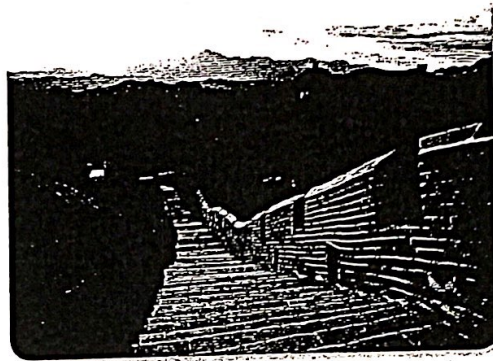
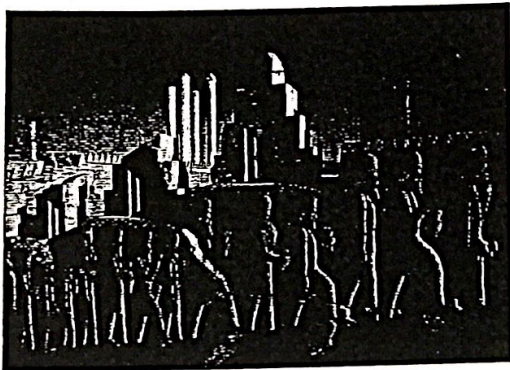


PART

2

THE FORMATION OF CLASSICAL SOCIETIES, ca. 500 B.C.E. TO ca. 500 C.E.



AP FOCUS ON THEMES

- Theme 1: Interaction Between Humans and the Environment
- Theme 2: Development and Interaction of Cultures
- Theme 3: State Building, Expansion, and Conflict
- Theme 4: Creation, Expansion, and Interaction of Economic Systems
- Theme 5: Development and Transformation of Social Structures

Period 2 of the AP World History curriculum dates from ca. 600 B.C.E. to ca. 600 C.E., and is often called the “classical” era by historians—meaning that something from this period of time became a long-established pattern or tradition extending beyond ca. 600 C.E. Recall that historians often differ in how they classify chronological time periods and dates. In these next chapters, you will read about types of governments, cultural traditions, religions, economic systems, and social structures that developed out of the foundations era (Period 1) to become the patterns of human life for the next two millennia. Period 2 ends ca. 600 C.E. when all these classical empires have collapsed; however, many of their traditions endure.

As populations grew and urban-based societies increased, there were many more opportunities for humans of different regions to come in contact with one another. New technologies of travel, massive road networks, and desires for both trade and conquest made these interactions more common—and when two or more cultures came in contact with one another, their two cultures often combined to create new and vibrant cultural combinations, or cultural syntheses.

The classical era is a time of massive empire-building. The simplest definition of an empire is that it is assembled by conquest, it is large, and it is multi-ethnic. There were small empires in the foundations era (the Babylonian Empire), but the classical empires were huge. Sheer size presented

equally-huge problems: how to build a government structure to manage an empire; how to acquire and pay for large militaries to conquer and maintain the empire; how to communicate with lands far away from the capitol, and how to maintain peace and prosperity within a multi-ethnic population. As you move through this period, take notes on the similarities and differences of how imperial states organized their governments and enforced their authority—that is, whether it enforced through laws, bureaucracies (people who work for the government), militaries, and whether they used religious ideas to bolster their political authority. Another point of comparison is how these empires accommodated their multi-ethnic populations: did they try to dilute the ethnic groups by moving them around, or did they offer them some sort of citizenship or legal tolerance?

Conquest was one way to get to know another culture; another was trade. A major theme of the classical era (Period 2) is the emergence of trade and communications networks with peoples in other regions. These are called either transregional or interregional networks (the terms mean the same thing). We saw smaller versions of these trade routes earlier, but now they are expanded and intensified. There were massive systems of paved or government-maintained roads in all the classical empires, including the Maya and probably the Moche. These routes could be both land- and water-based (maritime).

You need to know where and why specific trade routes existed, who traveled along them, and with whom they did business. Whenever trade routes appear in World History, watch for the four M's: merchants, militaries, missionaries,



and migrants. Trade routes allow the transport of much more than just merchandise across regions. Interregional trade is an enormously important theme in AP World History, and you will be asked about it over and over again on the AP exam.

Pay particular attention when nomadic/pastoralist peoples are mentioned. They often functioned as the “truckers” of the trade routes and were important links in commercial networks—they also occasionally invaded the empires. Watch also for unintended consequences of movement along the trade routes. Diseases hitchhiked with the travelers and their goods, and periodically wreaked havoc. Epidemics, or even pandemics, broke out in most of the major empires in the later dates of this period and contributed to the destruction of the Han Chinese, Roman, and Gupta empires.

Many of the social structures that began in the first urban-based societies continue in the classical era. Imperial societies were all patriarchal (controlled by men, believing that men were superior to women) and hierarchical (ordered like a ladder, from top to bottom). These social structures solidified in classical empires and became “traditional” in later periods. Governments and religions supported these divisions. If you lived in a classical imperial society, you were identified with a specific social class, and you knew perfectly well who was above you and who was below you on the social scale. Classical civilizations divided their societies into groups of landowners, unskilled workers, artisans (skilled craftsmen), merchants, military and government bureaucrats, and slaves (unfree labor) of some sort. The order of significant classes, however, could vary. In Han China, for example, merchants were not considered middle class; and in Mauryan and Gupta India, the priestly class ranked higher than rulers and warriors. As you read about each classical society, be sure you understand how their social structure was organized; how religions

reinforced these social structures; if there was something unique about a particular society's way of organizing its people into classes; and the responsibilities of, and taxes owed, by each social class. And take particular note of the conflict between the classes—it was often the conflicts that were partially responsible for toppling these empires.

In the foundations era, we saw societies develop religions and belief systems to explain the natural world around them: animism, shamanism, polytheism, ancestor worship (veneration), and the early phases of what developed into Hinduism and Judaism. Judaism and Hinduism continued to mature so that by the end of the classical era believers had common sets of practices, scriptures, and beliefs. Historians say that the religions were “codified.” Along with older belief systems, new belief systems emerged that remain significant today: Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Christianity. In AP World History, we see these abiding religions and beliefs begin to develop, and we wait until the postclassical era (the early part of AP World History Period 3) to see them spread beyond the boundaries of their homelands by the four M's on the trade routes.

Each of the classical societies or civilizations developed distinct, unique, cultural traditions that endured long past the demise of the empire. The buildings in Washington, D.C., for example, reflect the influence of Greco-Roman architecture, and the hopes of being just as great as that culture. A society's art, architecture, drama, and sculpture tell historians a great deal about a society's values, beliefs, interests, and technological abilities. These cultural “documents” sometimes give us a glimpse into the human side of a long-dead society: its sense of humor, for example, or its standards of beauty. These cultural documents also provide examples when historians look for evidence of one society learning and adopting information or styles from another society. We watch merchants bring their religious ideas to new places along their trade routes, and then the local people often integrating their old beliefs with new ones, a process called syncretism (blending). Historians find evidence of this syncretism in buildings and artwork as well as written works. The AP exam may use a photograph or a quotation from a classical empire to ask you questions about the values of the empire itself, or about cultural syncretism evident in a particular work of art.

AP THINKING ABOUT THEMES

1. *What were some of the features common to most of the classical societies?*
2. *In what ways do the legacies of the classical societies continue to influence the world's peoples?*