lines was unusual in classical civilizations.

Each classical civilization distinctively defined the position of the lowest orders. As Greece and then Rome expanded, they relied heavily on the legal and physical compulsions of slavery to provide menial service and demanding labor. Greece and Rome

gave unusual voice to farmers when they maintained their own property but tended to scorn manual labor itself, a view that helped justify and was perpetuated by slavery. Confucianism urged deference but offered more active praise for peasant work.

Finally, each classical civilization developed a different cultural glue to help hold its social hierarchy together. Greece and Rome left much of the task of managing the social hierarchy to local authorities; community bonds, as in the city-states, were meant to pull different groups into a sense of common purpose. They also relied on military force and clear legal statements that defined rights according to station. Force and legal inequalities played important roles in China and India as well, but there were additional inducements. Chinese Confucianism urged general cultural values of obedience and self-restraint, creating some agreement—despite varied religions and philosophies—on the legitimacy of social ranks by defining how gentlemen and commoners should behave.

In no case did the social cement work perfectly; social unrest surfaced in all the classical civilizations, as in major slave rebellions in the Roman countryside or peasant uprisings in China. At the same time, the rigidity of classical social structures gave many common people some leeway. Elites viewed the masses as being so different from themselves that they did not try to revamp all their beliefs or community institutions.

Differences in approach to social inequality nevertheless had important results. China and, as we will see, particularly India generated value systems that might convince people in the lower classes and the upper ranks that there was some legitimacy in the social hierarchy. Greece and Rome attempted a more difficult task in emphasizing the importance of aristocracy while offering some other elements a share in the political system. This combination could work well, although some groups, including slaves and women, were always excluded. It tended to deteriorate, however, when poorer citizens lost property. Yet no sweeping new social theory emerged to offer a different kind of solace to the masses until Christianity began to spread. It is no accident, then, that Indian and Chinese social structures survived better than Mediterranean structures did, lasting well beyond the classical period into the modern era.

#### QUESTIONS

- Why did the classical civilizations seem to need radical social inequalities?
- What was the relationship between wealth and social position in each classical civilization?
- How did China and the Mediterranean cultures try to compensate for social inequalities?

**Each classical civilization distinctively defined the position of the lowest orders.**

including judges, were chosen for brief terms to control their power, and they were subject to review by the assembly. Furthermore, they were chosen by lot, not elected—on the principle that any citizen could and should be able to serve. To be sure, only a minority of the Athenian population were active citizens: Women had no rights of political participation, and half of all adult males were not citizens at all, being slaves or foreigners. This, then, was not exactly the kind of democracy we envision today. But it elicited widespread popular participation and devotion, and certainly embodied principles that we recognize as truly democratic. The Athenian leader Pericles, who led Athens during its decades of greatest glory between the final defeat of the Persians and the agony of war with Sparta, described the system this way:

The administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. But while the law secures equal justice to all alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished he is preferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege but as the reward of merit. Neither is poverty a bar, but a man may benefit his country whatever be the obscurity of his condition.

During the Peloponnesian Wars, Athens even demonstrated some of the potential drawbacks of democracy. Lower-class citizens, eager for government jobs and the spoils of war, often encouraged reckless military actions that weakened the state in its central dispute with Sparta.


Neither tyranny nor democracy, however, was the most characteristic political form in the classical Mediterranean world. The most widely preferred political framework centered on the existence of aristocratic assemblies, whose deliberations established guidelines for state policy and served as a check on executive power. Thus, Sparta was governed by a singularly militaristic aristocracy, intent on retaining power over a large slave population. Other Greek city-states, although less bent on disciplining their elites for rigorous military service, also featured aristocratic assemblies. Even Athens during much of its democratic phase found leadership in many aristocrats, including Pericles. The word *aristocracy*, which comes from Greek terms meaning “rule of the best,” suggests where many Greeks—particularly, of course, aristocrats—thought real political virtue lay.

#### Rome


The constitution of the Roman republic, until the final decades of dissension in the 1st century B.C.E., which led to the establishment of the empire, tried to reconcile the various elements suggested by the Greek political experience, with primary reliance on the principle of aristocracy. All Roman citizens in the republic could gather in periodic assemblies, the function of which was not to pass basic laws but rather to elect various magistrates, some of whom were specifically entrusted with the task of representing the interests of the common people. The most important legislative body was the **Senate**, composed mainly of aristocrats, whose members held virtually all executive offices in the Roman state. Two **consuls** shared primary executive power, but in times of crisis the Senate could choose a dictator to hold emergency authority until the crisis had passed. In the Roman Senate, as in the aristocratic assemblies of the Greek city-states, the ideal of public service, featuring eloquent public speaking and arguments that sought to identify the general good, came closest to realization.

The diversity of Greek and Roman political forms, as well as the importance ascribed to political participation, helped generate a significant body of political theory in classical Mediterranean civilization. True to the aristocratic tradition, much of this theory dealt with appropriate political ethics, the duties of citizens, the importance of incorruptible service, and key political skills such as oratory. Roman writers such as Cicero, an active senator, expounded eloquently on these subjects. Some of this political writing resembled Confucianism, although there was less emphasis on hierarchy and obedience or bureaucratic virtues, and more on participation in deliberative bodies that make laws and judge the actions of executive officers. Classical Mediterranean writers also paid great attention to the structure of the state itself, debating the virtues and vices of the various political forms. This kind of theory both expressed the political interests and diversity of the Mediterranean world and served as a key heritage to later societies.


The Roman empire was a different sort of political system from the earlier city-states, although it preserved some older institutions, such as the Senate, which became a rather meaningless forum for debates. Of necessity, the empire developed organizational capacities on a far larger scale than the city-states; it is important to remember, however, that considerable local autonomy prevailed in many regions. Only in rare cases, such as the forced dissolution of the independent Jewish state in 63 C.E. after a major local rebellion, did the Romans take over distant areas completely. Careful organization was particularly evident in the vast hierarchy of the Roman army, whose officers wielded great political power even over the emperors.

 Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Aristotle, The Creation of the Democracy in Athens

**Senate** Assembly of Roman aristocrats; advised on policy within the republic; one of the early elements of the Roman constitution.

 Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Livy, The Rape of Lucretia and the Origins of the Republic

**consuls** Two chief executives or magistrates of the Roman republic; elected by an annual assembly dominated by aristocracy.

 Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Polybius: “Why Romans and Not Greeks Govern the World,” c. 140 B.C.E.



In addition to considerable tolerance for local customs and religions, plus strong military organization, the Romans emphasized carefully crafted laws as the factor that would hold their vast territories together. Greek and Roman republican leaders had already developed an understanding of the importance of codified, equitable law. Aristocratic leaders in 8th-century Athens, for example, sponsored clear legal codes designed to balance the defense of private property with the protection of poor citizens, including access to courts of law administered by fellow citizens. The early Roman republic introduced its first code of law, the Twelve Tables, by 450 B.C.E. These early Roman laws were intended, among other things, to restrain the upper classes from arbitrary action and to subject them, as well as ordinary people, to some common legal principles. The Roman empire carried these legal interests still further, in the belief that law should evolve to meet changing conditions without, however, fluctuating wildly. The idea of Roman law was that rules, objectively judged, rather than personal whim should govern social relationships; thus, the law steadily took over matters of judgment earlier reserved for fathers of families or for landlords. Roman law also promoted the importance of commonsense fairness. In one case cited in the law texts of the empire, a slave was being shaved by a barber in a public square; two men were playing ball nearby, and one accidentally hit the barber with the ball, causing him to cut the slave's throat. Who was responsible for the tragedy: the barber, catcher, or pitcher? According to Roman law, the slave—for anyone so foolish as to be shaved in a public place was asking for trouble and bore the responsibility himself.

Roman law codes spread widely through the empire, and with them came the notion of law as the regulator of social life. Many non-Romans were given the right of citizenship—although most ordinary people outside Rome itself preferred to maintain their local allegiances. With citizenship, however, came full access to Rome-appointed judges and uniform laws. Imperial law codes also regulated property rights and commerce, thus creating some economic unity in the vast empire. The idea of fair and reasoned law, to which officers of the state should themselves be subject, was a key political achievement of the Roman empire, comparable in importance, although quite different in nature, to the Chinese elaboration of a complex bureaucratic structure.

The Greeks and Romans were less innovative in the functions they ascribed to government than in the political forms and theories they developed. Most governments concentrated on maintaining systems of law courts and military forces. Athens and, more durably and successfully, Rome placed great premium on the importance of military conquest. Mediterranean governments regulated some branches of commerce, particularly in the interest of securing vital supplies of grain. Rome, indeed, undertook vast public works in the form of roads and harbors to facilitate military transport as well as commerce. And the Roman state, especially under the empire, built countless stadiums and public baths to entertain and distract its subjects. The city of Rome itself, which at its peak contained more than a million inhabitants, provided cheap food as well as gladiator contests and other entertainment for the masses—the famous “bread and circuses” that were designed to prevent popular disorder. Colonies of Romans elsewhere were also given theaters and stadiums. This provided solace in otherwise strange lands such as England or Palestine. Governments also supported an official religion, sponsoring public ceremonies to honor the gods and goddesses; civic religious festivals were important events that both expressed and encouraged widespread loyalty to the state. However, there was little attempt to impose this religion on everyone, and other religious practices were tolerated so long as they did not conflict with loyalty to the state. Even the later Roman emperors, who advanced the idea that the emperor was a god as a means of strengthening authority, were normally tolerant of other religions. They only attacked Christianity, and then irregularly, because of the Christians' refusal to place the state first in their devotion.

Localism and fervent political interests, including a sense of intense loyalty to the state; a diversity of political systems together with the preference for aristocratic rule; the importance of law and the development of an unusually elaborate and uniform set of legal principles—these were the chief political legacies of the classical Mediterranean world. The sheer accomplishment of the Roman empire itself, which united a region never before or since brought together, still stands as one of the great political monuments of world history. This was a distinctive political mix. Although there was attention to careful legal procedures, no clear definition of individuals' rights existed. Indeed, the emphasis on duties to the state could lead, as in Sparta, to an essentially totalitarian framework in which the state controlled even the raising of children. Nor, until the peaceful centuries of the early Roman empire, was it an entirely successful political structure, as wars and instability were common. Nonetheless, there can be no question of the richness of this political culture or of its central importance to the Greeks and Romans themselves.

## RELIGION AND CULTURE

### 5.5 What was the relationship between Greek and Roman culture?

The Greeks and Romans did not create a significant, world-class religion; in this, they differed from India and to some extent from China and Persia. Christianity, which was to become one of the major world religions, did of course arise during the Roman empire. It owed some of its rapid geographical spread to the ease of movement within the huge Roman empire. However, Christianity was not really a product of Greek or Roman culture, although it was ultimately influenced by this culture. It took on serious historical importance only as the Roman empire began its decline. The characteristic Greco-Roman religion was a much more primitive affair, derived from a belief in the spirits of nature elevated into a complex set of gods and goddesses who were seen as regulating human life. Greeks and Romans had different names for their pantheon, but the objects of worship were essentially the same: a creator or father god, Zeus or Jupiter, presided over an unruly assemblage of gods and goddesses whose functions ranged from regulating the daily passage of the sun (Apollo) or the oceans (Neptune) to inspiring war (Mars) or human love and beauty (Venus). Specific gods were the patrons of other human activities such as metalworking, the hunt, even literature and history. Regular ceremonies to the gods had real political importance, and many individuals sought the gods' aid in foretelling the future or in ensuring a good harvest or good health.

In addition to its political functions, Greco-Roman religion had certain other features. It tended to be rather human, of this world in its approach. The doings of the gods made for good storytelling; they read like soap operas on a superhuman scale. Thus, the classical Mediterranean religion early engendered an important literary tradition, as was also the case in India. (Indeed, Greco-Roman and Indian religious lore reflected the common heritage of Indo-European invaders.) The gods were often used to illustrate human passions and foibles, thus serving as symbols of a serious inquiry into human nature. Unlike the Indians, however, the Greeks and Romans became interested in their gods more in terms of what they could do for and reveal about human-kind on this earth than the principles that could elevate people toward higher planes of spirituality (Figure 5.4).

This dominant religion also had a number of limitations. Its lack of spiritual passion failed to satisfy many ordinary workers and peasants, particularly in times of political chaos or economic distress. “Mystery” religions, often imported from the Middle East, periodically swept through Greece and Rome, providing secret rituals and fellowship and a greater sense of contact with unfathomable divine powers. Even more than in China, a considerable division arose between upper-class and popular belief.

The gods and goddesses of Greco-Roman religion left many upper-class people dissatisfied also. They provided stories about how the world came to be, but little basis for a systematic inquiry into nature or human society. And while the dominant religion promoted political loyalty, it did not provide a basis for ethical thought. Hence, many thinkers, both in Greece and Rome, sought a separate model for ethical behavior. Greek and Roman moral philosophy, as issued by philosophers such as **Aristotle** and **Cicero**, typically stressed the importance of moderation and balance in human behavior as opposed to the instability of much political life and the excesses of the gods. Other ethical systems were devised, particularly during the Hellenistic period. **Stoics**, for example, emphasized an inner moral independence, to be cultivated by strict discipline of the body and by personal bravery. These ethical systems, established largely apart from religious considerations, were major contributions in their own right; they also were blended with later religious thought, under Christianity.

The idea of a philosophy separate from the official religion, although not necessarily hostile to it, informed classical Mediterranean political theory, which made little reference to religious principles. It also considerably emphasized the powers of human thought. In Athens, **Socrates** (born in 469 B.C.E.) encouraged his pupils to question conventional wisdom, on the grounds that the chief human duty was “the improvement of the soul.”

Greek and Roman economies were based on commercial agriculture, trade, and slavery. The two societies developed somewhat different versions of the patriarchal family.

**Aristotle** (384–322 B.C.E.) Greek philosopher; teacher of Alexander the Great; knowledge based on observation of phenomena in material world.

**Cicero** (106–43 B.C.E.) Conservative Roman senator; Stoic philosopher; one of great orators of his day; killed in reaction to assassination of Julius Caesar.

**Stoics** Hellenistic group of philosophers; emphasized inner moral independence cultivated by strict discipline of the body and personal bravery.

**Socrates** Athenian philosopher of later 5th century B.C.E.; tutor of Plato; urged rational reflection of moral decisions; condemned to death for corrupting minds of Athenian young.

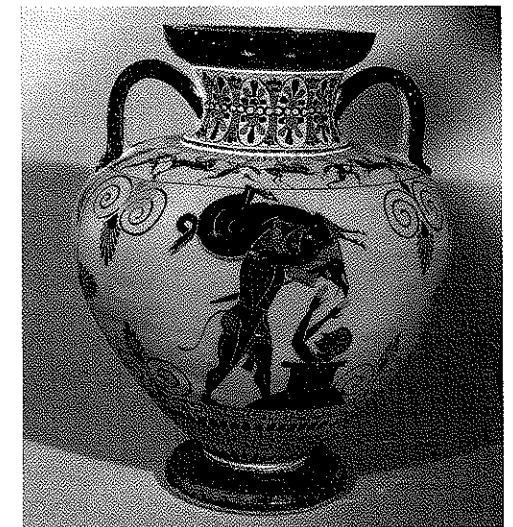


FIGURE 5.4 After murdering his wife and children, Hercules, who became the Greeks' greatest mythical hero, was sentenced to perform 12 tasks that would have been impossible for most mortals. This vase depicts the fourth labor of Hercules, in which he was ordered to capture the Erymanthian boar and bring it to his master, Eurystheus. The frightened Eurystheus has hidden in a wine jar. (Copyright The British Museum.)

Socrates ran afoul of the Athenian government, which thought that he was undermining political loyalty; given the choice of suicide or exile, Socrates chose the former. However, the Socratic principle of rational inquiry by means of skeptical questioning became a recurrent strand in classical Greek thinking and in its heritage to later societies. Socrates' great pupil Plato accentuated the positive somewhat more strongly by suggesting that human reason could approach an understanding of the three perfect forms—the absolutely True, Good, and Beautiful—which he believed characterized nature. Thus, a philosophical tradition arose in Greece, although in very diverse individual expressions, which tended to deemphasize the importance of human spirituality in favor of a celebration of the human ability to think. The result bore some similarities to Chinese Confucianism, although with greater emphasis on skeptical questioning and abstract speculations about the basic nature of humanity and the universe.

Greek interest in rationality carried over an inquiry into the underlying order of physical nature. The Greeks were not outstanding empirical scientists. Relatively few new scientific findings emanated from Athens, or later from Rome, although philosophers such as Aristotle did collect large amounts of biological data. The Greek interest lay in speculations about nature's order, and many non-Westerners believe that this tradition continues to inform what they see as an excessive Western passion for seeking basic rationality in the universe. In practice, the Greek concern translated into a host of theories, some of which were wrong, about the motions of the planets and the organization of the elemental principles of earth, fire, air, and water, and into a considerable interest in mathematics as a means of rendering nature's patterns comprehensible. Greek and later Hellenistic work in geometry was particularly impressive, featuring among other achievements the basic theorems of Pythagoras. Scientists, during the Hellenistic period, made some important empirical contributions, especially in studies of anatomy; medical treatises by Galen were not improved on in the Western world for many centuries. The mathematician Euclid produced what was long the world's most widely used compendium of geometry. Less fortunately, the Hellenistic astronomer Ptolemy produced an elaborate theory of the sun's motion around a stationary earth. This new Hellenistic theory contradicted much earlier Middle Eastern astronomy, which had recognized the earth's rotation; nonetheless, it was Ptolemy's theory that was long taken as fixed wisdom in Western thought.

Roman intellectuals, actively examining ethical and political theory, did not add to Greek and Hellenistic science. They did help to preserve this tradition in the form of textbooks that were administered to upper-class schoolchildren. The Roman genius was more practical than the Greek and included engineering achievements such as the great roads and aqueducts that carried water to cities large and small. Roman ability to construct elaborate arches so that buildings could carry great structural weight was unsurpassed anywhere in the world. These feats, too, left their mark, as Rome's huge edifices long served as a reminder of ancient glories. But ultimately, it was the Greek and Hellenistic impulse to extend human reason to nature's principles that resulted in the most impressive legacy.

In classical Mediterranean civilization, however, science and mathematics loomed far less large than art and literature in conveying key cultural values. The official religion inspired themes for artistic expression and the justification for temples, statues, and plays devoted to the glories of the gods. Nonetheless, the human-centered qualities of the Greeks and Romans also registered, as artists emphasized the beauty of realistic portrayals of the human form and poets and playwrights used the gods as foils for inquiries into the human condition.

All the arts received some attention in classical Mediterranean civilization. Performances of music and dance were vital parts of religious festivals, but their precise styles have unfortunately not been preserved. Far more durable was the Greek interest in drama, because plays, more than poetry, took a central role in this culture. Greek dramatists produced both comedy and tragedy, indeed making a formal division between the two approaches that is still part of the Western tradition, as in the labeling of current television shows as either form. On the whole, in contrast to Indian writers, the Greeks placed the greatest emphasis on tragedy. Their belief in human reason and balance also involved a sense that these virtues were precarious, so a person could easily become ensnared in situations of powerful emotion and uncontrollable consequences. The Athenian dramatist **Sophocles**, for example, so insightfully portrayed the psychological flaws of his hero Oedipus that modern psychology long used the term *Oedipus complex* to refer to a potentially unhealthy relationship between a man and his mother.

**Sophocles** (496–406 B.C.E.) Greek writer of tragedies; author of *Oedipus Rex*.

Greek literature contained a strong epic tradition as well, starting with the beautifully crafted tales of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, attributed to the poet Homer, who lived in the 8th century B.C.E. Roman authors, particularly the poet Vergil, also worked in the epic form, seeking to link Roman history and mythology with the Greek forerunner. Roman writers made significant contributions to poetry and to definitions of the poetic form that was long used in western literature. The overall Roman literary contribution was less impressive than the Greek, but it was substantial enough both to provide important examples of how poetry should be written and to furnish abundant illustrations of the literary richness of the Latin language.

In the visual arts, the emphasis of classical Mediterranean civilization was sculpture and architecture. Greek artists also excelled in ceramic work, whereas Roman painters produced realistic (and sometimes pornographic) decorations for the homes of the wealthy. In the brilliant age of Athens' 5th century—the age of Pericles, Socrates, Sophocles, and so many other intensely creative figures—sculptors such as Phidias developed unprecedented skill rendering simultaneously realistic yet beautiful images of the human form, from lovely goddesses to muscled warriors and athletes. Roman sculptors, less innovative, continued this heroic-realistic tradition. They molded scenes of Roman conquests on triumphal columns and captured the power but also the human qualities of Augustus Caesar and his successors on busts and full-figure statues alike.

Greek architecture, from the 8th century B.C.E. onward, emphasized monumental construction, square or rectangular in shape, with columned porticos. The Greeks devised three embellishments for the tops of columns supporting their massive buildings, each more ornate than the next: the **Doric**, the **Ionic**, and the **Corinthian**. The Greeks, in short, invented what Westerners and others in the world today still regard as “classical” architecture, although the Greeks themselves were influenced by Egyptian models in their preferences. Greece, and later Italy, provided abundant stone for ambitious temples, markets, and other public buildings. Many of these same structures were filled with products of the sculptors' workshops. They were brightly painted, although over the centuries the paint faded, so that later imitators came to think of the classical style as involving unadorned (some might say drab) stone. Roman architects adopted the Greek themes quite readily. Their engineering skill allowed them to construct buildings of even greater size, as well as new forms such as the freestanding stadium. Under the empire, the Romans learned how to add domes to rectangular buildings, which resulted in some welcome architectural diversity. At the same time, the empire's taste for massive, heavily adorned monuments and public buildings, while a clear demonstration of Rome's sense of power and achievement, moved increasingly away from the simple lines of the early Greek temples (Figure 5.5).

Classical Mediterranean art and architecture were intimately linked with the society that produced them. There is a temptation, because of the formal role of classical styles in later societies, including our own, to attribute a stiffness to Greek and Roman art that was not present in the original. Greek and Roman structures were built to be used. Temples and marketplaces and the public baths that so delighted the Roman upper classes were part of daily urban life. Classical art was also flexible, according to need. Villas or small palaces—built for the Roman upper classes and typically constructed around an open courtyard—had a light, even simple quality rather different from that of temple architecture. Classical dramas were not merely examples of high art performed for the cultural elite. Indeed, Athens lives in the memory of many humanists today as much because of the large audiences that trooped to performances of plays by authors such as Sophocles as for the creativity of the writers and philosophers themselves. Literally thousands of people gathered in the large hillside theaters of Athens and other cities for the performance of new plays and for associated music and poetry competitions. Popular taste in Rome, to be sure, seemed less elevated. Republican Rome was not an important cultural center, and many Roman leaders indeed feared the more emotional qualities of Greek art. The Roman empire is known more for monumental athletic performances—chariot races and gladiators—than for high-quality popular theater. However, the fact remains that, even in Rome, elements of classical art—the great monuments if nothing more—were part of daily urban life and the pursuit of pleasure. Roman styles also blended with Christianity during the later empire (Figure 5.6) providing another lasting expression.

**Iliad** Greek epic poem attributed to Homer but possibly the work of many authors; defined gods and human nature that shaped Greek myths.

**Odyssey** Greek epic poem attributed to Homer but possibly the work of many authors; defined gods and human nature that shaped Greek myths.

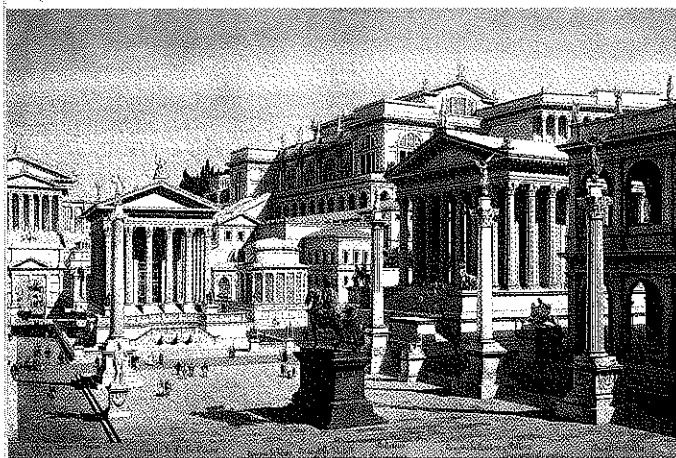
**Doric** Along with Ionian and Corinthian, distinct style of Hellenistic architecture; the least ornate of the three styles.

**Ionic** Along with Doric and Corinthian, distinct style of Hellenistic architecture; more ornate than Doric but less than Corinthian.

**Corinthian** Along with Doric and Ionian, distinct style of Hellenistic architecture; the most ornate of the three styles.



Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Vitruvius, "On Symmetry" from The Ten Books on Architecture



**FIGURE 5.5** This is an artist's recreation of the Forum in imperial times. The use of decorative styles that originated in classical Greece was a central feature of Roman architecture, but as the empire grew, buildings became steadily more massive. Larger columns and greater heights reflected the Roman taste for the monumental. Ultimately, Roman architects also developed the capacity to build domed structures—a feat of engineering.

(Hypothetical reconstruction of the Roman Forum in Imperial Times. Southern part. Watercolor. Soprintendenza alle Antichità, Rome, Italy/Scala/Art Resource, NY.)

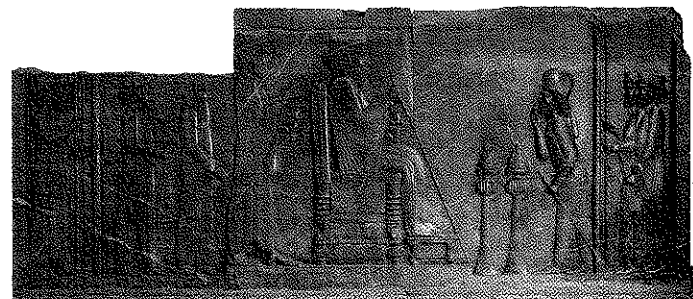


**FIGURE 5.6** This mosaic from the city of Ravenna depicts the Last Supper, which took place on the night before Jesus was crucified. According to Christian belief, at this supper Jesus broke bread and drank wine with his disciples, teaching them the ritual of the Eucharist. Mosaic designs like this one were common in Roman buildings, often inlaid into floors and depicting both secular and religious scenes. The mosaic tradition continued in the Eastern empire, mainly used there to depict Christian figures, becoming ever more elegant and richly detailed.

## VISUALIZING THE PAST

### Political Rituals in Persia

THIS IS A RELIEF FROM THE Audience Hall of the Persian royal Palace in Persepolis, built by Darius I (522–486 B.C.E.). The scene shows court rituals in Persia. Later, when Alexander conquered Persia, he was inclined to install the same rituals, but many of his soldiers objected vigorously, and the whole issue caused great furor in the ranks. It has been speculated, however, that some of these rituals later passed to Europe, where they helped define appropriate behavior in the presence of kings.



#### QUESTIONS

- What kinds of rituals does this scene suggest, and what kinds of relationships between subjects and the emperor?
- Why, and on what basis, might Greeks object to this kind of behavior toward a ruler?
- Why was Alexander tempted to transfer these rituals to his own court?

## ECONOMY AND SOCIETY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

**5.6** How did the social structures of the classical Mediterranean and classical China compare?

Politics and formal culture in Greece and Rome were mainly affairs of the cities—they were of intense concern only to a minority of the population. Most Greeks and Romans were farmers, tied to the soil and often to local rituals and festivals that were rather different from urban forms. Many Greek farmers, for example, annually gathered for a spring passion play to celebrate the recovery of the goddess of fertility from the lower world, an event that was seen as a vital preparation for planting and that also suggested the possibility of an afterlife—a prospect important to many people who endured a life of hard labor and poverty. A substantial population of free farmers, who owned their own land, flourished in the early days of the Greek city-states and later around Rome. However, there was a constant tendency, most pronounced in Rome, for large landlords to squeeze these farmers, forcing them to become tenants or laborers or to join the swelling crowds of the urban lower class. Tensions between tyrants and aristocrats or democrats and aristocrats in Athens often revolved around free farmers' attempts to preserve their independence and shake off the heavy debts they had incurred. The Roman republic declined in part because too many farmers became dependent on the protection of large landlords, even when they did not work their estates outright, and so no longer could vote freely.

Persia and Greece shared many social features. Persia like Greece relied heavily on agriculture. Both emphasized a military aristocracy derived originally from conquering invaders. Both also developed a strong merchant class: Persia of course encouraged land-based trade, with Athens more interested in seagoing opportunities. Both relied considerably on slavery, with many slaves captured in wars of conquest. Sparta additionally used helots, or unfree labor, as Indo-European conquerors subjected the local population and required agricultural work.

### Agriculture and Trade

Farming in Greece and also in much of Italy was complicated by the fact that soil conditions were not ideal for grain growing, and yet grain was the staple of life. First in Greece, then in central Italy, farmers were increasingly tempted to shift to the production of olives and grapes, which were used primarily for cooking and wine making. These products were well suited to the soil conditions, but they required an unusually extensive conversion of agriculture to a market basis. That is, farmers who produced grapes and olives had to buy some of the food they needed, and they had to sell most of their own product in order to do this. Furthermore, planting olive trees or grape vines required substantial capital, for they did not bear fruit for at least five years after planting. This was one reason so many farmers went into debt. It was also one of the reasons that large landlords gained increasing advantage over independent farmers, for they could enter into market production on a much larger scale if only because of their greater access to capital.

The rise of commercial agriculture in Greece and then around Rome was one of the prime forces leading to efforts to establish an empire. Greek city-states, with Athens usually in the lead, developed colonies in the Middle East and then in Sicily mainly to gain access to grain production; for this, they traded not only olive oil and wine but also manufactured products and silver. Rome pushed south, in part, to acquire the Sicilian grain fields and later used much of North Africa as its granary. Indeed, the Romans encouraged such heavy cultivation in North Africa that they promoted a soil depletion, which helps account for the region's reduced agricultural fertility in later centuries.

The importance of commercial farming obviously dictated extensive concern with trade. Private merchants operated most of the ships that carried agricultural products and other goods. Greek city-states and ultimately the Roman state supervised the grain trade, promoting public works and storage facilities and carefully regulating the vital supplies. Other kinds of trade were vital also. Luxury products from the shops of urban artists or craftspeople played a major role in the lifestyle of the upper classes. There was some trade also beyond the borders of Mediterranean civilization, for goods from India and China. In this trade, the Mediterranean peoples found themselves at some disadvantage, for their manufactured products were less sophisticated than those of eastern Asia; thus, they typically exported animal skins, precious metals, and even exotic African animals for Asian zoos in return for the spices and artistic products of the east.

For all the importance of trade, merchants enjoyed a somewhat ambiguous status in classical Mediterranean civilization. Leading Athenian merchants were usually foreigners, mostly from the trading

Rome began to decline about 180 c.e., losing territory and suffering economic reversals. The legacy of the classical civilizations in the Mediterranean and Middle East was important even after this decline.

peoples of the Middle East—the descendants of Lydians and Phoenicians. Merchants had a somewhat higher status in Rome, clearly forming the second most prestigious social class under the landed patricians, but here, too, the aristocracy frequently disputed the merchants' rights. Overall, merchants fared better in the Mediterranean than in China, in terms of official recognition, but worse than in India; classical Mediterranean society certainly did not set in motion a culture that distinctly valued capitalist money-making.

## Slavery

Slavery was another key ingredient of the classical economy. Philosophers such as Aristotle produced elaborate justifications for the necessity of slavery in a proper society. Athenians used slaves as household servants and also as workers in their vital silver mines, which provided the manpower for Athens' empire and commercial operations alike. Sparta used slaves extensively for agricultural work. Slavery spread steadily in Rome from the final centuries of the republic. Because most slaves came from conquered territories, the need for slaves was another key element in military expansion. Here was a theme visible in earlier civilizations in the eastern Mediterranean, and within later societies in this region as well, which helps explain the greater importance of military forces and expansion in these areas than in India or China. Actual slave conditions varied greatly. Roman slaves performed household tasks—including the tutoring of upper-class children, for which cultured Greek slaves were highly valued. They also worked the mines, for precious metals and for iron; as in Greece, slave labor in the mines was particularly brutal, and few slaves survived more than a few years of such an existence. Roman estate owners used large numbers of slaves for agricultural work, along with paid laborers and tenant farmers. This practice was another source of the steady pressure placed upon free farmers who could not easily compete with unpaid forced labor.

Partly because of slavery, partly because of the overall orientation of upper-class culture, neither Greece nor Rome was especially interested in technological innovations applicable to agriculture or manufacturing. The Greeks made important advances in shipbuilding and navigation, which were vital for their trading economy. Romans, less adept on the water, developed their skill in engineering to provide greater urban amenities and good roads for swift and easy movement of troops. But a technology designed to improve the production of food or manufactured goods did not figure largely in this civilization, which mainly relied on the earlier achievements of previous Mediterranean societies. Abundant slave labor probably discouraged concern for more efficient production methods. So did a sense that the true goals of humankind were artistic and political. One Hellenistic scholar, for example, refused to write a handbook on engineering because "the work of an engineer and everything that ministers to the needs of life is ignoble and vulgar." As a consequence of this outlook, Mediterranean society lagged behind both India and China in production technology, which was one reason for its resulting unfavorable balance of trade with eastern Asia.

Greek and particularly Roman economic structures had considerable environmental impact. Smoke pollution bedeviled Rome itself. Clearing of forests for fuel, construction, and expansion of agriculture led to erosion and soil depletion.

Both Greek and Roman society emphasized the importance of a tight family structure, with a husband and father firmly in control. Women had vital economic functions, particularly in farming and artisan families. In the upper classes, especially in Rome, women often commanded great influence and power within a household. But in law and culture, women were held inferior. Families burdened with too many children sometimes put female infants to death because of their low status and their potential drain on the family economy. Pericles stated common beliefs about women when he noted, "For a woman not to show more weakness than is natural to her sex is a great glory, and not to be talked about for good or for evil among men." Early Roman law stipulated, "The husband is the judge of his wife. If she commits a fault, he punishes her; if she has drunk wine, he condemns her; if she has been guilty of adultery, he kills her." (Later, however, such customs were held in check by family courts composed of members of both families.) Here was a case where Roman legal ideas modified traditional family controls. If divorced because of adultery, a Roman woman lost a third of her property and had to wear a special garment that set her apart like a prostitute. On the other hand, the oppression of women was probably less severe in this civilization than in China. Many Greek and Roman women were active in business and controlled a portion, even if only the minority, of all urban property.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Aristotle on Slavery (4th c. B.C.E.)

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Slaves in the Roman Countryside, c. 150 B.C.E.—50 C.E.

## DOCUMENT

### Rome and a Values Crisis

ROME'S INCREASING CONTACT WITH THE EASTERN Mediterranean, particularly Greece, brought important debates about culture. Many conservatives deplored Greek learning and argued that it would corrupt Roman virtue. Cicero, a leading politician in the Senate and a major Latin writer, here defends Greek literature, using Hellenistic justifications of beauty and utility. Cicero played a major role in popularizing Greek culture during the 1st century B.C.E. His comments also reflect the concerns that Greek culture inspired a source of change.

Do you think that I could find inspiration for my daily speeches on so manifold a variety of topics, did I not cultivate my mind with study, or that my mind could endure so great a strain, did not study provide it with relaxation? I am a votary of literature, and make the confession unashamed; shame belongs rather to the bookish recluse, who knows not how to apply his reading to the good of his fellows, or to manifest its fruits to the eyes of all. But what shame should be mine, gentlemen, who have made it a rule of my life for all these years never to allow the sweets of a cloistered ease or the seductions of pleasure or the enticements of repose to prevent me from aiding any man in the hour of his need? How then can I justly be blamed or censured, if it shall be found that I have devoted to literature a portion of my leisure hours no longer than others without blame devote to the pursuit of material gain, to the celebration of festivals or games, to pleasure and the repose of mind and body, to protracted banqueting, or perhaps to the gaming-board or to ballplaying? I have the better right to indulgence herein, because my devotion to letters strengthens my oratorical powers, and these, such as they are, have never failed my friends in their hour of peril. Yet insignificant though these powers may seem to be, I fully realize from what source I draw all that is highest in them. Had I not persuaded myself from my youth up, thanks to the moral lessons derived from a wide reading, that nothing is to be greatly sought after in this life save glory and honour, and that in their quest all bodily pains and all dangers of death or exile should be lightly accounted, I should never have borne for the safety of you all the brunt of many a bitter encounter, or bared my breast to the daily onsets of abandoned persons. All literature, all philosophy, all history, abounds with incentives to noble action, incentives which would be buried in black darkness were the light of the written word not flashed upon them. How many pictures of high endeavor the great authors of Greece and Rome have drawn for our use, and bequeathed to us, not only for our contemplation,

but for our emulation! These I have held ever before my vision throughout my public career, and have guided the workings of my brain and my soul by meditating upon patterns of excellence.

But let us for the moment waive these solid advantages; let us assume that entertainment is the sole end of reading; even so, I think you would hold that no mental employment is so broadening to the sympathies or so enlightening to the understanding. Other pursuits belong not to all times, all ages, all conditions; but this gives stimulus to our youth and diversion to our old age; this adds a charm to success, and offers a haven of consolation to failure. In the home it delights, in the world it hampers not. Through the night watches, on all our journeying, and in our hours of country ease, it is an unfailing companion.

If anyone thinks that the glory won by the writing of Greek verse is naturally less than that accorded to the poet who writes in Latin, he is entirely in the wrong. Greek literature is read in nearly every nation under heaven, while the vogue of Latin is confined to its own boundaries, and they are, we must grant, narrow. Seeing, therefore, that the activities of our race know no barrier save the limits of the round earth, we ought to be ambitious that whithersoever our arms have penetrated there also our fame and glory should extend; for the reason that literature exalts the nation whose high deeds it sings, and at the same time there can be no doubt that those who stake their lives to fight in honour's cause find therein a lofty incentive to peril and endeavor. We read that Alexander the Great carried in his train numbers of epic poets and historians. And yet, standing before the tomb of Achilles at Sigeum, he exclaimed, "Fortunate youth, to have found in Homer an herald of thy valor!" Well might he so exclaim, for had the *Iliad* never existed, the same mound which covered Achilles' bones would also have overwhelmed his memory.

#### QUESTIONS

- What kind of objections to Greek learning is Cicero arguing against?
- Which of his arguments had the most lasting appeal to those who were reshaping Roman culture?
- Can you think of similar debates about foreign culture in other times and places in history?
- How would you use this document to reconstruct the debate Cicero was participating in and why it seemed important?

Source: Cicero, *Pro Archia Poeta*. Translated by N. H. Watts. Loeb Classical Library. Cicero, *Pro Archia* (Harvard University Press, 1965), 12–14, 16, 23–24.

Because of the divisions within classical Mediterranean society, no easy generalizations about culture or achievement can be made. An 18th-century English historian called the high point of the Roman empire, before 180 C.E., the period in human history "during which the condition of the human race was most happy or prosperous." This is doubtful, given the technological accomplishments of China and India. And certainly, many slaves, women, and ordinary farmers in the



Mediterranean world might have disagreed with this viewpoint. Few farmers, for example, actively participated in the political structures or cultural opportunities that were the most obvious mark of this civilization. Many continued to work largely as their ancestors had done, with quite similar tools and in very similar poverty, untouched by the doings of the great or the bustle of the cities except when wars engulfed their lands.

We are tempted, of course, exclusively to remember the urban achievements, for they exerted the greatest influence on later ages that recalled the glories of Greece and Rome. The distinctive features of classical Mediterranean social and family structures had a less enduring impact, although ideas about slavery or women were revived in subsequent periods. However, the relatively unchanging face of ordinary life had an important influence as well, because many farmers and artisans long maintained the habits and outlook they developed during the great days of the Greek and Roman empires, and because their separation from much of the official culture posed both a challenge and opportunity for new cultural movements such as Christianity.

## Pressing the Environment

Rome's economy had serious environmental consequences. In Rome itself, the burning of wood for heat but also for manufacturing created serious problems of air pollution. The accumulation of garbage was also a serious issue. Widespread use of lead, in wine production and for tableware, created extensive poisoning that, some have argued, contributed to imperial decline.

At least as serious was deforestation and inroads on natural vegetation. Trees were cut down for fuel and for construction materials, but above all to expand agriculture. Eager to promote more food production, in 111 B.C.E. the republic decreed that anyone could keep up to 20 acres of public land if it was brought into cultivation. Deforestation, particularly on hillsides, promoted erosion and loss of topsoil. Widespread grazing by herds of sheep and goats also cut into grasslands, again promoting erosion. And sheer over-farming, particularly in grain growing regions like North Africa, reduced the fertility of soil and gradually reduced productivity. Here too, historians have speculated that the results may have promoted the empire's ultimate decline.

## TOWARD THE FALL OF ROME

**5.7** What were the main legacies of classical Mediterranean civilization, for later societies?

Classical Mediterranean society had one final impact on world history through its rather fragmentary collapse. Unlike China, classical civilization in the Mediterranean region was not simply disrupted only to revive. Unlike India, there was no central religion, derived from the civilization itself, to serve as link between the classical period and what followed. Furthermore, the fall of Rome was not uniform; in essence, Rome fell more in some parts of the Mediterranean than it did in others. The result, among other things, was that no single civilization ultimately rose to claim the mantle of Greece and Rome. At the same time, there was no across-the-board maintenance of the classical Mediterranean institutions and values in any of the civilizations that later claimed a relationship to the Greek and Roman past. Greece and Rome lived on, in more than idle memory, but their heritage was unquestionably more complex and more selective than proved to be the case for India or China.

### A Complex Legacy

Classical Greece, Persia, and their Hellenistic successors lasted for about 600 years, and Rome another 600 years beyond this. Although major political and social changes took place during this span, some durable characteristics also developed.

Greece's political legacy obviously lay more in the realm of ideas than in enduring political institutions such as China's emperor and bureaucracy, although Rome copied some Greek structures. On the whole, Greek art and philosophy formed the most lasting heritage of this classical civilization.

But, partly because they did not generate a major religion, Greek and Roman contributions to a durable popular culture were more limited than was true in China or India.

There are two final complexities in dealing with the classical civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The first involves the relationship of Greek and Roman achievements to contemporary North Americans. Classical Greece is often presented as the first phase of North Americans' own classical past. The framers of the Constitution of the United States were very conscious of Greek and Roman precedents. Designers of public buildings in the United States have copied classical Mediterranean models. The Western educational tradition has long invited elaborate explorations of the Greco-Roman past as part of the standard intellectual equipment for the educated person.

Yet this important legacy should not obscure the actual Greek and Roman record as a classical civilization. Classical ideas did not flow smoothly into a Western tradition (indeed, they had far more initial impact on the Middle East, which was where Greeks and even Romans tended to look when they thought of spreading their key achievements). Important revivals and modifications had to occur before the Greek approach to science had a fruitful impact on western Europe many centuries later. And democracy did not spread directly from Greece or Rome to other societies, although the Greek example was cited by later advocates whose passions had very different sources.

The second complexity involves Persia, an important civilization in its own right. Hellenistic conquests brought Greek cultural influence into Persia. Influences were mutual, however. Hellenistic kings imitated Persian centralization and bureaucracy. Cultural exchange also gave Zoroastrian influences a wider range. This furthered the influence these religious ideas would have on Mediterranean religions, including Judaism, and later, Christianity and Islam. The Jewish book of Daniel, for example, picked up the Zoroastrian idea that humans would be rewarded for good or bad behavior in a future life.

At the same time, there was no tidy homogenization. Persians continued to see themselves as partially distinct, and viewed Alexander's successors as foreigners. Later, more purely Persian kingdoms arose as the Hellenistic states declined. Parthians and then Sasanids revived Persian political institutions and culture in their realms to the east of the Roman empire's Middle Eastern holdings. Under Hellenism and Persia alike, the Middle East enhanced its role as a point of exchange among many different merchants and cultures.

## Global Connections and Critical Themes

### PERSIA, GREECE, ROME, AND THE WORLD

The Persian empire fostered trade with both Asia and with the eastern Mediterranean. Persian roads and institutions facilitated commerce from Asia to the Mediterranean. Cultural influences spread widely as well. Greeks developed wide contacts, also, but more gradually and with some definite prejudices.

Like other classical civilizations, notably China, Greeks had a definite sense of the inferiority of other peoples. Classical Greeks indiscriminately called non-Greeks "barbarians," and some Greek city-states, like Sparta, were quite closed to outside influences. But overall, the Greeks were also a trading and expansionist people. They set up Greek colonies in various parts of the Mediterranean. They traded even more widely and relied heavily on foreigners for part of this trade. Greek scholars went to Egypt to further their training in science and mathematics. Some Greeks were immensely curious about other peoples and their habits. The historian and traveler Herodotus (484–425 B.C.E.) talked enthusiastically about

customs very different from his own, although he was also capable of believing wild exaggerations about how some people lived.

Greek outreach was extended by Alexander the Great, who did not have such a keen belief in Greek superiority. Alexander forged important new contacts between the eastern Mediterranean, the rest of the Middle East including Persia, and western India. He even hoped to extend his system into China, but obviously this did not occur. The system did not last, but the interest in setting up stronger links between the eastern Mediterranean and Asia remained an important concern.

Rome's world connections were in some ways more varied. The empire obviously influenced Europeans beyond the actual Roman borders, acquainting various Germanic and Celtic peoples with some Roman styles. Trade with Africa, also beyond the borders, particularly involved the northeast. Roman expeditions to India constituted an important commercial outreach. Most Roman attention, in trade as well as politics, focused on creating ties within the vast territories of the empire, but significant influence extended to other parts of the world. Some of these connections would affect trading patterns and missionary religious outreach even as the empire began to decline.