CHAPTER 5
THE FIRST WORLD CIVILIZATION: ROME, CHINA, AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SILK ROAD

CHAPTER OUTLINE
AND FOCUS QUESTIONS

Early Rome and the Republic
Q What policies and institutions help explain the Romans’ success in conquering Italy? How did Rome achieve its empire from 264 to 133 B.C.E., and what problems did Rome face as a result of its growing empire?

The Roman Empire at Its Height
Q What were the chief features of the Roman Empire at its height in the second century C.E.?

Crisis and the Late Empire
Q What reforms did Diocletian and Constantine institute, and to what extent were the reforms successful?

Transformation of the Roman World:
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Q What characteristics of Christianity enabled it to grow and ultimately to triumph?

The Glorious Han Empire (202 B.C.E.–221 C.E.)
Q What were the chief features of the Han Empire?

CRITICAL THINKING
Q In what ways were the Roman Empire and the Han Chinese Empire similar, and in what ways were they different?

ALTHOUGH THE ASSYRIANS, Persians, and Indians under the Mauryan dynasty had created empires, they were neither as large nor as well controlled as the Han and Roman Empires that flourished at the beginning of the first millennium C.E. They were the largest political entities the world had yet seen. The Han Empire extended from Central Asia to the Pacific Ocean; the Roman Empire encompassed the lands around the Mediterranean, parts of the Middle East, and western and central Europe. Although there were no diplomatic contacts between the two civilizations, the Silk Road linked the two great empires commercially.

Roman history is the remarkable story of how a group of Latin-speaking people, who established a small community on a plain called Latium in central Italy, went on to conquer all of Italy and then the entire Mediterranean world. Why were the Romans able to do this? Scholars do not really know all the answers, but the Romans had their own explanation. Early Roman history is filled with legendary tales of the heroes who made Rome great. One of the best known is the story of Horatius at the bridge. Threatened by attack from the neighboring Etruscans, Roman farmers abandoned their fields and moved into the city, where they would be protected by the walls.
One weak point in the Roman defenses, however, was a wooden bridge over the Tiber River. Horatius was on guard at the bridge when a sudden assault by the Etruscans caused many Roman troops to throw down their weapons and flee. Horatius urged them to make a stand at the bridge; when they hesitated, he told them to destroy the bridge behind him while he held the Etruscans back. Astonished at the sight of a single defender, the confused Etruscans threw their spears at Horatius, who caught them on his shield and barred the way. By the time the Etruscans were about to overwhelm the lone defender, the Roman soldiers had brought down the bridge. Horatius then dived fully armed into the water and swam safely to the other side through a hail of arrows. Rome had been saved by the courageous act of a Roman who knew his duty and was determined to carry it out. Courage, duty, determination—these qualities would serve the many Romans who believed that it was their divine mission to rule nations and peoples. As one orator proclaimed, “By heaven’s will my Rome shall be capital of the world.”

Early Rome and the Republic

Q Focus Questions: What policies and institutions help explain the Romans’ success in conquering Italy? How did Rome achieve its empire from 264 to 133 B.C.E., and what problems did Rome face as a result of its growing empire?

Italy is a peninsula extending about 750 miles from north to south (see Map 5.1). It is not very wide, however, averaging about 120 miles across. The Apennines form a ridge down the middle of Italy that divides westfrom east. Nevertheless, Italy has some fairly large fertile plains that are ideal for farming. Most important are the Po River valley in the north; the plain of Latium, on which Rome was located; and Campania to the south of Latium. To the east of the Italian peninsula is the Adriatic Sea and to the west the Tyrrhenian Sea, bounded by the large islands of Corsica and Sardinia. Sicily lies just west of the “toe” of the boot-shaped Italian peninsula.

Geography had an impact on Roman history. Although the Apennines bisected Italy, they were less rugged than the mountain ranges of Greece and did not divide the peninsula into small isolated communities. Italy also possessed considerably more productive agricultural land than Greece, enabling it to support a large population. Rome’s location was favorable from a geographical point of view. Located 18 miles inland on the Tiber River, Rome had access to the sea and yet was far enough inland to be safe from pirates. Built on seven hills, it was easily defended.

Moreover, the Italian peninsula juts into the Mediterranean, making Italy an important crossroads between the western and eastern ends of the sea. Once Rome had unified Italy, involvement in Mediterranean affairs was natural. And after the Romans had conquered their Mediterranean empire, governing it was made easier by Italy’s central location.

Early Rome

According to Roman legend, Rome was founded by twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, in 753 B.C.E., and archaeologists have found that by around that time, a village of huts had been built on the tops of Rome’s hills. The early Romans, basically a pastoral people, spoke Latin, which, like Greek, belongs to the Indo-European family of languages (see Table 1.2 in Chapter 1). The Roman historical tradition also maintained that early Rome (753–509 B.C.E.) had been under the control of seven kings and that two of the last three had been Etruscans, people who lived north of Rome in Etruria. Historians believe that the king list may have some historical accuracy. What is certain is that Rome did fall under the influence of the Etruscans for about a hundred years during the period of the kings and that by the beginning of the sixth century, under Etruscan influence, Rome began to emerge as a city. The Etruscans were responsible for an outstanding building program. They
constructed the first roadbed of the chief street through Rome, the Sacred Way, before 575 B.C.E. and oversaw the development of temples, markets, shops, streets, and houses. By 509 B.C.E., supposedly when the monarchy was overthrown and a republican form of government was established, a new Rome had emerged, essentially a result of the fusion of Etruscan and native Roman elements. After Rome had expanded over its seven hills and the valleys in between, the Servian Wall was built in the fourth century B.C.E. to surround the city.

The Roman Republic

The transition from monarchy to a republican government was not easy. Rome felt threatened by enemies from every direction and, in the process of meeting these threats, embarked on a military course that led to the conquest of the entire Italian peninsula.

The Roman Conquest of Italy  At the beginning of the Republic, Rome was surrounded by enemies, including the Latin communities on the plain of Latium. If we are to believe Livy, one of the chief ancient sources for the history of the early Roman Republic, Rome was engaged in almost continuous warfare with these enemies for the next hundred years. In his account, Livy provided a detailed narrative of Roman efforts. Many of his stories were legendary in character; writing in the first century B.C.E., he used his stories to teach Romans the moral values and virtues that had made Rome great. These included tenacity, duty, courage, and especially discipline (see the box on p. 132).

By 340 B.C.E., Rome had crushed the Latin states in Latium. During the next fifty years, the Romans waged a successful struggle with hill peoples from central Italy and then came into direct contact with the Greek communities. The Greeks had arrived on the Italian peninsula in large numbers during the age of Greek colonization (750–550 B.C.E.; see Chapter 4). Initially, the Greeks settled in southern Italy and then crept around the coast and up the peninsula. The Greeks had much influence on Rome. They cultivated olives and grapes, passed on their alphabet, and provided artistic and cultural models through their sculpture, architecture, and literature. By 267 B.C.E., the Romans had completed the conquest of southern Italy by defeating the Greek cities. After crushing the remaining Etruscan states to the north in 264 B.C.E., Rome had conquered most of Italy.

To rule Italy, the Romans devised the Roman Confederation. Under this system, Rome allowed some peoples—especially the Latins—to have full Roman citizenship. Most of the remaining communities were made allies. They remained free to run their own local affairs but were required to provide soldiers for Rome. Moreover, the Romans made it clear that loyal allies could improve their status and even have hope of becoming Roman citizens. The Romans had found a way to give conquered peoples a stake in Rome’s success.

In the course of their expansion throughout Italy, the Romans had pursued consistent policies that helped explain their success. The Romans were superb diplomats who excelled in making the correct diplomatic decisions. In addition, the Romans were not only good soldiers but also persistent ones. The loss of an army or a fleet did not cause them to quit but spurred them on to build new armies and new fleets. Finally, the Romans had a practical sense of strategy. As they conquered, the Romans established colonies—fortified towns—at strategic locations throughout Italy. By building roads to these settlements and connecting them, the Romans created an impressive communications and military network that enabled them to rule effectively and efficiently (see the comparative illustration “Roman and Chinese Roads” on p. 133). By insisting on military service from the allies in the Roman Confederation, Rome essentially mobilized the entire military manpower of all Italy for its wars.

The Roman State  After the overthrow of the monarchy, Roman nobles, eager to maintain their position of power, established a republican form of government. The chief executive officers of the Roman Republic were the consuls and praetors. Two consuls, chosen annually, administered the government and led the Roman army into battle. In 366 B.C.E., the office of praetor was created. The praetor was in charge of civil law (law as it applied to Roman citizens), but he could also lead armies and govern Rome when the consuls were away from the city. As the Romans’ territory expanded, they added another praetor to judge cases in which one or both people were noncitizens. The Roman state also had a number of administrative officials who handled specialized duties, such as the administration of financial affairs and supervision of the public games of Rome.

The Roman senate came to hold an especially important position in the Roman Republic. The senate or council of elders was a select group of about three hundred men who served for life. The senate could only advise the magistrates, but this advice was not taken lightly and by the third century B.C.E. had virtually the force of law.

The Roman Republic had a number of popular assemblies. By far the most important was the centuriae assembly. Organized by classes based on wealth, it was structured in such a way that the wealthiest citizens always had a majority. This assembly elected the chief
magistrates and passed laws. Another assembly, the council of the plebs, came into being as a result of the struggle of the orders.

This struggle arose as a result of the division of early Rome into two groups, the patricians and the plebeians. The patricians were great landowners, who constituted an aristocratic governing class. Only they could be consuls, magistrates, and senators. The plebeians constituted the considerably larger group of nonpatrician large landowners, less wealthy landholders, artisans, merchants, and small farmers. Although they, too, were citizens, they did not have the same rights as the patricians. Both patricians and plebeians could vote, but only the patricians could be elected to governmental offices. Both had the right to make legal contracts and marriages, but intermarriage between patricians and plebeians was forbidden. At the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E., the plebeians began a struggle to seek both political and social equality with the patricians.

The struggle between the patricians and plebeians dragged on for hundreds of years, but it led to success for the plebeians. The council of the plebs, a popular assembly for plebeians only, was created in 471 B.C.E., and new officials, known as tribunes of the plebs, were given the power to protect plebeians against arrest by patrician magistrates. A new law allowed marriages between patricians and plebeians, and in the fourth century B.C.E., plebeians were permitted to become consuls. Finally, in 287 B.C.E., the council of the plebs received the right to pass laws for all Romans.

The struggle between the patricians and plebeians, then, had a significant impact on the development of the Roman state. Theoretically, by 287 B.C.E., all Roman citizens were equal under the law, and all could strive for
COMPARATIVE ILLUSTRATION

Roman and Chinese Roads. The Romans built a remarkable system of roads. After laying a foundation of gravel, which allowed for drainage, the Roman builders topped it with flagstones, closely fitted together. Unlike other peoples who built similar kinds of roads, the Romans did not follow the contours of the land but made their roads as straight as possible to facilitate communications and transportation, especially for military purposes. Seen here is a view of the Via Appia (Appian Way), built in 312 B.C.E., under the leadership of the censor and consul Appius Claudius (Roman roads were often named after the great Roman families who encouraged their construction). The Via Appia (shown on the map) was meant to make it easy for Roman armies to march from Rome to the newly conquered city of Capua, a distance of 152 miles. Under the Empire, roads were extended to provinces throughout the Mediterranean, parts of western and eastern Europe, and into western Asia. By the beginning of the fourth century C.E., the Roman Empire contained 372 major roads covering 56,000 miles.

Like the Roman Empire, the Han Empire relied on roads constructed with stone slabs for the movement of military forces. The First Emperor of Qin was responsible for the construction of 4,350 miles of roads, and by the end of the second century C.E., China had almost 22,000 miles of roads. Although roads in both the Roman and Chinese Empires were originally constructed for military purposes, they came to be used to facilitate communications and commercial traffic.

Q What was the importance of roads to both the Roman and Han Empires?

The Roman Conquest of the Mediterranean (264–133 B.C.E.)

After their conquest of the Italian peninsula, the Romans found themselves face to face with a formidable Mediterranean power—Carthage. Founded around

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800 B.C. on the coast of North Africa by Phoenicians, Carthage had flourished and assembled an enormous empire in the western Mediterranean. By the third century B.C., Carthage controlled the coast of North Africa, southern Spain, Sicily, and parts of Italy. The Carthaginian Empire included the Phoenician city of Carthage and its colonies in the western Mediterranean. The Carthaginians were skilled merchants, and their economic power was based on control of the seas and the trade of goods between the Mediterranean and the rest of the world.

In the First Punic War (264-241 B.C.), the Romans decided to conquer Sicily and destroy Carthage. The Romans fought against Carthage and its allies, including Syracuse, for control of the western Mediterranean. The Romans' strategy was to first conquer Sicily and then turn their attention to Carthage. The Romans eventually succeeded in destroying Carthage and its allies.

In the Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.), the Romans faced a renewed Carthaginian threat. Carthage's leader, Hannibal, crossed the Alps with an army and invaded Italy, threatening Rome itself. The Romans eventually defeated Hannibal at the Battle of Zama in 202 B.C., but the war continued for another 16 years. The Romans finally defeated Carthage in 201 B.C., and the Carthaginian Empire was destroyed.

In the Third Punic War (149-146 B.C.), the Romans realized that Carthage was a threat to their interests in the western Mediterranean. The Romans invaded Carthage and destroyed the city in 146 B.C., ending the Carthaginian Empire forever.

The Roman conquest of Carthage was a significant event in the history of the western Mediterranean. The Romans went on to conquer and control much of the region, establishing a vast empire that stretched from modern-day Spain to Egypt. The Roman conquest of Carthage and the western Mediterranean was a key factor in the development of the Roman Empire and the spread of Roman culture and influence.
The Destruction of Carthage

The Romans used a technical breach of Carthage’s peace treaty with Rome to undertake a third and final war with Carthage (149–146 B.C.E.). Although Carthage posed no real threat to Rome’s security, the Romans still remembered the traumatic experiences of the Second Punic War, when Hannibal had ravaged much of their homeland. The hard-liners gained the upper hand in the Senate and called for the complete destruction of Carthage. The city was razed, the survivors sold into slavery, and the land turned into a province. In this passage, the historian Appian of Alexandria describes the final destruction of Carthage by the Romans under the command of Scipio Aemilianus.

Appian, Roman History

Then came new scenes of horror. The fire spread and carried everything down, and the soldiers did not wait to destroy the buildings little by little, but pulled them all down together. So the crashing grew louder, and many fell with the stones into the midst dead. Others were seen still living, especially old men, women, and young children who had hidden in the inmost nooks of the houses, some of them wounded, some more or less burned, and uttering horrible cries. Still others, thrust out and falling from such a height with the stones, timbers, and fire, were torn asunder into all kinds of horrible shapes, crushed and mangled. Nor was this the end of their miseries, for the street cleaners, who were removing the rubbish with axes, mattocks, and boat hooks, and making the roads passable, tossed with these instruments the dead and the living together into holes in the ground, sweeping them along like sticks and stones or turning them over with their iron tools, and man was used for filling up a ditch. Some were thrown in head foremost, while their legs, sticking out of the ground, withered a long time. Others fell with their feet downward and their heads above ground. Horses ran over them, crushing their faces and skulls, not purposely on the part of the riders, but in their headlong haste. Nor did the street cleaners either do these things on purpose; but the press of war, the glory of approaching victory, the rush of the soldiers, the confused noise of heralds and trumpeters all around, the tribunes and centurions changing guard and marching the cohorts hither and thither—all together made everybody frantic and heedless of the spectacle before their eyes.

Six days and nights were consumed in this kind of turmoil, the soldiers being changed so that they might not be worn out with toil, slaughter, want of sleep, and these horrid sights…

Scipio, beholding this city, which had flourished 700 years from its foundation and had ruled over so many lands, islands, and seas, as rich in arms and fleets, elephants, and money as the mightiest empires, but far surpassing them in hardihood and high spirit… now come to its end in total destruction—Scipio, beholding this spectacle, is said to have shed tears and publicly lamented the fortune of the enemy. After meditating by himself a long time and reflecting on the inevitable fall of cities, nations, and empires, as well as of individuals, upon the fate of Troy, that once proud city, upon the fate of the Assyrian, the Median, and afterwards of the great Persian empire, and, most recently of all, of the splendid empire of Macedon, either voluntarily or otherwise the words of the poet [Homer, Iliad] escaped his lips:

The day shall come in which our sacred Troy
And Priam, and the people over whom
Spear-bearing Priam’s rule, shall perish all.

Being asked by Polybius in familiar conversation (for Polybius had been his tutor) what he meant by using these words, Polybius says that he did not hesitate frankly to name his own country, for whose fate he feared when he considered the mutability of human affairs. And Polybius wrote this down just as he heard it.

During its struggle with Carthage, Rome also had problems with the Hellenistic states in the eastern Mediterranean, and after the defeat of Carthage, Rome turned its attention there. In 148 B.C.E., Macedonia was made a Roman province, and two years later, Greece was placed under the control of the Roman governor of Macedonia. In 133 B.C.E., the king of Pergamum deeded his kingdom to Rome, giving Rome its first province in Asia. Rome was now master of the Mediterranean Sea.

Evolution of the Roman Army

By the fourth century B.C.E., the Roman army consisted of four legions, each made up of four thousand to five thousand men; each legion had about three hundred cavalry and the rest infantry. The infantry consisted of three lines of battle. The hastati (spearmen), consisting of the youngest recruits, formed the front line; they were armed with heavy spears and short swords and protected by a large oval shield, helmet, breastplate, and greaves (shin guards). The principes (chief men), armed and protected like the hastati, formed the second line. The third line of battle was formed by the triarii (third-rank men), who knelt behind the first two lines, ready to move up and fill any gaps. A fourth group of troops, poor citizens who wore cloaks
CHRONOLOGY  The Roman Conquest of Italy and the Mediterranean

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<tr>
<td>End of Latin revots</td>
<td>340 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>Creation of the Roman Confederation</td>
<td>338 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>First Punic War</td>
<td>264-241 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>Second Punic War</td>
<td>218-201 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>Battle of Cannae</td>
<td>216 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>Roman seizure of Spain</td>
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<td>Battle of Zama</td>
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<td>Third Punic War</td>
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<td>Macedonia made a Roman province</td>
<td>148 B.C.E.</td>
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<td>Destruction of Carthage</td>
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<td>Kingdom of Pergamum to Rome</td>
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but no armor and were lightly armed, functioned as skirmishers who usually returned to the rear lines after their initial contact with the enemy to form backup reserves.

In the early Republic, the army was recruited from citizens between the ages of eighteen and forty-six who had the resources to equip themselves for battle. Since most of them were farmers, they enrolled only for a year, campaigned during the summer months, and returned home in time for the fall harvest. Later, during the Punic Wars of the third century B.C.E., the period of service had to be extended, although this was resisted by farmers whose livelihoods could be severely harmed by a long absence. Nevertheless, after the disastrous battle of Cannae in 216 B.C.E., the Romans were forced to recruit larger armies, and the number of legions rose to twenty-five. Major changes in recruitment would not come until the first century B.C.E. with the military reforms of Marius (see "Growing Unrest and a New Role for the Roman Army" in the next section).

The Decline and Fall of the Roman Republic (133–31 B.C.E.)

By the middle of the second century B.C.E., Roman domination of the Mediterranean Sea was complete. Yet the process of creating an empire had weakened the internal stability of Rome, leading to a series of crises that plagued the empire for the next hundred years.

Growing Unrest and a New Role for the Roman Army By the second century B.C.E., the senate had become the effective governing body of the Roman state. It comprised three hundred men, drawn primarily from the landed aristocracy, who remained senators for life and held the chief magistracies of the Republic. The senate directed the wars of the third and second centuries and took control of both foreign and domestic policy, including financial affairs.

Of course, these aristocrats formed only a tiny minority of the Roman people. The backbone of the Roman state had traditionally been the small farmers. But over time, many small farmers had found themselves unable to compete with large, wealthy landowners and had lost their lands. By taking over state-owned land and by buying out small peasant owners, these landed aristocrats had amassed large estates (called latifundia) that used slave labor. Thus, the rise of the latifundia contributed to a decline in the number of small citizen farmers who were available for military service. Moreover, many of these small farmers drifted to the cities, especially Rome, forming a large class of landless poor.

Some aristocrats tried to remedy this growing economic and social crisis. Two brothers, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, came to believe that the underlying cause of Rome’s problems was the decline of the small farmer. To help the landless poor, they bypassed the senate by having the council of the plebs pass land-reform bills that called for the government to reclaim public land held by large landowners and to distribute it to landless Romans. Many senators, themselves large landowners whose estates included broad tracts of public land, were furious. A group of senators took the law into their own hands and murdered Tiberius in 133 B.C.E. Gaius later suffered the same fate. The attempts of the Gracchus brothers to bring reforms had opened the door to further violence. Changes in the Roman army soon brought even worse problems.

In the closing years of the second century B.C.E., a Roman general named Marius began to recruit his armies in a new way. The Roman army had traditionally been a conscript army of small farmers who were
landholders. Marius recruited volunteers from both the urban and rural poor who possessed no property. These volunteers swore an oath of loyalty to the general, not the senate, and thus constituted a professional-type army no longer subject to the state. Moreover, to recruit these men, the generals would promise them land, forcing the generals to play politics in order to get laws passed that would provide the land promised to their veterans. Marius had created a new system of military recruitment that placed much power in the hands of the individual generals.

The Collapse of the Republic  The first century B.C.E. was characterized by two important features: the jostling for dominance of a number of powerful individuals and the civil wars generated by their conflicts. Three individuals came to hold enormous military and political power—Crassus, Pompey, and Julius Caesar. Crassus was known as the richest man in Rome and led a successful military command against a major slave rebellion. Pompey had returned from a successful military command in Spain in 71 B.C.E. and had been hailed as a military hero. Julius Caesar also had a military command in Spain. In 60 B.C.E., Caesar joined with Crassus and Pompey to form a coalition that historians call the First Triumvirate (triumviri means “three-man rule”).

The combined wealth and influence of these three men was enormous, enabling them to dominate the political scene and achieve their basic aims: Pompey received a command in Spain, Crassus a command in Syria, and Caesar a special military command in Gaul (modern France). When Crassus was killed in battle in 53 B.C.E., it left two powerful men with armies in direct competition. Caesar had conquered all of Gaul and gained fame, wealth, and military experience as well as an army of seasoned veterans who were loyal to him. When leading senators endorsed Pompey as the less harmful to their cause and voted for Caesar to lay down his command and return as a private citizen to Rome, Caesar refused. He chose to keep his army and moved into Italy illegally by crossing the Rubicon, the river that formed the southern boundary of his province. Caesar marched on Rome and defeated the forces of Pompey and his allies, leaving Caesar in complete control of the Roman government.

Caesar was officially made dictator in 47 B.C.E. and three years later was named dictator for life. Realizing the need for reforms, he gave land to the poor and increased the senate to nine hundred members. He also reformed the calendar by introducing the Egyptian solar year of 365 days (with later changes in 1582, it became the basis of our own calendar). Caesar planned much more in the way of building projects and military adventures in the East, but in 44 B.C.E., a group of leading senators assassinated him.

Within a few years after Caesar’s death, two men had divided the Roman world between them—Octavian, Caesar’s grandnephew and heir, taking the western portion and Antony, Caesar’s ally and assistant, the eastern half. But the empire of the Romans, large as it was, was still too small for two masters, and Octavian and Antony eventually came into conflict. Antony allied himself closely with the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra VII. At the Battle of Actium in Greece in 31 B.C.E., Octavian’s forces smashed the army and navy of Antony and Cleopatra, who both fled to Egypt, where they committed suicide a year later. Octavian, at the age of thirty-two, stood supreme over the Roman world. The civil wars were ended. And so was the Republic.

The Roman Empire at Its Height

Q Focus Question: What were the chief features of the Roman Empire at its height in the second century C.E.?

With the victories of Octavian, peace finally settled on the Roman world. Although civil conflict still erupted occasionally, the new imperial state constructed by Octavian experienced remarkable stability for the next two hundred years. The Romans imposed their peace on the largest empire established in antiquity.
The Age of Augustus (31 B.C.E.—14 C.E.)

In 27 B.C.E., Octavian proclaimed the “restoration of the Republic.” He understood that only traditional republican forms would satisfy the senatorial aristocracy. At the same time, Octavian was aware that the Republic could not be fully restored. Although he gave some power to the senate, Octavian in reality became the first Roman emperor. The senate awarded him the title of Augustus, “the revered one”—a fitting title, in view of his power, that had previously been reserved for gods. Augustus proved highly popular, but the chief source of his power was his continuing control of the army. The senate gave Augustus the title of imperator (our word emperor), or commander in chief.

Augustus maintained a standing army of twenty-eight legions, or about 150,000 men (a legion was a military unit of about 5,000 troops). Only Roman citizens could be legionaries, while subject peoples could serve as auxiliary forces, which numbered around 130,000 under Augustus. Augustus was also responsible for setting up a praetorian guard of roughly 9,000 men who had the important task of guarding the emperor.

While claiming to have restored the Republic, Augustus inaugurated a new system for governing the provinces. Under the Republic, the senate had appointed the governors of the provinces. Now certain provinces were given to the emperor, who assigned deputies known as legates to govern them. The senate continued to name the governors of the remaining provinces, but the authority of Augustus enabled him to overrule the senatorial governors and establish a uniform imperial policy.

Augustus also stabilized the frontiers of the Roman Empire. He conquered the central and maritime Alps and then expanded Roman control of the Balkan peninsula up to the Danube River. His attempt to conquer Germany failed when three Roman legions, led by a general named Varus, were massacred in 9 C.E. by a coalition of German tribes. His defeat in Germany taught Augustus that Rome’s power was not unlimited and also devastated him; for months, he would beat his head on a door, shouting, “Varus, give me back my legions!”

Augustus died in 14 C.E. after dominating the Roman world for forty-five years. He had created a new order while placating the old by restoring traditional values. By the time of his death, his new order was so well established that few agitated for an alternative. Indeed, as the Roman historian Tacitus pointed out, “Practically no one had ever seen truly Republican government…. Political equality was a thing of the past; all eyes watched for imperial commands.”

The Early Empire (14–180)

There was no serious opposition to Augustus’ choice of his stepson Tiberius as his successor. By his actions, Augustus established the Julio-Claudian dynasty; the next four successors of Augustus were related to the family of Augustus or that of his wife, Livia.

Several major tendencies emerged during the reigns of the Julio-Claudians (14–68 C.E.). In general, more and
more of the responsibilities that Augustus had given to the senate tended to be taken over by the emperors, who also instituted an imperial bureaucracy, staffed by talented freedmen, to run the government on a daily basis. As the Julio-Claudian successors of Augustus acted more openly as real rulers rather than “first citizens of the state,” the opportunity for arbitrary and corrupt acts also increased. Nero (54–68), for example, freely eliminated people he wanted out of the way, including his own mother, whose murder he arranged. Without troops, the senators proved unable to oppose these excesses, but the Roman legions finally revolted. Abandoned by his guards, Nero chose to commit suicide by stabbing himself in the throat after uttering his final words, “What an artist the world is losing in me!”

**The Five Good Emperors (96–180)** Many historians regard the **Pax Romana** (the “Roman peace”) and the prosperity it engendered as the chief benefits of Roman rule during the first and second centuries C.E. These benefits were especially noticeable during the reigns of the five so-called **good emperors**. These rulers treated the ruling classes with respect, maintained peace in the empire, and supported generally beneficial domestic policies. Though absolute monarchs, they were known for their tolerance and diplomacy. By adopting capable men as their sons and successors, the first four of these emperors reduced the chances of succession problems.

Under the five good emperors, the powers of the emperor continued to expand at the expense of the senate. Increasingly, imperial officials appointed and directed by the emperor took over the running of the government. The good emperors also extended the scope of imperial administration to areas previously untouched by the imperial government. Trajan (98–117) implemented an alimentary program that provided state funds to assist poor parents in raising and educating their children. The good emperors were widely praised for their extensive building programs. Trajan and Hadrian (117–138) were especially active in constructing public works—aqueducts, bridges, roads, and harbor facilities—throughout the empire.

**Frontiers and the Provinces** Although Trajan extended Roman rule into Dacia (modern Romania), Mesopotamia, and the Sinai peninsula (see Map 5.3), his successors recognized that the empire was overextended and returned to Augustus’ policy of defensive imperialism. Hadrian withdrew Roman forces from much of Mesopotamia. Although he retained Dacia and Arabia, he went on the defensive in his frontier policy by reinforcing the fortifications along a line connecting the Rhine and Danube Rivers and building a defensive wall 80 miles long across northern Britain to keep the Scots out of Roman Britain. By the end of the second century, the Roman forces were established in permanent bases behind the frontiers.

At its height in the second century C.E., the Roman Empire was one of the greatest states the world had seen. It covered about 3.5 million square miles and had a population, like that of Han China, estimated at more than fifty million. While the emperors and the imperial administration provided a degree of unity, considerable leeway was given to local customs, and the privileges of Roman citizenship were extended to many people throughout the empire. In 212, the emperor Caracalla completed the process by giving Roman citizenship to every free inhabitant of the empire. Latin was the language of the western part of the empire, while Greek was used in the east. Roman culture spread to all parts of the empire and freely mixed with Greek culture, creating what has been called Greco-Roman civilization.

The administration and cultural life of the Roman Empire depended greatly on cities and towns. A provincial governor’s staff was not large, so it was left to local city officials to act as Roman agents in carrying out many government functions, especially those related to taxes. Most towns and cities were not large by modern standards. The largest was Rome, but there were also some large cities in the east: Alexandria in Egypt numbered more than 300,000 inhabitants. In the west, cities were usually small, with only a few thousand inhabitants. Cities were important in the spread of Roman culture, law, and the Latin language, and they resembled one another with their temples, markets, amphitheaters, and other public buildings.

**Prosperity in the Early Empire** The Early Empire was a period of considerable prosperity. Internal peace resulted in unprecedented levels of trade. Merchants from all over the empire came to the chief Italian ports of Puteoli on the Bay of Naples and Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber River. Long-distance trade beyond the Roman frontiers also developed during the Early Empire. Economic expansion in both the Roman and Chinese Empires helped foster the growth of this trade. Although both empires built roads chiefly for military purposes, the roads also came to be used to facilitate trade. Moreover, by creating large empires, the Romans and Chinese not only established internal stability but also pacified bordering territories, thus reducing the threat that bandits posed to traders. As a result, merchants developed a network of trade routes that brought these two great empires into commercial contact. Most important was the overland Silk Road, a regular caravan route between West and East (see “Imperial Expansion and the Origins of the Silk Road” later in this chapter).

Despite the profits from trade and commerce, agriculture remained the chief pursuit of most people and the underlying basis of Roman prosperity. Although the large latifundia still dominated agriculture, especially in southern and central Italy, small peasant farms continued to flourish, particularly in Etruria and the Po valley. Although large estates depended on slaves for the raising of sheep and cattle, the lands of some latifundia were also
worked by free tenant farmers who paid rent in labor, produce, or sometimes cash.

The prosperity of the Roman world left an enormous gulf between rich and poor. The development of towns and cities, so important to the creation of any civilization, is based largely on the agricultural surpluses of the countryside. In ancient times, the margin of surplus produced by each farmer was relatively small. Therefore, the upper classes and urban populations had to be supported by the labor of a large number of agricultural producers, who never found it easy to produce much more than for themselves.

**Culture and Society in the Roman World**

One of the notable characteristics of Roman culture and society is the impact of the Greeks. Greek ambassadors, merchants, and artists traveled to Rome and spread Greek thought and practices. After their conquest of the Hellenistic kingdoms, Roman generals shipped Greek manuscripts and artworks back to Rome. Multitudes of educated Greek slaves labored in Roman households. Rich Romans hired Greek tutors and sent their sons to Athens to study. As the Roman poet Horace said, "Captive Greece took captive her rude conqueror." Greek thought captivated the less sophisticated Roman minds, and the Romans became willing transmitters of Greek culture.

**Roman Literature**

The Latin literature that first emerged in the third century B.C.E. was strongly influenced by Greek models. It was not until the last century of the Republic that the Romans began to produce a new poetry in which Latin poets were able to use various Greek forms to express their own feelings about people, social and political life, and love.

The high point of Latin literature was reached in the age of Augustus, often called the golden age of Latin literature. The most distinguished poet of the Augustan Age was Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.). The son of a small landholder in northern Italy, he welcomed the rule of Augustus and wrote his greatest work in the emperor's honor. Virgil's masterpiece was the *Aeneid*, an epic poem
clearly intended to rival the work of Homer. The connection between Troy and Rome is made in the poem when Aeneas, a hero of Troy, survives the destruction of that city and eventually settles in Latium—establishing a link between Roman civilization and Greek history. Aeneas is portrayed as the ideal Roman—his virtues are duty, piety, and faithfulness. Virgil’s overall purpose was to show that Aeneas had fulfilled his mission to establish the Romans in Italy and thereby start Rome on its divine mission to rule the world.

Let others fashion from bronze more lifelike, breathing images—
For so they shall—and evoke living faces from marble: Others excel as oracle, others track with their instruments.
The planets circling in heaven and predict when stars will appear.
But Romans, never forget that government is your medium!
Be this your art—to practise men in the habit of peace, Generosity to the conquered, and firmness against aggressors.

As Virgil expressed it, ruling was Rome’s gift.

Roman Art The Romans were also dependent on the Greeks for artistic inspiration. The Romans developed a taste for Greek statues, which they placed not only in public buildings but also in their private houses. The Romans’ own portrait sculpture was characterized by an intense realism that included even unpleasant physical details. Wall paintings and frescoes in the homes of the rich realistically depicted landscapes, portraits, and scenes from mythological stories.

The Romans excelled in architecture, a highly practical art. Although they continued to adapt Greek styles and made use of colonnades and rectangular structures, the Romans were also innovative. They made considerable use of curvilinear forms: the arch, vault, and dome. The Romans were also the first people in antiquity to use concrete on a massive scale. They constructed huge buildings—public baths, such as those of Caracalla, and amphitheaters capable of seating fifty thousand spectators. These large buildings were made possible by Roman engineering skills. These same skills were put to use in constructing roads, aqueducts, and bridges: a network of 50,000 miles of roads linked all parts of the empire, and in Rome, almost a dozen aqueducts kept the population of one million supplied with water.

Roman Law One of Rome’s chief gifts to the Mediterranean world of its day and to later generations was its system of law. Rome’s first code of laws was the Twelve Tables of 450 B.C.E., but that was designed for a simple farming society and proved inadequate for later needs. So from the Twelve Tables the Romans developed a system of civil law that applied to all Roman citizens. As Rome expanded, problems arose between citizens and non-citizens and also among noncitizen residents of the empire. Although some of the rules of civil law could be used in these cases, special rules were often needed. These rules gave rise to a body of law known as the law of nations, defined as the part of the law that applied to both Romans and foreigners. Under the influence of Stoicism, the Romans came to identify their law of nations with natural law, a set of universal laws based on reason. This enabled them to establish standards of justice that applied to all people.

These standards of justice included principles that we would immediately recognize. A person was regarded as innocent until proved otherwise. People accused of wrongdoing were allowed to defend themselves before a judge. A judge, in turn, was expected to weigh evidence carefully before arriving at a decision. These principles lived on long after the fall of the Roman Empire.

The Roman Family At the heart of the Roman social structure stood the family, headed by the paterfamilias—the dominant male. The household also included the wife, sons with their wives and children, unmarried daughters, and slaves. Like the Greeks, Roman males believed that females needed male guardians (see the box on p. 143). The paterfamilias exercised that authority; upon his death, sons or nearest male relatives assumed the role of guardians.
The Pantheon. Shown here is the Pantheon, one of Rome’s greatest buildings. Constructed of brick, six kinds of concrete, and marble, it is a stunning example of the Romans’ engineering skills. The outside porch of the Pantheon contains eighteen Corinthian columns made of granite, but it is the inside of the temple that amazes onlookers. The interior is a large circular space topped by a huge dome. A hole in the center of the roof is the only source of light. The dome, built up layer by layer, was made of concrete, weighing 10 million pounds. The walls holding the dome are almost 20 feet thick.

Fathers arranged the marriages of daughters. In the Republic, women married “with legal control” passing from father to husband. By the mid-first century B.C.E., the dominant practice had changed to “without legal control,” which meant that married daughters officially remained within the father’s legal power. Since the fathers of most married women died sooner or later, not being in the “legal control” of a husband entailed independent property rights that forceful women could translate into considerable power within the household and outside it.

Some parents in upper-class families provided education for their daughters by hiring private tutors or sending them to primary schools. At the age when boys were entering secondary schools, however, girls were pushed into marriage. The legal minimum age for marriage was twelve, although fourteen was a more common age in practice (for males, the legal minimum age was fourteen, and most men married later). Although some Roman doctors warned that early pregnancies could be dangerous for young girls, early marriages persisted because women died at a relatively young age. A good example is Tullia, Cicero’s beloved daughter. She was married at sixteen, widowed at twenty-two, remarried one year later, divorced at twenty-eight, remarried at twenty-nine, and divorced at thirty-three. She died at thirty-four, which was not unusually young for women in Roman society.

By the second century C.E., significant changes were occurring in the Roman family. The pater familias no longer had absolute authority over his children; he could no longer sell his children into slavery or have them put to death. Moreover, the husband’s absolute authority over his wife had also disappeared, and by the late second century, upper-class Roman women had considerable freedom and independence.

Slaves and Their Masters Although slavery was a common institution throughout the ancient world, no people possessed more slaves or relied so much on slave labor as the Romans eventually did. Slaves were used in many ways in Roman society. The rich owned the most and the best. In the late Roman Republic, it became a badge of prestige to be attended by many slaves. Greek slaves were in much demand as tutors, musicians, doctors, and artists. Roman businessmen would employ them as shop assistants or craftspeople. Slaves were also used as farm laborers; in fact, huge gangs of slaves worked
the large landed estates under pitiful conditions. Many slaves of all nationalities were used as menial household workers, such as cooks, waiters, cleaners, and gardeners. Contractors used slave labor to build roads, aqueducts, and other public structures.

The treatment of Roman slaves varied. There are numerous instances of humane treatment by masters and situations where slaves even protected their owners from danger out of gratitude and esteem. Slaves were also

**Roman Women.** Roman women, especially those of the upper class, developed comparatively more freedom than women in Classical Athens despite the persistent male belief that women required guardianship. This mural decoration, found in the remains of a villa destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, shows a group of Pompeian ladies with their slave hairdresser.
subject to severe punishments, torture, abuse, and hard labor that drove some to run away, despite the stringent laws Romans had against aiding a runaway slave. Some slaves revolted against their owners and even murdered them, causing some Romans to live in unspoken fear of their slaves (see the box above).

Near the end of the second century B.C.E., large-scale slave revolts occurred in Sicily, where enormous gangs of slaves were subjected to horrible working conditions on large landed estates. The most famous uprising on the Italian peninsula occurred in 73 B.C.E. Led by a gladiator named Spartacus, the revolt broke out in southern Italy and involved seventy thousand slaves. Spartacus managed to defeat several Roman armies before being trapped and killed in southern Italy in 71 B.C.E. Six thousand of his followers were crucified, the traditional form of execution for slaves.

**Imperial Rome** At the center of the colossal Roman Empire was the ancient city of Rome. A true capital city, Rome had the largest population of any city in the empire, close to one million by the time of Augustus. Only Chang’an, the imperial capital of the Han Empire in China, had a comparable population during this time.

Both food and entertainment were provided on a grand scale for the inhabitants of Rome. The poet Juvenal said of the Roman masses, "But nowadays, with no vote to sell, their motto is 'Couldn't care less.' Time was when their plebiscite elected generals, heads of state,
**FILM & HISTORY**

**SPARTACUS (1960)**

*Spartacus*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, is based on *Spartacus*, a novel written by Howard Fast, and focuses for the most part on the major events in the life of the gladiator who led a major rebellion against the Romans. Kirk Douglas stars as a Thracian slave who was bought and trained as a gladiator by Batiatus, a role played by Peter Ustinov, who won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for his performance. Spartacus leads a revolt in the gladiatorial camp in Capua run by Batiatus, flees with the other gladiators, and then brings together a large number of escaped slaves as they move through southern Italy. The gladiators among them are able to create the semblance of a trained army, and they are initially successful in conquering a force sent from the city of Rome. Eventually, however, they are defeated by the army of Crassus (Laurence Olivier), who is aided by the unexpected arrival of the forces of two other Roman generals. Many of the leaders of the revolt, including Spartacus, are crucified as punishment for their rebellion. Nevertheless, the movie has a typical happy Hollywood ending, which is entirely fictional. Varinia, a slave woman (Jean Simmons) who has married Spartacus and given birth to his son, bids a final farewell to the crucified Spartacus, who sees his son and is assured by Varinia that he will live as a free man.

*Freedom* is the key word for this entire movie. Spartacus is portrayed as a man who dreamed of the death of slavery, thousands of years before its death (although he would be disappointed to know that it still survives in some corners of the world today). The film rings with the words of freedom: "We only want our freedom." "We must stay true to ourselves, we are brothers and we are free," and "I pray for a son who must be born free." Indeed, freedom was also on the minds of the film's creators. The film appeared in 1960, only a few years after Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist crusade in the 1950s had led to an exaggerated fear of Communists. Both Howard Fast, the author of the novel, and Dalton Trumbo, the screenwriter for the film, had been blacklisted from working in Hollywood as a result of McCarthy's charges that they were Communists or Communist sympathizers. The film was a statement of Hollywood's determination to allow both men to work freely and openly. The speeches about freedom also evoke the rhetoric of free world versus communism that was heard frequently during the height of the Cold War in the 1950s.

Although the general outlines of the film are historically accurate (there was a slave rebellion in southern Italy from 73 to 71 B.C.E. led by Spartacus that was ended by Roman troops commanded by Crassus), it also contains a number of historical inaccuracies. Although many slave leaders were crucified, Spartacus was not one of them. He was killed in the final battle, and his body was never found. Crassus, the general who crushed the slave rebellion, was not seeking dictatorial power as the film insists. The character of Gracchus is depicted as a mob-loving popular senatorial leader, although the Gracchus brothers had died some fifty years before the revolt. Julius Caesar had nothing to do with Spartacus, nor was he made prefect of the city, a position that did not yet exist.

Commanders of legions: but now they've pulled in their horns, there's only two things that concern them: Bread and Circuses.

Public spectacles were provided by the emperor as part of the great religious festivals celebrated by the state. Most famous were the gladiatorial shows, which took place in amphitheaters. Perhaps the most famous was the amphitheater known as the Colosseum, constructed in Rome to seat fifty thousand spectators. In most cities and towns, amphitheaters were the biggest buildings, rivaled only by the circuses (arenas) for races and the public baths.

Gladiatorial games were held from dawn to dusk. Contests to the death between trained fighters formed the central focus of these games, but the games...
included other forms of entertainment as well. Criminals of all ages and both genders were sent into the arena without weapons to face certain death from wild animals who would tear them to pieces. Numerous types of animal contests were also held: wild beasts against each other, such as bears against buffaloes; staged hunts with men shooting safely from behind iron bars; and gladiators in the arena with bulls, tigers, and lions. It is recorded that five thousand beasts were killed in one day of games when Emperor Titus inaugurated the Colosseum in 80 C.E.

**Disaster in Southern Italy** Gladiatorial spectacles were contrived by humans, but the Roman Empire also experienced some spectacular natural disasters. One of the greatest was the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on August 24, 79 C.E. Although known to be a volcano, Vesuvius was thought to be extinct, its hillsides green with flourishing vineyards. Its eruption threw up thousands of tons of lava and ash. Toxic fumes killed many people, and the nearby city of Pompeii was quickly buried under volcanic ash. To the west, Herculaneum and other communities around the Bay of Naples were submerged beneath a mud flow (see the box on p. 147). Not for another 1,700 years were systematic excavations begun on the buried towns. The examination of their preserved remains has enabled archeologists to reconstruct the everyday life and art of these Roman towns. Their discovery in the eighteenth century was an important force in stimulating both scholarly and public interest in classical antiquity and helped give rise to the Neoclassical style of that century.

**Crisis and the Late Empire**

**Focus Question:** What reforms did Diocletian and Constantine institute, and to what extent were the reforms successful?

During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the last of the five good emperors, a number of natural catastrophes struck Rome. To many Romans, these natural disasters seemed to portend an ominous future for Rome. New problems arose soon after the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180.

**Crises in the Third Century**

In the course of the third century, the Roman Empire came near to collapse. Military monarchy under the Severan rulers (193–235), which restored order after a series of civil wars, was followed by military anarchy. For the next forty-nine years, the Roman imperial throne was occupied by anyone who had the military strength to seize it—a total of twenty-two emperors, only two of whom did not meet a violent death. At the same time, the empire was beset by a series of invasions, no doubt exacerbated by the civil wars. In the east, the Sassanid Persians made inroads into Roman territory. Germanic tribes also poured into the empire. Not until the end of the third century were most of the boundaries restored.

Invasions, civil wars, and plague came close to causing an economic collapse of the Roman Empire in the third century. There was a noticeable decline in trade and small industry, and the labor shortage caused by the plague affected both military recruiting and the economy. Farm production deteriorated significantly as fields were ravaged by invaders or, even more often, by the defending Roman armies. The monetary system began to collapse as a result of debased coinage and inflation. Armies were needed more than ever, but financial strains made it difficult to pay and enlist more soldiers. By the mid-third century, the state had to hire Germans to fight under Roman commanders.

**The Late Roman Empire**

At the end of the third and beginning of the fourth centuries, the Roman Empire gained a new lease on life through the efforts of two strong emperors, Diocletian and Constantine. Under their rule, the empire was transformed into a new state, the so-called Late Empire, distinguished by a new governmental structure, a rigid economic and social system, and a new state religion—Christianity (see "Transformation of the Roman World: The Development of Christianity" later in this chapter).

**The Reforms of Diocletian and Constantine** Both Diocletian (284–305) and Constantine (306–337) expanded imperial control by strengthening and expanding the administrative bureaucracies of the Roman Empire. A hierarchy of officials exercised control at the various levels of government. The army was enlarged, and mobile units were set up that could be quickly moved to support frontier troops when the borders were threatened.

Constantine's biggest project was the construction of a new capital city in the east, on the site of the Greek city of Byzantium on the shores of the Bosporus. Eventually renamed Constantinople (modern Istanbul), the city was developed for defensive reasons and had an excellent strategic location. Calling it his "New Rome," Constantine endowed the city with a forum, large palaces, and a vast amphitheater.

The political and military reforms of Diocletian and Constantine greatly increased two institutions—the army
THE Eruption of Mount Vesuvius

Pliny the Younger, an upper-class Roman who rose to the position of governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, wrote a letter to the Roman historian Tacitus, describing the death of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, as a result of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Pliny the Elder was the commander of a fleet at Misenum. When the eruption occurred, his curiosity led him to take a detachment of his fleet to the scene. He landed at Stabiae, where he died from toxic fumes.

Pliny, Letter to Cornelius Tacitus

Thank you for asking me to send you a description of my uncle’s death so that you can leave an accurate account of it for posterity…. It is true that he perished in a catastrophe which destroyed the loveliest regions of the earth, a fate shared by whole cities and their people, and one so memorable that it is likely to make his name live for ever….

My uncle was stationed at Misenum, in active command of the fleet. On 24 August, in the early afternoon, my mother drew his attention to a cloud of unusual size and appearance…. He called for his shoes and climbed up to a place which would give him the best view of the phenomenon. It was not clear at that distance from which mountain the cloud was rising (it was afterwards known to be Vesuvius); its general appearance can best be expressed as being like an umbrella pine, for it rose to a great height on a sort of trunk and then split off into branches. I imagine because it was thrust upwards by the first blast and then left unsupported as the pressure subsided, or else it was borne down by its own weight so that it spread out and gradually dispersed. In places it looked white, elsewhere blotched and dirty, according to the amount of soil and ashes it carried with it. My uncle’s scholarly acumen saw at once that it was important enough for a closer inspection, and he ordered a boat to be made ready….

[Unable to go farther by sea, he lands at Stabiae.]

Meanwhile on Mount Vesuvius broad sheets of fire and leaping flames blazed at several points, their bright glare emphasized by the darkness of night. My uncle tried to allay the fears of his companions by repeatedly declaring that these were nothing but bonfires left by the peasants in their terror, or else empty houses on fire in the districts they had abandoned….

They debated whether to stay indoors or take their chance in the open, for the buildings were now shaking with violent shocks, and seemed to be swaying to and fro as if they were torn from their foundations. Outside on the other hand, there was the danger of falling pumice-stones, even though these were light and porous; however, after comparing the risks they chose the latter. In my uncle’s case one reason outweighed the other, but for the others it was a choice of fears. As a protection against falling objects they put pillows on their heads tied down with cloths.

Elsewhere there was daylight by this time, but they were still in darkness, blacker and denser than any ordinary night, which they relieved by lighting torches and various kinds of lamp. My uncle decided to go down to the shore and investigate on the spot the possibility of any escape by sea, but he found the waves still wild and dangerous. A sheet was spread on the ground for him to lie down, and he repeatedly asked for cold water to drink. Then the flames and smell of sulphur which gave warning of the approaching fire drove the others to take flight and roused him to stand up. He stood leaning on two slaves and then suddenly collapsed, I imagine because the dense fumes choked his breathing by blocking his windpipe which was constitutionally weak and narrow and often inflamed. When daylight returned on the 26th—two days after the last day he had seen—his body was found intact and uninjured, still fully clothed and looking more like sleep than death.

Q: What do you think were the reactions of upper-class Romans to this event? What do you think was the reaction of lower-class Romans?

CENGAGENOW To read other works by Pliny, enter the documents area of the World History Resource Center using the access card that is available for World History.

and the civil service—that drained most of the public funds. Though more revenues were needed to pay for the army and the bureaucracy, the population was not growing, so the tax base could not be expanded. To ensure the tax base and keep the empire going despite the shortage of labor, the emperors issued edicts that forced people to remain in their designated vocations. Basic jobs, such as baker or shipper, became hereditary. The fortunes of free tenant farmers also declined. Soon they found themselves bound to the land by large landowners who took advantage of depressed agricultural conditions to enlarge their landed estates.

The End of the Western Empire Constantine had reunited the Roman Empire and restored a semblance of order. After his death, however, the empire continued to divide into western and eastern parts, which had become two virtually independent states by 395. In the
course of the fifth century, while the empire in the east remained intact under the Roman emperor in Constantinople, the administrative structure of the empire in the west collapsed and was replaced by an assortment of Germanic kingdoms. The process was a gradual one, beginning with the movement of Germans into the empire.

Although the Romans had established a series of political frontiers along the Rhine and Danube Rivers, Romans and Germans often came into contact across these boundaries. Until the fourth century, the empire had proved capable of absorbing these people without harm to its political structure. In the late fourth century, however, the Germanic tribes came under new pressure when the Huns, a fierce tribe of nomads from the steppes of Asia who may have been related to the Xiongnu, the invaders of the Han Empire in China, moved into the Black Sea region, possibly attracted by the riches of the empire to its south. One of the groups displaced by the Huns was the Visigoths, who moved south and west, crossed the Danube into Roman territory, and settled down as Roman allies. But the Visigoths soon revolted, and the Roman attempt to stop them at Adrianople in 378 led to a crushing defeat for Rome.

Increasing numbers of Germans now crossed the frontiers. In 410, the Visigoths sacked Rome. Vandals poured into southern Spain and Africa, Visigoths into Spain and Gaul. The Vandals crossed into Italy from North Africa and ravaged Rome again in 455. By the middle of the fifth century, the western provinces of the Roman Empire had been taken over by Germanic peoples who set up their own independent kingdoms. At the same time, a semblance of imperial authority remained in Rome, although the real power behind the throne tended to rest in the hands of important military officials known as masters of the soldiers. These military commanders controlled the government and dominated the imperial court. In 476, Odoacer, a master of the soldiers, himself of German origin, deposed the Roman emperor, the boy Romulus Augustus. To many historians, the deposition of Romulus signaled the end of the Roman Empire in the west. Of course, this is only a symbolic date, as much of direct imperial rule had already been lost in the course of the fifth century.

Transformation of the Roman World: The Development of Christianity

**Q Focus Question:** What characteristics of Christianity enabled it to grow and ultimately to triumph?

The rise of Christianity marked a fundamental break with the dominant values of the Greco-Roman world. To understand the rise of Christianity, we must first examine both the religious environment of the Roman world and the Jewish background from which Christianity emerged.

The Roman state religion focused on the worship of a pantheon of Greco-Roman gods and goddesses, including Juno, the patron goddess of women; Minerva, the goddess of craftspeople; Mars, the god of war; and Jupiter Optimus Maximus ("best and greatest"), who became the patron deity of Rome and assumed a central place in the religious life of the city. The Romans believed that the observance of proper ritual by state priests brought them into a right relationship with the gods, thereby guaranteeing security, peace, and prosperity, and that their success in creating an empire confirmed the favor of the gods. As the first-century B.C.E. politician Cicero claimed, "We have overcome all the nations of the world because we have realized that the world is directed and governed by the gods."

The polytheistic Romans were extremely tolerant of other religions. They allowed the worship of native gods and goddesses throughout their provinces and even adopted some of the local deities. In addition, beginning with Augustus, emperors were often officially made gods by the Roman senate, thus bolstering support for the emperors (see the comparative essay "Rulers and Gods" on p. 149).

The desire for a more emotional spiritual experience led many people to the mystery religions of the Hellenistic east, which flooded into the western Roman world during the Early Empire. The mystery religions offered their followers entry into a higher world of reality and the promise of a future life superior to the present one.

In addition to the mystery religions, the Romans' expansion into the eastern Mediterranean also brought them into contact with the Jews. Roman involvement with the Jews began in 63 B.C.E., and by 6 C.E., Judaea (which embraced the old Jewish kingdom of Judah) had been made a province and placed under the direction of a Roman procurator. But unrest continued, augmented by divisions among the Jews themselves. One group, the Essenes, awaited a Messiah who would save Israel from oppression, usher in the kingdom of God, and establish paradise on earth. Another group, the Zealots, were militant extremists who advocated the violent overthrow of Roman rule. A Jewish revolt in 66 C.E. was crushed by the Romans four years later. The Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, and Roman power once more stood supreme in Judaea.

The Origins of Christianity

Jesus of Nazareth (c. 6 B.C.E. – c. 29 C.E.) was a Palestinian Jew who grew up in Galilee, an important center of the militant Zealots. Jesus’ message was simple. He reassured his fellow Jews that he did not plan to undermine their traditional religion. What was important was not strict adherence to the letter of the law but the transformation of the inner person: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this
COMPARATIVE ESSAY
RULERS AND GODS

All of the world’s earliest civilizations believed that there was a close relationship between rulers and gods. In Egypt, pharaohs were considered gods whose role was to maintain the order and harmony of the universe in their own kingdom. In the words of an Egyptian hymn, “What is the king of Upper and Lower Egypt? He is a god by whose dealings one lives, the father and mother of all men, alone by himself, without an equal.” In Mesopotamia, India, and China, rulers were thought to rule with divine assistance. Kings were often seen as rulers who derived their power from the gods and who were the agents or representatives of the gods. In ancient India, rulers claimed to be representatives of the gods because they were descended from Manu, the first man who had been made a king by Brahma, the chief god. Many Romans believed that their success in creating an empire was a visible sign of divine favor.

Their supposed connection to the gods also caused rulers to seek divine aid in the affairs of the world. This led to the art of divination, an organized method to discover the intentions of the gods. In Mesopotamian and Roman society, one form of divination involved the examination of the livers of sacrificed animals; features seen in the livers were interpreted to foretell events to come. The Chinese used oracle bones to receive advice from supernatural forces that were beyond the power of human beings. Questions to the gods were scratched on turtle shells or animal bones, which were then exposed to fire. Shamans examined the resulting cracks on the surface of the shells or bones and interpreted their meaning as messages from supernatural forces. The Greeks divined the will of the gods by use of the oracle, a sacred shrine dedicated to a god or goddess who revealed the future in response to a question.

Underlying all of these divinatory practices was a belief in a supernatural universe, that is, a world in which divine forces were in charge and in which humans were dependent for their own well-being on those divine forces. It was not until the Scientific Revolution of the modern world that many people began to believe in a natural world that was not governed by spiritual forces.

Q: What role did spiritual forces play in early civilizations?

Vishnu. Brahma the Creator, Shiva the Destroyer, and Vishnu the Preserver are the three chief Hindu gods of India. Vishnu is known as the Preserver because he mediates between Brahma and Shiva and thus maintains the stability of the universe.

sums up the Law and the Prophets,” God’s command was simple—to love God and one another: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.” In the Sermon on the Mount (see the box on p. 150), Jesus presented the ethical concepts—humility, charity, and brotherly love—that would form the basis of the value system of medieval Western civilization.

To the Roman authorities of Palestine, however, Jesus was a potential revolutionary who might transform Jewish expectations of a messianic kingdom into a revolt against Rome. Therefore, Jesus found himself denounced on many sides, and the procurator Pontius Pilate ordered his crucifixion. But that did not solve the problem. A few loyal followers of Jesus spread the story that Jesus had overcome death, had been resurrected, and had then ascended into heaven. The belief in Jesus’ resurrection became an important tenet of Christian doctrine. Jesus was now hailed as “the anointed one” (Christus in Greek), the Messiah who would return and usher in the kingdom of God on earth.

Christianity began, then, as a religious movement within Judaism and was viewed that way by Roman authorities for many decades. One of the prominent figures in early Christianity, however, Paul of Tarsus (c. 5–c. 67), believed that the message of Jesus should be preached not only to Jews but to Gentiles (non-Jews) as well. Paul taught that Jesus was the Savior, the son of God, who had come to earth to save all humans, who were all sinners as a result of Adam’s sin of disobedience against God. By his death, Jesus had atoned for the sins of all humans and made possible their reconciliation with God and hence their salvation. By accepting Jesus as their Savior, they too could be saved.

The Spread of Christianity
Christianity spread slowly at first. Although the teachings of early Christianity were mostly disseminated by the preaching of convince Christians, written materials also appeared. Among them were a series of epistles (letters) written by Paul outlining Christian beliefs for different Christian communities. Some of Jesus’
Christianity was one of many religions competing for attention in the Roman Empire during the first and second centuries. The rise of Christianity marked a fundamental break with the value system of the upper-class elites who dominated the world of classical antiquity. As these excerpts from the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament gospel of Saint Matthew illustrate, Christians emphasized humility, charity, brotherly love, and a belief in the inner being and a spiritual kingdom superior to this material world. These values and principles were not those of classical Greco-Roman civilization as exemplified in the words and deeds of its leaders.

The Gospel According to Saint Matthew

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn: for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek: for they will inherit the Earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful: for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God.
Blessed are the peace-makers: for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...

You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person.

If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.…

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.…

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? So do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

What were the ideals of early Christianity? How do they differ from the values and principles of classical Greco-Roman civilization? Compare this sermon to the Buddha’s sermon on the Four Noble Truths in Chapter 2. How are they different? How are they similar?

CENGAGENOW To read more of the Sermon on the Mount, enter the documents area of the World History Resource Center using the access code that is available for World History.

disciples may also have preserved some of the sayings of the master in writing and would have passed on personal memories that became the basis of the written gospels—the “good news” concerning Jesus—of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which by the end of the first century C.E. had become the authoritative record of Jesus’ life and teachings and formed the core of the New Testament. Recently, some scholars have argued that other gospels, such as that of Thomas, were rejected because they deviated from the beliefs about Jesus held by the emerging church leaders.

Although Jerusalem was the first center of Christianity, its destruction by the Romans in 70 C.E. dispersed the Christians and left individual Christian churches with considerable independence. By 100, Christian churches had been established in most of the major cities of the east and in some places in the western part of the empire. Many early Christians came from the ranks of Hellenized Jews and the Greek-speaking populations of the east. But in the second and third centuries, an increasing number of followers came from Latin-speaking peoples.

Initially, the Romans did not pay much attention to the Christians, whom they regarded as simply another Jewish sect. As time passed, however, the Roman attitude toward Christianity began to change. The Romans tolerated other religions as long as they did not threaten public order or public morals. Many Romans came to view Christians as harmful to the Roman state because they refused to worship the state gods and emperors.
Nevertheless, Roman persecution of Christians in the first and second centuries was only sporadic and local, never systematic. In the second century, Christians were largely ignored as harmless (see the box on p. 152). By the end of the reigns of the five good emperors, Christians still represented a small minority within the empire, but one of considerable strength.

The Triumph of Christianity

Christianity grew slowly in the first century, took root in the second, and by the third had spread widely. Why was the new faith able to attract so many followers? First, the Christian message had much to offer the Roman world. The promise of salvation, made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection, made a resounding impact on a world full of suffering and injustice. Christianity seemed as simply another mystery religion, offering immortality as the result of the sacrificial death of a savior-god. At the same time, it offered more than the other mystery religions did. Jesus had been a human figure who was easy to relate to.

Moreover, the sporadic persecution of Christians by the Romans in the first and second centuries, which did little to stop the growth of Christianity, in fact served to strengthen Christianity as an institution in the second and third centuries by causing it to become more organized. Crucial to this change was the emerging role of the bishops, who began to assume more control over church communities. The Christian church was creating a well-defined hierarchical structure in which the bishops and clergy were salaried officers separate from the laity or regular church members.

As the Christian church became more organized, some emperors in the third century responded with more systematic persecutions, but their schemes failed. The last great persecution was at the beginning of the fourth century, but by that time, Christianity had become too strong to be eradicated by force. After Constantine became the first Christian emperor, Christianity flourished. Although Constantine was not baptized until the end of his life, in 313 he issued the Edict of Milan officially tolerating Christianity. Under Theodosius the Great (378–395), it was made the official religion of the Roman Empire. In less than four centuries, Christianity had triumphed.

Jesus and His Apostles. Pictured is a fourth-century C.E. fresco from a Roman catacomb depicting Jesus and his apostles. Catacombs were underground cemeteries where early Christians buried their dead. Christian tradition holds that in times of imperial repression, Christians withdrew to the catacombs to pray and hide.

The Glorious Han Empire

(202 B.C.E.—221 C.E.)

Q Focus Question: What were the chief features of the Han Empire?

During the same centuries that Roman civilization was flourishing in the West, China was the home of its own great empire. The fall of the Qin dynasty in 206 B.C.E. had been followed by a brief period of civil strife as aspiring successors competed for hegemony. Out of this strife emerged one of the greatest and most durable dynasties in Chinese history—the Han. The Han dynasty would later become so closely identified with the advance of Chinese civilization that even today the Chinese sometimes refer to themselves as "people of Han" and to their language as the "language of Han."

The founder of the Han dynasty was Liu Bang (Liu Pang), a commoner of peasant origin who would be known historically by his title of Han Gaozu (Han Kao Tsu, or Exalted Emperor of Han). Under his strong rule and that of his successors, the new dynasty quickly moved to consolidate its control over the empire and promote the welfare of its subjects. Efficient and benevolent, at least...
OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS

ROMAN AUTHORITIES AND A CHRISTIAN ON CHRISTIANITY

At first, Roman authorities were uncertain how to deal with the Christians. In the second century, as seen in the following exchange between Pliny the Younger and the emperor Trajan, Christians were often viewed as harmless and yet were subject to persecution if they persisted in their beliefs. Pliny was governor of the province of Bithynia in northwestern Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). He wrote to the emperor for advice about how to handle people accused of being Christians. Trajan’s response reflects the general approach toward Christians by the emperors of the second century. The final selection is taken from Against Celsus, written about 246 by Origen of Alexandria. In it, Origen defended the value of Christianity against Celsus, a philosopher who had launched an attack on Christians and their teachings.

An Exchange Between Pliny and Trajan

Pliny to Trajan

It is my custom to refer all my difficulties to you, Sir, for no one is better able to resolve my doubts and to inform my ignorance.

I have never been present at an examination of Christians. Consequently, I do not know the nature of the extent of the punishments usually meted out to them, nor the grounds for starting an investigation and how far it should be pressed.

For the moment this is the line I have taken with all persons brought before me on the charge of being Christians. I have asked them in person if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution; for whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished. There have been others similarly fanatical who are Roman citizens. I have entered them on the list of persons to be sent to Rome for trial.

Now that I have begun to deal with this problem, as so often happens, the charges are becoming more widespread and increasing in variety. An anonymous pamphlet has been circulated which contains the names of a number of accused persons.

I have therefore postponed any further examination and hastened to consult you. The question seems to me to be worthy of your consideration, especially in view of the number of persons endangered; for a great many individuals of every age and class, both men and women, are being brought to trial, and this is likely to continue. It is not only the towns, but villages and rural districts too which are infected through contact with this wretched cult. I think through that it is still possible for it to be checked and directed to better ends, for there is no doubt that people have begun to throng the temples which had been almost entirely deserted for a long time; the sacred rites which had been allowed to lapse are being performed again, and flesh of sacrificial victims is on sale everywhere, though up till recently scarcely anyone could be found to buy it. It is easy to infer from this that a great many people could be reformed if they were given an opportunity to repent.

Trian to Pliny

You have followed the right course of procedure, my dear Pliny, in your examination of the cases of persons charged with being Christians, for it is impossible to lay down a general rule to a fixed formula. These people must not be hunted out; if they are brought before you and the charge against them is proved, they must be punished, but in the case of anyone who denies that he is a Christian, and makes it clear that he is not by offering prayers to our gods, he is to be pardoned as a result of his repentance; however suspect his past conduct may be. But pamphlets circulated anonymously must play no part in any accusation. They create the worst sort of precedent and are quite out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

Origen, Against Celsus

[Celsus] says that Christians perform their rites and teach their doctrines in secret, and they do this with good reason to escape the death penalty that hangs over them. He compares the danger to the risks encountered for the sake of philosophy as by Socrates…. I reply to this that in Socrates’ cases the Athenians at once regretted what they had done, and cherished no lingering aggression against him…. But in the case of the Christians the Roman Senate, the contemporary emperors, the army…and the relatives of believers fought against the gospel and would have hindered it; and it would have been defeated by the combined force of so many unless it had overcome and risen above the opposition by divine power, so that it has conquered the whole world that was conspiring against it…. He [also] ridicules our teachers of the gospel who try to elevate the soul in every way to the Creator of the universe…. He compares them [Christians] to wool-workers in houses, cobbler's, laundry-workers, and the most obtuse yokels, as if they called children quite in infancy and women to evil practices, telling them to leave their father and teachers and to follow them. But let Celsus…tell us how we make women and children leave noble and sound teaching, and call them to wicked practices. But he will not
by the standards of the time, Gaozu maintained the centralized political institutions of the Qin but abandoned its harsh Legalistic approach to law enforcement. Han rulers discovered in Confucian principles a useful foundation for the creation of a new state philosophy. Under the Han, Confucianism began to take on the character of an official ideology.

Confucianism and the State

The integration of Confucian doctrine with Legalist institutions, creating a system generally known as State Confucianism, did not take long to accomplish. In doing this, the Han rulers retained many of the Qin institutions. For example, they borrowed the tripartite division of the central government into civilian and military authorities and a censore. The government was headed by a "grand council" including representatives from all three segments of government. The Han also retained the system of local government, dividing the empire into provinces and districts.

Finally, the Han continued the Qin system of selecting government officials on the basis of merit rather than birth. Shortly after founding the new dynasty, Han Gaozu decreed that local officials would be asked to recommend promising candidates for public service. Thirty years later, in 165 B.C.E., the first known civil service examination was administered to candidates for positions in the bureaucracy. Shortly after that, an academy was established to train candidates. The first candidates were almost all from aristocratic or other wealthy families, and the Han bureaucracy itself was still dominated by the traditional hereditary elite. Still, the principle of selecting officials on the basis of talent had been established and would eventually become standard practice.

Under the Han dynasty, the population increased rapidly—by some estimates rising from about twenty million to over sixty million at the height of the dynasty—creating a growing need for a large and efficient bureaucracy to maintain the state in proper working order. Unfortunately, the Han were unable to resolve all of the problems left over from the past. Factionalism at court remained a serious problem and undermined the efficiency of the central government. Equally important, despite their efforts, the Han rulers were never able to restrain the great aristocratic families, who continued to play a dominant role in political and economic affairs. The failure to curb the power of the wealthy clans eventually became a major factor in the collapse of the dynasty.

The Economy

Han rulers also retained some of the economic and social policies of their predecessors. In rural areas, they saw that a free peasantry paying taxes directly to the state would both limit the wealth and power of the great noble families and increase the state's revenues. The Han had difficulty preventing the recurrence of the economic inequities that had characterized the last years of the Zhou, however (see the box on p. 154). The land taxes were relatively light, but the peasants also faced a number of other exactions, including military service and forced labor of up to one month annually. Although the use of iron tools brought new lands under the plow and food production increased steadily, the trebling of the population under the Han eventually reduced the average size of the individual farm plot to about one acre per capita, barely enough for survival. As time went on, many poor peasants were forced to sell their land and become tenant farmers, paying rents of up to half the annual harvest. Thus land once again came to be concentrated in the hands of the powerful clans, which often owned thousands of acres worked by tenants.

Although such economic problems contributed to the eventual downfall of the dynasty, in general the Han era was one of unparalleled productivity and prosperity. The period was marked by a major expansion of trade, both domestic and foreign. This was not necessarily due to official encouragement. In fact, the Han were as suspicious of private merchants as their predecessors had been and levied stiff taxes on trade in an effort to limit commercial activities. Merchants were also subject to severe social constraints. They were disqualified from seeking office, restricted in their place of residence, and
AN EDICT FROM THE EMPEROR

According to Confucian doctrine, Chinese monarchs ruled with the mandate of Heaven so long as they properly looked after the welfare of their subjects. One of their most important responsibilities was to maintain food production at a level sufficient to feed their people. Natural calamities such as floods, droughts, and earthquakes were interpreted as demonstrations of displeasure with the “Son of Heaven” on earth. In this edict, Emperor Wendi (r. 180–157 B.C.E.) wonders whether he has failed in his duty to carry out his imperial Dao (Way), thus incurring the wrath of Heaven. After the edict was issued in 163 B.C.E., the government took steps to increase the grain harvest, bringing an end to the food shortages.

**Han Shu (History of the Han Dynasty)**

For the past years there have been no good harvests, and our people have suffered the calamities of flood, drought, and pestilence. We are deeply grieved by this, but being ignorant and unenlightened, we have been unable to discover where the blame lies. We have considered whether our administration has been guilty of some error or our actions of some fault. Have we failed to follow the Way of Heaven or to obtain the benefits of Earth? Have we caused disharmony in human affairs or neglected the gods that they do not accept our offerings? What has brought on these things? Have the provisions for our officials been too lavish or have we indulged in too many unprofitable affairs? Why is the food of the people so scarce? When the fields are surveyed, they have not decreased, and when the people are counted they have not grown in number, so that the amount of land for each person is the same as before or even greater. And yet there is a drastic shortage of food. Where does the blame lie? Is it that too many people pursue secondary activities to the detriment of agriculture? Is it that too much grain is used to make wine or too many domestic animals are being raised? I have been unable to attain a proper balance between important and unimportant affairs. Let this matter be debated by the chancellor, the nobles, the high officials, and learned doctors. Let all exhaust their efforts and ponder deeply whether there is some way to aid the people. Let nothing be concealed from us!

**Q** What reasons does Emperor Wendi advance to explain the decline in grain production in China? What are the possible solutions that he proposes? Does his approach meet the requirements for official behavior raised by Chinese philosophers such as Mencius?

**Confucianism**

To read more of the Han Shu, enter the documents area of the World History Resource Center using the access card that is available for World History.

viewed in general as parasites providing little true value to Chinese society.

The state itself directed much trade and manufacturing; it manufactured weapons, for example, and operated shipyards, granaries, and mines. The government also moved cautiously into foreign trade, mostly with neighboring areas in Central and Southeast Asia, although trade relations were established with countries as far away as India and the Mediterranean, where active contacts were maintained with the Roman Empire (see Map 5.4). Some of this long-distance trade was carried by sea through southern ports like Guangzhou, but more was transported by overland caravans on the Silk Road (see Chapter 10) and other routes that led westward into Central Asia.

New technology contributed to the economic prosperity of the Han era. Significant progress was achieved in such areas as textile manufacturing, water mills, and iron casting; skill at ironworking led to the production of steel a few centuries later. Paper was invented under the Han, and the development of the rudder and fore-and-aft rigging permitted ships to sail into the wind for the first time. Thus equipped, Chinese merchant ships carrying heavy cargoes could sail throughout the islands of Southeast Asia and into the Indian Ocean.

**Imperial Expansion and the Origins of the Silk Road**

The Han emperors continued the process of territorial expansion and consolidation that had begun under the Zhou and the Qin. Han rulers, notably Han Wudi (Han Wu Ti, or Martial Emperor of Han), successfully completed the assimilation into the empire of the regions south of the Yangtze River, including the Red River delta in what is today northern Vietnam. Han armies also marched westward as far as the Caspian Sea, pacifying nomadic tribal peoples and extending China’s boundary far into Central Asia (see Map 5.5 on p. 156).

The latter project apparently was originally planned as a means to fend off pressure from the nomadic Xiongnu peoples, who periodically threatened Chinese lands from their base area north of the Great Wall. In 138 B.C.E., Han Wudi dispatched the courtier Zhang Qian (Chang Ch’ien) on a mission westward into Central Asia to seek alliances with peoples living in the area against the common Xiongnu menace. Zhang Qian returned home with ample information about political and economic conditions in Central Asia. The new knowledge provoked the Han court to establish the first
Chinese military presence in the area of the Taklamakan Desert and the Tian Shan (Heavenly Mountains). Eventually, this area would become known to the Chinese people as Xinjiang, or “New Region.”

Chinese commercial exchanges with peoples in Central Asia now began to expand dramatically. Eastward into China came grapes, precious metals, glass objects, and horses from Persia and Central Asia. Horses were of particular significance because Chinese military strategists had learned of the importance of cavalry in their battles against the Xiongnu and sought the sturdy Ferghana horses of Bactria to increase their own military effectiveness. In return, China exported goods, especially silk, to countries to the west.

Silk, a filament recovered from the cocoons of silkworms, had been produced in China since the fourth millennium B.C.E. Eventually, knowledge of the wonder product reached the outside world, and Chinese silk exports began to rise dramatically. By the second century B.C.E., the first items made from silk reached the Mediterranean Sea, stimulating the first significant contacts between China and Rome, its great counterpart in the west. The bulk of the trade went overland through Central Asia (thus earning this route its name, the Silk Road), although significant exchanges also took place via the maritime route (see Chapter 9). Silk became a craze among Roman elites, leading to a vast outflow of silver from Rome to China and provoking...
the Roman emperor Tiberius to grumble that “the ladies and their baubles are transferring our money to foreigners.”

The silk trade also stimulated a degree of mutual curiosity between the two great civilizations but not much mutual knowledge or understanding. Roman authors like Pliny and the geographer Strabo (who speculated that silk was produced from the leaves of a “silk tree”) wrote of a strange land called “Seris” far to the east, while Chinese sources mentioned the empire of “Great Qin” at the far end of the Silk Route to the west. So far as is known, no personal or diplomatic contacts between the two civilizations ever took place. But two great empires at either extreme of the Eurasian supercontinent had for the first time been linked in a commercial relationship.

Social Changes

Under the Han dynasty, Chinese social institutions evolved into more complex forms than had been the case in past eras. The emergence of a free peasantry resulted in a strengthening of the nuclear family, although the joint family—the linear descendant of the clan system in the Zhou dynasty—continued to hold sway in much of the countryside.

Under the Han, women continued to play a secondary role in society. Ban Zhao, a prominent female historian of the Han dynasty whose own career was an exception to the rule, described that role as follows:

To be humble, yielding, respectful and reverential; to put herself after others—these qualities are those exemplifying woman’s low and humble estate. To retire late and rise early; not to shirk exertion from dawn to dusk—this is called being diligent. To behave properly and decorously in serving her husband; to be serene and self-possessed, shunning jests and laughter—this is called being worthy of continuing the husband’s lineage. If a woman possesses the above-mentioned three qualities, then her reputation shall be excellent.

The vast majority of Chinese continued to live in rural areas, but the number of cities, mainly at the junction of rivers and trade routes, was on the increase. The largest was the imperial capital of Chang’an, which was one of the great cities of the ancient world and rivaled Rome in magnificence. The city covered a total
area of nearly 16 square miles and was enclosed by a 12-foot earthen wall surrounded by a moat. Twelve gates provided entry into the city, and eight major avenues ran east-west or north-south. Each avenue was nearly 150 feet wide; a center strip in each avenue was reserved for the emperor, whose palace and gardens occupied nearly half of the southern and central parts of the city.

Religion and Culture

The Han dynasty’s adoption of Confucianism as the official philosophy of the state did not have much direct impact on the religious beliefs of the Chinese people. Although official sources sought to flesh out the scattered metaphysical references in the Confucian canon with a more coherent cosmology, the pantheon of popular religion was still peopled by local deities and spirits of nature, some connected with popular Daoism. Sometimes in the first century B.C.E., however, a new salvationist faith appeared on the horizon. Merchants from Central Asia carrying their wares over the Silk Road brought the Buddhist faith to China for the first time. At first, its influence was limited, as no Buddhist text was translated into Chinese from the original Sanskrit until the fifth century C.E. But the terrain was ripe for the introduction of a new religion into China, and the first Chinese monks departed for India shortly after the end of the Han dynasty.

Cultural attainments under the Han tended in general to reflect traditional forms, although there was considerable experimentation with new forms of expression. In literature, poetry and philosophical essays continued to be popular, but historical writing became

Han Dynasty Horse. This terra-cotta horse head is a striking example of Han artistry. Although the Chinese had domesticated the smaller Mongolian pony as early as 2000 B.C.E., it was not until toward the end of the first millennium B.C.E. that the Chinese acquired horses as a result of military expeditions into Central Asia. Admired for their power and grace, horses made of terra-cotta or bronze were often placed in Qin and Han tombs. This magnificent head suggests the divine power that the Chinese of this time attributed to horses.

the primary form of literary creativity. Historians such as Sima Qian and Ban Gu (the dynasty’s official historian and the older brother of the female historian Ban Zhao) wrote works that became models for later dynastic histories. These historical works combined political and social history with biographies of key figures. Like so much literary work in China, their primary purpose was moral and political—to explain the underlying reasons for the rise and fall of individual human beings and dynasties.

Painting—often in the form of wall frescoes—became increasingly popular, although little has survived the ravages of time. In the plastic arts, bronze was steadily being replaced by iron as a medium of choice. Less expensive to produce, it was better able to satisfy the growing popular demand during a time of increasing economic affluence.

The trend toward reduced expenditures was also evident in the construction of imperial mausoleums. Qin Shi Huangdi’s ambitious effort to provide for his immortality became a pattern for his successors during the Han dynasty, although apparently on a somewhat more modest scale. In 1990, Chinese workers discovered a similar underground army for a Han emperor of the second century B.C.E. Like the imperial guard of the First Qin Emperor, the underground soldiers were buried in parallel pits and possessed their own weapons and individual facial features. But they were smaller—only one-third the height of the average human adult—and were armed with wooden weapons and dressed in silk clothing, now decayed. A burial pit nearby indicated that as many as ten thousand workers, probably slaves or prisoners, died in the process of building the emperor’s mausoleum, which took an estimated ten years to construct.

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The Decline and Fall of the Han

In 9 C.E., the reformist official Wang Mang, who was troubled by the plight of the peasants, seized power from the Han court and declared the foundation of the Xin (New) dynasty. The empire had been crumbling for decades. As frivolous or depraved rulers amused themselves with the pleasures of court life, the power and influence of the central government began to wane, and the great noble families filled the vacuum, amassing vast landed estates and transforming free farmers into tenants. Wang Mang tried to confiscate the great estates, restore the ancient well field system, and abolish slavery. In so doing, however, he alienated powerful interests who conspired to overthrow him. In 23 C.E., beset by administrative chaos and a collapse of the frontier defenses, Wang Mang was killed in a coup d'etat.

For a time, strong leadership revived some of the glory of the early Han. The court did attempt to reduce land taxes and carry out land resettlement programs. The growing popularity of nutritious crops like rice, wheat, and soybeans, along with the introduction of new crops such as alfalfa and grapes, helped boost food production. But the great landed families' firm grip on land and power continued. Weak rulers were isolated within their imperial chambers and dominated by eunuchs and other powerful court insiders. Official corruption and the concentration of land in the hands of the wealthy led to widespread peasant unrest. The Han also continued to have problems with the Xiongnu beyond the Great Wall to the north. Nomadic raids on Chinese territory continued intermittently to the end of the dynasty, once reaching almost to the gates of the capital city. One Chinese source reported with bitterness the conditions of the times:

The houses of the powerful are compounds where several hundreds of ridgebeams are linked together. Their fertile fields fill the countryside. Their slaves throng in thousands, and their military dependents can be counted in tens of thousands. Their boats, carts, and merchants are spread throughout the four quarters. Their stocks of goods held back for speculation fill up the principal cities. Their great mansions cannot contain their precious stones and treasure. The upland valleys cannot hold their horses, cattle, sheep, and swine. Their elegant apartments are full of seductive lads and lovely concubines. Singing-girls and courtesans are lined up in their deep halls.9

Buffeted by insurmountable problems within and without, in the late second century C.E., the dynasty entered a period of inexorable decline. The population of the empire, which had been estimated at about sixty million in China's first census in the year 2 C.E., had shrunk to less than one-third that number two hundred years later. In the early third century C.E., the dynasty was finally brought to an end when power was seized by Cao Cao (Ts'ao Ts'ao), a general known to later generations as one of the main characters in the famous Chinese epic The Romance of the Three Kingdoms. But Cao Cao was unable to consolidate his power, and China entered a period of almost constant anarchy and internal division, compounded by invasions by northern tribal peoples. The next great dynasty did not arise until the beginning of the seventh century, four hundred years later.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the first millennium C.E., two great empires—the Roman Empire in the West and the Han Empire in the East—dominated large areas of the world. Although there was little contact between them, the two empires had some remarkable similarities. Both lasted for centuries, and both had remarkable success in establishing centralized control. They built elaborate systems of roads in order to rule efficiently and relied on provincial officials, and especially on towns and cities, for local administration. In both empires, settled conditions led to a high level of agricultural production that sustained large populations, estimated at between fifty and sixty million in each empire. Although both empires expanded into areas that had different languages, ethnic groups, and ways of life, they managed to carry their legal and political institutions, their technical skills, and their languages throughout their territory.

The Roman and Han Empires had similar social and economic structures. The family stood at the heart of the social structure, with the male head of the family as all-powerful. Duty, courage, obedience, discipline—all were values inculcated by the family that helped make the empires strong. The wealth of both societies also depended on agriculture. Although a free peasantry was a backbone of strength and stability in each, the gradual conversion of free peasants into tenant farmers by wealthy landowners was
common to both societies and ultimately served to undermine the power of their imperial governments.

Of course, there were also significant differences. Merchants were more highly regarded and allowed more freedom in Rome than they were in China. One key reason seems clear: whereas many subjects of the Roman Empire depended to a considerable degree on commerce to provide them with items of daily use such as wheat, olives, wine, cloth, and timber, the vast majority of Chinese were subsistence farmers whose needs—when they were supplied—could normally be met by the local environment. As a result, social mobility was undoubtedly more limited in China than in Rome, and many Chinese peasants never ventured in their entire lives far beyond their village gate.

On the other hand, political instability was more pronounced in the Roman Empire. With the mandate of Heaven and the strong dynastic principle, Chinese rulers had authority that was easily passed on to other family members. Although Roman emperors were accorded divine status by the Roman senate after their death, accession to the Roman imperial throne depended less on solid dynastic principles and more on pure military force. As a result, over a period of centuries, Chinese imperial authority was far more stable.

Both empires were eventually overcome by invasions of nomadic peoples: the Han dynasty was weakened by the incursions of the Xiongnu, and the western Roman Empire eventually collapsed in the face of incursions by the Germanic peoples. However, although the Han dynasty collapsed, the Chinese imperial tradition, along with the class structure and values that sustained it, survived, and the Chinese Empire, under new dynasties, continued into the twentieth century as a unified political entity. The Roman Empire, by contrast, collapsed and lived on only as an idea.

Nevertheless, Roman achievements were bequeathed to the future. The Romance languages of today (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian) are based on Latin. Western practices of impartial justice and trial by jury owe much to Roman law. As great builders, the Romans left monuments to their skills throughout Europe, some of which, such as aqueducts and roads, are still in use today. Aspects of Roman administrative practices survived in the Western world for centuries. The Romans also preserved the intellectual heritage of the Greco-Roman world of antiquity. But the heirs of Rome went on to create new civilizations—European, Islamic, and Byzantine—that led to a dramatically different phase in the development of human society.

**Timeline**

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