

MAJOR THEMES: CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS

AGE OF EMPIRES: 2000 BCE-600 CE

An **empire** is a centralized state that controls extensive territory, often containing larger and more diverse populations. Often, this centralized power rules from one or several capital cities. This expansion can be achieved through military, economic, or cultural control- sometimes even a combination of all these factors. The Achaemenid Persian Empire was built largely through military conquest, while the Mauryas in India used a combination of political sabotage, religious conversion, and military conquest to expand its rule. The Romans, although a militaristic society, did not generally set out to conquer territory; they got involved in many wars, which extended their economic and cultural control to the enemies they defeated. Empires are usually referred to as a single unit. But because empires are so large, they are often divided into smaller, more manageable political units called **provinces**. Empires increased trade by connecting many regions through a shared government and transportation and communication networks because subjects of an empire could travel freely and safely within that empire. Empires often included diverse regions and climates that allowed for a variety of goods to be produced. The larger an empire became, the harder it was for a central government to oversee all its territory and address all needs. When groups within empires became unhappy with imperial rule, it could lead to conflict, economic suffering, and the weakening or decline of the empire entirely.



Major Time Periods:

550-330 BCE – Achaemenid Persian Empire

336-323 BCE – Reign of Alexander the Great

322-187 BCE – Mauryan Empire

206 BCE-227 CE – Han Dynasty

509 BCE-476 CE – Roman Republic/Empire

GOVERNMENT, DEMOCRACY & LAW



As empires grew, their leaders had to come up with new ways to govern the added populations; for example, Rome offered citizenship to former enemies, and the Persians allowed freedom of religious belief. New administrative systems and bureaucracies were created during this period to oversee and carry out different functions. The Han Dynasty in China used **bureaucracy**- rule by government officials- to enforce imperial edicts many hundreds of miles from their capital. The Han developed civil service tests to appoint the most qualified people to government jobs that included overseeing the construction of roads and waterworks and collecting taxes. Athens, a city-state of the Greek Empire, transitioned through

different systems of government as its population grew and eventually developed the world's first **democracy**. In this system, all Athenian citizens participated in important political decisions. However, women and slaves were not considered citizens and could not cast their votes. The Romans evolved into a **republic** by replacing their last king with two consuls, rulers who had many of the same powers as the king but were elected to serve one-year terms. Each consul could veto, or reject, the actions of the other consul. The political institutions that Rome developed proved both resilient and adaptable, preventing any one man from becoming too powerful.

Major Events:

509 BCE – Founding of the Roman Republic

507 BCE – Cleisthenes introduces democracy through Athenian political reforms

406 BCE-320 CE – Direct democracy is practiced in Athens

27 BCE- Establishment of the Roman Empire

124 BCE- Han Dynasty institutes Civil Service exams

RELIGION

Historians do not try to determine whether the beliefs of a certain religion are true or not. Instead, when historians look at how religions developed, they try to understand how beliefs were shaped and why people follow particular religious traditions. For example, the Indian culture and way of life has been deeply influenced by **Hinduism**, a polytheistic religion whose followers worship multiple gods. Emperors during the Gupta Empire used it as a unifying religion and while followers focused on personal salvation. Hinduism reinforced a strict social hierarchy called a **caste system** that made it nearly impossible for people to move outside of their social station, and it was believed people had been born into their caste because of the good or bad they committed in a previous life. In contrast, Buddhist disregard for the caste system appealed to people in lower castes. The founder of **Buddhism**, Siddhartha Gautama, suggested that individual people might be able to attain enlightenment in this life and held that caste was not a punishment for deeds committed in a past life. State acceptance and support came from Mauryan Emperor Asoka, who converted to Buddhism in 260 BCE. **Christianity** developed in Judea in the mid-first century CE, based first on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and later on the writings and missionary work of Paul of Tarsus. Originally, Christianity was a small, unorganized sect that promised personal salvation after death through belief in Jesus as the son of God. Early believers had to make sure their new religion did not conflict with the official policies of the Roman Empire. Later, the Roman Empire made Christianity its official religion, which gave followers political, as well as cultural, power.



Major Events:

1500-500 BCE – India’s Vedic Period; Hinduism developed during this time

500 BCE (circa) – Probable lifetime of Siddhartha Gautama

262-232 BCE – Reign of Emperor Asoka

0-34 CE – Probable lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth, founder of Christianity

313 CE – Edict of Milan legalizes Christianity in the Roman Empire

CULTURE



Economic, social, and political conditions are reflected in the art and culture a civilization produces. Great thinkers, athletes, and artists emerged out of Ancient Greece and were immensely influential in many spheres: language, politics, educational systems, philosophy, science, and the arts. Literature and theatre, including the concepts of **tragedy and comedy**, were developed by playwrights like Sophocles. In the Roman Empire, the Colosseum was built to entertain thousands of Roman spectators with presentations of military reenactments, athletic events, and gladiator contests. The Colosseum represents Roman achievements in **architecture**, incorporating Greek-inspired Doric and Ionic columns with their own Corinthian columns that are still a major component of structural design today. In China, belief systems, philosophies, and ideologies influenced the cultural development of proper rituals and social relationships. **Filial piety**, a structure of family relationships where men were formally the heads of the family unit and exercised legal power over the women and children in the household, was a result of the significant growth of Dao and Confucian ideologies. Artisans crafted glazed pottery, experimented with paper, and the availability of ink and brushes would launch calligraphy writing as an important Chinese art form. The **silk production** that was booming at the end of the Huang He Valley civilization developed into an extensive trade network called the Silk Road, where ideas, inventions, and goods were exchanged with different groups across Asia.

Major Events:

700-650 BCE – Probable lifetime of Greek poet Homer

500 BCE – Development of Greek tragedy and comedy

138-125 BCE – Trade begins along the Silk Road

70-80 CE – Flavian’s Amphitheater, aka the Colosseum, is built in Rome

105 CE – Refined paper for writing is produced in China