



### CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Rome's Creation of a Mediterranean Empire, 753 B.C.E.–600 C.E.
- The Origins of Imperial China, 221 B.C.E.–220 C.E.
- Conclusion

DIVERSITY + DOMINANCE *The Treatment of Slaves in Rome and China*

ENVIRONMENT + TECHNOLOGY *Water Engineering in Rome and China*



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**Dancing Girl Wearing Silk Garment, Second–Third Century c.e.** This Roman mosaic depicts a musician accompanying a dancer who is wearing a sheer garment of silk imported from China.



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# An Age of Empires: Rome and Han China, 753 B.C.E.—600 C.E.

According to Chinese sources, in the year 166 C.E. a group of travelers identifying themselves as envoys from Andun, the king of distant Da Qin, arrived at the court of the Chinese emperor Huan, one of the Han rulers. Andun was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the emperor of Rome. As far as we know, these travelers were the first “Romans” to reach China, although they probably were residents of one of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, and they probably stretched the truth in claiming to be official representatives of the Roman emperor. More likely they were merchants hoping to set up a profitable trading arrangement at the source of the silk so highly prized in the West. Chinese officials, however, were in no position to disprove their claim, since there was no direct contact between the Roman and Chinese Empires.

We do not know what became of these travelers, and their mission apparently did not lead to more regular contact between the empires. Even so, the episode raises some interesting points. First, the last centuries B.C.E. and the first centuries C.E. saw the emergence of two manifestations of a new kind of empire. Second, Rome and China were linked by far-flung international trading networks encompassing the entire Eastern Hemisphere, and they were dimly aware of each other’s existence.

The Roman Empire encompassed all the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea as well as sizeable portions of continental Europe and the Middle East. The Han Empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the oases of Central Asia. The largest empires the world had yet seen, they succeeded in centralizing control to a greater degree than earlier empires; their cultural impact on the lands and peoples they dominated was more pervasive; and they were remarkably stable and lasted for many centuries.

Thousands of miles separated Rome and Han China; neither influenced the other. Why did two such unprecedented political entities flourish at the same time? And why did they develop roughly similar solutions to certain problems? Historians have put forth theories stressing supposedly common factors—such as climate change and the pressure of nomadic peoples from Central Asia on the Roman and Chinese frontiers—but no theory has won general support.

- How did Rome create and maintain its vast Mediterranean empire?
- How did imperial China evolve under the Qin and Han dynasties?
- What were the most important similarities and differences between these two empires, and what do the similarities and differences tell us about the circumstances and the character of each?

**AP\* Exam Tip** The differences between empires like Rome and Han China are major comparison points on the exam. These types of comparisons make excellent essay topics.





## ROME'S CREATION OF A MEDITERRANEAN EMPIRE, 753 B.C.E.–600 C.E.

Rome's central location contributed to its success in unifying Italy and then all the lands ringing the Mediterranean Sea (see Map 5.1). The middle of three peninsulas that jut from the European landmass into the Mediterranean, the boot-shaped Italian peninsula and the large island of Sicily constitute a natural bridge almost linking Europe and North Africa. Italy was a crossroads in the Mediterranean, and Rome was a crossroads within Italy. Rome lay at the midpoint of the peninsula, about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the western coast, where a north-south road intersected an east-west river route. The Tiber River on one side and a double ring of seven hills on the other afforded natural protection to the site.

Italy is a land of hills and mountains. The Apennine range runs along its length like a spine, separating the eastern and western coastal plains, while the arc of the Alps shields it on the north. Many of Italy's rivers are navigable, and passes through the Apennines and through the snowcapped Alps allowed merchants and armies to travel overland. The mild Mediterranean climate affords a long growing season and conditions suitable for a wide variety of crops. The hillsides, largely denuded of cover today, were well forested in ancient times, providing timber for construction and fuel. The region of Etruria in the northwest was rich in iron and other metals.

Even though as much as 75 percent of the total area of the Italian peninsula is hilly, there is still ample arable land in the coastal plains and river valleys. Much of this land has extremely fertile volcanic soil and sustained a much larger population than was possible in Greece. While expanding within Italy, the Roman state created effective mechanisms for tapping the human resources of the countryside.

### A Republic of Farmers, 753–31 B.C.E.

#### Origins

**Republic** The period from 507 to 31 B.C.E., during which Rome was largely governed by the aristocratic Roman Senate.

**Senate** A council whose members were the heads of wealthy, landowning families. Originally an advisory body to the early kings, in the era of the Roman Republic the Senate effectively governed the Roman state and the growing empire. Under Senate leadership, Rome conquered an empire of unprecedented extent in the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

#### The Republic

Popular legend maintained that Romulus was cast adrift on the Tiber River as a baby, was nursed by a she-wolf, and founded the city of Rome in 753 B.C.E. Archaeological research, however, shows that the Palatine Hill was occupied as early as 1000 B.C.E. The merging of several hilltop communities to form an urban nucleus, made possible by the draining of a swamp on the site of the future Roman Forum (civic center), took place shortly before 600 B.C.E. The Latin speech and cultural patterns of the inhabitants of the site were typical of the indigenous population of most of the peninsula. However, tradition remembered Etruscan immigrants arriving in the seventh century B.C.E., and Rome came to pride itself on offering refuge to exiles and outcasts.

Agriculture was the essential economic activity in the early Roman state, and land was the basis of wealth. As a consequence, social status, political privilege, and fundamental values were related to land ownership. Most early Romans were self-sufficient farmers who owned small plots of land. A small number of families managed to acquire large tracts of land. The heads of these wealthy families were members of the Senate—a “Council of Elders” that played a dominant role in the politics of the Roman state. According to tradition, there were seven kings of Rome between 753 and 507 B.C.E. The first was Romulus; the last was the tyrannical Tarquinius Superbus. In 507 B.C.E. members of the senatorial class, led by Brutus “the Liberator,” deposed Tarquinius Superbus and instituted a *res publica*, a “public possession,” or republic.

The **Republic**, which lasted from 507 to 31 B.C.E., was not a democracy in the modern sense. Sovereign power resided in an Assembly of the male citizens where the votes of the wealthy classes counted for more than the votes of poor citizens. Each year a slate of officials was chosen, with members of the elite competing vigorously to hold offices in a prescribed order. The culmination of a political career was to be selected as one of the two consuls who presided over meetings of the Senate and Assembly and commanded the army on military campaigns.

The real center of power was the **Senate**. Technically an advisory council, first to the kings and later to the annually changing Republican officials, the Senate increasingly made policy and governed. Senators nominated their sons for public offices and filled Senate vacancies from the ranks of former officials. This self-perpetuating body, whose members served for life, brought together the state's wealth, influence, and political and military experience.



CHRONOLOGY	
Rome	China
<b>1000 B.C.E.</b>	1000 B.C.E. First settlement on site of Rome
<b>500 B.C.E.</b>	507 B.C.E. Establishment of the Republic
<b>300 B.C.E.</b>	290 B.C.E. Defeat of tribes of Samnium gives Romans control of Italy 264–202 B.C.E. Wars against Carthage guarantee Roman control of western Mediterranean
<b>200 B.C.E.</b>	200–146 B.C.E. Wars against Hellenistic kingdoms lead to control of eastern Mediterranean
<b>100 B.C.E.</b>	88–31 B.C.E. Civil wars and failure of the Republic 31 B.C.E.–14 C.E. Augustus establishes the Principate
<b>50 C.E.</b>	45–58 C.E. Paul spreads Christianity in the eastern Mediterranean
<b>200 C.E.</b>	235–284 C.E. Third-Century Crisis
<b>300 C.E.</b>	324 C.E. Constantine moves capital to Constantinople
	480–221 B.C.E. Warring States Period
	221 B.C.E. Qin emperor unites eastern China
	202 B.C.E. Han dynasty succeeds Qin
	140–87 B.C.E. Emperor Wu expands the Han Empire
	109–91 B.C.E. Sima Qian writes history of China
	9–23 C.E. Wang Mang usurps throne
	25 C.E. Han capital transferred from Chang'an to Luoyang
	99 C.E. Ban Zhao composes “Lessons for Women”
	220 C.E. Fall of Han dynasty

### Class, Conflicts, and Social Relations

#### patron/client relationship

In ancient Rome, a fundamental social relationship in which the patron—a wealthy and powerful individual—provided legal and economic protection and assistance to clients, men of lesser status and means, and in return the clients supported the political careers and economic interests of their patron.

The inequalities in Roman society led to periodic conflict between the elite (called “patricians” [puh-TRISH-uhn]) and the majority of the population (called “plebeians” [pluh-BEE-uhn]), a struggle known as the Conflict of the Orders. On several occasions the plebeians refused to work or fight, and even physically withdrew from the city, in order to pressure the elite to make political concessions. One result was publication of the laws on twelve stone tablets ca. 450 B.C.E., which served as a check on arbitrary decisions by judicial officials. Another important reform was the creation of new officials, the tribunes (TRIH-byoon), who were drawn from the nonelite classes and who could veto, or block, actions of the Assembly or officials that threatened the interests of the lower orders. The elite, though forced to give in on key points, found ways to blunt the reforms, in large part by bringing the plebeian leadership into an expanded elite.

The basic unit of Roman society was the family, made up of the several living generations of family members plus domestic slaves. The oldest living male, the *paterfamilias*, exercised absolute authority over other family members. More generally, important male members of the society possessed *auctoritas*, a quality that elicited obedience from their inferiors.

Complex ties of obligation, such as the **patron/client relationship**, bound together individuals of different classes. Clients sought the help and protection of patrons, men of wealth and influence. A patron provided legal advice and representation, physical protection, and loans of money in tough times. In turn, the client was expected to follow his patron into battle, work on his land, and support him in the political arena. Throngs of clients awaited their patrons in the morning and accompanied them to the Forum for the day’s business. Especially large retinues brought great prestige. Middle-class clients of aristocrats might be patrons of poorer men. In Rome inequality was accepted, institutionalized, and turned into a system of mutual benefits and obligations.







Alinari/Art Resource, NY

**Statue of a Roman Carrying Busts of His Ancestors, First Century B.C.E.** Roman society was extremely conscious of status, and the status of an elite Roman family was determined in large part by the public achievements of ancestors and living members. A visitor to a Roman home found portraits of distinguished ancestors in the entry hall, along with labels listing the offices they held. Portrait heads were carried in funeral processions.

Historical sources rarely report the activities of Roman women, largely because they played no public role, and nearly all our information pertains to the upper classes. In early Rome, a woman was like a child in the eyes of the law. She started out under the absolute authority of her paterfamilias. When she married, she came under the jurisdiction of the paterfamilias of her husband's family. Unable to own property or represent herself in legal proceedings, she depended on a male guardian to protect her interests.

Despite these limitations, Roman women were less constrained than their Greek counterparts (see Chapter 4). Over time they gained greater personal protection and economic freedom: for instance, some employed a form of marriage that left a woman under the jurisdiction of her father and independent after his death. There are many stories of strong women with great influence on their husbands or sons who helped shape Roman history. From the first century B.C.E. on, Roman poets confess their love for educated and outspoken women.

Early Romans believed in invisible forces known as *numina*. Vesta, the living, pulsating energy of fire, dwelled in the hearth. Janus guarded the door. The Penates watched over food stored in the cupboard. Other deities resided in nearby hills, caves, grottoes, and springs. Romans made small offerings of cakes and liquids to win the favor of these spirits. Certain gods had larger spheres of operation—for example, Jupiter was the god of the sky, and Mars initially was a god of agriculture as well as war.

The Romans labored to maintain the *pax deorum* (“peace of the gods”), a covenant between the gods and the Roman state. Boards of priests drawn from the aristocracy performed sacrifices and other rituals to win the gods’ favor. In return, the gods were expected to favor the undertakings of the Roman state.

When the Romans came into contact with the Greeks of southern Italy (see Chapter 4), they equated their major deities with Greek gods—for example, Jupiter with Greek Zeus, Mars with Greek Ares—and they took over the myths attached to those gods.

## Religion

## Causes and Instruments of Expansion



**AP\* Exam Tip** It is important to understand the growth and expansion of classical empires.

## Expansion in Italy and the Mediterranean

Around 500 B.C.E. Rome was a relatively unimportant city-state in central Italy. Three and a half centuries later, Rome was the center of a huge empire encompassing virtually all the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Expansion began slowly, then picked up momentum, reaching a peak in the third and second centuries B.C.E. Some scholars attribute this expansion to the greed and aggressiveness of a people fond of war. Others observe that the structure of the Roman state encouraged war, because the two consuls had only one year in office in which to gain military glory. The Romans invariably claimed that they were only defending themselves. The pattern was that the Romans, feeling insecure, expanded the territory under their control in order to provide a buffer against attack. However, each new conquest became vulnerable and led to further expansion.

The chief instrument of Roman expansion was the army. All male citizens owning a specified amount of land were subject to service. The Roman soldiers’ equipment—body armor, shield, spear, and sword—was not far different from that of Greek hoplites, but the Roman battle line was more flexible than the phalanx, being subdivided into units that could maneuver independently. Roman armies were famous for their training and discipline. One observer noted





Peter Rockwell, Rome

**Scene from Trajan's Column, Rome, ca. 113 C.E.** The Roman emperor Trajan erected a marble column 125 feet (38 meters) in height to commemorate his triumphant campaign in Dacia (modern Romania). The relief carving, which snakes around the column for 656 feet (200 meters), illustrates numerous episodes of the conquest and provides a detailed pictorial record of the equipment and practices of the Roman army in the field. This panel depicts soldiers building a fort.

that a Greek army would lazily seek a naturally defended hilltop to camp for the night, but a Roman army would always laboriously fortify an identical camp in the plain.

Rome's conquest of Italy was sparked by friction between the hill tribes of the Apennines, who drove their herds to seasonal grazing grounds, and the farmers of the coastal plains. In the fifth century B.C.E. Rome led a league of central Italian cities organized for defense against the hill tribes. On several occasions in the fourth century B.C.E. the Romans protected the wealthy and sophisticated cities of Campania, the region on the Bay of Naples possessing the richest farmland in Italy. By 290 B.C.E., in the course of three wars with the Samnite tribes of central Italy, the Romans had extended their "protection" over nearly the entire peninsula.

Unlike the Greeks, who were reluctant to share the privileges of citizenship with outsiders, the Romans often granted some or all of the political, legal, and economic privileges of Roman citizenship to conquered populations. They co-opted

the most influential people in the conquered communities and made Rome's interests their interests. Rome demanded soldiers from its Italian subjects, and a seemingly inexhaustible reservoir of manpower was a key element of its military success. In a number of crucial wars, Rome was able to endure higher casualties than the enemy and to prevail by sheer numbers.

### Overseas Provinces

Between 264 and 202 B.C.E. Rome fought two protracted and bloody wars against the Carthaginians, those energetic descendants of Phoenicians from Lebanon who had settled in present-day Tunisia and dominated the commerce of the western Mediterranean (see Chapter 3). The Roman state emerged as the unchallenged master of the western Mediterranean and acquired its first overseas provinces in Sicily, Sardinia, and Spain (see Map 5.1). Between 200 and 146 B.C.E. a series of wars pitted the Roman state against the major Hellenistic kingdoms in the eastern Mediterranean. The Romans were at first reluctant to occupy such distant territories and withdrew their troops at the conclusion of several wars. But when the settlements that they imposed failed to take root—often because Rome's "friends" in the Greek world did not understand that they were expected to be deferential and obedient clients to their Roman patron—the frustrated Roman government took over direct administration of these lands. The conquest of the Celtic peoples of Gaul (modern France; see Chapter 2) by Rome's most brilliant general, Gaius Julius Caesar, between 59 and 51 B.C.E. led to Rome's first territorial acquisitions in Europe's heartland.

At first the Romans resisted extending their system of governance and citizenship rights to the distant provinces. Indigenous elite groups willing to collaborate with the Romans were given considerable autonomy, including responsibility for local administration and tax collection. Every year a senator who recently had held a high office was dispatched to each province to serve as governor. Accompanied by a small retinue of friends and relations who served as advisers and deputies, he was responsible for defending the province against outside attack and internal disruption, overseeing the collection of taxes and other revenues due Rome, and deciding legal cases.



Over time, this system of provincial administration proved inadequate. Officials were chosen because of their political connections and often lacked competence. Yearly changes of governor meant that incumbents had little time to gain experience or make local contacts. Although many governors were honest, some unscrupulously extorted huge sums of money from the provincial populace. While governing an ever-larger Mediterranean empire, the Romans were still relying on the institutions and attitudes that developed when Rome was merely a city-state.

## The Failure of the Republic

### Economic and Social Changes in Italy



**PRIMARY SOURCE: A Man of Unlimited Ambition: Julius Caesar** Find out how Roman attitudes toward kingship led to the assassination of Julius Caesar.

Rome's success in creating a vast empire unleashed forces that eventually destroyed the Republican system of government. The frequent wars and territorial expansion of the third and second centuries B.C.E. produced profound changes in the Italian landscape. Most of the wealth generated by the conquest and control of new provinces ended up in the hands of the upper classes. Italian farmers were away from home on military service for long periods of time, and while they were away, investors took over their farms by purchase, deception, or intimidation. The small, self-sufficient farms of the Italian countryside, whose peasant owners had been the backbone of the Roman legions, were replaced by *latifundia*, literally “broad estates,” or ranches.

The owners of these large estates grazed herds of cattle or grew crops—such as grapes for wine—that brought in big profits, rather than growing wheat, the staple food of ancient Italy. As a result, the population in the burgeoning cities of Italy became dependent on expensive imported grain. Meanwhile, the cheap slave labor provided by prisoners of war (see Diversity and Dominance: The Treatment of Slaves in Rome and China) made it hard for peasants who had lost their farms to find work in the countryside. When they moved to Rome and other cities, they found no work there either, and they lived in dire poverty. The growing urban masses, idle and prone to riot, would play a major role in the political struggles of the late Republic.

One consequence of the decline of peasant farmers in Italy was a shortage of men who owned the property required for military service. At the end of the second century B.C.E. Gaius Marius—a “new man,” as the Romans called politically active individuals who did not belong to the traditional ruling class—accepted into his legions poor, propertyless men, and promised them farms upon retirement from military service. These troops became devoted to Marius and helped him get elected to an unprecedented (and illegal) six consulships.

Between 88 and 31 B.C.E., a series of ambitious individuals—Sulla, Pompey, Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, and Octavian—commanded armies more loyal to them than to the state. Their use of Roman troops to increase their personal power led to bloody civil wars. The city of Rome was taken by force on several occasions, and victorious commanders executed opponents and controlled the state.

### The Civil Wars

**Principate** A term used to characterize Roman government in the first three centuries C.E., based on the ambiguous title princeps (“first citizen”) adopted by Augustus to conceal his military dictatorship.

**Augustus** Honorific name of Octavian, founder of the Roman Principate, the military dictatorship that replaced the failing rule of the Roman Senate. After defeating all rivals, between 31 B.C.E. and 14 C.E. he laid the groundwork for several centuries of stability and prosperity in the Roman Empire.

**equites** In ancient Italy, prosperous landowners second in wealth and status to the senatorial aristocracy. The Roman emperors allied with this group to counterbalance the influence of the old aristocracy and used the equites to staff the imperial civil service.

## The Roman Principate, 31 B.C.E.–330 C.E.

Julius Caesar's grandnephew and heir, Octavian (63 B.C.E.–14 C.E.), eliminated all rivals by 31 B.C.E. and carefully set about refashioning the Roman system of government. He maintained the forms of the Republic—the offices, honors, and privileges of the senatorial class—but fundamentally altered the realities of power. A military dictator in fact, he never called himself king or emperor, claiming merely to be *princeps*, “first among equals,” in a restored Republic. Thus, the period following the Republic is called the **Principate**.

**Augustus**, one of the many honorific titles that the Senate gave Octavian, connotes prosperity and piety, and it became the name by which he is best known to posterity. Augustus's patience and intuitive grasp of human nature enabled him to manipulate all the groups in Roman society. When he died in 14 C.E., after forty-five years of carefully veiled rule, few could remember the Republic. During his reign Egypt and parts of the Middle East and Central Europe were added to the empire, leaving only the southern half of Britain and modern Romania to be added later.

Augustus allied himself with the **equites** (**EH-kwee-tays**), the class of well-to-do Italian merchants and landowners second in wealth and social status to the senatorial class. This body of competent and self-assured individuals became the core of a new, paid civil service that helped run the Roman Empire. At last Rome had a governmental bureaucracy up to the task of managing a large empire with considerable honesty, consistency, and efficiency.



## The Treatment of Slaves in Rome and China

Although slavery existed in most ancient societies, Rome was one of the few in which slave labor became the foundation of the economy. During the frequent wars of the second century B.C.E., large numbers of prisoners were enslaved. The prices of such slaves were low, and landowners and manufacturers found they could compel slaves to work longer and harder than hired laborers. Periodically, the harsh working and living conditions resulted in slave revolts.

The following excerpt, from one of several surviving manuals on agriculture, gives advice about controlling and efficiently exploiting slaves.

When the head of a household arrives at his estate, . . . he must go round his farm on a tour of inspection on the very same day, if that is possible, if not, then on the next day. When he has found out how his farm has been cultivated and which jobs have been done and which have not been done, then on the next day after that he must call in his manager and ask him which are the jobs that have been done and which remain, and whether they were done on time, and whether what still has to be done can be done, and how much wine and grain and anything else has been produced. When he has found this out, he must make a calculation of the labor and the time taken. If the work doesn't seem to him to be sufficient, and the manager starts to say how hard he tried, but the slaves weren't any good, and the weather was awful, and the slaves ran away, and he was required to carry out some public works, then when he has finished mentioning these and all sorts of other excuses, you must draw his attention to your calculation of the labor employed and time taken. If he claims that it rained all the time, there are all sorts of jobs that can be done in rainy weather—washing wine-jars, coating them with pitch, cleaning the house, storing grain, shifting muck, digging a manure pit, cleaning seed, mending ropes or making new ones; the slaves ought to have been mending their patchwork cloaks and their hoods. On festival days they would have been able to

clean out old ditches, work on the public highway, prune back brambles, dig up the garden, clear a meadow, tie up bundles of sticks, remove thorns, grind barley and get on with cleaning. If he claims that the slaves have been ill, they needn't have been given such large rations. When you have found out about all these things to your satisfaction, make sure that all the work that remains to be done will be carried out. . . . The head of the household should examine his herds and arrange a sale; he should sell the oil if the price makes it worthwhile, and any wine and grain that is surplus to needs; he should sell any old oxen, cattle or sheep that are not up to standard, wool and hides, an old cart or old tools, an old slave, a sick slave—anything else that is surplus to requirements. The head of a household ought to sell, and not to buy. (Cato the Elder, *Concerning Agriculture*, bk. 2, second century B.C.E.)

Cato, the Roman author of that excerpt, was notorious for his stern manner and hard-edged traditionalism, and while he does not represent the approach of all Roman masters—in reality, the treatment of slaves varied widely—he expresses a point of view that Roman society found acceptable.

Slavery was far less prominent in ancient China. During the Warring States Period, dependent peasants as well as slaves worked the large holdings of the landowning aristocracy. The Qin government sought to abolish slavery, but the institution persisted into the Han period, although it involved only a small fraction of the population and was not a central component of the economy. The relatives of criminals could be seized and enslaved, and poor families sometimes sold unwanted children into slavery. In China, slaves, whether they belonged to the state or to individuals, generally performed domestic tasks, as can be seen in the following text.

Wang Ziyuan of Shu Commandery went to the Jian River on business, and went up to the home of the widow Yang Hui,

So popular was Augustus when he died that four members of his family succeeded to the position of “emperor” (as we call it) despite serious personal and political shortcomings. However, because of Augustus's calculated ambiguity about his role, the position of emperor was never automatically regarded as hereditary, and after the mid-first century C.E. other families obtained the post. In theory the early emperors were affirmed by the Senate; in reality they were chosen by the armies. By the second century C.E. a series of very capable emperors instituted a new mechanism of succession: each adopted a mature man of proven ability as his son and trained him as his successor.

While Augustus had felt it important to appeal to Republican traditions and conceal the source and extent of his power, this became less necessary over time, and later emperors exercised their authority more overtly. In imitation of Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic kings,

who had a male slave named Bianliao. Wang Ziyuan requested him to go and buy some wine. Picking up a big stick, Bianliao climbed to the top of the grave mound and said: “When my master bought me, Bianliao, he only contracted for me to care for the grave and did not contract for me to buy wine for some other gentleman.”

Wang Ziyuan was furious and said to the widow: “Wouldn’t you prefer to sell this slave?”

Yang Hui said: “The slave’s father offered him to people, but no one wanted him.” Wang Ziyuan immediately settled on the sale contract.

The slave again said: “Enter in the contract everything you wish to order me to do. I, Bianliao, will not do anything not in the contract.”

Wang Ziyuan said: “Agreed.”

The text of the contract said:

The gentleman Wang Ziyuan, of Zizhong, purchases from the lady Yang Hui of Anzhi village in Zhengdu, the bearded male slave, Bianliao, of her husband’s household. The fixed sale [price] is 15,000 [cash]. The slave shall obey orders about all kinds of work and may not argue.

He shall rise at dawn and do an early sweeping. After eating he shall wash up. Ordinarily he should pound the grain mortar, tie up broom straws, carve bowls and bore wells, scoop out ditches, tie up fallen fences, hoe the garden, trim up paths and dike up plots of land, cut big flails, bend bamboos to make rakes, and scrape and fix the well pulley. In going and coming he may not ride horseback or in the cart, [nor may he] sit crosslegged or make a hubbub. When he gets out of bed he shall shake his head [to wake up], fish, cut forage, plait reeds and card hemp, draw water for gruel, and help in making zumo [drink]. He shall weave shoes and make [other] coarse things. [The list of tasks continues for two-and-a-half pages.] . . .

He shall be industrious and quick-working, and he may not idle and loaf. When the slave is old and his strength spent, he shall plant marsh grass and weave mats. When his work is over and he wishes to rest he should pound a picul [of grain]. Late at night when there is no work he shall wash clothes really white. If he has private savings they shall be the master’s gift, or from guests. The slave may not have evil secrets; affairs should be

open and reported. If the slave does not heed instructions, he shall be whipped a hundred strokes.

The reading of the text of the contract came to an end. The slave was speechless and his lips were tied. Wildly he beat his head on the ground, and beat himself with his hands; from his eyes the tears streamed down, and the drivel from his nose hung a foot long.

He said: “If it is to be exactly as master Wang says, I would rather return soon along the yellow-soil road, with the grave worms boring through my head. Had I known before I would have bought the wine for master Wang, I would not have dared to do that wrong.” (Wang Bao, first century B.C.E.)

*This story was meant to be humorous and no doubt exaggerates the amount of work that could be demanded from a slave, but it shows that Chinese slaves could be forced to work hard and engaged in many of the same menial tasks as their Roman counterparts. It also appears that slaves in China were legally protected by contracts that specified and limited what could be demanded of them.*

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Why might slavery have been less important in Han China than in the Roman Empire? Why would the treatment of slaves have been less harsh in China than in Rome?
2. In what ways were slaves treated like other forms of property, such as animals and tools? In what ways was a slave’s “humanity” taken into account?
3. What are some of the passive-resistance tactics that slaves resorted to, and what did they achieve by these actions?

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## Roman Law

many Roman emperors were officially deified (regarded as gods) after death. A cult of the living emperor developed as a way to increase the loyalty of subjects.

During the Republic a body of laws had developed, including decrees of the Senate, bills passed in the Assembly, and the practices of public officials who heard cases. In the later Republic legal experts began to analyze laws and legal procedures to determine the underlying principles, then applied these principles to the creation of new laws required by a changing society. These experts were less lawyers in the modern sense than teachers, though they were sometimes consulted by officials or the parties to legal actions.

During the Principate the emperor became a major source of new laws. Roman law was studied and codified with a new intensity by the class of legal experts, and their interpretations often had the force of law. The basic divisions of Roman law—persons, things, and actions—reveal



the importance of property and the rights of individuals in Roman eyes. The culmination of this long process of development and interpretation of the law was the sixth-century C.E. Digest of Justinian. Roman law has remained the foundation of European law to this day.

## An Urban Empire

### Life in the Cities

The Roman Empire of the first three centuries C.E. was an “urban” empire. This does not mean that most people lived in cities. Perhaps 80 percent of the 50 to 60 million people in the empire engaged in agriculture and lived in villages or isolated farms. The empire, however, was administered through a network of towns and cities, and the urban populace benefited most.

Numerous towns had several thousand inhabitants, while a few major cities had several hundred thousand. Rome itself had approximately a million residents. The largest cities strained the technological capabilities of the ancients; providing adequate food and water and removing sewage were always problems.

In Rome the upper classes lived in elegant townhouses on one of the hills. The house was centered around an *atrium*, a rectangular courtyard with an open skylight that let in light and rainwater for drinking and washing. Surrounding the atrium were a large dining room for dinner and drinking parties, an interior garden, a kitchen, and possibly a private bath. Bedrooms were on the upper level. The floors were decorated with pebble mosaics, and the walls and ceilings were covered with frescoes (paintings done directly on wet plaster) of mythological scenes or outdoor vistas, giving a sense of openness in the absence of windows. The typical aristocrat



Courtesy, Leo C. Curran

**Roman Shop Selling Food and Drink** The bustling town of Pompeii on the Bay of Naples was buried in ash by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 C.E. Archaeologists have unearthed the streets, stores, and houses of this typical Roman town. Shops such as this sold hot food and drink served from clay vessels set into the counter. Shelves and niches behind the counter contained other items. In the background can be seen a well-paved street and a public fountain where the inhabitants could fetch water.



also owned a number of villas in the Italian countryside to which the family could retreat to escape the pressures of city life.

The poor lived in crowded slums in the low-lying parts of the city. Damp, dark, and smelly, with few furnishings, these wooden tenements were susceptible to frequent fires. Fortunately, Romans could spend much of the day outdoors, working, shopping, eating, and socializing.

The cities, towns, and even the ramshackle settlements that sprang up on the edge of frontier forts were miniature replicas of the capital city in political organization and physical layout. A town council and two annually elected officials drawn from the local elite ran regional affairs with considerable autonomy. This “municipal aristocracy” imitated the manners and conduct of Roman senators, endowing their communities with attractive elements of Roman urban life—civic buildings, temples, gardens, baths, theaters, amphitheaters—and putting on games and public entertainments.

In the countryside hard work and drudgery were relieved by occasional holidays and village festivals and by the everyday pleasures of sex, family, and conversation. Rural people had to fend for themselves in dealing with bandits, wild animals, and other hazards of country life. They had little direct contact with the Roman government other than occasional run-ins with bullying soldiers and the dreaded arrival of the tax collector.

The concentration of land ownership in ever fewer hands was temporarily reversed by the distribution of farms to veteran soldiers during the civil wars of the late Republic, but it resumed in the era of the emperors. However, after the era of conquest ended in the early second century C.E., slaves were no longer plentiful or inexpensive, and landowners needed a new source of labor. “Tenant farmers” cultivated plots of land in return for a portion of their crops. The landowners lived in the cities and hired foremen to manage their estates. Thus wealth was concentrated in the cities but was based on the productivity of rural laborers.

Some urban dwellers got rich from manufacture and trade. Commerce was greatly enhanced by the **pax romana** (“Roman peace”), the safety and stability guaranteed by Roman might. Grain, meat, vegetables, and other bulk foodstuffs usually were exchanged locally because transportation was expensive and many products spoiled quickly. However, the city of Rome imported massive quantities of grain from Sicily and Egypt to feed its huge population, and special naval squadrons performed this vital task.

Glass, metalwork, delicate pottery, and other fine manufactured products were exported throughout the empire. The centers of production, originally located in Italy, moved into the provinces as knowledge of the necessary skills spread. Other merchants traded in luxury items from far beyond the boundaries of the empire, especially silk from China and spices from India and Arabia.

Roman armies stationed on the frontiers were a large market that promoted the prosperity of border provinces. The revenues collected by the central government transferred wealth from the rich interior provinces like Gaul (France) and Egypt, first to Rome to support the emperor and the central government, then to the frontier provinces to subsidize the armies.

**Romanization**—the spread of the Latin language and Roman way of life—was strongest in the western provinces, whereas Greek language and culture, a legacy of the Hellenistic kingdoms, predominated in the eastern Mediterranean (see Chapter 4). Modern Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and Romanian evolved from the Latin language. The Roman government did not force Romanization. Many provincials chose to adopt Latin and the cultural habits that went with it. There were advantages to speaking Latin and wearing a *toga* (the traditional cloak worn by Roman male citizens), just as people in today’s developing nations see advantages in moving to the city, learning English, and wearing Western clothing. Latin facilitated dealings with the Roman administration and helped merchants get contracts to supply the military. Many also were drawn to the aura of success surrounding the language and culture of the dominant people.

The empire gradually granted Roman citizenship, with its privileges, legal protections, and exemptions from some types of taxation, to people living outside Italy. Men who completed a twenty-six-year term of service in the native military units that backed up the Roman legions were granted citizenship and could pass this coveted status on to their descendants. Emperors made grants of citizenship to individuals or entire communities as rewards for good service. Finally, in 212 C.E. the emperor Caracalla granted citizenship to all free, adult, male inhabitants of the empire.

### Life in the Countryside

**pax romana** Literally, “Roman peace,” it connoted the stability and prosperity that Roman rule brought to the lands of the Roman Empire in the first two centuries C.E. The movement of people and trade goods along Roman roads and safe seas allowed for the spread of cultural practices, technologies, and religious ideas.

### Commerce

**Romanization** The process by which the Latin language and Roman culture became dominant in the western provinces. Indigenous peoples in the provinces often chose to Romanize because of the political and economic advantages that it brought, as well as the allure of Roman success.

### Romanization and Citizenship



The gradual extension of citizenship mirrored the empire's transformation from an Italian dominion into a commonwealth of peoples. As early as the first century C.E. some of the leading literary and intellectual figures came from the provinces. By the second century even the emperors hailed from Spain, Gaul, and North Africa.

## The Rise of Christianity

During this period of general peace and prosperity, events were taking place in the East that, though little noted at the moment, would be of great historical significance. The Jewish homeland of Judaea (see Chapter 3), roughly equivalent to present-day Israel, came under direct Roman rule in 6 C.E. Over the next half-century Roman governors insensitive to the Jewish belief in one god provoked opposition to Roman rule. Many waited for the arrival of the Messiah, the “Anointed One,” a military leader who would drive out the Romans and liberate the Jewish people.

This is the context for the career of **Jesus**, a young Jewish carpenter from the Galilee region in northern Israel. Since the portrait of Jesus found in the New Testament largely reflects the viewpoint of followers a half-century after his death, it is difficult to determine the motives and teachings of the historical Jesus. Some experts believe that he was essentially a rabbi, or teacher. Offended by Jewish religious and political leaders' excessive concern with money and power and by the perfunctory nature of mainstream Jewish religious practice in his time, he prescribed a return to the personal faith and spirituality of an earlier age. Others stress his connections to the apocalyptic fervor found in certain circles of Judaism, such as John the Baptist and the community that authored the Dead Sea Scrolls. They view Jesus as a fiery prophet who urged people to prepare themselves for the imminent end of the world and God's ushering in of a blessed new age. Still others see him as a political revolutionary, upset by the downtrodden condition of the peasants in the countryside and the poor in the cities, who determined to drive out the Roman occupiers and their collaborators among the Jewish elite. Whatever the real nature of his mission, the charismatic Jesus eventually attracted the attention of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, who regarded popular reformers as potential troublemakers. They turned him over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Jesus was imprisoned, condemned, and executed by crucifixion, a punishment usually reserved for common criminals. After his death his followers, the Apostles, sought to spread his teachings among their fellow Jews and persuade them that he was the Messiah and had been resurrected (returned from death to life).

**Paul**, a Jew from the Greek city of Tarsus in southeast Anatolia, converted to the new creed. Between 45 and 58 C.E. he threw his enormous talent and energy into spreading the word. Traveling throughout Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, and Greece, he became increasingly frustrated with the refusal of most Jews to accept that Jesus was the Messiah and had ushered in a new age. Many Jews, on the other hand, were appalled by the failure of the followers of Jesus to maintain traditional Jewish practices. Discovering a spiritual hunger among many non-Jews, Paul redirected his efforts toward them and set up a string of Christian (from the Greek name *christos*, meaning “anointed one,” given to Jesus by his followers) communities in the eastern Mediterranean. Paul's career exemplifies the cosmopolitan nature of the Roman Empire. Speaking both Greek and Aramaic, he moved comfortably between the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds. He used Roman roads, depended on the peace guaranteed by Roman arms, called on his Roman citizenship to protect him from the arbitrary action of local authorities, and moved from city to city in his quest for converts. In 66 C.E. long-building tensions in Roman Judaea erupted into a full-scale revolt that lasted until 73. One of the casualties of the Roman reconquest of Judaea was the Jerusalem-based Christian community, which focused on converting the Jews. This left the field clear for Paul's non-Jewish converts, and Christianity began to diverge more and more from its Jewish roots.

For more than two centuries, the sect grew slowly but steadily. Many of the first converts were from disenfranchised groups—women, slaves, the urban poor. They received respect not accorded them in the larger society and obtained positions of responsibility when the members of early Christian communities democratically elected their leaders. However, as the religious movement grew and prospered, it developed a hierarchy of priests and bishops and became subject to bitter disputes over theological doctrine (see Chapter 9).



**AP\* Exam Tip** Be prepared to explain the core beliefs and formation of Christianity.

### Jesus and Paul

**Jesus** A Jew from Galilee in northern Israel who sought to reform Jewish beliefs and practices. He was executed as a revolutionary by the Romans. Hailed as the Messiah and son of God by his followers, he became the central figure in Christianity, a belief system that developed in the centuries after his death.

**Paul** A Jew from the Greek city of Tarsus in Anatolia, he initially persecuted the followers of Jesus but, after receiving a revelation on the road to Syrian Damascus, became a Christian. Taking advantage of his Hellenized background and Roman citizenship, he traveled throughout Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, and Greece, preaching the new religion and establishing churches. Finding his greatest success among pagans (“gentiles”), he began the process by which Christianity separated from Judaism.

### Persecution and Growth of the Church



As monotheists forbidden to worship other gods, early Christians were persecuted by Roman officials, who regarded their refusal to worship the emperor as a sign of disloyalty. Despite occasional government-sponsored persecution and spontaneous mob attacks, or perhaps because of them, the young Christian movement continued to gain strength and attract converts. By the late third century C.E. its adherents were a sizeable minority within the Roman Empire and included many educated and prosperous people with posts in the local and imperial governments.

The expansion of Christianity should be seen as part of a broader religious tendency. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, a number of cults gained popularity by claiming to provide secret information about the nature of life and death and promising a blessed afterlife to their adherents. Arising in the eastern Mediterranean, they spread throughout the Greco-Roman lands in response to a growing spiritual and intellectual hunger not satisfied by traditional pagan practices. These included the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele in Anatolia, the Egyptian goddess Isis, and the Iranian sun-god Mithra. As we shall see, the ultimate victory of Christianity over these rivals had as much to do with historical circumstances as with its spiritual appeal.

**aqueduct** A conduit, either elevated or underground, that used gravity to carry water from a source to a location—usually a city—that needed it. The Romans built many aqueducts in a period of substantial urbanization.

### Engineering



**AP\* Exam Tip** Be sure to understand the impact of technology on the growth of large state structures.

## Technology and Transformation

The relative safety and ease of travel brought by Roman arms and roads enabled merchants to sell their wares and early Christians to spread their faith. Surviving remnants of roads, fortification walls, aqueducts, and buildings testify to the engineering expertise of the ancient Romans. Some of the best engineers served with the army, building bridges, siege works, and ballistic weapons that hurled stones and shafts. **Aqueducts**—long elevated or underground conduits—carried water from a source to an urban center, using only the force of gravity (see Environment and

**Roman Aqueduct Near Tarragona, Spain** The growth of towns and cities challenged Roman officials to provide an adequate supply of water. Aqueducts channeled water from a source, sometimes many miles away, to an urban complex, using only the force of gravity. To bring an aqueduct from high ground into the city, Roman engineers designed long, continuous rows of arches that maintained a steady downhill slope. Scholars sometimes can roughly estimate the population of an ancient city by calculating the amount of water that was available to it.



Robert Freck/Woodfin Camp & Associates



## Water Engineering in Rome and China

People needed water to drink; it was vital for agriculture; and it provided a rapid and economical means for transporting people and goods. Some of the most impressive technological achievements of ancient Rome and China involved hydraulic (water) engineering.

Roman cities, with their large populations, required abundant and reliable sources of water. One way to obtain it was to build aqueducts—stone channels to bring water from distant lakes and streams to the cities. The water flowing in these conduits was moved only by the force of gravity. Surveyors measured the land's elevation and plotted a course that very gradually moved downhill.

Aqueducts were well-built structures made of large cut stones closely fitted and held together by a cement-like mortar. Some were elevated atop walls or bridges, which made it difficult for unauthorized parties to tap the water line for their own use. Portions of some aqueducts were built underground. Construction was labor-intensive, and often both design and construction were carried out by military personnel. This was one of the ways in which the Roman government kept large numbers of soldiers busy in peacetime.

Sections of aqueduct that crossed rivers presented the same construction challenges as bridges. Roman engineers lowered prefabricated wooden cofferdams—large, hollow cylinders—into the riverbed and pumped out the water so workers could descend and construct cement piers to support the arched segments of the bridge. This technique is still used for construction in water.

When an aqueduct reached the outskirts of a city, the water flowed into a reservoir, where it was stored. Pipes connected the reservoir to different parts of the city. Even within the city, gravity provided the motive force until the water reached the public fountains used by the poor and the private storage tanks of individuals wealthy enough to have plumbing in their houses.

In ancient China, rivers running generally in an east-west direction were the main thoroughfares. The earliest development of complex societies centered on the Yellow River Valley, but by the beginning of the Qin Empire the Yangzi River Valley and regions farther south were becoming increasingly important to China's political and economic vitality. In this era the Chinese began to build canals connecting the northern and southern zones, at first for military purposes but eventually for transporting commercial goods as well. In later periods, with the acquisition of more advanced engineering skills, an extensive network of canals was built, including the 1,100-mile-long (1,771-kilometer-long) Grand Canal.

One of the earliest projects was the Magic Canal. A Chinese historian reports that the Qin emperor Shi Huangdi ordered his engineers to join two rivers by a 20-mile-long (32.2-kilometer-long) canal so that he could more easily supply his armies of conquest in the south. Construction of the canal posed a difficult engineering challenge because the rivers Hsiang and Li, though coming within 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) of one another, flowed in opposite directions and with a strong current.

The engineers took advantage of a low point in the chain of hills between the rivers to maintain a relatively level grade. The final element of the solution was to build a snout-shaped mound to divide the waters of the Hsiang, funneling part of that river into an artificial channel. Several spillways further reduced the volume of water flowing into the canal. The joining of the two rivers completed a network of waterways that permitted continuous inland water transport of goods between the latitudes of Beijing and Guangzhou (Canton), a distance of 1,250 miles (2,012 kilometers). Modifications were made in later centuries, but the Magic Canal is still in use.



Robert Temple, photographer

**The Magic Canal** Engineers of Shi Huangdi, “First Emperor” of China, exploited the contours of the landscape to connect the river systems of northern and southern China.

## Defense

Technology: Water Engineering in Rome and China). The Romans pioneered the use of arches, which allow even distribution of great weights without thick supporting walls. The invention of concrete—a mixture of lime powder, sand, and water that could be poured into molds—allowed the Romans to create vast vaulted and domed interior spaces, unlike the rectilinear pillar-and-post construction of the Greeks.

Defending borders that stretched for thousands of miles was a major challenge. Augustus advised against further expanding the empire because the costs of administering and defending subsequent acquisitions would be greater than the revenues. The Roman army was reorganized and redeployed to reflect the shift from an offensive to a defensive strategy. At most points the empire was protected by mountains, deserts, and seas. But the lengthy Rhine and Danube river frontiers in Germany and Central Europe were vulnerable. They were guarded by a string of forts with small garrisons adequate for dealing with raiders. On particularly desolate frontiers, such as in Britain and North Africa, the Romans built long walls to keep out intruders.

Most of Rome's neighbors were less technologically advanced and more loosely organized and so did not pose a serious threat to the security of the empire. The one exception was the Parthian kingdom, heir to the Mesopotamian and Persian Empires, which controlled the lands on the eastern frontier (today's Iran and Iraq). For centuries Rome and Parthia engaged in a rivalry that sapped both sides without any significant territorial gain by either party.

## The Third-Century Crisis

**Third-Century Crisis** Historians' term for the political, military, and economic turmoil that beset the Roman Empire during much of the third century C.E.: frequent changes of ruler, civil wars, barbarian invasions, decline of urban centers, and near-destruction of long-distance commerce and the monetary economy. After 284 C.E. Diocletian restored order by making fundamental changes.

The Roman state prospered for two and a half centuries after Augustus's reforms, but in the third century C.E. cracks in the edifice became visible. Historians use the expression "**Third-Century Crisis**" to refer to the period from 235 to 284 C.E., when political, military, and economic problems beset and nearly destroyed the Roman Empire. The most visible symptom of the crisis was the frequent change of rulers. Twenty or more men claimed the office of emperor during this period. Most reigned for only a few months or years before being overthrown by rivals or killed by their own troops. Germanic tribesmen on the Rhine/Danube frontier took advantage of the frequent civil wars and periods of anarchy to raid deep into the empire. For the first time in centuries, Roman cities began to erect walls for protection. Several regions, feeling that the central government was not adequately protecting them, broke away and turned power over to a leader who promised to put their interests first.

These crises had a devastating impact on the empire's economy. Buying the loyalty of the armies and defending the increasingly permeable frontiers drained the treasury. The unending demands of the central government for more tax revenues, as well as the interruption of commerce by fighting, eroded the towns' prosperity. Shortsighted emperors, desperate for cash, secretly reduced the amount of precious metal in coins and pocketed the excess. The public quickly caught on, and the devalued coinage became less and less acceptable in the marketplace. The empire reverted to a barter economy, a far less efficient system that further curtailed large-scale and long-distance commerce.

The municipal aristocracy, once the most vital and public-spirited class in the empire, was slowly crushed out of existence. As town councilors, its members were personally liable for shortfalls in taxes owed to the state. The decline in trade eroded their wealth, and many began to evade their civic duties and even went into hiding.

Population shifted out of the cities and into the countryside. Many sought employment and protection from both raiders and government officials on the estates of wealthy and powerful country landowners. The shrinking of cities and movement of the population to the country estates were the first steps in a demographic shift toward the social and economic structures of the European Middle Ages—roughly seven hundred years during which wealthy rural lords dominated a peasant population tied to the land (see Chapter 9).

Just when things looked bleakest, one man pulled the empire back from the brink of disaster. Like many rulers of that age, Diocletian came from one of the eastern European provinces most vulnerable to invasion. A commoner by birth, he had risen through the ranks of the army and gained power in 284. The proof of his success is that he ruled for more than twenty years and died in bed.

Diocletian implemented radical reforms that saved the Roman state by transforming it. To halt inflation (the process by which prices rise as money becomes worth less), Diocletian issued an edict specifying the maximum prices for various commodities and services. He froze many people into professions regarded as essential and required them to train their sons to succeed them. This unprecedented government regulation of prices and vocations had unforeseen



**AP\* Exam Tip** Be able to explain the decline and collapse of empire in Rome, India, and China.

## Diocletian and Constantine



**Constantine** Roman emperor (r. 312–337). After reuniting the Roman Empire, he moved the capital to Constantinople and made Christianity a favored religion.

consequences. A “black market” arose among buyers and sellers who ignored the government’s price controls (and threats to impose the death penalty on violators). Many inhabitants of the empire began to see the government as an oppressive entity that no longer deserved their loyalty.

When Diocletian resigned in 305, the old divisiveness reemerged as various claimants battled for the throne. The eventual winner was **Constantine** (r. 306–337), who reunited the entire empire under his sole rule by 324.

In 312 Constantine won a key battle at the Milvian Bridge near Rome. He later claimed that he had seen a cross—the sign of the Christian God—superimposed on the sun before the battle. Believing that the Christian God had helped him achieve the victory, in the following year Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, ending the persecution of Christianity and guaranteeing freedom of worship to Christians and all others. Throughout his reign he supported the Christian church, although he tolerated other beliefs as well. Historians disagree about whether Constantine was spiritually motivated or pragmatically seeking to unify the peoples of the empire under a single religion. In either case, his embrace of Christianity was of tremendous significance. Large numbers of people began to convert when they saw that Christians seeking political office or government favors had clear advantages over non-Christians.

In 324 Constantine transferred the imperial capital from Rome to Byzantium, an ancient Greek city on the Bosphorus (**BAHS-puhr-uhs**) strait leading from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea. The city was renamed Constantinople (**cahn-stan-tih-NO-pul**), “City of Constantine.” This move both reflected and accelerated changes already taking place. Constantinople was closer than Rome to the most-threatened borders in eastern Europe (see Map 5.1). The urban centers and middle class in the eastern half of the empire had better withstood the Third-Century Crisis than those in the western half. In addition, more educated people and more Christians were living in the eastern provinces (see Chapter 9).

The conversion of Constantine and the transfer of the imperial capital are often seen as

the end of Roman history. Though many changes that culminated during Constantine’s reign had their roots in the previous two centuries, the two halves of the empire followed different pathways thereafter. The Western Empire, increasingly overrun by migrating Germanic peoples, came to an end in 476 when the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, abdicated. (The melding of the Germanic and Roman cultural traditions will be discussed in Chapter 9.)

However, the eastern, or Byzantine, portion of the empire continued to flourish. Several emperors ordered collections of laws and edicts to be made. The most famous and complete collection was the *Corpus Juris Civilis* (*Body of Civil Law*) compiled in Latin by seventeen legal scholars at the behest of the emperor Justinian (r. 527–565), whose armies also briefly reoccupied some old imperial territories in Italy and Tunisia. The greatest Byzantine architectural creation, Constantinople’s Hagia Sophia (“Sacred Wisdom”) cathedral, proved to be a more lasting monument to Justinian’s reign. It represents a continuation of artistic creativity manifested in the design and ornamentation of churches and monasteries, and the painting of religious images known as icons. (The later centuries of Byzantine history are discussed in Chapter 9.)

## SECTION REVIEW

- Rome’s central location in Italy and the Mediterranean, and its ability to draw on the manpower resources of Italy, were important factors in its rise to empire.
- Early Rome was ruled by kings, but the Republic, inaugurated shortly before 500 B.C.E., was guided by the Senate, a council of the heads of wealthy families.
- Roman expansion, first in Italy, then throughout the Mediterranean, was due to several factors: the ambition and desire for glory of its leaders, weaker states appealing to Rome for protection, and Roman fear of others’ aggression.
- Within Italy, and later in the overseas provinces, Rome co-opted the elites of subject peoples and extended its citizenship. Many subjects in the western provinces adopted the Latin language and Roman lifestyle.
- The civil wars that brought down the Republic were fought by armies more loyal to their leaders than to the state.
- Augustus developed a new system of government, the Principate, and while claiming to restore the Republic, he really created a military dictatorship.
- The Third-Century Crisis almost destroyed Rome, but Diocletian and Constantine saved the empire by transforming it.
- Christianity originated in the turbulent province of Judaea in the first century C.E., and despite official and spontaneous persecution, it grew steadily. Constantine’s embrace of Christianity in the early fourth century C.E. made it virtually the official religion of the empire.

## THE ORIGINS OF IMPERIAL CHINA, 221 B.C.E.–220 C.E.

**Qin** A people and state in the Wei Valley of eastern China that conquered rival states and created the first Chinese empire (221–206 B.C.E.). The Qin ruler, Shi Huangdi, standardized many features of Chinese society and ruthlessly marshaled subjects for military and construction projects, engendering hostility that led to the fall of his dynasty shortly after his death. The Qin framework was largely taken over by the succeeding Han Empire.

### Shi Huangdi

**Shi Huangdi** Founder of the short-lived Qin dynasty and creator of the Chinese Empire (r. 221–210 B.C.E.). He is remembered for his ruthless conquests of rival states, standardization of practices, and forcible organization of labor for military and engineering tasks. His tomb, with its army of life-size terracotta soldiers, has been partially excavated.

**Han** A term used to designate (1) the ethnic Chinese people who originated in the Yellow River Valley and spread throughout regions of China suitable for agriculture and (2) the dynasty of emperors who ruled from 202 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.

### Clash with the Nomads



**AP\* Exam Tip** Understand the role of legal systems in the development of the Chinese bureaucracy.

The early history of China (described in Chapter 2) was characterized by the fragmentation that geography dictated. The Shang (ca. 1750–1045 B.C.E.) and Zhou (1045–221 B.C.E.) dynasties ruled over a compact zone in northeastern China. The last few centuries of nominal Zhou rule—the Warring States Period—saw frequent hostilities among a group of small states with somewhat different languages and cultures.

In the second half of the third century B.C.E. one of the warring states—the **Qin (chin)** state of the Wei (**way**) Valley—rapidly conquered its rivals and created China’s first empire (221–206 B.C.E.). Built at great cost in human lives and labor, the Qin Empire barely survived the death of its founder, **Shi Huangdi (shih wahng-dee)**. Power soon passed to a new dynasty, the **Han**, which ruled China from 202 B.C.E. to 220 C.E. (see Map 5.2). Thus began the long history of imperial China—a tradition of political and cultural unity and continuity that lasted into the early twentieth century and still has meaning for the very different China of our time.

### The Qin Unification of China, 221–206 B.C.E.

From the mid-third century B.C.E., Qin began to methodically conquer and incorporate the other Chinese states, and by 221 B.C.E. it had unified all northern and central China in the first Chinese “empire.” The name *China*, by which this land is known in the Western world, is probably derived from *Qin*. Qin emerged as the ultimate winner because of a combination of factors: the toughness and military preparedness of a frontier state long accustomed to defending itself against “barbarian” neighbors, the wholehearted adoption of severe Legalist methods for exploiting the natural and human resources of the kingdom (see Chapter 2), and the surpassing ambition of a ruthless and energetic young king.

The Qin monarch, Zheng (**jahng**), came to the throne at the age of thirteen in 246 B.C.E. Guided by a circle of Legalist advisers, he launched a series of wars of conquest. After defeating the last of his rivals in 221 B.C.E., he gave himself a title that symbolized the new state of affairs—Shi Huangdi, or “First Emperor”—and claimed that his dynasty would last ten thousand generations.

The new regime eliminated rival centers of authority. Its first target was the landowning aristocracy of the conquered states and the system on which aristocratic wealth and power had been based. The Qin government abolished primogeniture, the right of the eldest son to inherit all the landed property, requiring estates to be broken up and passed on to several heirs. A new, centrally controlled administrative structure was put in place, with district officials appointed by the king and watched over by his agents.

The Qin government’s commitment to standardization helped create a unified Chinese civilization. A code of law, in force throughout the empire, applied punishments evenhandedly to all members of society. The Qin also imposed standardized weights and measures, a single coinage, a common system of writing, and even a specified axle-length for carts so that they would create a single set of ruts in the road.

Li Si (**luh suh**), the Legalist prime minister, persuaded Shi Huangdi that the scholars (primarily Confucian rivals of the Legalists; see Chapter 2) were subverting the goals of the regime. The Legalists viewed Confucian expectations of benevolent and nonviolent conduct from rulers as an intolerable check on the government’s absolute power. Furthermore, the Confucians’ appeal to the past impeded the new order being created by the Qin. A crackdown on the scholars ensued in which many Confucian books were publicly burned and many scholars brutally executed.

Shi Huangdi was determined to secure the northern border against nomadic raids on Chinese territory. Pastoralists and farmers had always exchanged goods on the frontier. Herders sought food and crafted goods produced by farmers and townsfolk, and farmers depended on the herders for animals and animal products. Sometimes, however, nomads raided the settled lands and took what they needed. For centuries the Chinese kingdoms had struggled with these tough, horse-riding warriors, building long walls along the frontier to keep them away from vulnerable farmlands. Shortly before the Qin unification of China, several states had begun to train soldiers on horseback to contend with the mobile nomads.

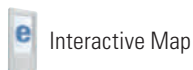


**Xiongnu** A confederation of nomadic peoples living beyond the northwest frontier of ancient China. Chinese rulers tried a variety of defenses and stratagems to ward off these “barbarians,” as they called them, and finally succeeded in dispersing the Xiongnu in the first century C.E.

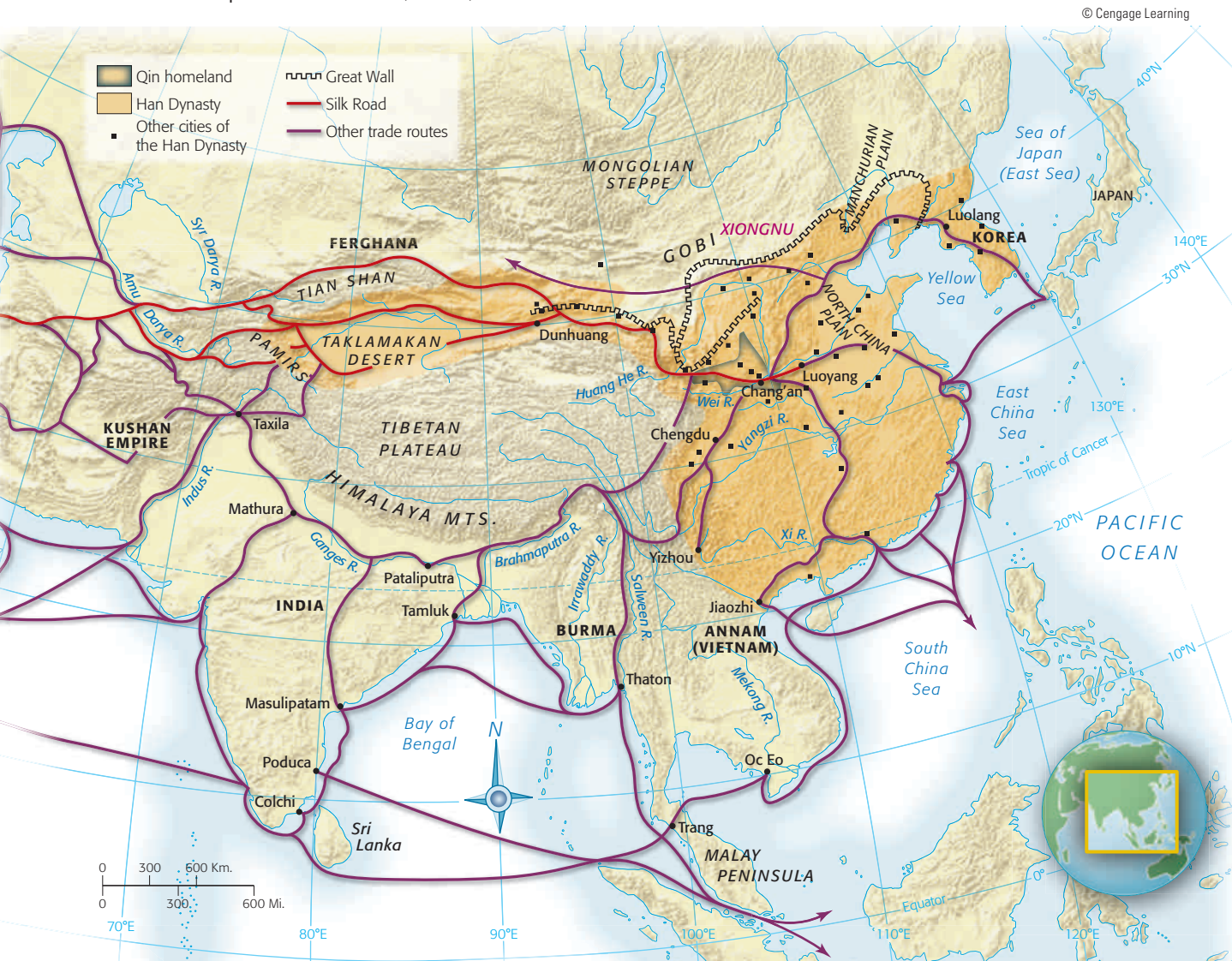
Shi Huangdi sent a large force to drive the nomads far north. His generals succeeded momentarily, extending Chinese territory beyond the great northern loop of the Yellow River. They also connected and extended earlier walls to create a continuous fortification, the ancestor of the Great Wall of China. A recent study concludes that, contrary to the common belief that the purpose of the wall was defensive—to keep the “barbarians” out of China—its primary function was offensive, to take in newly captured territory, to which large numbers of Chinese peasants were now dispatched and ordered to begin cultivation.<sup>1</sup>

Shi Huangdi’s attack on the nomads had an unanticipated consequence. The threat to their way of life created by the Chinese invasion drove the normally fragmented and quarreling nomad groups to unite in a great confederacy under the dynamic leadership of Maodun (**mow-doon**). This Xiongnu (**SHE-OONG-noo**) Confederacy would pose a huge military threat to China for centuries, with frequent wars and high costs in lives and resources.

Needing many people to serve in the armies, construct roads and walls on the frontiers, and build new cities, palaces, and a monumental tomb for the ruler, the Qin government instituted an oppressive program of compulsory military and labor services and relocated large groups of people. The recent discovery of a manual of Qin laws used by an administrator, with prescriptions less extreme than expected, suggests that the sins of the Qin may have been exaggerated



**MAP 5.2 Han China** The Qin and Han rulers of northeast China extended their control over all of eastern China and extensive territories to the west. A series of walls in the north and northwest, built to check the incursions of nomadic peoples from the steppes, were joined together to form the ancestor of the present-day Great Wall of China. An extensive network of roads connecting towns, cities, and frontier forts promoted rapid communication and facilitated trade. The Silk Road carried China’s most treasured products to Central, South, and West Asia and the Mediterranean lands.







**Terracotta Soldiers from the Tomb of Shi Huangdi, “First Emperor” of China, Late Third Century B.C.E.** Near the monumental tomb that he built for himself, the First Emperor filled a huge underground chamber with more than seven thousand life-sized baked-clay statues of soldiers. The terracotta army was unearthed in the 1970s.

by later sources. Nevertheless, the widespread uprisings that broke out after the death of Shi Huangdi attest to the harsh nature of the Qin regime.

When Shi Huangdi died in 210 B.C.E., several officials schemed with one of his sons to place him on the throne. The First Emperor was buried in a monumental tomb whose layout mirrored the geography of China, and the tomb was covered with a great mound of earth. Nearby were buried life-size sculptures of seven thousand soldiers to guard him in the afterlife, a more humane alternative to the human sacrifices of earlier eras. This terracotta (baked clay) army was discovered in the 1970s C.E., but the burial mound remains unexcavated.

The new emperor proved to be weak. Uprisings broke out on many fronts, reflecting both the resentment of the old aristocracies that had been deprived of wealth and privilege, and the anger of the commoners against excessive compulsory labor, forced relocations, and heavy taxation. By 206 B.C.E. Qin rule had been broken—the “ten-thousand-generation dynasty” had lasted only fifteen years. Nevertheless, the most important achievements of the Qin, the unification of China and the creation of a single, widely dispersed Chinese style of civilization, would endure.

### Fall of the Qin



**AP\* Exam Tip** Be prepared to discuss the political structure of ancient China, but not specific dynastic transitions.

### Gaozu

**Gaozu** The throne name of Liu Bang, one of the rebel leaders who brought down the Qin and founded the Han dynasty in 202 B.C.E.

## The Long Reign of the Han, 202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.

Despite the overthrow of the Qin, fighting continued among various rebel groups. In 202 B.C.E. Liu Bang (**le-oo bahng**) prevailed and inaugurated a new dynasty, the Han, that would govern China for more than four centuries (202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.). The Han created the machinery and ideology of imperial government that would prevail for two millennia, and Chinese people today refer to themselves ethnically as “Han.”

The new emperor, generally known by the throne name **Gaozu** (**gow-zoo**), came from a modest background. Stories stress his peasant qualities: fondness for drink, blunt speech, and easy manner. Gaozu and his successors courted popularity and consolidated their rule by denouncing the harshness of the Qin and renouncing many Qin laws. In reality, however, they



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.1672).  
Photograph © 1981 Metropolitan Museum of Art

**Gold Belt Buckle, Xiongnu, Second Century B.C.E.** The Xiongnu, herders in the lands north of China, shared the artistic conventions of nomadic peoples across the steppes of Asia and eastern Europe, such as this fluid, twisting representation of the animals on which they depended for their livelihood. Shi Huangdi’s military incursion into their pasturelands in the late third century B.C.E. catalyzed the formation of the Xiongnu Confederacy, whose horse-riding warriors challenged the Chinese for centuries.

maintained—with sensible modifications—many Legalist-inspired institutions of the Qin to control far-flung territories and diverse populations.

The early Han rulers faced tough challenges. China had been badly damaged by the harsh exactions of the Qin and the widespread fighting in the period of rebellions. Because the economy needed time to recover, Gaozu and his immediate successors had to be frugal, keeping costs down to reduce taxes and undertaking measures to improve the state of agriculture. For instance, during prosperous times the government collected and stored surplus grain that could be sold at reasonable prices in times of shortage.

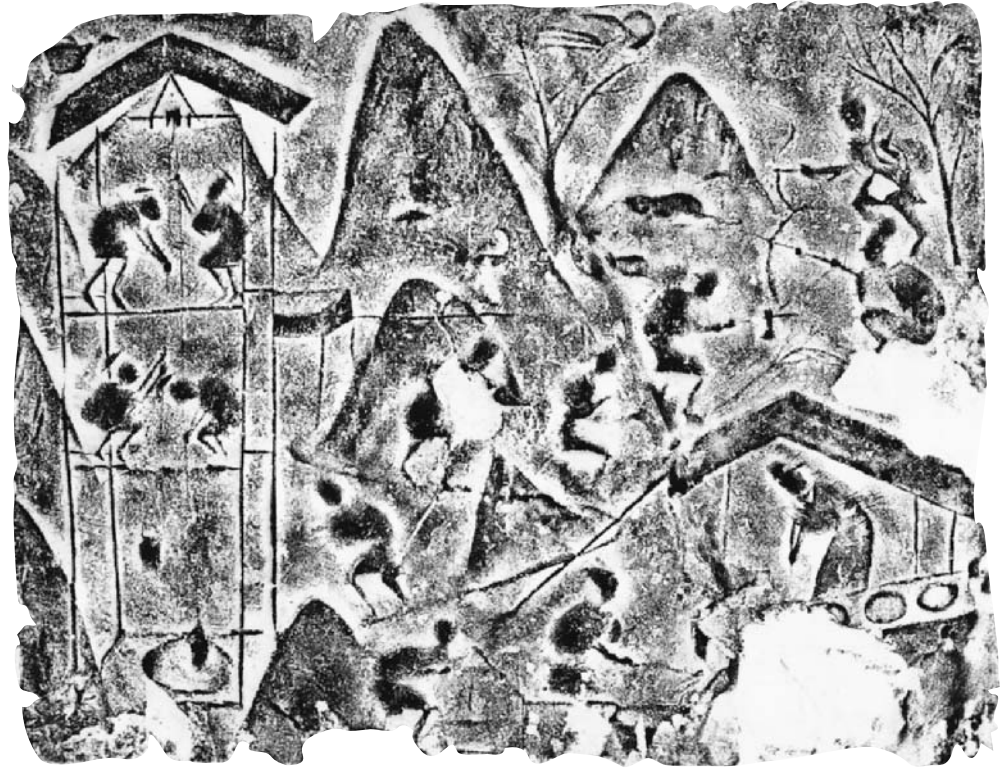
Gaozu reverted to the traditional feudal grants the Qin had abolished. The eastern parts of China were parceled out to relatives and major supporters, while the rest was divided into “commanderies” directly controlled by the central government. Over the next few reigns, these fiefs were reabsorbed as rebellions or deaths of the rulers provided the opportunity.

When Gaozu marched north to confront a Xiongnu incursion, he and his troops were trapped, and he had to negotiate a safe passage home for his army. Realizing the inferiority of Han troops and the limited funds for a military buildup, he adopted a policy of appeasing the Xiongnu. This essentially meant buying them off by dispatching annual “gifts” of rice, silk, and wine, as well as marrying a Han princess to the Xiongnu ruler.

While the throne passed to a young child when Gaozu died in 195 B.C.E., real power lay with Gaozu’s formidable wife, Empress Lü (*lyew*). Throughout the Han era, empresses played a key role in determining which of the many sons (the emperors had multiple wives and concubines) would succeed to the throne, and they often chose minors or weak figures whom they and their male relatives could control. Under such circumstances Wu came to the throne as a teenager in 141 B.C.E. The deaths of his grandmother and uncle soon opened the way for him to rule in his own right, and thus began one of the longest and most eventful reigns in the history of the dynasty (141–87 B.C.E.).

## Wu





Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

#### Rubbing of Salt Mining

Found in a Chinese tomb of the first century c.e., this rubbing illustrates a procedure for mining salt. The tower on the left originally served as a derrick for drilling a deep hole through dirt and rock. In this scene workers are hauling up buckets full of brine (saltwater) from underground deposits. In the background are hunters in the mountains.

**Sima Qian** Chief astrologer for the Han dynasty emperor Wu. He composed a monumental history of China from its legendary origins to his own time and is regarded as the Chinese “father of history.”

We know much about the personality and policies of this emperor because of **Sima Qian** (**sih-muh chyehn**) (ca. 145–85 B.C.E.), whom scholars regard as the first true “historian” in China. Serving as “chief astrologer” at the Han court, Sima Qian was castrated by Wu for defending a disgraced general. He therefore presents a generally negative view, portraying Wu as being manipulated by religious charlatans promising him magical powers, immortality, and séances with the dead. Reading his account carefully, however, one could also conclude that Wu used religious pageantry to boost his own power.

Indeed, Wu did much to increase the power of the emperor. He launched military operations south into Fujian, Guangdong, and northern Vietnam, and north into Manchuria and North Korea. He abandoned the policy of appeasing the Xiongnu, concluding that this approach had failed since the nomads still made periodic attacks on the northern frontier. Wu built up his military, especially the cavalry, and went on the offensive. Thus began decades of bitter, costly fighting between China and the Xiongnu. In the long run Wu and his successors prevailed, and by the mid-first century c.e. the Xiongnu Confederacy disintegrated, though nomad groups still threatened Chinese lands.

Wu dispatched forces to explore and conquer territories northwest of the Chinese heartland, essentially modern Gansu and Xinjiang (**SHIN-jyahng**). His goals were to improve access to large numbers of horses for his expanding cavalry and to pressure the Xiongnu on their western flank. Thus began the incorporation of this region into greater China. This expansion also brought new economic opportunities, laying the foundations for the Silk Road over which silk and other lucrative trade goods would be carried to Central, southern, and western Asia (see Chapter 7).



The military buildup and frequent wars with the Xiongnu were expensive, forcing Wu to find new revenues. One solution was government monopolies on several high-profit commodities: salt, iron, and alcoholic beverages. These measures were highly controversial.

Another momentous development was the adoption of Confucianism—modified to meet the circumstances of the era—as the official ideology of the imperial system. A university was opened on the outskirts of the capital city, Chang’an (**chahng-ahn**), and local officials were ordered to send a certain number of promising students from their districts each year. For two thousand years Chinese government would depend on scholar-officials promoted for their performance on exams probing their knowledge of Confucian texts. This alliance of Confucians and the imperial government, fraught with tensions, required compromises on both sides. The Confucians gained access to employment and power but had to accommodate ethical principles to the reality of far-from-perfect rulers. The emperors won the backing and services of a class of competent, educated people but had to deal with the Confucians’ expectation that rulers should model ethical behavior and their insistence on giving often unwelcome advice.

## Chinese Society

The Chinese government periodically conducted a census of inhabitants, and the results for 2 C.E. revealed 12 million households and 60 million people. Then, as now, the vast majority lived in the eastern river-valley regions where intensive agriculture could support a dense population.

### The Family

The fundamental unit was the family, including not only the living but all previous generations. The Chinese believed their ancestors maintained an interest in the fortunes of living family members, so they consulted, appeased, and venerated them. Each generation must produce sons to perpetuate the family and maintain the ancestor cult that provided a kind of immortality to the deceased. In earlier times multiple generations and groups of families lived together, but by the imperial era independent nuclear families were the norm.

Within the family was a clear-cut hierarchy headed by the oldest male. Each person had a place and responsibilities, based on gender, age, and relationship to other family members, and people saw themselves as part of an interdependent unit rather than as individual agents. Parents’ authority over children did not end with the passing of childhood, and parents occasionally took mature children to court for disobedience. The family inculcated the basic values of Chinese society: loyalty, obedience to authority, respect for elders and ancestors, and concern for honor and appropriate conduct. Because the hierarchy in the state mirrored the hierarchy in the family—peasants, soldiers, administrators, and rulers all made distinctive contributions to the welfare of society—these same attitudes carried over into the relationship between individuals and the state.

Traditional beliefs about conduct appropriate for women are preserved in a biography of the mother of the Confucian philosopher Mencius (Mengzi):

*A woman’s duties are to cook the five grains, heat the wine, look after her parents-in-law, make clothes, and that is all! . . . [She] has no ambition to manage affairs outside the house. . . . She must follow the “three submissions.” When she is young, she must submit to her parents. After her marriage, she must submit to her husband. When she is widowed, she must submit to her son.<sup>2</sup>*

In reality, a woman’s status depended on her “location” within various social institutions. Women of the royal family, such as wives of the emperor or queen-mothers, could be influential political figures. A young bride, whose marriage had been arranged by her parents, would go to live with her husband’s family, where she was, initially, a stranger who had to prove herself. Mothers-in-law had authority over their sons’ wives, and mothers, sisters, and wives competed for influence with the men of the household and a larger share of the family’s resources.

“Lessons for Women,” written at the end of the first century C.E. by Ban Zhao (**bahn jow**), illuminates the unresolved tensions in Han society’s attitudes toward women. Instructing her own daughters on how to conduct themselves as proper women, Zhao urges them to conform to



**AP\* Exam Tip** Understand the impact of philosophical systems and religions in the creation of social systems and gender roles.

### Women

#### PRIMARY SOURCE: Lessons for Women

Discover what Ban Zhao, the foremost female writer in Han China, had to say about the proper behavior of women.

### Chang'an

**Chang'an** City in the Wei Valley in eastern China. It became the capital of the Qin and early Han Empires. Its main features were imitated in the cities and towns that sprang up throughout the Han Empire.

### Scholars, Merchants, and Soldiers

**gentry** In China, the class of prosperous families, next in wealth below the rural aristocrats, from which the emperors drew their administrative personnel. Respected for their education and expertise, these officials became a privileged group and made the government more efficient and responsive than in the past. The term gentry also denotes the class of landholding families in England below the aristocracy.

traditional expectations by obeying males, maintaining their husbands' households, performing domestic chores, and raising the children. Yet she also makes an impassioned plea for the education of girls and urges husbands to respect and not beat their wives.

People lived in various milieus—cities, rural villages and farms, or military camps on the frontiers—and their activities and the quality of their lives were shaped by these contexts. From 202 B.C.E. to 8 C.E.—the period of the Early, or Western, Han—the capital was at **Chang'an** (modern Xi'an [**shee-ahn**]), in the Wei Valley, an ancient seat of power from which the Zhou and Qin dynasties had emerged. Protected by a ring of hills but with ready access to the fertile plain, Chang'an was surrounded by a wall of pounded earth and brick 15 miles (24 kilometers) in circumference. In 2 C.E. its population was 246,000. Part of the city was carefully planned. Broad thoroughfares running north and south intersected with others running east and west. High walls protected the palaces, administrative offices, barracks, and storehouses of the imperial compound, to which access was restricted. Temples and marketplaces were scattered about the civic center. Chang'an became a model of urban planning, its main features imitated in cities and towns throughout China (it is estimated that between 10 and 30 percent of the population lived in urban centers). From 25 to 220 C.E. the Later, or Eastern, Han established its base farther east, in the more centrally located Luoyang (**LWOE-yahng**).

Han literature describes the appearance of the capitals and the activities taking place in the palace complexes, public areas, and residential streets. Moralizing writers criticized the excesses of the elite. Living in multistory houses, wearing fine silks, traveling in ornate horse-drawn carriages, well-to-do officials and merchants devoted their leisure time to art and literature, occult religious practices, elegant banquets, and various entertainments—music and dance, juggling and acrobatics, dog and horse races, and cock and tiger fights. In stark contrast, the common people inhabited a sprawling warren of alleys, living in dwellings packed “as closely as the teeth of a comb.”

While the upper echelons of scholar-officials resided in the capital, lower-level bureaucrats were scattered throughout smaller cities and towns serving as headquarters for regional governments. These scholar-officials, or **gentry** (**JEHN-tree**) as they are sometimes called, shared a common Confucian culture and ideology. Exempt from taxes and compulsory military or labor services, they led comfortable lives by the standards of the time. While the granting of government jobs on the basis of performance on the exams theoretically should have given everyone an equal chance, in reality the sons of the gentry had distinct advantages in obtaining the requisite education in classical texts. Thus the scholar-officials became a self-perpetuating, privileged class. The Han depended on local officials for day-to-day administration of their far-flung territories. They collected taxes, regulated conscription for the army and labor projects, provided protection, and settled disputes.

Merchant families also were based in the cities, and some became very wealthy. However, ancient Chinese society viewed merchants with suspicion, accusing them of greedily driving prices up through speculation and being parasites who lived off the work of others. Advisers to the emperors periodically blamed merchants for the economic ills of China and proposed harsh measures, such as banning them and their children from holding government posts.

The state required two years of military service, and large numbers of Chinese men spent long periods away from home as soldiers in distant frontier posts, building walls and forts, keeping an eye on barbarian neighbors, fighting when necessary, and growing crops to support themselves. Poems written by soldiers complain of rough conditions in the camps, tyrannical officers, and the dangers of confrontations with enemy forces, but above all they are homesick, missing and worrying about aged parents and vulnerable wives and children.

## New Forms of Thought and Belief

The Han period was rich in intellectual developments, thanks to the relative prosperity of the era, the growth of urban centers, and state support of scholars. In their leisure time scholar-officials read and wrote in a range of genres, including poetry, philosophy, history, and technical subjects.



### History

The Chinese had been preserving historical records since the early Zhou period. However, Sima Qian, the aforementioned “chief astrologer” of Emperor Wu, is “the father of history” in China, both because he created an organizational framework that became the standard for subsequent historical writing and because he sought the causes of events. Sima’s monumental history, covering 2,500 years from legendary early emperors to his own time, was organized in a very different way from Western historical writing. It was divided into five parts: dynastic histories, accounts of noble families, biographies of important individuals and groups (such as Confucian scholars, assassins, barbarian peoples), a chart of historical events, and essays on special topics such as the calendar, astrology, and religious ceremonies. The same event may be narrated in more than one section, sometimes in a different way, inviting the reader to compare and interpret the differences. Sima may have utilized this approach to offer carefully veiled interpretations of past and present. Historians and other scholars in Han China had the advantage, as compared to their Western counterparts, of being employed by the government, but the disadvantage of having to limit their criticism of that government.

### Technology

There were advances in science and technology. Widespread belief in astrology engendered astronomical observation of planets, stars, and other celestial objects. The watermill, which harnessed the power of running water to turn a grindstone, was used in China long before it appeared in Europe. The development of a horse collar that did not constrict breathing allowed Chinese horses to pull heavier loads than European horses. The Chinese first made paper, perhaps as early as the second century B.C.E., replacing the awkward bamboo strips of earlier eras. Improvements in military technology included horse breeding techniques to supply the cavalry and a reliable crossbow trigger. The Qin and Han built thousands of miles of roads—comparable in scale to the roads of the Roman Empire—to connect parts of the empire and move armies quickly. They also built a network of canals connecting the river systems of northern and southern China (see Environment and Technology: Water Engineering in Rome and China). One clever inventor even created an early seismometer to register earthquakes and indicate the direction where the event took place.

### Religion

Chinese religion encompassed a wide spectrum of beliefs. Like the early Romans, the Chinese believed that divinity resided within nature. Most people believed in ghosts and spirits. The state maintained shrines to the lords of rain, winds, and soil, as well as to certain great rivers and high mountains. Sima Qian devoted an essay to the connection between religion and power, showing how emperors used ancient ceremonies and new-fangled cults to secure their authority. Daoism (see Chapter 2) became popular with the common people, incorporating an array of mystical and magical practices, including alchemy (the art of turning common materials into precious metals such as gold) and the search for potions that would impart immortality. Because Daoism questioned tradition and rejected the hierarchy and rules of the Confucian elite classes, charismatic Daoist teachers led several popular uprisings in the unsettled last decades of the Han dynasty.

Perhaps as early as the first century C.E. Buddhism (**BOOD-izm**) began to trickle into China. Originating in northern India in the fifth century B.C.E. (see Chapter 6), it slowly spread through South Asia and into Central Asia, carried by merchants on the Silk Road. Certain aspects of Buddhism fit comfortably with Chinese values: reverence for classic texts was also a feature of Confucianism, and the emphasis on severing attachments to material goods and pleasures found echoes in Daoism. But in other ways the Chinese were initially put off by Buddhist practices. The fact that Buddhist monks withdrew from their families to live in monasteries, shaved off their hair, and abstained from sex and procreation of children was repugnant to traditional Chinese values, which emphasized the importance of family ties, the body as an inviolable gift from parents, and the need to produce children to maintain the ancestor cult. Gradually Buddhism gained acceptance and was reshaped to fit the Chinese context, a process accelerated by the non-Chinese dynasties that dominated the north after the fall of the Han.

## Decline of the Han

### Wang Mang

A break in the long sequence of Han rulers occurred early in the first century C.E. when an ambitious official named Wang Mang (**wahng mahng**) seized power (9–23 C.E.). The new ruler implemented major reforms to address serious economic problems and to cement his popularity with the common people, including limiting the size of the estates of the rich and giving the

surplus land to landless peasants. However, a cataclysmic flood that changed the course of the Yellow River caused large numbers of deaths and economic losses. Members of the Han family and other elements of the elite resisted their loss of status and property, and widespread poverty engendered a popular uprising of the “Red Eyebrows,” as the insurgents were called. Wang Mang was besieged in his palace and killed, and a member of the Han royal family was soon installed as emperor. In 25 C.E., the capital was moved east to Luoyang.

The dynasty continued for another two centuries, but the imperial court was frequently plagued by weak leadership and court intrigue, with royal spouses and their families jockeying for power behind immature or ineffectual monarchs. Poems from this period complain of corrupt officials, unchecked attacks by barbarians, uprisings of desperate and hungry peasants, the spread of banditry, widespread poverty, and despair.

Several factors contributed to the fall of the Han. Continuous military vigilance along the frontier burdened Han finances and exacerbated the economic troubles of later Han times. Despite the earnest efforts of Qin and early Han emperors to reduce the power and wealth of the aristocracy and turn land over to a free peasantry, by the end of the first century B.C.E. nobles and successful merchants again controlled huge tracts of land. Many peasants sought their protection against the demands of the imperial government, which was thereby deprived of tax revenues and manpower. The system of military conscription broke down, forcing the government to hire more and more foreign soldiers and officers, men willing to serve for pay but not necessarily loyal to the Han state. By the end of the second century the empire was convulsed by civil wars, and in 220 C.E. a triumphant general named Cao Cao (**tsow tsow**) formally terminated the Han dynasty.

With the fall of the Han, China entered a period of political fragmentation that lasted until the rise of the Sui (**sway**) and Tang (**tahng**) dynasties in the late sixth and early seventh centuries C.E., a story we take up in Chapter 10. In this period the north was dominated by a series of barbarian peoples who combined elements of their own practices with the foundation of Chinese culture. Many ethnic Chinese migrated south into the Yangzi Valley, where Chinese rulers prevailed, and in this era the center of gravity of both the population and Chinese culture shifted to the south.

### Fall of the Han

## SECTION REVIEW

- The tough, disciplined frontier kingdom of Qin conquered all rival kingdoms and unified China by 221 B.C.E. The First Emperor and his Legalist advisers imposed standardization in many spheres and compelled the labor of many people.
- The Qin attack on the northern nomads led to the formation of the formidable Xiongnu Confederacy, which long posed a military threat to China.
- The Han dynasty added to the Qin foundation, creating fundamental patterns of imperial government that lasted for two millennia.
- Emperor Wu went on the offensive against the nomads, extended Chinese control in the northwest, and began to use Confucian scholars as government officials.
- The family, with its strict hierarchy, roles for each member, and values of deference and obedience, prepared citizens for their obligations to the state.
- The layout, buildings, and activities in the capital city, Chang’an, were replicated in cities and towns across China. Regional administration was based on this network of urban centers.
- The Han era saw major intellectual and technological developments, as well as the arrival of Buddhism in China.
- The fall of the Han dynasty early in the third century C.E. was followed by the takeover of the northern plain by barbarian peoples. Many Chinese fled south to the Yangzi River Valley, which became the new center of gravity for Chinese civilization.



## CONCLUSION

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Both the Roman Empire and the first Chinese empire arose from relatively small states that, because of their discipline and military toughness, were initially able to subdue their neighbors. Ultimately they unified widespread territories under strong central governments.

Agriculture was the fundamental economic activity and source of wealth. Government revenues primarily derived from a percentage of the annual harvest. Both empires depended initially on sturdy independent farmers pressed into military service or other forms of compulsory labor. Conflicts over who owned the land and how it was used were at the heart of political and social turmoil. The autocratic rulers of the Roman and Chinese states secured their positions by breaking the power of the old aristocratic families, seizing their excess land, and giving land to small farmers. The later reversal of this process, when wealthy noblemen again gained control of vast tracts of land and reduced the peasants to dependent tenant farmers, signaled the erosion of state authority.

Both empires spread out from an ethnically homogeneous core to encompass widespread territories containing diverse ecosystems, populations, and ways of life. Both brought those regions a cultural unity that has persisted, at least in part, to the present day. This development involved far more than military conquest and political domination. As the population of the core areas outstripped available resources, Italian and Han settlers moved into new regions, bringing their languages, beliefs, customs, and technologies. Many people in the conquered lands were attracted to the culture of the ruler nation and chose to adopt these practices and attach themselves to a “winning cause.” Both empires found similar solutions to the problems of administering far-flung territories and large populations in an age when communication depended on men on horseback or on foot. The central government had to delegate considerable autonomy to local officials. These local elites identified their own interests with the central government they loyally served. In both empires a kind of civil service developed, staffed by educated and capable members of a prosperous middle class.

Technologies that facilitated imperial control also fostered cultural unification and improvements in the general standard of living. Roads built to expedite the movement of troops became the highways of commerce and the spread of imperial culture. A network of cities and towns linked the parts of the empire, providing local administrative bases, promoting commerce, and radiating imperial culture into the surrounding countryside. The majority of the population still resided in the countryside, but those living in urban centers enjoyed most of the advantages of empire. Cities and towns modeled themselves on the capital cities of Rome and Chang’an. Travelers found the same types of buildings and public spaces, and similar features of urban life, in outlying regions that they had seen in the capital.

The empires of Rome and Han China faced similar problems of defense: long borders located far from the administrative center and aggressive neighbors who coveted their prosperity. Both had to build walls and maintain chains of forts and garrisons to protect against incursions. The cost of frontier defense was staggering and eventually eroded the economic prosperity of the two empires. As imperial governments demanded more taxes and services from the hard-pressed civilian population, they lost the loyalty of their own people, many of whom sought protection on the estates of powerful rural landowners. Rough neighbors gradually learned the skills that had given the empires an initial advantage and were able to close the “technology gap.” The Roman and Han governments eventually came to rely on soldiers hired from the same “barbarian” peoples who were pressing on the frontiers. Eventually, both empires were so weakened that their borders were overrun and their central governments collapsed. Ironically, the newly dominant immigrant groups were so deeply influenced by imperial culture that they maintained it to the best of their abilities.

In referring to the eventual failure of these two empires, we are brought up against important differences that led to different long-term outcomes. In China the imperial model was revived in

subsequent eras, but the lands of the Roman Empire never again achieved the same level of unification. Several interrelated factors account for the different outcomes.

First, these cultures had different attitudes about the relationship of individuals to the state. In China the individual was more deeply embedded in the larger social group. The Chinese family, with its emphasis on a precisely defined hierarchy, unquestioning obedience, and solemn rituals of deference to elders and ancestors, served as the model for society and the state. Moreover, Confucianism, which sanctified hierarchy and provided a code of conduct for public officials, arose long before the imperial system and could be revived and tailored to fit changing political circumstances. Although the Roman family had its own hierarchy and traditions of obedience, the cult of ancestors was not as strong as among the Chinese, and the family was not the organizational model for Roman society and the Roman state. Also, there was no Roman equivalent of Confucianism—no ideology of political organization and social conduct that could survive the dissolution of the Roman state.

Opportunities for economic and social mobility were greater in the Roman Empire than in ancient China. Whereas the merchant class in China was frequently disparaged and constrained by the government, the absence of government interference in the Roman Empire resulted in greater economic mobility and a thriving and influential middle class in the towns and cities. The Roman army, because it was composed of professional soldiers in service for decades and constituting a distinct and increasingly privileged group, frequently played a decisive role in political conflict. In China, on the other hand, the army was drawn from draftees who served for two years and was much less likely to take the initiative in struggles for power.

Although Roman emperors tried to create an ideology to bolster their position, they were hampered by the persistence of Republican traditions and the ambiguities about the position of emperor deliberately cultivated by Augustus. As a result, Roman rulers were likely to be chosen by the army or by the Senate; the dynastic principle never took deep root; and the cult of the emperor had little spiritual content. This stands in sharp contrast to the unambiguous Chinese belief that the emperor was the divine Son of Heaven with privileged access to the beneficent power of the royal ancestors. Thus, in the lands that had once constituted the western part of the Roman Empire, there was no compelling basis for reviving the position of emperor and the territorial claims of empire in later ages.

Finally, Christianity, with its insistence on monotheism and one doctrine of truth, negated the Roman emperor's pretensions to divinity and was unwilling to compromise with pagan beliefs. The spread of Christianity through the provinces during the Late Roman Empire, and the decline of the western half of the empire in the fifth century C.E. (see Chapter 9), constituted an irreversible break with the past. On the other hand, Buddhism, which came to China in the early centuries C.E. and flourished in the post-Han era (see Chapter 10), was more easily reconciled with traditional Chinese values and beliefs.

## KEY TERMS

**Republic** p. 142

**Senate** p. 142

**patron/client relationship** p. 143

**Principate** p. 147

**Augustus** p. 147

***equites*** p. 147

***pax romana*** p. 151

**Romanization** p. 151

**Jesus** p. 152

**Paul** p. 152

**aqueduct** p. 153

**Third-Century**

**Crisis** p. 155

**Constantine** p. 156

**Qin** p. 157

**Shi Huangdi** p. 157

**Han** p. 157

**Xiongnu** p. 158

**Gaozu** p. 159

**Sima Qian** p. 161

**Chang'an** p. 163

**gentry** p. 163

## EBOOK AND WEBSITE RESOURCES

### Primary Sources

A Man of Unlimited Ambition: Julius Caesar  
Lessons for Women

### Interactive Maps

**Map 5.1** The Roman Empire  
**Map 5.2** Han China

**Plus flashcards, practice quizzes, and more. Go to:**  
[www.cengage.com/history/bulletearthpeople5e](http://www.cengage.com/history/bulletearthpeople5e)

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## NOTES

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## AP\* REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 5

- The most essential activity in early Rome was
  - trade.
  - farming.
  - fishing.
  - military conquest.
- In Roman families, the authority figure was the oldest male. This situation is known as
  - patronage.
  - rule by the paterfamilias.
  - primogeniture.
  - the patron relationship.
- Unlike the Greeks, the Romans
  - were a peaceful people who practiced diplomacy over farming.
  - were a naval power.
  - granted Roman citizenship to conquered people.
  - forced conversion to the Roman state religion.
- One of the major impacts of the pax romana was
  - the facilitation of trade.
  - major wars against Persia.
  - the conquest of Arabia.
  - the rise of tenant farming.
- One of the most enduring consequences of the Roman Empire was
  - the expansion of the Roman tax system.
  - the idea of electing officials.
  - the spread of the Latin language.
  - Roman military arts.
- The Romans originally viewed Christians negatively because
  - they were not Roman in origin.
  - Jesus had offended the Roman government.
  - Judaism was a banned religion.
  - their monotheism kept them from worshiping the Roman emperor.
- As the Western Roman Empire collapsed in the 500s, Rome
  - remained the locus of the Christian church.
  - was abandoned by all of the wealthy citizens.
  - lost its trade centers to Naples.
  - became the capital of the Franks.
- By the early Han dynasty, China's population had
  - stabilized and stopped growing due to the warfare of the time.
  - shifted away from the river valleys.
  - become centered on Beijing.
  - grown because of intensive agricultural practices.
- Like Rome, the Qin and Han
  - faced similar problems with defense of the empire.
  - had to delegate autonomy to local officials.
  - built thousands of miles of roads to facilitate trade.
  - All of the above
- Qin and Han emperors had to ally themselves with the gentry as one strategy to weaken the rural aristocrats. In China, the gentry were
  - similar to peasant farmers in Europe.
  - the class of prosperous and educated families just below the aristocrats.
  - the traditional warrior class of China.
  - the lower class of priests.
- Which of the following is true of the Han collapse?
  - Nomadic bands raided.
  - Official corruption spread.
  - Peasant uprisings increased.
  - All of the above
- Which of the following is true of Rome and the Han dynasty?
  - Buddhism was more easily reconciled with the Han than Christianity was with Rome.
  - Both Rome and the Han were governed by ethnic minorities.
  - Rome and Han armies were made up of mercenary soldiers.
  - Both Rome and the Han used the idea of the Mandate of Heaven.