

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

What were the main similarities and differences between Africa and the Americas by the early centuries C.E.? p. 115

6.1

What were the main differences in the process of decline in classical China and in classical India? p. 125

6.2

What were the causes of decline in the Roman Empire? p. 129

6.3

How did the organization of Christianity reflect its complex relationships with the Roman Empire? p. 133

6.4

The Classical Period: Directions, Diversities, and Declines by 500 C.E.

At the highpoint of the classical period, with the Han and Roman empires in full swing, the Indian Ocean provided a network of important contacts. The major civilizations did not depend on long-distance trade: Rome, China, and India were economically and culturally self-sufficient. But Roman fleets and Chinese ships regularly sailed the ocean, along with more local Persian, Arab, and Indonesian merchants. The Roman government actually arranged for archers on their convoys to beat back local pirates. Rome wanted spices and textiles from the region. The Chinese wanted exotic goods as well—one Han emperor sent a mission to India to acquire a rhinoceros.

Some types of cultural exchange also occurred in the Indian Ocean region, although historians are not sure how much. For example, Buddhism had established a number of institutions, rituals,

 Watch the Video: Symbiosis: The Exchange of Languages, Goods, and Ideas in Central Asia (Al Andrea)

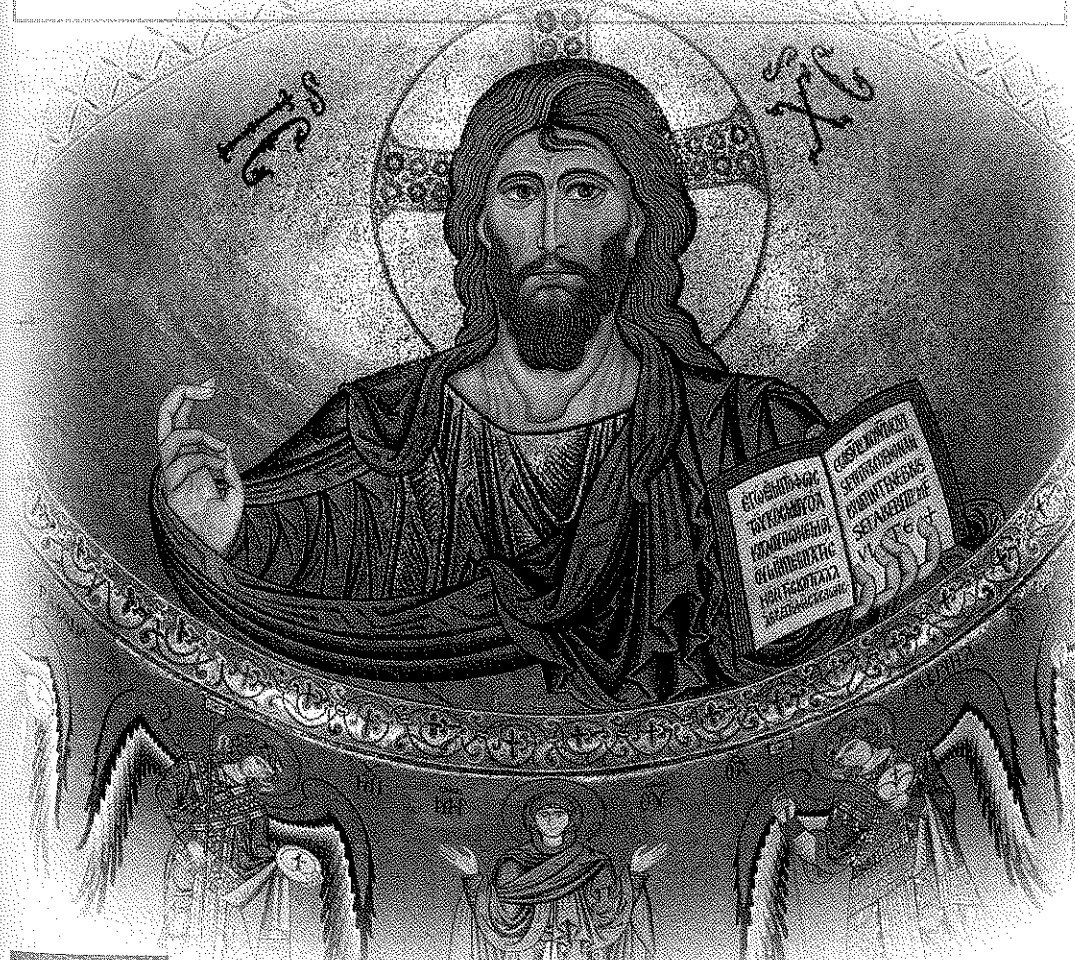


FIGURE 6.1 This twelfth-century Sicilian mosaic, Christ as Pantocrator (ruler of all), depicts him as many Christian artists have, his head surrounded by a halo, representing his holiness.

Further Readings

Important works include Xinru Liu and Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Connections Across Eurasia: Transportation, Communications and Cultural Exchange Across the Silk Roads* (2007); Lindsey Bell, *The Persian Empire* (2005); Richard A. Gabriel, *The Ancient World* (2007); Emma Bridges et al., *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars* (2007); Peter M. Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia: The Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia, and Palmyra Under Roman Control* (2008); George Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars: The Failure of Persia* (2005); Gene R. Garthwaite, *The Persians* (2004); Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals* (2007); Peter Green, *The Greco-Persian Wars* (1996); John Curtis and Nigel Tallis, eds., *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* (2005); Nancy Demand, *A History of Ancient Greece* (1996), with a good bibliography; Waldemar Heckel, *Crossroads of History: The Age of Alexander* (2003); N. G. L. Hammond, *The Genius of Alexander the Great* (1997); Roger Brock, ed., *Alternatives to Athens: Varieties of Political Organization and Community in Ancient Greece* (2000); M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (expanded ed., 1998). See also Thomas Benediktson, *Literature and the Visual Arts in Ancient Greece and Rome* (2001); George Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars: The Failure of Persia* (New York, 2005); Gary Forsythe, *A Critical History of Early Rome: From Prehistory to the First Punic War* (2005); Alain M. Gowing, *Empire and Memory: The Representation of the Roman Republic in Imperial Culture* (2005); Callie Williamson, *The Laws of the Roman People: Public Laws in the Expansion and Decline of the Roman Republic* (2005); Richard Holland, *Augustus: Godfather of Europe* (2004); Harriet I. Flower, *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic* (2004); G. E. R. Lloyd, *Ancient*

Worlds, Modern Reflections: Philosophical Perspectives on Greek and Chinese Science and Culture (2004); Marilyn B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (2005); I. M. Plant, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: An Anthology* (2004); Fiona McHardy and Eireann Marshall, eds., *Women's Influence on Classical Civilization* (2004); and James I. Porter, *Classical Pasts: The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome* (2006).

There are a number of excellent sources on classical Greece and Rome, even aside from translations of the leading thinkers and writers. Florence Dupont's *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (1999) examines Roman ideas of space and time and honor. See M. Crawford, ed., *Sources for Ancient History* (1983); Polly Low, *Interstate Relations in Classical Greece: Morality and Power* (2007); C. Fornara, *Translated Documents of Greece and Rome* (1977); N. Lewis, *Greek Historical Documents: The Fifth Century B.C.* (1971); M. Crawford, *The Roman Republic* (1982); P. Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Ages* (1990); and M. M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest* (1981). Important specialized works include R. Zewlinich-Abramovitz, *Not Wholly Free: The Concept of Manumission and the Status of Manumitted Slaves in the Ancient Greek World* (2005); Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (1975); and Renate Bridenthal and others, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (1998). A recent book by Donald Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War* (2003), captures Greece's crisis moment. On Rome, see K. Christ, *The Romans: An Introduction to Their History and Civilization* (1984), which is eminently readable and provocative; Clifford Ando and Jorg Rupke, *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome* (2006); J. Boardman et al., *Oxford History of the Classical World* (1986); and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire* (1987).

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Critical Thinking Questions

- How did the Persian empire illustrate major developments of the classical period?
- What was the relationship between art and politics in the classical Mediterranean?
- Compare the Roman empire with the Chinese empire under the Han dynasty.
- What were the main contributions of the classical Mediterranean to Middle Eastern and to African history?
- Can Greece, Hellenistic society, and Rome be treated as phases of a more durable Mediterranean civilization, or are separate treatments essential?
- Compare the classical period in Mesoamerica with the classical period in the Mediterranean.

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and symbols prior to the rise of Christianity. These included the halo (technically, the nimbus) used in artistic representations of saints, the very idea of saints, monasteries, holy water, the five-chained censer to burn incense, and the hand blessing (Figure 6.1). Christianity would later develop versions of these same practices. Had these elements of Buddhism become familiar to early Christians as a result of trade (and some Buddhist missions to Persia)? We simply do not know, but the coincidences are striking. There was also movement in the other direction. Early Christians from the Middle East established at least one church for their community in India, and later Christian missionaries—including, according to legend, the apostle Thomas—went to India as well. Again, we do not know, although there is a tomb designated for Saint Thomas in southern India.

Trade and some cultural exchange raise a final question: What would happen when the decline of Rome and Han China opened the region to other initiatives? Trading opportunities still existed, but they now invited other participants. India was the first beneficiary. The Gupta empire persisted for a century or more after Rome foundered. Indian merchants fanned out from the Persian Gulf to southeast Asia, as the Guptas encouraged business. Indian elites valued gold highly, which motivated much of their trade with southeast Asia. In return, they could offer fine cotton cloth. Indian prosperity reached new levels, and many new temples were built as one result. Indian influence helped expand Hinduism and, to a greater degree, Buddhism into southeast Asia.

The Gupta dynasty finally fell. Indian trading activity continued for a time, but there were new opportunities for Persians and Greeks (from the Eastern Roman empire) to rekindle competition for trade in the Indian Ocean. China would begin to reassert itself as well. When the dust settled from the long crisis of the classical world, the Indian Ocean was open to new claimants for trade supremacy. It would be the Arabs, previously confined to lesser commercial roles, including piracy, who would first meet this postclassical challenge. ■

This chapter focuses primarily on the centers of classical civilization in Eurasia and north Africa, while sketching developments in other key regions. The end of the classical era is defined by changes in Asia, north Africa, and the Mediterranean, not the whole world. Nevertheless, the fading of the great classical empires had consequences beyond their borders. The resulting change in civilization boundaries unleashed new forces that affected sub-Saharan Africa, northern Europe, and other parts of Asia.

Three issues predominate. First, why did these civilizations decline? Invasions were an important cause. Nomadic forces accustomed to fighting on horseback had an advantage over the armies of the classical civilizations. But in their prime, the empires would have been able to turn the invaders back—so what else was going on? Second, why did different regions see different patterns of decline, with different results? And third, what was the significance of these developments—not just for the end of one period, but for the beginning of another? The rapid spread of world religions, as the empires faded, provides a vital part of the answer.

BEYOND THE CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS

6.1

What were the main similarities and differences between Africa and the Americas by the early centuries C.E.?

Although the development of the three great civilizations is the central thread in world history during the classical period, significant changes also occurred in other parts of the world. On the borders of the major civilizations, as in northeastern Africa, Japan, and northern Europe, these changes bore some relationship to the classical world, although they were partly autonomous. Elsewhere, most notably in the Americas,

Significant civilizations developed in the Americas and Africa outside the immediate classical orbit.

new cultures continued to evolve in an entirely independent way. In all cases, changes during the classical period set the stage for more important links in world history later on. Southeast Asia gained access to civilization during the classical period mainly through its contacts with India. Regional kingdoms had already been established, and agricultural economies were familiar on the principal islands of Indonesia as well as on the mainland. Participation in wider trade patterns developed through the efforts of Indian merchants. Hindu and particularly Buddhist religion and art also spread from India. Here was a case of the outright expansion of civilization without the creation of a fully distinctive or unified culture.

Developments in Africa's Kush and Its Heritage

A similar case of expansion from an established civilization affected parts of sub-Saharan Africa; indeed, in this case the interaction had begun well before the rise of Greece and Rome. By the year 1000 B.C.E., the independent kingdom of Kush was flourishing along the upper Nile. It possessed a form of writing derived from Egyptian hieroglyphics (and which has not yet been fully deciphered) and mastered the use of iron. Briefly, around 750 B.C.E., armies from Kush conquered Egypt (Figure 6.2). Major cities were built. The Kushites seem to have established a strong monarchy, with elaborate ceremonies illustrating a belief that the king was divine. The kingdom of Kush was defeated by a rival kingdom called **Axum** by about 300 B.C.E.; Axum ultimately fell to another regional kingdom, **Ethiopia**. Axum and Ethiopia had active contacts with the eastern Mediterranean world until after the fall of Rome. They traded with this region for several centuries. The activities of Jewish merchants brought some conversions to Judaism, and a small minority of Ethiopians has remained Jewish to the present day. Greek-speaking merchants also had considerable influence, and it was through them that Christianity was brought to Ethiopia by the 4th century C.E. The Ethiopian Christian church, however, was cut off from mainstream Christianity thereafter, flourishing in isolation to modern times. And Ethiopia had the world's oldest continuous monarchy, which lasted until it was abolished in the late 20th century.

It is not clear how much influence, if any, the kingdoms of the upper Nile had on the later history of sub-Saharan Africa. Knowledge of ironworking certainly spread, facilitating the expansion of agriculture in other parts of the continent. Patterns of strong, ceremonial kingship—sometimes called divine kingship—would surface in other parts of Africa later, but whether this occurred through some contact with the Kushite tradition or independently is not known. Knowledge of Kushite writing did not spread, which suggests that the impact of this first case of civilization below the Sahara was somewhat limited.

For most of Africa below the Sahara but north of the great tropical jungles, the major development up to 500 C.E. was the further extension of agriculture. Well-organized villages arose, often very similar in form and structure to those that still exist. Farming took earliest root on the southern fringes of the **Sahara**, which was less arid than it is today. Toward the end of the classical era, important regional kingdoms were forming in western Africa, leading to the first great state in the region: Ghana. Because of the barriers of dense vegetation and the impact of African diseases on domesticated animals, agriculture spread only slowly southward. However, the creation of a strong agricultural economy prepared the way for the next, more long-lasting and influential wave of African kingdoms,

Axum Kingdom located in Ethiopian highlands; replaced Meroë in first century C.E.; received strong influence from Arabian peninsula; eventually converted to Christianity.

Ethiopia A Christian kingdom that developed in the highlands of eastern Africa under the dynasty of King Lalibela; retained Christianity in the face of Muslim expansion elsewhere in Africa.

Sahara Desert running across northern Africa; separates the Mediterranean coast from southern Africa.

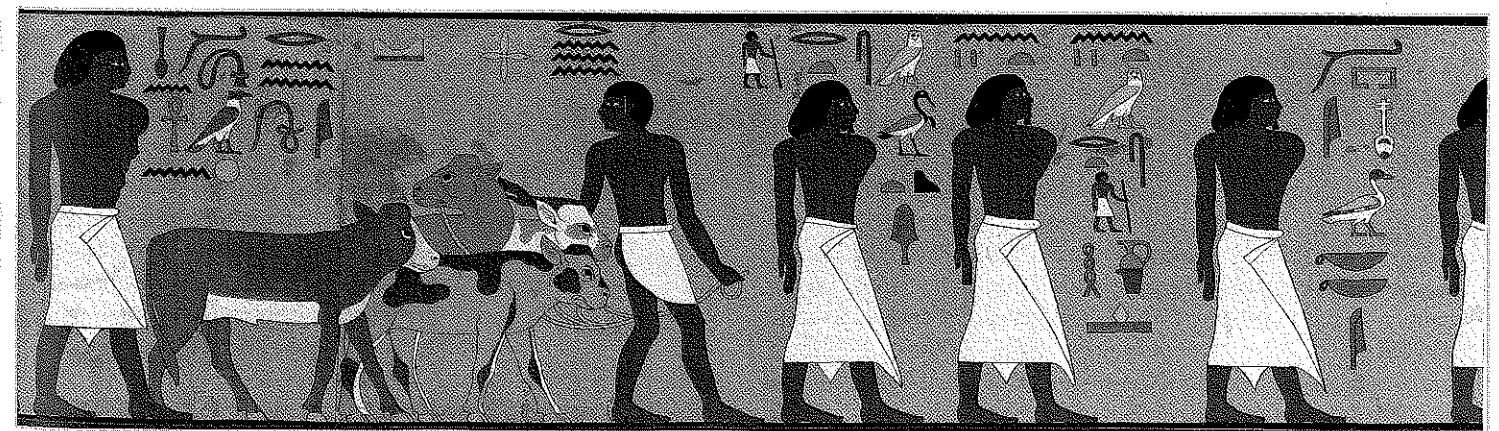


FIGURE 6.2 This Egyptian wall painting portrays dark-skinned people from the rising kingdom of Kush, who interacted increasingly with Egyptian society and, for several centuries ruled Egypt directly.

1000 B.C.E.

1 C.E.

250 C.E.

500 C.E.

c. 1000 Polynesians reach Fiji, Samoa
1000 Independent kingdom of Kush
800–400 Spread of Olmec civilization: cultivation of maize (corn), potatoes; domestication of turkeys, dogs
c. 300 Rise of Axum

c. 30 Crucifixion of Jesus
c. 100 Root crops introduced to southern Africa through trade
100 Beginning of decline of Han dynasty
180 Rome begins to decline; population decline
c. 200 Extensive agriculture practiced in Japan
227 Beginning of Sassanid empire in Persia

284–305 Reign of Diocletian
c. 300 Ethiopia adopts Christianity
c. 312–337 Reign of Constantine; establishment of eastern Roman empire; toleration of Christianity
330–379 Basil organizes Eastern monasticism
354–430 Life of Augustine
370–480 Nomadic invasions of western Europe
c. 400 Growth of Mayan civilization
c. 400 Polynesians reach Hawaii
450 Huns begin to invade India
476 Collapse of Rome

c. 500 Buddhism takes root in east and southeast Asia
c. 500 Formation of Ghana
c. 600 Beginning of Islam
606–647 Loose empire under Harsha in India
618 Tang dynasty in China: glorious cultural period
700 Shintoism unified into single national religion in Japan
527–565 Reign of Justinian, Eastern emperor
c. 540 Collapse of Gupta dynasty
589–618 Sui dynasty

100 C.E.

200 C.E.

400 C.E.

600 C.E.

88 Beginning of Han decline
180 ff. Beginning of Rome's decline; population decline
184 Daoist Yellow Turban rebellion

220 Last Han emperor deposed; Time of Troubles begins; nomadic invasions in North China
231 First Germanic invasions of Roman empire
284–305 Reign of Diocletian emperor

400–500 Decline of Buddhism in India; evolution of popular Hinduism
401 ff. Increased Germanic invasions
410 Rome sacked by Visigoths under Alaric
450 Hun invasions begin
476 Last Roman emperor in West deposed
480–547 Life of Benedict, founder of Western monasticism

618 Tang dynasty
606–647 Loose empire under Harsha in India
610 Beginning of Islam
657 ff. Rajput (regional princes) dominant in India; periodic clashes with Islamic armies in northwest

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Nomads and Cross-Civilization Contacts and Exchanges

THROUGH MUCH OF RECORDED HUMAN HISTORY, nomadic peoples have been key agents of contact between sedentary, farming peoples and town dwellers in centers of civilization across the globe. Nomadic peoples pioneered all the great overland routes that linked the civilized cores of Eurasia in ancient times and the Middle Ages. The most famous was the fabled Silk Road that ran from western China across the mountains and steppes of central Asia to the civilized centers of Mesopotamia in the last millennium B.C.E., and to Rome, the Islamic heartlands, and western Europe in the first millennium and a half C.E.

Chinese rulers at one end of these trading networks, and Roman emperors and later Islamic sultans at the other end, often had to send their armies to do battle with hostile nomads whose raids threatened to cut off the flow of trade. But perhaps more often, pastoral peoples played critical roles in establishing and expanding trading links. For periodic payments by merchants and imperial bureaucrats, they provided protection from bandits and raiding parties for caravans passing through their grazing lands. For further payments, nomadic peoples supplied animals to transport both the merchants' goods and the food and drink needed by those in the caravan parties. At times, pastoralists themselves took charge of transport and trading, but it was more common for the trading operations to be controlled by specialized merchants. These merchants were based either in the urban centers of the civilized cores or in the trading towns that grew up along the Silk Road in central Asia, the oases of Arabia, and the savanna zones that bordered on the north and south the vast Sahara desert in Africa.

Until they were supplanted by the railroads and steamships of the Industrial Revolution, the overland trading routes of Eurasia and the Americas, along with comparable networks established

for sailing vessels, were the most important channels for contacts between civilizations. Religions such as Buddhism and Islam spread peacefully along the trading routes throughout central Asia, Persia, and Africa. Artistic motifs and styles, such as those developed in the cosmopolitan Hellenistic world created by Alexander the Great's conquests, were spread by trading contacts in northern Africa, northern India, and western China.

Inventions that were vital to the continued growth and expansion of the civilized cores were carried in war and peace by traders or nomadic peoples from one center to another. For example, central Asian steppe nomads who had converted to Islam clashed with the armies of China in the 8th century C.E. The victorious

Muslims found craftspeople among their prisoners who knew the secrets of making paper, which had been invented many centuries earlier by the Chinese. The combination of nomadic mobility and established trading links resulted in the rapid diffusion of papermaking

techniques to Mesopotamia and Egypt in the 8th and 9th centuries and across northern Africa to Europe in the centuries that followed.

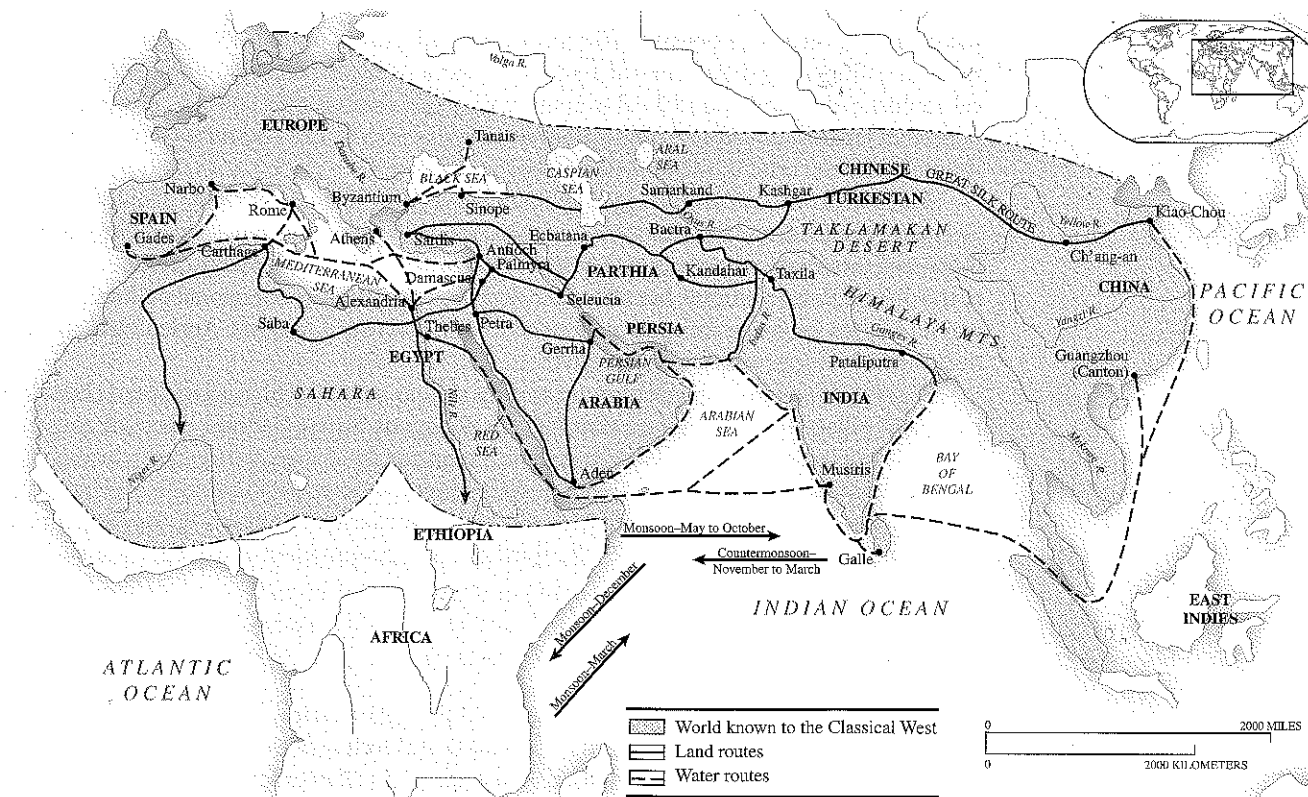
Nomadic warriors also contributed to the spread of new military technologies and modes of warfare, particularly across the great Eurasian land mass. Sedentary peoples often adopted the nomads' reliance on heavy cavalry and hit-and-run tactics. Saddles, bits, and bow and arrow designs developed by nomadic herders were avidly imitated by farming societies. And defense against nomadic assaults inspired some of the great engineering feats of the preindustrial world, most notably the Great Wall of China (discussed in Chapter 2). It also spurred the development of gunpowder and cannons in China, where the threat of nomadic incursions persisted well into the 19th century.

Pastoral peoples played critical roles in establishing and expanding trading links.

In addition, nomadic peoples have served as agents for the transfer of food crops between distant civilized cores, even if they did not usually themselves cultivate the plants being exchanged. In a less constructive vein, nomadic warriors have played a key role in transmitting diseases. In the best-documented instance of this pattern, Mongol cavalry carried the bacterium that causes the strain of the plague that came to be known as the Black Death from central Asia to China in the 14th century. They may also have transmitted it to the West, where it devastated the port cities of the Black Sea region and was later carried by merchant ships to the Middle East and southern Europe.

QUESTIONS

- What other groups played roles as intermediaries between civilizations in early global history?
- What features of the nomads' culture and society rendered them ideal agents for transmitting technology, trade goods, crops, and diseases between different cultural zones?
- Why have the avenues of exchange they provided been open only for limited time spans and then blocked for years or decades at a time?
- What agents of transmission have taken the place of nomadic peoples in recent centuries?



MAP 6.1 Trade Routes at the End of the Classical Era



FIGURE 6.3 The simplicity and woodland setting of this shrine at Izumo, Japan, are characteristic of Shinto architecture, which was designed to reflect reverence for and harmony with nature.

Shintoism Religion of early Japanese culture; devotees worshipped numerous gods and spirits associated with the natural world; offers of food and prayers made to gods and nature spirits.

simple religion, rather different in ritual and doctrine from the great world religions and philosophies developing in the classical civilizations. Something like national politics arose only around 400 c.e., when one regional ruler began to win the loyalty and trust of other local leaders. This was the basis for Japan's imperial house, with the emperor worshipped as a religious figure. Such growing political sophistication and national cultural unity were just emerging by 600 c.e., however. It was at this point that Japan was ready for more elaborate contacts with China—a process that would move Japan squarely into the orbit of major civilizations.

Much of northern Europe lagged behind Japan's pace. Teutonic or Celtic peoples in what today is Germany, England, and Scandinavia, as well as Slavic peoples in much of eastern Europe, were loosely organized into regional kingdoms. Some, in Germany and England, had succumbed to the advances of the distant Roman empire, but after Rome's decline the patterns of regional politics resumed. There was no written language, except in cases where Latin had been imported. Agriculture, often still combined with hunting, was rather primitive.

Scandinavians were developing increasing skill as sailors, which would lead them into wider trade and pillage in the centuries after 600 c.e. Religious beliefs featured a host of gods and rituals designed to placate the forces of nature. This region would change, particularly through the spread of the religious and intellectual influences of Christianity. However, these shifts still lay in the future, and even conversions to Christianity did not bring northern and eastern Europe into the orbit of a single civilization. Until about 1000 c.e., northern Europe remained one of the most backward areas in the world.

The Americas

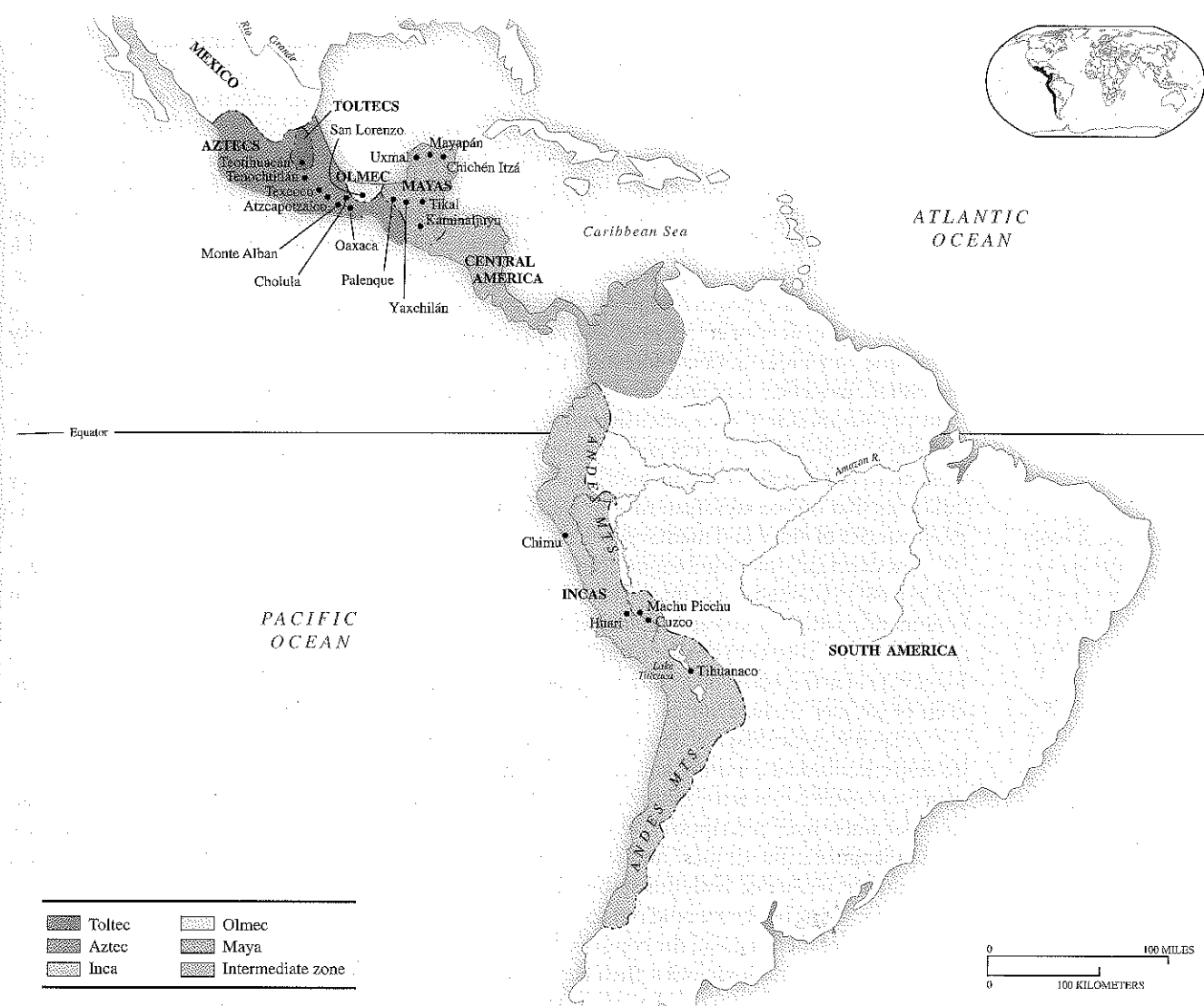
Crucial developments occurred in the Americas during the classical period, although still in isolation from patterns in other parts of the world. Following the decline of the Olmecs, the period from about 150 to 900 c.e. was a great age of cultural achievement in Mesoamerica. Archeologists refer to it as the classical period, and during it, great civilizations flourished in many places. The two main centers of civilization were the high central valley of Mexico and the more humid tropical lands of southern Mexico, Yucatan, and Guatemala (Map 6.2).

far to the west of the Nile. New crops, including root crops and plantains introduced through trade with southeast Asia about 100 c.e., helped African farmers push into new areas.

Japan and Northern Europe

Advances in agriculture and manufacturing also occurred in other parts of the world besides sub-Saharan Africa. In northern Europe and Japan, there was no question, as yet, of elaborate contacts with the great civilizations, no counterpart to the influences that affected parts of southeast Asia and the upper Nile valley. Japan, by the year 200 c.e., had established extensive agriculture. The population of the islands had been formed mainly by migrations from the peninsula of Korea, over a 200,000-year span. These migrations had ceased by the year 200. In Japan, a regional political organization based on tribal chiefs evolved; each tribal group had its own god, thought of as an ancestor. A Chinese visitor in 297 described the Japanese as law-abiding, fond of drink, expert at agriculture and fishing; they observed strict social differences, indicated by tattoos or other body markings. Japan had also developed considerable ironworking; the Japanese seem to have skipped the stage of using bronze and copper tools, moving directly from stone tools to iron. Finally, regional states in Japan became increasingly sophisticated, each controlling somewhat larger territories. In 400 c.e., one such state brought in scribes from Korea to keep records—this represented the introduction of writing in the islands.

Japan's religion, **Shintoism**, provided for the worship of political rulers and the spirits of nature, including the all-important god of rice. Many local shrines and rituals revolved around Shinto beliefs, which became unified into a single national religion by 700 c.e. (Figure 6.3). However, this was a




MAP 6.2 **Civilizations of Central and South America** Three cultural "hearths" are represented: Mesoamerica, extending from north-central Mexico to Nicaragua; the Andean region in South America, and the Intermediate zone of modern-day Colombia and Panama, which shared many characteristics with the other zones but did not build in stone.

The Valley of Mexico: Teotihuacan In central Mexico, the city of **Teotihuacan**, near modern Mexico City, emerged as an enormous urban center with important religious functions. It was supported by intensive agriculture in the surrounding region and probably by crops planted around the great lakes that dominated the central valley of Mexico. Teotihuacan's enormous temple pyramids rival those of ancient Egypt and suggest a large state apparatus with the power to mobilize many workers. Population estimates for this city, which covered 9 square miles, are as high as 200,000. This would make it greater than the cities of ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia and probably second only to ancient Rome of the cities of classical antiquity.

Certain trades and ethnic groups had their own residential districts, and there is much evidence of wide social distinctions between the priests, nobles, and common people. The many gods of Mesoamerica, still worshiped when the Europeans arrived in the 16th century, were already honored at Teotihuacan. The god of rain, the feathered serpent, the goddess of corn, and the goddess of waters all appear in the murals and decorations of the palaces and temples. In fact, almost all Teotihuacan art seems to have been religious.

The influence of Teotihuacan extended widely, and tribute probably was exacted from many regions. But by the 8th century c.e. the city was in decline, and it was finally abandoned after attacks

Teotihuacan [tay-oh-tee-wah-KAHN] Site of classic culture in central Mexico; urban center with important religious functions; supported by intensive agriculture in surrounding regions; population of as much as 200,000.

 **View the Closer Look on MyHistoryLab:** The Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan

probably from nomadic raiders from the north. But for centuries thereafter, the memory of Teotihuacan lived on among the peoples of Mesoamerica as a golden age of cultural achievements.

The Classic Maya Between about 300 and 900 C.E., at roughly the same time that Teotihuacan dominated the central plateau, the Maya peoples were developing Mesoamerican civilization to its highest point in southern Mexico and Central America. The American classic period, launched as the Old World classical civilizations were coming to an end, lasted well into the next period in history.

The Maya culture extended over a broad region that now includes parts of five different countries: Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. It included several related languages, and it had considerable regional variation, as can be seen in its art styles. The whole region shared a common culture that included monumental architecture, a written language, a calendar and mathematical system, a highly developed religion, and concepts of statecraft and social organization. Using only stone tools in an area of dense forests, plagued by insects and poor soils, as many as 50 city-states flourished. Evidence of irrigation, swamp drainage, and a system of artificially constructed ridged fields at river mouths (where intensive agriculture was practiced) seems to explain the Mayan ability to support large urban centers and a total population of perhaps 5 million. The Maya cities vary in size and layout, but almost all include large pyramids surmounted by temples, complexes of masonry buildings that served administrative or religious purposes, elite residences, a ritual ball court, and often a series of altars and memorial pillars.

The calendar system and sophisticated astronomical observations were made possible by a vigesimal system of mathematics (that is, based on 20). The Maya knew the concept of zero and used it in conjunction with the concept of place value or position. With elegant simplicity and with signs for only 1, 5 and 0, they could make complex calculations. As among all the Mesoamerican peoples, the Maya calendar was based on a concept of recurring cycles of different lengths. The Maya had a sacred cycle of 260 days divided into months of 20 days each, within which there was a cycle of 13 numbers.

A second great Maya accomplishment was the creation of a writing system. The Maya wrote on stone monuments, murals, and ceramics and in books of folded paper and deerskin, only four of which survive. Scribes were honored and held an important place in society. Although we still cannot fully decipher many inscriptions, recent advances now permit the reading of many texts. The Maya written language, like Chinese and Sumerian, was a logographic system, which combined phonetic and semantic elements. With this system and about 287 symbols, the Maya recorded complex ideas. The few surviving books are religious and astronomical texts, and many inscriptions on ceramics deal with the cult of the dead and the complex Maya cosmology, but hundreds of the inscriptions refer to the reign of kings, their victories, their accomplishments, and their lineages.

The Maya had a complex religious system with many deities, but there was a basic Mesoamerican concept of dualism—male and female, good and bad, day and night. This idea, similar to that found in some Asian religions, emphasized the unity of all things. Each god had a parallel female consort or feminine form and often an underworld equivalent as well. In addition, there were patron deities of various occupations and classes. The number of gods and goddesses in the inscriptions seems overwhelming, but they should be understood as manifestations of a more limited set of supernatural forces, much like the various incarnations of the Hindu gods.

From the historical inscriptions we know that the major Maya centers were the cores of city-states, which controlled outlying territories. There was constant warfare, and rulers such as Pacal of Palenque expanded their territories by conquest. The rulers exercised civil and probably religious power, and an elite aided their rule and performed administrative functions. A class of scribes, or perhaps priests, tended to the cult of the state and specialized in the complex calendar observations and calculations. The ruler and the scribes organized and participated in rituals of self-mutilation and human sacrifice that among the Maya, as in much of Mesoamerica, were an important aspect of religion. Also, as a form of both worship and sport, the Maya, like other Mesoamerican peoples, wagered on and played a ritual ball game on specially constructed courts in which players moved a ball with their hips or elbows. The stakes were high: Losers might forfeit their possessions or their lives. Between about 700 and 900 C.E., the Mesoamerican world was shaken by the rapid decline of the great cultural centers. The reasons for this collapse are not fully understood, but it was widespread. In the central plateau, Teotihuacan was destroyed about 650 C.E. by outside invaders, probably nomadic hunters from the north, perhaps with the help of some of the groups under the dominance of Teotihuacan. The city may have already been in decline because of increasing problems with agriculture. More mysterious was the abandonment of the Maya cities. During the 8th century C.E., Maya rulers stopped erecting

commemorative stelae and large buildings, and population sizes dwindled. By 900 C.E., most of the major Maya centers has been deserted. Scholars do not agree whether this process was the result of ecological problems and climate change, agricultural exhaustion, internal revolt, or foreign pressure. The primary explanation for the collapse is agricultural exhaustion. By the 8th century, the limits of the Mayan agricultural system, given the size and density of population, may have been reached. Tikal had an estimated density of more than 300 people per square mile. Maintaining the great population centers was an increasing burden. Others believe that the peasants simply refused to bear the burdens of serving and feeding the political and religious elite and that internal rebellion led to the end of the ruling dynasties and their cities. Only after 1000 C.E. would another group, the Toltecs, revive trade and urban development in the region.

In the Andes, following the decline of Chavin culture, the Mochica state (200–700 C.E.), in the Moche (MOH-chay) valley and on the coast to the north of Chavín, mobilized workers to construct great clay brick temples, residences, and platforms. Artisans produced gold and silver jewelry and copper tools. The potter's art reached a high point; scenes on Mochica ceramics depict rulers receiving tribute and executing prisoners. Nobles, priests, farmers, soldiers, and slaves are also portrayed in remarkably lifelike ways; many vessels are clearly portraits of individual members of the elite. The Mochica also produced a great number of pottery vessels showing a variety of explicit sexual acts. These scenes are almost always in a domestic setting and indicate descriptions of everyday life rather than ritual unions.

Moche expanded its control by conquest. Mochica art contains many representations of war, prisoners, and the taking of heads as trophies. There is also archeological evidence of hilltop forts and military posts. Politically, Moche and the other regional states seem to have been military states or chiefdoms, supported by extensive irrigated agriculture and often at war. Other regional centers also emerged and one state, the Chimu (chee-MOO) expanded steadily from 800 C.E. until the rise of the Incas.

Polynesia A final case of isolated development featured the migration of agricultural peoples to new island territories in the Pacific. **Polynesian** peoples had reached islands such as Fiji and Samoa by 1000 B.C.E. Further explorations in giant outrigger canoes led to the first settlement of island complexes such as Hawaii by 400 C.E., where the new settlers adapted local plants, brought in new animals (notably pigs), and imported a highly stratified caste system under powerful local kings.

Overall, agriculture expanded into a number of new areas during the classical period; early civilizations, or early contacts, were also forming. These developments were not central to world history during the classical period itself, but they folded into the larger human experience thereafter.

Inca Group of clans centered at Cuzco that were able to create an empire incorporating various Andean cultures; term also used for leader of empire.

Polynesia Islands contained in a rough triangle whose points lie in Hawaii, New Zealand, and Easter Island.

DECLINE IN CHINA AND INDIA

6.2

What were the main differences in the process of decline in classical China and in classical India?

Between 200 and 600 C.E., all three classical civilizations collapsed entirely or in part, first in China, then the Mediterranean, and finally in India. During this four-century span, all suffered from outside invasions, the result of growing incursions by groups from central Asia. This renewed wave of nomadic expansion was not as sweeping as the earlier Indo-European growth, which had spread over India and much of the Mediterranean region many centuries before, but it severely tested the civilized regimes. Rome, of course, fell directly to Germanic invaders, who fought on partly because they were, in turn, harassed by the fierce Asiatic Huns. The Huns swept once across Italy, invading the city of Rome amid great destruction. Another Hun group from central Asia overthrew the Guptas in India, and similar nomadic tribes had earlier toppled the Chinese Han dynasty. The central Asian nomads were certainly encouraged by a growing realization of the weakness of the classical regimes. Han China as well as the later Roman empire suffered from serious internal problems long before the invaders dealt the final blows. And the Guptas in India had not permanently resolved that area's tendency to dissolve into political fragmentation.

Decline and Fall in Han China

The deteriorations of the late Han dynasty operated on several levels. Assassinations of and by bureaucrats competing for power at the top occurred on several occasions. At a basic level, conditions among the peasantry began to deteriorate. Large landowners, always powerful under the Han, grew more

A combination of internal weakness and invasion led to important changes, first in China, then in India.

Maya Classic culture emerging in southern Mexico and Central America contemporary with Teotihuacan; extended over broad region; featured monumental architecture, written language, calendrical and mathematical systems, highly developed religion.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: From the Popol Vuh: The Great Mythological Book of the Ancient Maya [ca. 1550]

so, avoiding taxes and forming private armies. Taxes on peasants increased, and many farmers were forced into serfdom, where they had to provide labor and turn over much of their own produce to the landlords. Social protest increased.

Peasant unrest culminated in a great revolutionary effort led by the Daoists in 184 C.E. Leaders called the **Yellow Turbans** promised a golden age to be brought about by divine magic. Han generals suppressed this rebellion but set themselves up as regional rulers, a clear sign of the collapse of the central state. The last Han emperor was deposed in 220 C.E. China was divided into three kingdoms for several decades, but finally even these began to collapse. For several centuries, China was ruled by the land-owning class, operating beyond the control of formal government. Southern and northern China also pulled apart, with the south maintaining higher levels of economic growth and continuing to absorb tribal peoples into Chinese culture.

No firm dynasties could be established in this 350-year period, although there were short-lived regimes in the south. Northern China was pressed by invasions from central Asia. Nomadic peoples had been incorporated into Chinese armies, much as later Roman rulers tried to use Germanic troops, but as the government deteriorated the nomads broke loose and began to invade the Middle Kingdom. Several nomad-dominated states were formed, but none lasted long. Internal warfare became endemic in this unusually long breakdown in Chinese stability.

Into this chaos came the new fascination with Buddhism, which offered spiritual solace in response to political uncertainty and economic distress. Also, like Christianity in Europe, it provided cultural cohesion at a time when political links had broken down. Imported from India—the only case until modern times when China borrowed a major idea from abroad—and disseminated by silk merchants and missionaries, Buddhism spread among both the Chinese and the nomadic warriors, helping gradually to mold a common culture in which Chinese ingredients predominated. Buddhist influence also brought to China a new impetus for art and sculpture, altering the established styles and themes.


Buddhism came under periodic attack by Daoist regional rulers, but the faith reached throughout China by the 5th century C.E., and it spread rapidly for many decades (Map 6.1). Buddhist monasteries for women as well as men gained ground. Many Chinese monks made pilgrimages to India, and Buddhist literature and philosophy spread widely. Chinese Buddhists blended practices from many Indian Buddhist sects, using meditation, prayers, and devotional exercises. The Document section shows what benefits Chinese converts might expect from their new religion. The Chinese imposed some of their own values on Buddhism as well. For instance, they insisted on the importance of forming families so that the ancestral line could be preserved. Typically, as a result, only second sons became Buddhist monks, and first sons maintained the family responsibilities. Buddhists were also pressed into political loyalty, paying taxes to the government and submitting to government regulations on the formation of monasteries.

Buddhism made other adjustments in its spread in east Asia. It had a fascinating impact on women in China, among families who converted. On the face of things, Buddhism should have disrupted China's firm belief in patriarchal power, because Buddhists believed that women had souls along with men. Indeed, some individual women in China won great attention because of their spiritual accomplishments. But Chinese culture generated changes in Buddhism within the empire. Buddhist phrases like "husband supports wife" were changed to "husband controls his wife," while "the wife comforts the husband"—another Buddhist phrase from India—became "the wife reveres her husband." Finally, many men valued pious Buddhist wives, because they might benefit the family's salvation and because Buddhist activity could keep their wives busy, calm, and out of mischief. Buddhism could be meaningful to Chinese women, but it did not really challenge patriarchy. A biography of one Buddhist wife put it this way: "At times of crisis she could be tranquil and satisfied with her fate, not letting outside things agitate her mind."

The growing Buddhist influence also had an impact on Daoism, forcing greater formalization of Daoist doctrine and more efforts to reach the common people. Many Chinese found great similarities between the two faiths, although Buddhism continued to have the advantage of offering a clearer doctrine of personal salvation—the chance of holy life after death—and a firmer set of personal ethics. Daoist leaders developed a variety of practices, including meditation and dietary restrictions, which might bring immortality. Popular Daoism, mixing Daoist beliefs with an animistic pantheon of many gods, tended to hold that good or evil done in this life would be compensated by heavens or hells hereafter. Popular Daoism also provided priests and shamans who practiced faith healing to cure disease. These ramifications of Daoism appealed to the Chinese peasantry, lasting in some parts of eastern Asia even today.

Confucianism lost ground during this confused period in Chinese history, eclipsed by the more otherworldly interests. But the legacy of Chinese institutions and secular beliefs did not disappear,

Yellow Turbans Chinese Daoists who launched a revolt in 184 C.E. in China promising a golden age to be brought about by divine magic.

 **View the Closer Look on MyHistoryLab: A Buddhist Pilgrim of the Seventh Century**

DOCUMENT

The Popularization of Buddhism

CHINESE BUDDHISM, UNLIKE MOST CHINESE BELIEFS, spread among all regions and social groups. Although it divided into many sects that disagreed over details of theology and rituals by commenting on earlier Buddhist scriptures (the Sutras), many ordinary Chinese believers cared little for such details and were more concerned with direct spiritual benefits. Often they arranged to have Buddhist sermons copied, as a means of obtaining merit, while adding a note of their own. The following passages come from such notes, written mainly in the 6th century. They suggest the various reasons people might go through the challenging process of converting to a new religion.

RECORDED ON THE 15TH DAY OF THE FOURTH MONTH OF 531.

The Buddhist lay disciple Yuan Rong—having lived in this degenerate era for many years, fearful for his life, and yearning for home—now makes a donation of a thousand silver coins to the Three Jewels [the Buddha, the Law, and the Monastic Order]. This donation is made in the name of the Celestial King Vairavana. In addition, he makes a donation of a thousand to ransom himself and his wife and children [from their earthly existence], a thousand more to ransom his servants, and a thousand more to ransom his domestic animals. This money is to be used for copying sutras. It is accompanied by the prayer that the Celestial King may attain Buddhahood; that the disciple's family, servants, and animals may be blessed with long life, may attain enlightenment, and may all be permitted to return to the capital.

DATED THE 29TH DAY OF THE FOURTH MONTH OF 550.

Happiness is not fortuitous: pray for it and it will respond. Results are not born of thin air: pay heed to causes and results will follow. This explains how the Buddhist disciple and nun Daorong—because her conduct in her previous life was not correct—came to be born in her present form, a woman, vile and unclean.

Now if she does not honor the awesome decree of Buddha, how can future consequences be favorable for her? Therefore, having cut down her expenditures on food and clothing, she reverently has had the Nirvana Sutra copied once. She prays that those who read it carefully will be exalted in mind to the highest realms and that those who communicate its meaning will cause others to be so enlightened.

She also prays that in her present existence she will have no further sickness or suffering, that her parents in seven other incarnations (who have already died or will die in the future) and her present family and close relatives may experience joy in the four realms [earth, water, fire, and air], and that whatever they seek may indeed come to pass. Finally, she prays that all

those endowed with knowledge may be included within this prayer.

RECORDED ON THE 28TH DAY OF THE FIFTH MONTH OF 583.

The Army Superintendent, Song Shao, having suffered the heavy sorrow of losing both his father and mother, made a vow on their behalf to read one section each of [many] sutras. He prays that the spirits of his parents will someday reach the Pure Land [paradise] and will thus be forever freed from the three unhappy states of existence and the eight calamities and that they may eternally listen to the Buddha's teachings.

He also prays that the members of his family, both great and small, may find happiness at will, that blessings may daily rain down upon them while hardships disperse like clouds. He prays that the imperial highways may be open and free of bandits, that the state may be preserved from pestilence, that wind and rain may obey their proper seasons, and that all suffering creatures may quickly find release. May all these prayers be granted!

The preceding incantation has been translated and circulated.

If this incantation is recited 7, 14, or 21 times daily (after having cleansed the mouth in the morning with a willow twig, having scattered flowers and incense before the image of Buddha, having knelt and joined the palms of the hands), the four grave sins, the five wicked acts, and all other transgressions will be wiped away. The present body will not be afflicted by untimely calamities; one will at last be born into the realm of immeasurably long life; and reincarnation in the female form will be escaped forever.

Now, the Sanskrit text has been reexamined and the Indian Vinaya monk Buddhasangha and other monks have been consulted; thus we know that the awesome power of this incantation is beyond comprehension. If it is recited 100 times in the evening and again at noon, it will destroy the four grave sins and five wicked acts. It will pluck out the very roots of sin and will ensure rebirth in the Western Regions. If, with sincerity of spirit, one is able to complete 200,000 recitations, perfect intelligence will be born and there will be no relapses. If 300,000 recitations are completed, one will see Amita Buddha face to face and will certainly be reborn into the Pure Land of tranquility and bliss.

Copied by the disciple of pure faith Sun Szu-chung on the 8th day of the fourth month of 720.

QUESTIONS

- Why did Buddhism spread widely in China by the 6th century?
- How did popular Buddhism compare with original Buddhist teachings?
- How did Chinese Buddhists define holy life?
- How do these documents suggest some of the troubles China faced after the collapse of the Han dynasty?

View the **Closeur Look** on MyHistoryLab: A Tang Painting of the Goddess of Mercy

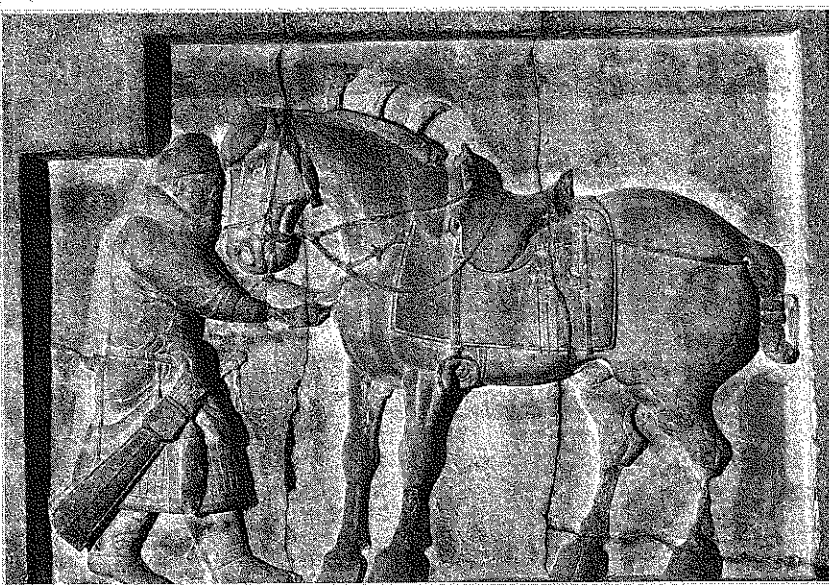


FIGURE 6.4 Stone relief from the tomb of the Tang emperor Taizong (7th century), showing one of his warhorses attended by a bearded “barbarian” groom. How does this relief suggest the barbarian threat was being handled after China’s crisis period had ended? (Relief of Emperor Tai Tsung’s Horse, “Autumn Dew.” The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.)

Sui [sway] Dynasty that succeeded the Han in China; emerged from strong rulers in northern China; united all of northern China and reconquered southern China.

Tang Dynasty that succeeded the Sui in 618 C.E.; more stable than previous dynasty.

Harsha Ruler who followed Guptas in India; briefly constructed a loose empire in northern India between 616 and 657 C.E.

Rajput [RAHJ-poot] Regional princes in western India; emphasized military control of their regions.

Devi [DAY-vee] Mother goddess within Hinduism; widely spread following collapse of Guptas; encouraged new emotionalism in religious ritual.

and as nomadic invaders were partly converted to Chinese ways, the opportunity for political revival reemerged toward the end of the 6th century. A series of strong rulers in the north drove out nomadic bands and then merged, under a general of Chinese-Turkish background, into a new **Sui** dynasty. Under this brief dynasty, northern China was united and south China was reconquered. The government built new canals and repaired the Great Wall. Attempts to expand into Korea and central Asia brought financial collapse, along with new rebellions, and only in 618 C.E. was the more durable **Tang** dynasty established. The time of troubles had ended. New artistic works reflected renewed political integration (Figure 6.4).

The decline and fall of the Han had thus disrupted Chinese civilization and opened it to new religious influences. But old values survived as well. Even the competing landlords retained some training in Confucianism and with that training the idea of a united empire. With its greater cultural homogeneity established in the classical era, China differed markedly from the Mediterranean, where Christianity and Islam came close to displacing older philosophical concerns while challenging earlier political loyalties. Many nomadic invaders imitated Chinese styles and thus encouraged the revival of older political habits.

The End of the Guptas: Decline in India

The decline of classical civilization in India was less drastic than the collapse of Han China in that India had not depended so heavily on political structures to hold its civilization together. Yet the Gupta collapse left durable traces in later Indian history, as political unity became more difficult to achieve. The high point of Gupta rule came under Chandragupta II early in the 5th century, but his immediate successors managed to remain prosperous. India at this point probably was the most stable and peaceful area in the world. However, in 440 C.E., the nomadic Huns began a series of invasions that gradually reduced the empire’s strength. The Gupta pattern of somewhat decentralized rule, whereby vassal princes were treated as partial allies rather than subject to direct central administration, made response to invasion more difficult. The Huns controlled much of northwestern India—the typical invasion route of the subcontinent—by 500 C.E. By this time, the quality of Gupta kings was also diminishing, and this added to the problem. It was a regional prince, **Harsha** Vardhana, not the Guptas themselves, who broke the hold of the Huns in the northwest about 530 C.E., and the Guptas were too weak to restore their claims. The dynasty collapsed entirely about 550 C.E.

A few echoes of Gupta splendor were heard during the 7th century. Harsha, a descendant of the Guptas through his grandmother, established a loose empire across northern India between 616 and 657. But he died without heirs, and his empire broke up again. From this point onward, until a better-organized series of outside invasions began, northern India was politically divided. Regional dynasties occasionally were powerful, but few lasted very long. A section of northern India was invaded by Tang Chinese-led Tibetan troops, who captured a young Indian prince and took him back to the Chinese capital in 648. This was the first and, until our own era, the only military clash between China and India. The northern regional princes, collectively called the **Rajput**, emphasized military prowess. Although there were many local wars, few political events had great significance.

In this localized framework, Indian culture continued to evolve. Buddhism declined steadily in India. The Guptas had preferred Hinduism, and the Hun invaders disliked the otherworldly tone of Buddhism as well. Military-minded princes had little sympathy for the Buddhist principles of calm and contemplation. Hindu beliefs gained ground, converting the Hun leaders, among other groups. Within Hinduism, worship of a mother goddess, **Devi**, spread widely, which encouraged a new popular emotionalism in religious ritual. In essence, India partially redefined its core culture by

emphasizing the Hindu strain more clearly while relying heavily on cultural cohesion at a time when political life became more difficult. The reassertion of Hinduism also promoted the caste system, now spreading to southern India. The number and complexity of jati (JAH-tee), or castes, increased as invaders were assimilated into the system, but the basic principles remained.

India’s economic activity also remained strong, although in periods of outright invasion there were new hardships. Here too, Indian civilization did not collapse to the extent of Han China or the western Mediterranean. Indeed, the decades after the fall of the Guptas saw new outreach in trade and even some conquest by southern Tamil kingdoms, which were trying to establish firmer strongholds along the Indian Ocean in southeast Asia.

Although Indian civilization largely maintained its position, albeit with a more diverse political lineup, another threat came after 600 C.E. from the new Middle Eastern religion of **Islam**. At first, India’s contacts with this new force were limited. Arab armies, fighting under the banner of Islam, reached India’s northwestern frontier during the 7th century, and although there was initially little outright conquest, Islam won some converts in the north. By the 8th century, Islamic competition also began to hit India’s international economic position. Arab traders soon took control of the Indian Ocean from Tamil merchants and reduced India’s commercial strength.

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

6.3

What were the causes of decline in the Roman empire?

Signs of decay at various levels began to emerge in the Roman empire in the late 2nd century. Population size declined, as birth rates no longer kept pace with mortality rates, and it became more difficult to recruit effective armies. Political signs included the greater brutality and arbitrariness of many later Roman emperors—victims, according to one commentator at the time, of “lustful and cruel habits.” Tax collection became increasingly difficult as residents of the empire fell on hard times. The governor of Egypt complained that “the once numerous inhabitants of the aforesaid villages have now been reduced to a few, because some have fled in poverty and others have died . . . and for this reason we are in danger owing to impoverishment of having to abandon the tax-collectorship.”

Wide-Ranging Signs of Decline

Above all there were the human symptoms. Inscriptions on Roman tombstones increasingly ended with the motto “I was not, I was, I am not, I have no more desires,” suggesting despair. As the structures of the empire deteriorated, meaning in life became harder to find, and this mood made efforts at structural revival more difficult. The signs of change in the quality of political and economic life began to emerge after about 180 C.E., at which point the empire’s geographic expansion had slightly receded from its high point. Unlike Han China or Gupta India, the Roman empire had depended extensively on expansion, not only to provide prestige but to recruit the necessary slaves. With the empire’s boundaries now pushed to the limits it could support, Rome had to restructure its labor policies on the great commercial estates and in the mines. This restructuring reduced economic vitality and market production.

Initially more pressing were the internal issues of politics and population. Government leadership became a problem. Growing political confusion, including disputes over how emperors should be appointed, produced a series of weak rulers and many battles over succession to the throne. Intervention of the army in the selection of emperors, as the army became an increasingly separate institution, complicated political life and contributed to the worsening of rule.

Causes of Roman Decline

The decline of the Roman state raises the question of human agency: When things go badly in a society, are weak leaders an accident, causing growing disarray, or do larger trends cause the selection of inferior rulers? Still more important in this decline was a series of plagues that swept over the empire at the end of the 2nd century C.E. These plagues decimated the population and severely disrupted economic life. Some authorities argue that Rome’s urban population also suffered lead poisoning from the pipes

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: From the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean

Islam Major world religion having its origins in 610 C.E. in the Arabian peninsula; meaning literally submission; based on prophecy of Muhammad.

Decline in Rome was complex, involving a mix of internal and external factors. The eastern and western portions of the empire developed differently after the fall of Rome.

leading from the aqueducts, which further weakened people and reduced their numbers. Lower population added to the problems of finding labor. With recruitment of troops becoming more difficult, the empire had to hire Germanic soldiers to guard its frontiers. The need to pay troops added to the demands on the state's budget, just as declining production cut into tax revenues and the absence of new conquests cut into other rewards for soldiers. Environmental deterioration in north Africa reduced grain supply and hurt the Roman tax base; overuse had reduced soil fertility and advanced desertification.

This may be the key to the process of decline: a set of general problems, including a cycle of plagues that could not be prevented, resulting in a spiral that steadily worsened, particularly as the selection of emperors deteriorated. But there is another side to Rome's downfall, although whether it was a cause or result of the initial difficulties is hard to say. Rome's upper classes became steadily more pleasure-seeking and individualistic, turning away from the concepts of civil duty that had characterized the republic and early empire. Cultural life decayed. Aside from some truly creative Christian writers, the fathers of Western theology, there was very little sparkle to the art or literature of the later empire. The Romans wrote textbooks about rhetoric instead of displaying rhetorical talent in actual political life; they wrote simple compendiums about animals or geometry that barely captured the essentials of what earlier intellectuals had known, and they often added superstitious beliefs that previous generations would have scorned. This cultural decline was not clearly caused by disease or economic collapse; it began in some ways before these larger problems hit. Something was happening to the Roman elite, perhaps because of the deadening hand of authoritarian political rule, perhaps because of a new commitment to luxuries and sensual indulgence. Military service became less attractive to the upper class, which forced the recruitment of paid soldiers from groups such as the Germanic tribes along the northern borders of the empire.

The Process of Roman Decline

As the quality of imperial rule declined and as life became more dangerous and economic survival more precarious, many farmers clustered around the protection of large landlords, surrendering full control of their plots of land, hoping for military and judicial protection. The decentralization of political and economic authority, which was greatest in the western, or European, portions of the empire, foreshadowed the manorial system of Europe in the Middle Ages. The estate system gave great political power to the landlords and could provide some local stability. But it weakened the emperor's power and tended to drive the economy away from the elaborate trade patterns of Mediterranean civilization in its heyday. Many estates attempted to produce almost everything needed on the spot. Trade and production declined further, causing tax revenues to drop and cities to shrink. The empire was locked in a vicious circle in which the responses to initial deterioration merely lessened the chances of recovery.

Some later emperors tried to reverse the flow. **Diocletian**, who ruled from 284 to 305 C.E., tightened up the administration of the empire and tried to improve tax collection. Regulation of the dwindling economy increased. Diocletian also tried to monopolize political loyalty, increasing the pressure to worship the emperor as god. This was what prompted him to persecute Christians with particular viciousness, for they would not give Caesar preference over their god. The emperor **Constantine**, who ruled from 312 to 337, tried other experiments. He set up a second capital city, Constantinople, to regulate the eastern half of the empire more efficiently. He tried to use the religious force of Christianity to unify the empire spiritually, extending toleration and adopting it as his own faith. These measures were not without result. The eastern empire, ruled from Constantinople (formerly the Greek colony of Byzantium, now the Turkish city of Istanbul), remained an effective political and economic unit. Christianity spread under official sponsorship, although some new problems were attached to success.

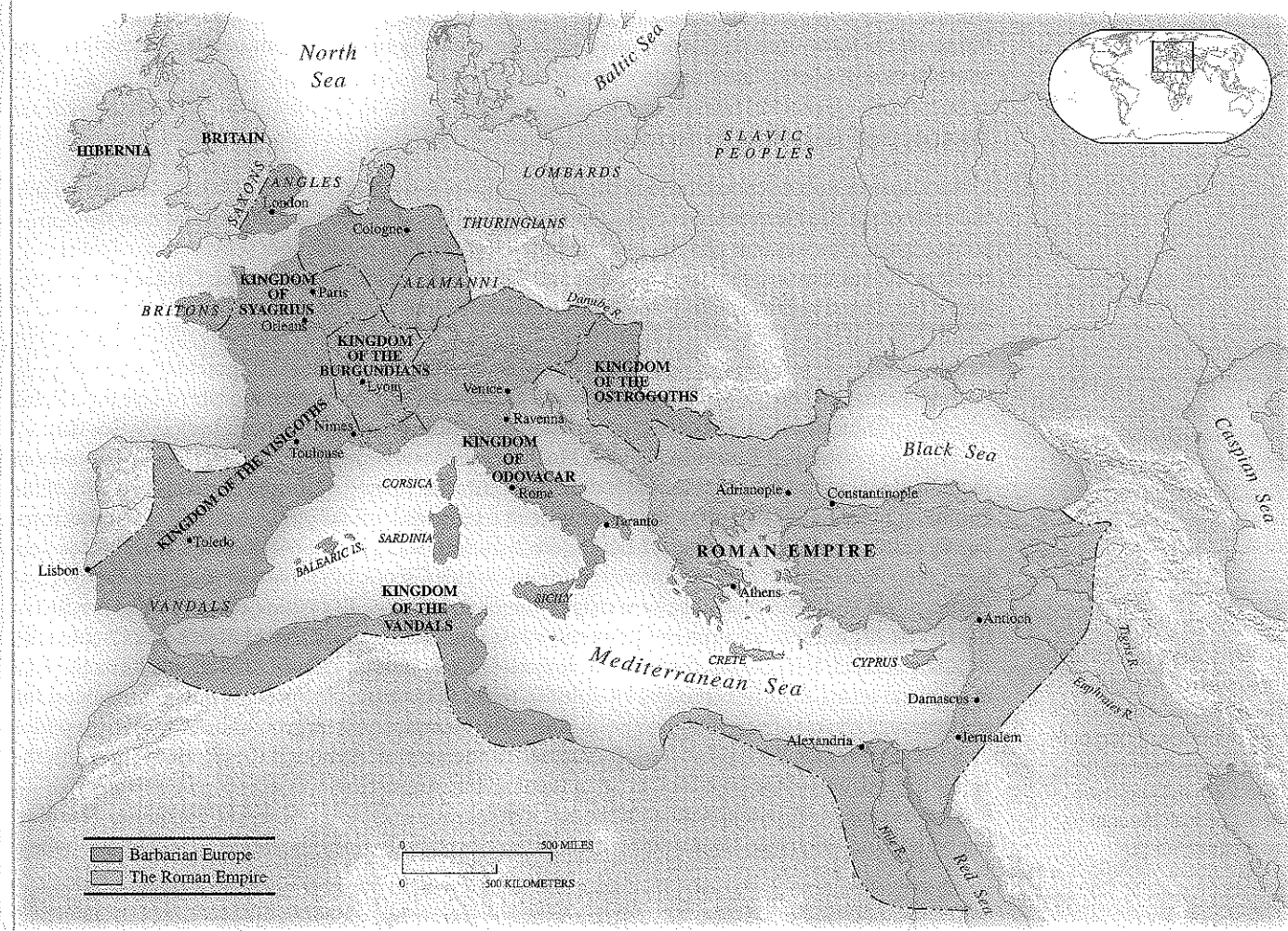
But none of these measures revived the empire as a whole. Human agency could have real impact, setting new forces in motion, but it could not reverse basic trends. Division merely made the weakness of the western half worse. Attempts to regulate the economy reduced economic initiative and lowered production; ultimately, tax revenues declined once again. The army deteriorated further. When the Germanic invasions began in earnest in the 400s, there was little resistance. Many peasants, burdened by the social and economic pressures of the decaying empire, actually welcomed the barbarians. A priest noted, "In all districts taken over by the Germans, there is one desire among all the Romans, that they should never again find it necessary to pass under Roman jurisdiction." German kingdoms were set up in many parts of the empire by 425, and the last Roman emperor in the West was displaced in 476 (Map 6.3). The Germanic invaders numbered, at most, 5 percent of the population of the empire, but so great was the earlier decline that this small, uncoordinated force put an end to one of the world's great political structures.

Diocletian Roman emperor from 284 to 305 C.E.; restored later empire by improved administration and tax collection.

Constantine Roman emperor from 312 to 337 C.E.; established second capital at Constantinople; attempted to use religious force of Christianity to unify empire spiritually.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Eusebius of Caesarea, selections from *Life of Constantine*

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Sidonius Apollinaris, Rome's Decay and A Glimpse of the New Order



MAP 6.3 Germanic Kingdoms After the Invasions Nomadic tribes converged mainly on the western part of the Roman empire, invading Rome and its European outposts. Was this the cause or the result of the fact that the western portion of the empire was weaker than the eastern?

Attila the Hun

In Europe, the most famous invader was Attila the Hun, who lived from 406 to 453. Attila led the nomadic Huns, fighting with great fierceness. He organized a loose kingdom that ran from Germany to China. Known by Christians as the "scourge of God," Attila invaded what is now France in 451. Both Romans and Germanic tribes resisted him. An end run into Italy brought him to Rome, where the pope pleaded with him to spare the city—to no avail. Attila highlighted and contributed to Rome's collapse. His own kingdom fell after his death. But his success called attention to the importance of cavalry in warfare, something the Greeks and Romans, with their preference for infantry, had largely ignored.

Patterns of Decline?

The fall of Rome echoes some of the same questions that apply to China and India. Do civilizations inevitably fall, or at least undergo cycles of decline? When the collapse involves outside invading forces, does one look primarily at internal decay? Germanic or central Asian invaders had a few military advantages. Their reliance on hunting and herding gave them some skills, including excellent equestrian skills in the case of the Huns, which allowed them to overrun more populous peasant settlements where people were unaccustomed to battle. From their contacts on the Roman borders,

the Germans had also learned new organizational methods that made them a more formidable force. But there is no question that in their glory days, the professional armies of Rome or Han China could have contained the invaders; it was internal weakness that allowed the invaders to have such disruptive effects. Rome seemed headed for downfall even before the Germanic intruders dealt the final blows. At the same time, the luxurious living of the upper classes and the impressive reputation of the classical empires helped lure the invaders in.

Results of the Fall of Rome

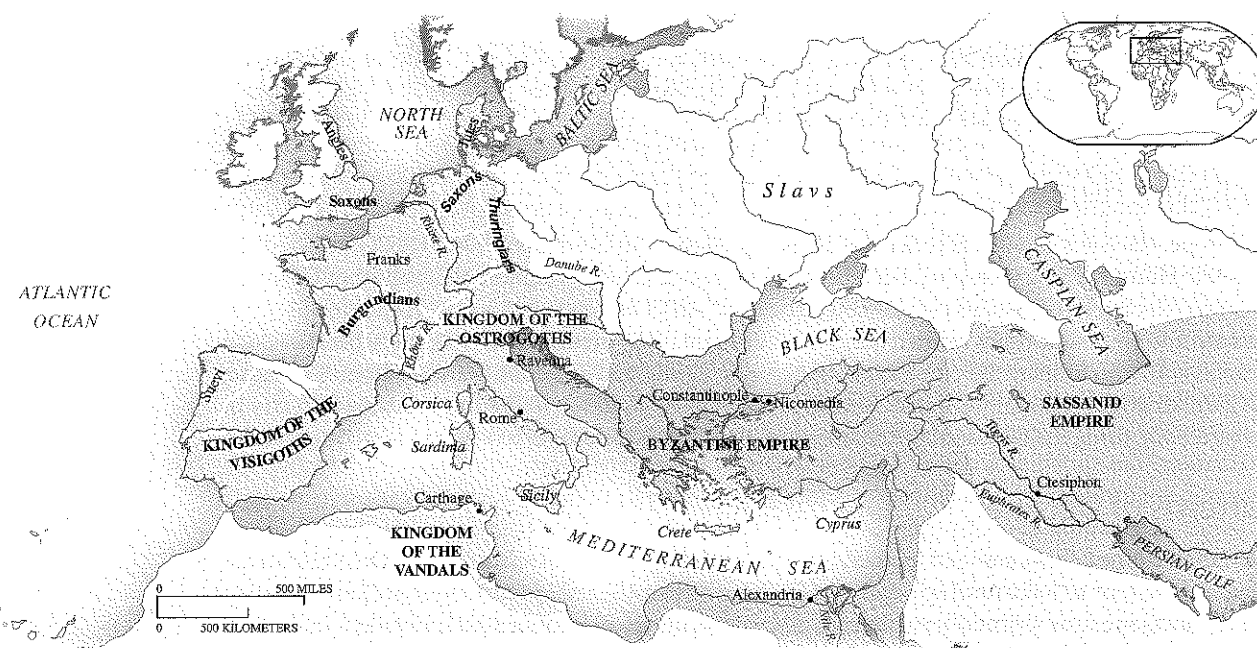
The collapse of Rome echoed through the later history of Europe and the Middle East. Rome's fall split the unity of the Mediterranean lands that had been won through Hellenistic culture and then the Roman empire itself. This was one sign that the end of the Roman empire was more serious than the displacement of the last classical dynasties in India and China. Greece and Rome, unlike China, had not produced the shared political culture and bureaucratic traditions that could allow revival after a period of chaos. Nor had Mediterranean civilization, for all its vitality, generated a common religion that reached deeply enough, or satisfied enough needs, to maintain unity amid political fragmentation, as in India. Such religions reached the Mediterranean world as Rome fell, but they came too late to save the empire, and they produced a deep rift between Christian and Muslim that has not been healed to this day.

In effect, the fall of Rome divided the Mediterranean world into three zones, the starting point of three distinct civilizations that developed in later centuries (Map 6.4). In the northeastern part of the empire, centered in Constantinople, the empire in a sense did not fall. Classical civilization was more deeply entrenched there than in some of the western European portions of the empire, and there were fewer pressures from invaders. Emperors continued to rule Greece, other parts of southeast Europe, and the northern Middle East. This eastern empire, later known as the **Byzantine empire**, was a product of the Hellenistic era and late imperial Rome, and it demonstrated great survival power (see Chapter 14).

The second zone that devolved from Rome's fall was more seriously disrupted, although more in political terms than in economic or cultural terms. This zone consisted of north Africa and the southeastern shores of the Mediterranean. The eastern empire held its ground briefly but then pulled back. Several regional kingdoms briefly succeeded the empire. Although Christianity spread in the area—indeed, one of the greatest Christian theologians, **Augustine**, was a bishop in north Africa—it was not as uniformly triumphant as in the Byzantine Empire or western Europe. Furthermore, differing beliefs and doctrines soon split north African Christianity from the larger branches, producing

Byzantine empire Eastern half of Roman empire following collapse of western half of old empire; retained Mediterranean culture, particularly Greek; later lost Palestine, Syria, and Egypt to Islam; capital at Constantinople.

Augustine (Saint) Influential church father and theologian (354–430 C.E.); born in Africa and ultimately bishop of Hippo in Africa; champion of Christian doctrine against various heresies and very important in the long-term development of Christian thought on such issues as predestination.



MAP 6.4 The Mediterranean, Middle East, Europe, and North Africa, c. 500 C.E. Soon after the fall of Rome, the former empire split into three distinct zones.

most notably the **Coptic** Church in Egypt, which still survives as a Christian minority in that country, and another branch in Ethiopia. Soon much of north Africa was filled with the still newer doctrines of Islam and a new Arab empire.

Finally, there was the western part of the empire: Italy, Spain, and points north. Here is where Rome's fall not only shattered unities but reduced the level of civilization itself. Crude, regional Germanic kingdoms grew in parts of Italy, France, and elsewhere. The only clearly vital force in this region was not Roman tradition but the spread of Christianity. Even Christianity could not sustain sophisticated literature, art, or even theology, however. In Rome's collapse, cities and commercial activity also declined.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND SPREAD OF WORLD RELIGIONS

6.4

How did the organization of Christianity reflect its complex relationships with the Roman empire?

As with the period of chaos in China, Rome's decline encouraged vital new religious influences, in this case to societies around the Mediterranean. Christianity moved westward from its original center in the Middle East, just as in Asia Buddhism was spreading east from India. Although initially less significant than Buddhism in terms of numbers of converts, Christianity ultimately became one of the two largest world faiths. It played a direct role in forming the postclassical civilizations of eastern and western Europe.

The newly expanding religions (including Islam soon afterward) all emphasized intense devotion and piety, stressing the importance of spiritual concerns beyond the daily cares of life. All three offered the hope of a better existence after this life ended, and all responded to new political instability and to the growing poverty of many people in various parts of the classical world. Finally, all promoted active missionary efforts, seeking to spread their ideas of religious truth across cultural and political boundaries.

Christianity and Buddhism Compared

Christianity resembled Buddhism in important ways. It could stress the unimportance of things of this world, urging a focus on spiritual destiny and divinity. Not surprisingly, Christianity, like Buddhism, produced an important monastic movement, in which people seeking holiness came together in groups to live a spiritual life and serve their religion. Christianity resembled the version of Buddhism that spread to China (and later Korea and Japan) by stressing the possibility of an afterlife and the role holy leaders could play in helping to attain it.

The Chinese version of Buddhism, called **Mahayana**, or the Greater Vehicle, placed considerable emphasis on Buddha as god or savior. Statues of the Buddha as god violated the earlier Buddhist hostility to religious images, but they emphasized the religion as a channel of salvation. Well-organized temples, with priests and rituals, also helped bring religious solace to ordinary people in east Asia. The idea developed also that Buddhist holy men, or **bodhisattvas**, built up such spiritual merit that their prayers, even after death, could aid people and allow them to achieve some holiness. These were people who had achieved enlightenment, thereby breaking the cycle of reincarnation, but chose to return to earth to help others do the same thing. Christianity in many respects moved in similar directions. It also came to emphasize salvation with well-organized rituals. Religious images, although contrary to Jewish beliefs against idol worship, helped focus popular belief in most versions of Christianity. Holy men and women, sometimes granted the title *saint* after their deaths, were revered because their spiritual attainments could lend merit to the strivings of more ordinary people. The broad similarities between Christianity and the evolving Buddhism of east Asia remind us of the common processes at work as new religions spread amid the ruins of great empires.

Yet Christianity had a flavor of its own. More than any of the forms of Buddhism, it emphasized church organization and structure, copying the example of the Roman empire. It also placed greater value on missionary activity and widespread conversions, believing that error must be actively opposed in God's name. More perhaps than any other major religion—certainly more than the contemplative and tolerant Buddhism—Christianity stressed its possession of exclusive truth and its intolerance of competing beliefs. Such fierce confidence was not the least of the reasons for the new religion's success.

Coptic Christian sect in Egypt, later tolerated after Islamic takeover.

The period of classical decline saw the rapid expansion of Buddhism and Christianity. Religious change had wider cultural, social, and political implications.

Mahayana Chinese version of Buddhism; placed considerable emphasis on Buddha as god or savior.

bodhisattvas [boh-dih-SAH-tuh] Buddhist holy men and women; built up spiritual merits during their lifetimes; prayers even after death could aid people to achieve reflected holiness.

Early Christianity

Christianity began as part of a Jewish reform movement. Initially, there seems to have been no intent to found a new religion. After Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples expected his imminent return and with it the end of the world. Only gradually, when the Second Coming did not happen, did the disciples begin to fan out and, through preaching, pick up supporters in various parts of the Roman empire.

The message of Jesus and his disciples seemed clear. There was a single God who loved humankind despite earthly sin. A virtuous life should be dedicated to the worship of God and fellowship with other believers. Worldly concerns were secondary, and a life of poverty might be most conducive to holiness. God sent **Jesus of Nazareth**, called Christ (from the Greek word *Christos*, "God's anointed"), to preach his holy word and, through his sacrifice, to prepare for the possibility of an afterlife of heavenly communion with God. Belief, good works, and discipline of fleshly concerns would lead toward heaven; rituals, such as commemorating Christ's Last Supper with wine and bread, would promote the same goal.

This message spread at an opportune time. The official religion of the Greeks and Romans had long seemed rather sterile, particularly to many of the poor. The Christian emphasis on the beauty of poverty and the spiritual equality of all people, plus the fervor of the early Christians and the satisfying rituals they provided, gained growing attention. The wide reach of the Roman empire made it easy for Christian missionaries to travel through Europe and the Middle East and spread the new word. Then, when conditions began to deteriorate in the empire, the solace of this otherworldly religion won even more converts.

Paul of Tarsus (c. 10–67 C.E.) was a key Christian leader. Initially a Jewish rabbi, he was hostile to Christians as heretics. But on a journey to try to round up the Christians in Damascus, a vision of Jesus came to him. He became an ardent Christian missionary and contributed to several adjustments in Christian doctrine. He spent his last years in jail, first in Roman-ruled Jerusalem, then in Rome, because of the official opposition to Christianity.

The adjustments made by early Christian leaders drew even more converts. Under the guidance of Paul, Christians began to see themselves as part of a new religion rather than a Jewish reform movement, and they welcomed non-Jewish converts. Paul also encouraged more formal organization in the new church, with local groups selecting elders to govern them; soon, a single leader, or bishop, was appointed for each major city. This structure paralleled the provincial government of the empire. Finally, Christian doctrine became increasingly well organized as the writings of several disciples and others were collected into what became the New Testament of the Christian Bible.

Christianity Gains Ground

During the first three centuries after Christ, Christianity did not advance entirely smoothly. The new religion faced periodic persecution from the normally tolerant imperial government. Even so, by the time Constantine converted to the religion, Christianity had won perhaps 10 percent of the empire's population. One convert was Constantine's mother, who visited the Holy Land and founded many churches there. Constantine's favor brought some new troubles to Christianity as the state began to interfere in matters of doctrine.

Nevertheless, it became much easier to spread Christianity with official backing. Christian writers began to claim that both church and empire were works of God. At the same time, continued deterioration of the empire added to the motives to join this successful new church. In the eastern Mediterranean, where imperial rule remained strong, state control of the church became a way of life and an important motive, for certain people, for adopting Christianity in the first place. A pagan prefect of Constantinople, Cyrus of Panopolis, facing the disapproval of an imperial official in the mid-5th century, could save himself only by converting and becoming a Christian bishop. But in the west, where conditions were far more chaotic, bishops had a freer hand.

A centralized church organization under the leadership of the bishop of Rome, called the **pope** from the Latin word *papa*, or father, gave the western church unusual strength and independence. By the time Rome collapsed, Christianity had thus demonstrated immense spiritual power and a solid organization, although it differed from east to west. The new church faced several controversies over doctrine but managed to promote certain standard beliefs. A key tenet was a complex doctrine of the Trinity, which held that the one God had three persons, the Father, the Son (Christ), and the Holy Ghost (God as present in human spiritual experience). In 325 C.E., the church **Council of Nicaea** under imperial sponsorship, met to debate a doctrine known as Arianism, which argued that Christ was divine but not of the same nature as God the Father. Ruling against Arianism, the resultant Nicene Creed insisted

Jesus of Nazareth Prophet and teacher among the Jews; believed by Christians to be the Messiah; executed c. 30 C.E.

Paul One of the first Christian missionaries; moved away from insistence that adherents of the new religion follow Jewish law; use of Greek as language of Church.

pope Bishop of Rome; head of the Christian Church in western Europe.

Council of Nicaea [nye-SEE-uh] Christian council that met in 325 C.E. to determine orthodoxy with respect to the Trinity; insisted on divinity of all persons of the Trinity.

on the shared divinity of all three parts of the Trinity. An important but complex decision, it showed how important unified doctrine was to Christianity, in contrast to the greater toleration of diversity in Hinduism and Buddhism. Experience in fighting heresies promoted the Christian interest in defending a single belief and strengthened its resistance to any competing doctrine or faith.

In its founding but also in its consolidation, Christianity was aided by strong individual leadership, although it can be debated how much this leadership caused religious success and how much it flowed from the religion's appeal. For example, Pope Leo I (d. 461) most clearly established the papacy as the supreme authority in western Europe. Born a Roman aristocrat, he faced the rapid collapse of the empire, negotiating with German rulers to save the city of Rome and using their backing to assert his authority over church leaders in France and elsewhere. Leo competed with the patriarch of Alexandria for spiritual primacy in Christianity, centralizing the western church and standardizing its rituals, prayers, and doctrine.

Early Christianity also produced an important formal theology through formative writers such as Augustine. This theology blended many elements of classical philosophy with Christian belief and helped the church gain respectability among intellectuals. Theologians such as Augustine grappled with such problems as freedom of the will: If God is all-powerful, can mere human beings have free will? And if not, how can human beings be justly punished for sin? By working out these issues in elaborate doctrine, the early theologians, or church fathers, provided an important role for formal, rational thought in a religion that continued to emphasize the primary importance of faith.

Like all successful religions, Christianity combined several appeals. It offered deep devotion to an all-powerful God. Christianity also developed its own complex and fascinating intellectual system. Mystical holy men and women flourished under Christian banners, particularly in the Middle East.

In the West, soon after the empire's collapse, this impulse was partially disciplined through the institution of monasticism, which gained ground in Italy under **Benedict of Nursia** early in the 6th century. Benedict started a monastery to demonstrate the true holy life to Italian peasants in a region still (to Benedict's horror) worshipping the sun god Apollo. The Benedictine rule, which soon spread to many other monasteries and convents, urged a disciplined life, with prayer and spiritual development alternating with hard work in agriculture and study. Monastic movements also developed in the eastern empire, in Greece and Turkey, and in Egypt. Eastern monasticism was organized by Saint Basil in the 4th century.

Thus, Christianity tried to encourage but also to discipline intense piety and to avoid a complete gulf between the lives of saintly men and women and the spiritual concerns of ordinary people. Christianity's success and organizational strength obviously appealed to political leaders. But the new religion never became the creature of the upper classes alone, because its message of ritual and salvation continued to draw the poor. Like Hinduism in India, Christianity provided some religious unity among different social groups. It even held special interest for women. Christianity did not preach equality between men and women, but it did preach the equal importance of women's and men's souls, and unlike many other faiths it encouraged men and women to worship together.

Christianity promoted a new culture among its converts (Figure 6.5). The rituals, the otherworldly emphasis, and the interest in spiritual equality were very different from the central themes of classical Mediterranean civilization. Christianity modified classical beliefs in the central importance of the state and political loyalties. Although Christians accepted the state, they did not put it first. Christianity also worked against other classical institutions, such as slavery, in the name of brotherhood (although later Christians accepted slavery in other contexts). Western monasticism may have fostered a greater respectability for disciplined work than had been current in the aristocratic ethic of Mediterranean civilization.

Christianity preserved important classical values in addition to the interest in solid organization and some of the themes of classical philosophy. Church buildings in western Europe retained Roman architectural styles, although often with greater simplicity, if only because of the poverty of the

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Pope Leo I on Bishop Hilary of Arles

Benedict of Nursia Founder of monasticism in what had been the western half of the Roman Empire; established Benedictine Rule in the 6th century; paralleled development of Basil's rules in Byzantine empire.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: From the Rule of St. Benedict (6th c.) (Excerpt) by St. Benedict of Nursia



FIGURE 6.5 People of European background are accustomed to seeing the Madonna and child depicted as looking much like them. As this 10th-century Byzantine image demonstrates, Christians from other parts of the world developed different imagery for the major figures of their religion.

later empire and the Germanic states. Latin remained the language of the church in the West, Greek the language of most Christians in the eastern Mediterranean. Monasticism played a very valuable role in preserving classical as well as Christian learning through the patient librarianship of the monks.

The New Religious Map

The centuries after the rise of Christianity, the spread of Buddhism, and the inception of Islam (610 C.E.) saw the conversion of most of the civilized world to one or another of the great faiths. This produced a religious map that in Europe, Asia, and parts of Africa did not change greatly until our own

VISUALIZING THE PAST

Religious Geography

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORLD'S MAJOR religions calls for knowledge both of numerical data and geography. This map and table, using contemporary data, also suggest which aspects of the world's religious distribution were beginning to solidify at the end of the late classical period and which aspects depended on developments yet to come.

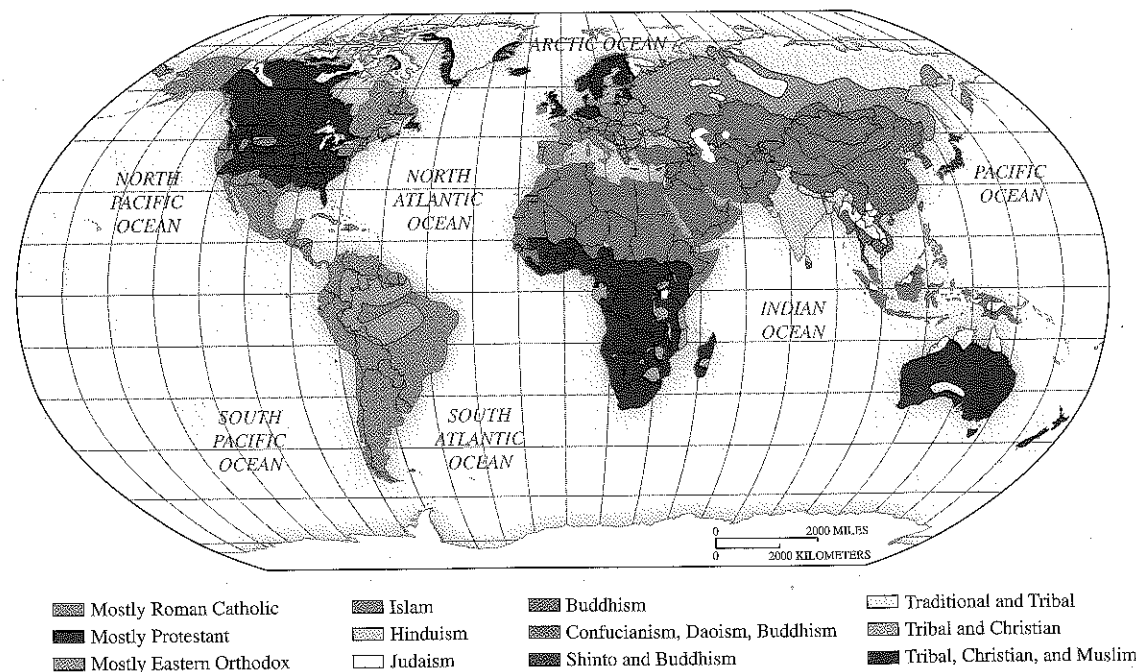
QUESTIONS

- Where are the greatest concentrations of the four major religions today?
- Which aspects of modern religious geography follow from the patterns of religious dissemination under way by the end of the classical period?
- Which cannot be explained by these late classical developments?

RELIGIONS AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION IN THE WORLD TODAY

Religion	Distribution*
Christianity	2 billion
Islam	1.3 billion
Hinduism	900 million
Buddhism	360 million
Shintoism	4 million
Daoism and other Chinese traditional religions	225 million
Judaism	14 million
Non-religious	850 million

*Figures for several religions have been reduced over the past 50 years by the impact of communism in eastern Europe and parts of Asia.



MAP 6.5 Major Religions of the Modern World This map shows the contemporary geography of the major religions, including areas of considerable mixture like Africa.

time. The spread of the great religions caused many people in many different societies to shift their beliefs away from traditional ideas about a host of divine spirits in nature to concentration on a single divine force and on new hopes for an afterlife. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, plus Hinduism in a few parts of southeast Asia, provided shared beliefs that could transcend divided, bickering political units. They could indeed draw allegiance and funding away from politics. The three most widespread religions raised new social questions, because they all stressed a basic spiritual equality. The great religions could even facilitate international trade because they did not depend on local customs but on an ever-present God or divine order throughout the world; in turn, successful trade could help spread the religions. A new force was at work in world history.

In the Wake of Decline and Fall

By 600 C.E., the major civilizations looked very different from the classical world at its height, and many of the differences have never been erased. The results of classical decline went beyond the striking shifts in religious allegiance. Some areas, however, changed far more than others. China was unique in its ability to recapture so many classical ingredients. China and India shared an ability to maintain substantial cultural cohesion, based on widespread beliefs as well as restored politics in China's case. Today, Indian and Chinese civilizations are in essentially the same places where they had taken root by late classical times, and until quite recently, they still abundantly reflected the classical heritage: India in the caste system and an otherworldly cultural tone, China in Confucian beliefs and a fascination with a strong, bureaucratic state.

The case was quite different in the Mediterranean zone. The Roman empire split, in part because it had not been able to spread shared beliefs very widely. Classical Mediterranean civilization left a very real heritage, but in part because geographic unity was lost, this heritage was used by successor civilizations far more selectively than was true in eastern or southern Asia.

Another approach to the problem of decline argues that it is almost inevitable.

Global Connections and Critical Themes:

THE LATE CLASSICAL PERIOD AND THE WORLD

During most of the classical period, key developments often focused within civilizations. We have seen that there were wider contacts. Each civilization radiated trade and other influences to a larger region; thus India had contacts with other parts of south-southeast Asia, and China with Korea and Vietnam. Trade along the Silk Road through central Asia, conducted mainly by nomadic merchants, was another key connection, as were the exchanges in the Indian Ocean.

As the classical civilizations began to fail, contacts in some ways accelerated—but they also encountered new difficulties. Overland

travel between China and Rome became more dangerous, because government protection faltered in both empires. This placed a new premium on using shipping connections, particularly in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, traders, missionaries, and of course nomadic invaders began to reach out in new ways, as borders became more porous. The end of the classical period thus witnessed important new cultural exchanges across regions. These included the spread of Buddhism from India to China and to other parts of east Asia, and the spread of Christianity beyond the Roman empire into parts of northeast Africa and into Armenia. These developments set new bases for connections among various societies in Afro-Eurasia.