

Chapter 4

What Led to the Emergence and Collapse of Large Scale Empires?

What are the shared characteristics of the classical civilizations?

What are the defining characteristics of city states, civilizations, and empires?

How did legal codes, belief systems, and written language aid in the development of large regional empires?

How did governmental authority, military power, taxation, coerced labor, and slavery help in the building and maintenance of empires?

What role did geography play in the development of empires?

How did new trade routes develop and how did that economically impact all groups?

How did cooperation and conflict impact the growth and spread of empires?

What new economic systems were created during this era?



Section 1

How are Civilizations and Empires Similar and Different?

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What are the shared characteristics of the classical civilizations?
2. What are the defining characteristics of city- states, civilizations, and empires?

Terms, places, and people:

Civilizations

Empires

What is an empire? How did they grow? What did they do? How did they work? Why do they decline and fall? These are some of the questions that historians have studied and tried to figure out for centuries. In this chapter you will learn about the difference between a civilization and an empire, the characteristics of empires, the impact of geography on civilizations and empires, how trade developed, and how empires were governed. Finally you will look at some examples of empires from this age.

In the previous unit you learned about the early river valley civilizations and the development of a new way of living for humans.

Civilizations and **empires** had many similarities which can make it hard to tell the difference



between the two. This is because at their very basic level empires exist as a subset of civilizations. By that, we mean some civilizations develop into empires as they progress, however, not all civilizations develop into empires. There are differences that can be looked for to help clarify and sort out which one is which and when a group of people has transitioned into being an empire.

The seven characteristics of civilizations, discussed earlier in the book, are: cities, government and law, system of writing, specialization, social systems, complex technology, and culture, including organized religion. Empires have all of these things as well making the two appear, on the surface at least, to be very similar. The most important difference between empires and civilizations lies with three main points: size, how they are governed, and growth.

We have already discussed that empires are characterized by their large size, something that is not a characteristic of much smaller civilizations. In fact, most empires are a collection of civilizations brought under one ruler. These civilizations are brought into the empires and governed by force, as opposed to civilizations, which developed their own forms of leadership over time

Finally, empires typically grow and collapse much more quickly than civilizations. Empires tended to be much less stable, growing quickly into massive sizes only to collapse in on themselves and disappear in a very short time.

Ultimately, like many things in history, there is no perfect definition of exactly what is a civilization and what is an empire. There are places and people that fit some but not all, and a constant debate for historians is how do we define and classify these places.

7 Characteristics of Empires

1. Cities
2. Government and law
3. System of Writing
4. Specialization
5. Social systems
6. Complex technology
7. Organized religion



What are the Characteristics of an Empire?

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What are the shared characteristics of the classical civilizations?
2. What are the defining characteristics of city- states, civilizations, and empires?

Empires were one of the most important forces of Era 3. Empires changed and shaped the world and began to draw people more closely together. But, what are the characteristics of an empire? How do we know when an empire has developed? These are just two of the questions to explore when studying world history.



One of the first characteristics of empires is their large size. Humans began living closely along the banks of rivers and the coasts of oceans, but by this era empires spanned thousands, and sometimes more than a million, square miles. At its peak, the Roman Empire covered a territory of approximately 1.69 million square miles and the Achaemenid Empire covered an area of approximately 3.29 million square miles. By comparison, the state of Michigan is approximately 96,716 square miles. As these empires began to stretch out and cover large territory they began to grow in terms of populations as well.

A second important characteristic of empires is their large populations. The old river valley civilizations and city-states contained many people, but these new empires had incredibly large amounts of people living in them. Estimates put the population of Rome between 50 million and 100 million people at its peak and the Han dynasty of China is estimated to have had around 57 million people. While it is difficult to determine exact totals due to unreliable data, that is still a lot of people! As these

populations rose and borders expanded, empires began to pull more and more people into their territory and under their control.

A third characteristic of empires is the fact that they rule over regions and people who live far away from where power and the government are centered, known as the core of the empire. This is an important change; people living in city-states usually were under the local control of their individual leaders. As the empires of this age expanded and developed they began to pull new

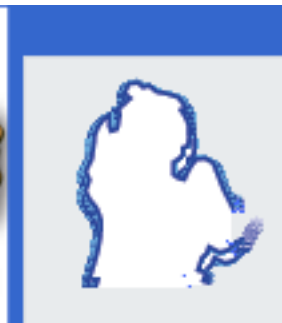
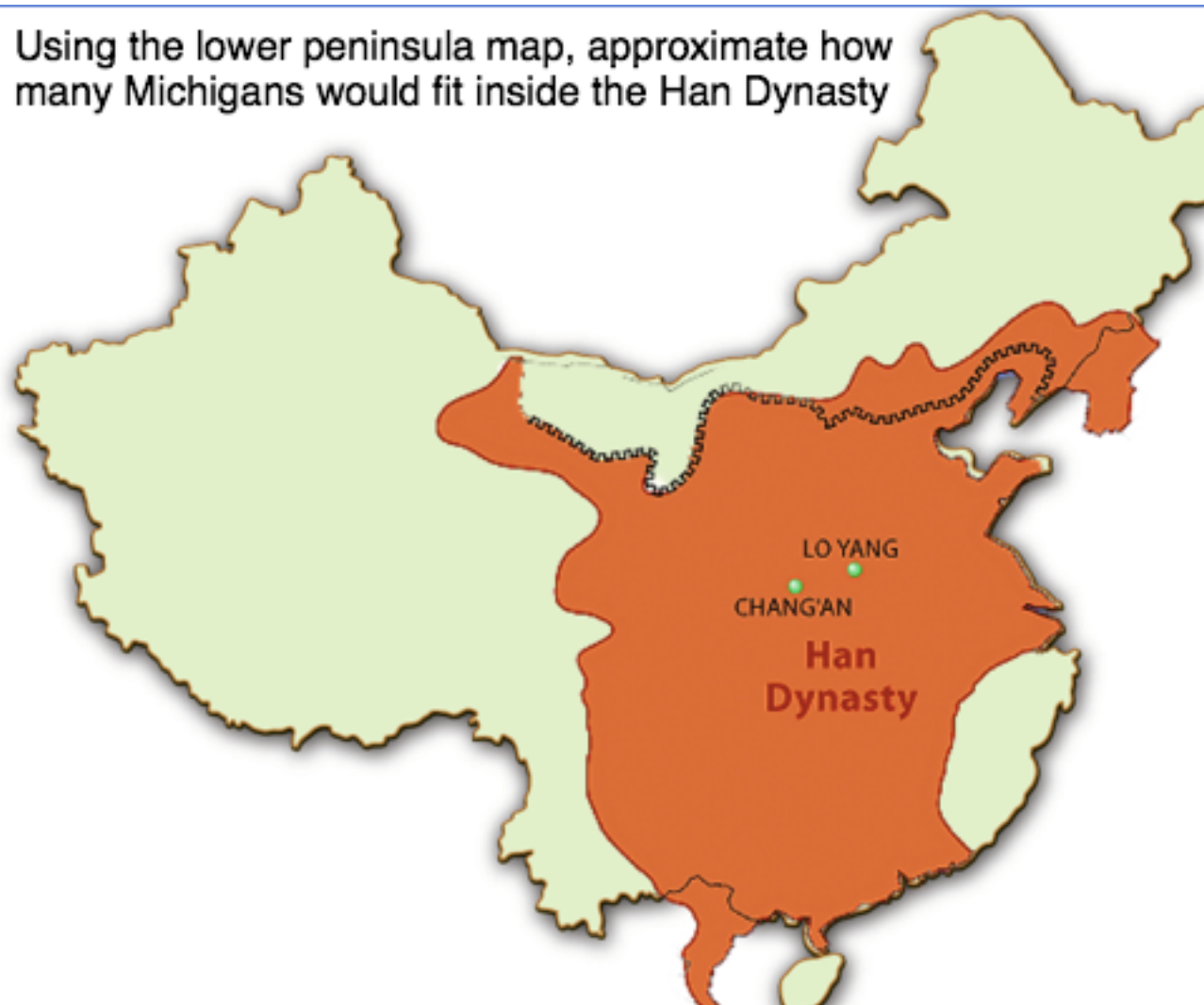
people and places under their control.

Some empires forced these new subjects to adapt and change while others allowed them to continue their lives as normal. We will see examples of these later in this chapter.

Finally, the empires of this age were characterized by monarchy and oligarchy government systems. The majority of these empires were controlled by a single ruler (called a king or emperor) or a group of rulers called oligarchs. In either case, the ruler or rulers held total and absolute power over their territory and attempted to control all aspects of the lives of the people living within their borders. Whatever belief system the emperors held so did those of

Interactive 4.1 How Many Michigan Lower Peninsulas?

Using the lower peninsula map, approximate how many Michigans would fit inside the Han Dynasty



the people they ruled. The famous example of this is when Constantine converted not only himself, but the entire Roman Empire, to Christianity before his death. You will read more about this in a later chapter. These absolute rulers used legal codes and communication as the means by which they ruled their empires. Language and forms of communication were useful in tying together groups of people within the empire who may have little else in common. Systems of law provided people of all different backgrounds with a set of rules and expectations that would be accepted and universal across the empire.

The Impact of Geography on Empires

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What are the shared characteristics of the classical civilizations?
2. What are the defining characteristics of city- states, civilizations, and empires?

Terms, places, and people:

Persians

As mentioned in previous sections of this book, geography plays an important role in history and how things change and develop. This is also the case when it comes to empires. Many empires started geographically in places where city-states and civilizations already existed, which helps support the idea that empires were in fact subsets of civilizations. We have already discussed how these places had good climates, access to a steady food supply, and access to resources. But how else did geography impact and influence human life and development?

Geography greatly impacted empires in a number of different ways. In some cases empires were aided and protected by geography and in other cases empires were limited and hindered by their geography. Why were the **Persians** able to construct one of the largest empires in the world? When you examine geography the answer becomes clearer: there are very few geographical barriers in that region of the world which allowed them to expand and grow into a massive empire.

Geographical barriers could also act as a source of protection for empires. As you learned in the previous chapter, the Chinese Empire enjoyed protection on three sides with natural barriers to potential invaders. They decided to build a wall where natural barriers didn't exist.

By contrast, some regions were limited and constrained by the geographic barriers surrounding them. The Indian Empires were limited by the fact that they were a peninsula closed on their northern edge by the world's tallest mountains. The Roman Empire was also unable to expand further into Africa due to the massive Sahara Desert.

Geographic barriers greatly impacted the stability of many empires in this time as well. The Middle East, which we know had few geographic barriers, saw the most turmoil and conflict during this time. Empires rapidly grew, shrank, and competed with one another over this large and ever changing space. By comparison the Indian and Chinese Empires, sheltered by mountains and highlands, enjoyed more stability and faced fewer external threats. This is one reason why China maintained its empire for hundreds of years.

Geographical barriers were significant but not insurmountable. We will see how they were sometimes overcome in later sections of this unit.

Let's explore some maps and see

if we can uncover how geography affects empires. Each of the maps below shows not only the empire, but also the “core” area of the empire, which is represented by the shape inside the empire.

After examining these maps how do you think geography aided each of these individual empires? How do you think it could have limited these empires? Use specific geographic examples from each map to explain your thinking in this interactive where you will explain how geography both aided and hindered empires.

Gallery 4.1 Empire Maps



World Map (Map copied with permission from Phil Gersmehl)

The Development and Impact of Trade Networks

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What are the shared characteristics of the classical civilizations?
2. What are the defining characteristics of city- states, civilizations, and empires?

Terms, places, and people:

trade

Silk Road

cultural diffusion

Trade became an economic pillar and was incredibly important for the creation and survival of empires. Trade provided these large-scale empires with the resources and goods that they needed to survive and could not make for themselves, or did not have access to. Trade also gave them access to faraway markets and places to sell the things they produced. This is supply and demand economics at its very basic level. For this reason trade routes became the veins



and arteries that fed the hearts of the empires. By the end of Era 3, nearly all of the empires were connected and interacted along these increasingly important trade routes marking the first real move toward what we refer to today as globalization.

The most famous of these trade routes was **the Silk Road**. The Silk Road was a massive connection of trade routes linking China and the Roman Empire. Romans had acquired a love for silk fabrics, and the only people in the world who knew the secret to producing that silk were the Chinese. Traders would begin travelling along the Silk Road like runners in a relay, passing the silk from traveler to traveler along the route until they eventually reached their destination. Travel could be dangerous, but the rewards were great for those who traveled along the Silk Road.



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Goods were not the only things that traveled along the Silk Road. As traders went from place to place they shared language, stories, ideas, technology, and even religion. Just as goods moved from one empire to another so did these other equally important products. They helped to develop an increasingly connected world in which ideas were more freely shared among all of humanity. This process is known as **cultural diffusion** and it was not unique to this era of history. It happened in previous eras and still happens to this day.

Empires usually found it mutually beneficial to exchange goods along these trade routes. But there were times when the empires could come in conflict. At these times, a secondary impact of these roads and trade routes was that they provided a ready-made access point to invade the empire.

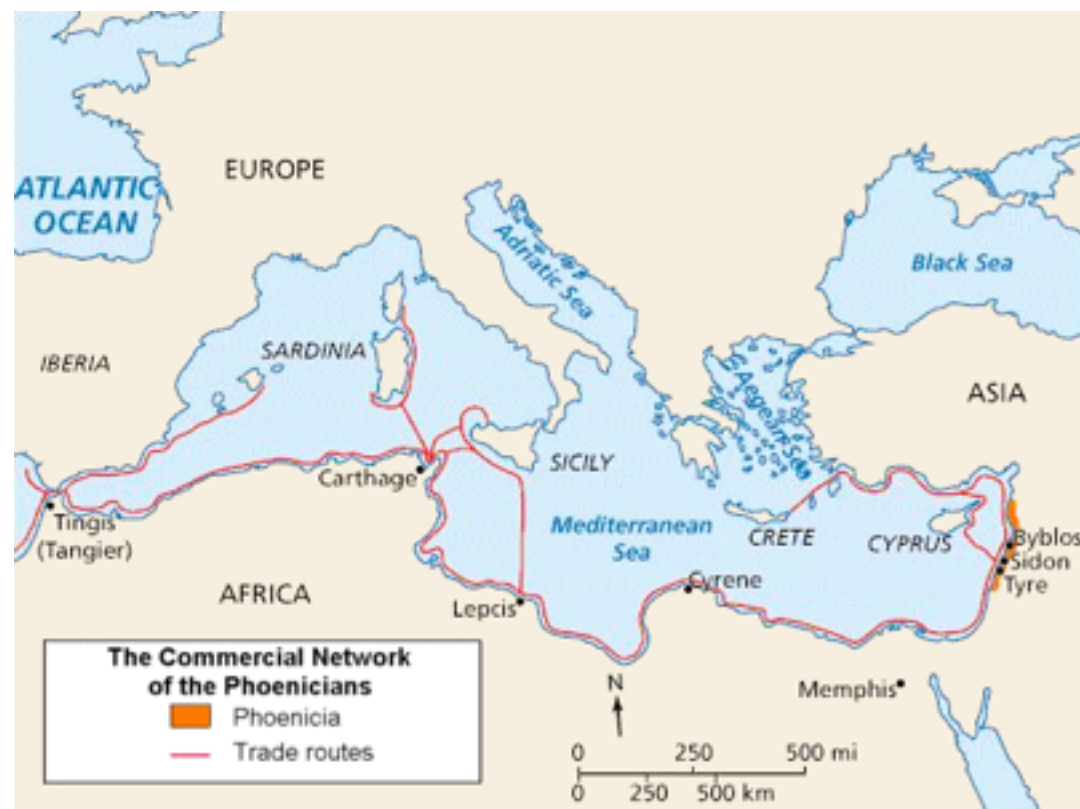
It would be impossible to talk about trade routes and the Silk Road without mentioning the humble camel. Often overlooked, the camel was vitally important to the success of trade routes. Like trucks on the roadways today, camels were the main method of transport and travel along these trade routes. Camels could traverse the variety of terrains



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that existed along the Silk Road and other trade routes. From high mountain passes to burning desert sands, the camel's ability to carry heavy loads while needing little water made it an indispensable creature that was vital to the success of trading.

Finally, it is important to examine the success of trade routes over water as well. One of the most powerful groups of traders at the beginning of this era were the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians were expert ship builders who used this knowledge and their location to become incredibly rich. The Phoenicians traded with the Egyptians, the Mesopotamians, and places across Africa by sailing around the Mediterranean Sea. The Phoenicians used these overwater trade routes to achieve great success for several



By Yom (talk · contribs) - Own work based on: ar:File:Ph routes.jpg Transferred from en.wikipedia to Commons by Akigka., CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1074993>

hundred years. As the Greek city-states grew more powerful they challenged and ultimately defeated the Phoenicians taking over their trade routes and building wealth of their own. Later, the Roman Empire, as we saw on an earlier map, would control all of the trade routes in the Mediterranean and the surrounding land, completely controlling the region.



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How Are Empires Governed?

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What are the shared characteristics of the classical civilizations?
2. What are the defining characteristics of city- states, civilizations, and empires?

Terms, places, and people:

social hierarchies

With their complex size, empires required more developed systems of managing all of the people living within its boundaries. While a king easily ruled over a city-state or civilization, the rulers of empires needed more complex ways to control and manage the population. One of the most obvious ways was through the establishment of social hierarchies. Hierarchies had already existed prior to empire building, but empires developed much more elaborate social hierarchies and organizations for their societies.

In the previous chapter, you may have noticed that a common feature of all of these hierarchies and empires was an all-powerful ruler at the top who was responsible for controlling and ruling the empire. The majority of these rulers created an autocracy, a government in which they were the sole ruler, or an oligarchy, where the empire was ruled by a small group of people. Many empires passed power down through family lines in what is known as a dynasty. These rulers families often made up the next level of the social hierarchy and had great power and wealth.

The middle of the **social hierarchies** tended to be made up of skilled workers and craftsmen. These workers were responsible for the “day-to-day” work of the empire. They were the sculptors, carpenters, traders, and merchants who helped empires to run smoothly. These people could be viewed as your average everyday citizens of the empire. Despite the relatively little power granted to these people,

they held an important role in the empires. Women did not hold a place on many of the hierarchies of the ancient world. Unlike earlier time periods when women often held equal roles as men, women in Era 3 began to see their status decline. In many cases they were not allowed to read and write, they were not involved in the running of empires, and they were very rarely mentioned in many of the histories of the day.

Another common feature of these hierarchies were the people located at the bottom. Practically all empires practiced some form of slavery or forced servitude. Slaves could come from many different places; they could be prisoners of war, people who owed debts, or criminals. In some empires slave status was passed on to the next generation meaning people could be born into slavery. In some there were opportunities for slaves to work their way out of slavery. Treatment of the slaves tended to be harsh and they oftentimes worked the worst jobs within the empire. Some slaves were able to attain freedom, but the few that did rarely achieved a higher social status.

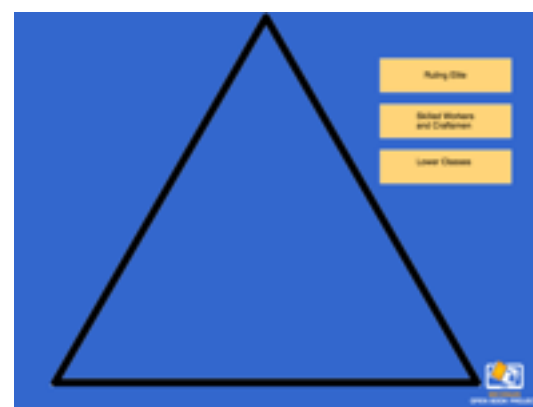
It is impossible to overlook the contributions made by slaves within the empires. In many cases, slaves literally built and maintained the physical structure

of the empire by constructing and maintaining homes, roads, **aqueducts**, palaces, theaters, and other important buildings and structures - the very things thousands of years later are often admired as an empire's great achievements. Though the way it was practiced varied from place to place, one thing is certain: slavery was a part of the society and culture of nearly every empire during this era.

In many empires, belief systems and language were the glue that helped to connect and hold empires together, regardless of who was in charge or what internal struggles developed. You will be learning much more about religion in the next chapter. Religion provided explanations for many things in the world that people could not otherwise explain and helped to connect people who may have little else in common. Languages, like religion, helped to stitch together groups of people spread over large areas and allowed governing officials to easily communicate amongst themselves and to the people that they were in charge of governing.

Militaries became an important and pivotal group within empires. While most were typically from lower ranks in the social hierarchies, military leadership could often be from some of the upper ranks. These leaders had some ability to control and sway the way that empires ran. Militaries were one of the most important tools that an emperor would use to govern their empire. They could be used to expand the empire, protect the empire,

Interactive 4.2 Social Hierarchies



Can you place these three groups in the proper order?



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and to enforce the rules of the emperor. Militaries filled their ranks with conscripts and volunteers who oftentimes had few other options within the hierarchy that existed in their empire. Like any tool, if the emperor used it incorrectly or unsafely it could be dangerous to them. A ruler without control of the military would be unable to protect their empire or enforce their rules. In some cases the military itself was responsible for the overthrow of, and replacement of, emperors.

Money was the final, and in some ways, most crucial piece of governing an empire. Empires required massive amounts of money to keep themselves stable and working. This money



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came primarily from two places: conquest and taxes. The business of conquering new areas was expensive but resulted in big rewards for emperors. Prisoners of war and conquered people could be used as slaves within the empires, and the access to new resources could create vast sources of new wealth. Emperors could also impose tax systems that would require citizens to pay taxes that would help the government's wealth grow.

Conquest and raising taxes, while supporting empires, could also prove to be a disaster. If things did not go well and a conquest failed there is no reward for the risk taken by the leader, making it an unpopular and costly decision. Taxes, if too high or seen as unfair by the people, could lead to internal instability that could cause the empire to collapse. The most successful leaders had to be good at balancing the risk and reward that came along with building and growing their empires, while also ensuring financial peace and stability within the empire.

Exploring Major Empires of Era 3

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What are the shared characteristics of the classical civilizations?
2. What are the defining characteristics of city- states, civilizations, and empires?

Terms, places, and people:

Alexander the Great

Democracy

The Greeks and Alexander the Great

Whether the Greeks truly represented an empire before the rise of Alexander the Great (who you will learn about shortly) is a question that historians will likely continue to explore for many years to come. They certainly fit the criteria for civilization. However, the Greeks are often seen as the forerunner to many of the empires and to much of Western Civilization. It is important that they are mentioned here. The Greek Civilization was a loose collection of city-states controlled by different types of governing systems ranging from the Kings of Sparta to the Athenian form of **Democracy**. Greek city-states would often battle each other over who would control and manage the peninsula, as Athens and Sparta did during the Peloponnesian Wars. Those same Greek city-states would also form allegiances and alliances to fight against common enemies when their homelands were threatened, as they did against the Persians. The Greeks have left many legacies which still resound with us in the world today, which are further discussed in a

Interactive 4.3 Leonidas



Learn more about Leonidas and the 300 in this video from the History Channel.

Interactive 4.4 Olympics



Learn about the origin of the Olympics in this video.

later chapter.

Greek Democracy would inspire countless future governments, Greek historians and poets would write tales that would last until modern times, and they would create architectural structures that would be copied for thousands of years. We can even thank them for the Olympic games! But who were they and where did they come from? Humans have been living in and around the Greek Peninsula since the Neolithic era. The first “Greeks” were the

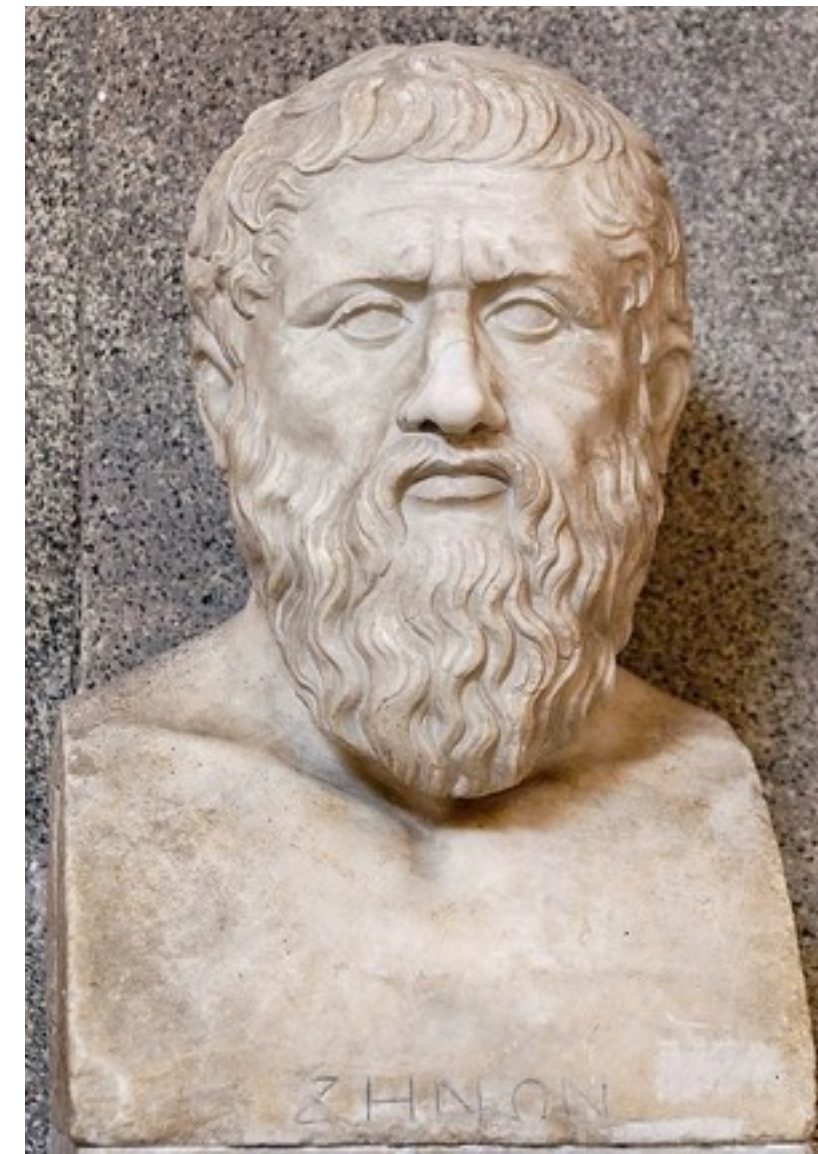


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Minoans and Mycenaeans that appeared during the Bronze Age.

The disappearance of these groups began a period of little development and activity in Greek history. Around 700 BCE Greek populations began to grow and city-states began to rapidly form and develop. Two of the most famous and easily recognized groups of the “classical period” in Greece are Athens and Sparta.

The Athenians were one of the two most powerful city-states on the Greek peninsula. The Athenians were some of the first to practice true direct democracy. Athens was a center of education, learning, culture, and art. Some of the most famous poets, historians, and artists called Athens home. These are people and ideas that have survived through the ages and impact us to this day. Students still learn about Aristotle and Socrates and still read the works of Homer.



By Marie-Lan Nguyen (2009), CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9057273>

Many of the principles of democracy practiced today can be traced back to Greece.



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The Spartans were in many ways the opposite of Athenians. They had an incredibly strict society ruled over by two kings, not the people. Sparta focused on discipline and military tactics, crafting one of the best militaries the world had ever seen. These two city-states were in a constant struggle over who would

control the Greek peninsula. The Spartans and Athenians joined together on several occasions to battle the Persians and to protect Greece from invaders. But the two groups also engaged in decades of bloody war, called the Peloponnesian War, that would ultimately lead to the decline of both.

In the wake of the Peloponnesian War, Athens and Sparta declined, leaving Greece without any leading city-state. The city-state of Macedonia rose to power in this environment and their leader Philipp II worked to control more territory. His assassination led to one of the most significant Greeks in all of history taking control, Alexander the Great. Alexander embodied the significance and importance of strong leaders. He quickly took control of and conquered the Greek mainland and began to invade into Asia. Alexander the Great was a fantastic warrior and a superb leader who boldly expanded his control and began to absorb more and more territory and people under his control. He integrated and added new people into his ranks and spread Greek culture across the areas that he conquered.

Alexander's empire collapsed shortly after his death, lasting only as long as he was alive, but the impacts of this newly created empire lasted far beyond his death. Hellenistic (Greek) culture went from being locked into the Greek peninsula to spreading around the Mediterranean Sea and into Asia. Greek thinking, language, and ideas spread far and wide, greatly impacting not

only the people in the area but the empires that would grow out of the remnants of Alexander's massive, but short lived, empire.



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Interactive 4.5 Sparta



Learn more about Sparta in this video!



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Persia (Achaemenid Empire)

The rise of the Persian (Achaemenid) Empire began around 550 BCE when a group of nomadic tribes were united by a leader named Cyrus. Cyrus was able to conquer older empires which laid the groundwork for the creation of his own. Cyrus went on to add neighboring city-states and kingdoms to grow his empire into the largest of this time period. Cyrus faced the simple, yet important, issue discussed earlier in this chapter: “How do you manage and govern people with such diverse backgrounds and cultures?”

Cyrus developed a system that was different than some of the other empires discussed within this unit. The regions controlled by Cyrus were allowed to keep their religions, their practices, their culture, and in some cases their rulers. The only thing Cyrus required was the conquered subjects pay taxes to the empire.

Initially, this was widely popular and allowed the Achaemenid Empire to easily absorb other groups into its control. As the Persians grew, however, this system lacked the stability and control that was required and the empire faced internal pressures.

Cyrus’s son Cambyses II was able to expand and grow by conquering Egypt, but while he was away a group of priests attempted to steal the throne and take control of the empire.

Cambyses died and his successor Darius I was able to restore order to the empire and even expand further into the Indus Valley.

Darius also reorganized the government to make it run more



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efficiently; he divided the empire into 20 regions known as satraps with appointed governors to rule and govern over each one. Darius also worked to connect these regions further through a series of roads and a postal service that allowed information, people, and goods to travel freely and easily throughout the Achaemenid Empire.

Beginning around 500 BCE revolts and uprisings began by Greeks in the city-state of Ionia.

Darius was able to stop the rebellion but wanted to punish the Greeks by attacking Athens and raising taxes because they had supported the uprisings.

Darius was defeated by the Athenians at the Battle of Marathon, and other regions began to rebel in response to the higher taxes. Rule fell to Xerxes I, the son of Darius, who sought to restore peace and order to the empire. Xerxes lacked the understanding of how government and politics worked as well as not knowing about the different cultures that made up the people that he ruled like Cyrus and Darius had when they ruled.

Xerxes attempted to avenge his father by attacking the Greeks but was defeated after several massive land and sea battles.

Xerxes returned back to his empire and withdrew from controlling the empire. He spent his wealth and power while neglecting the



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empire he had attempted to build. Over the years the emperors continued to withdraw and lost support of the satraps and their citizens. The empire began to fall apart and was finally conquered by Alexander the Great in 334 BCE.

The Achaemenid rulers accomplished many things, most of which helped them to govern over their large empire. They created silver and gold coins that had the same value no matter where you traveled within their territory. They also



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encouraged trade with other groups as well as within their own empire by building road and trade routes between them. Different parts of the empire were also used to provide different needs of the people. One example of this was grain was grown in the fertile Nile River Valley in Egypt and gold, which was supplied from India. They also created an elaborate tax system which depended on what your region supplied, or did not supply.

The Achaemenid empire was one of the first large-scale empires in the world, and, whether directly or indirectly, it would impact the others that would follow after it.

Rome

Rome is one of the most widely discussed and studied empires of this age. It was not the the longest lasting, but what they were able to achieve in the time they occupied is truly remarkable. The remnants of the Roman Empire are visible across Europe and Northern Africa, and the legacy of Rome is visible all across the globe. Rome likely began as a small kingdom, possibly as early as 600 BCE, with the city of Rome being founded in 750 BCE. Over time Rome grew and developed into a Republic. The Roman Republic was ruled by a king who worked closely beside the Senate to make laws and govern the country. In fact, in many ways the founding fathers of the United States modeled our government after the Roman Republic.

The Roman Republic began to face pressure after battling Carthage, a city across the Mediterranean in North Africa, in the Punic Wars which required significant resources. The Roman Republic was further threatened when a civil war resulted from a slave uprising, led by a man named Spartacus, and order was restored by Julius Caesar. Caesar named himself Emperor of Rome, but the Roman Senate assassinated him, hoping that their Republic could be restored after years of turmoil. It couldn't.

Julius Caesar's death led to another civil war among generals and their followers and Caesar's nephew, Octavius emerged as the victor. Octavius's power and control was enough that the Senate didn't challenge his claim to be Emperor. Under him and several successors, Rome continued to grow and expand as an empire until it reached its peak in 117 CE. This time period of expansive growth is known as the Pax Romana (latin for Roman Peace); it lasted until 180 CE with the death of Emperor Marcus



Aurelius.

As Rome grew it began to face pressure and conflict from within and without. Rome faced conflict at its borders that forced the Romans to build and maintain massive armies to protect itself.

Germanic tribes from central Europe were constantly putting pressure on the Roman borders, and the Huns from Asia also fought with and attacked at the borders of the Roman Empire.

Rome struggled to feed and manage the people within the empire and constantly faced internal pressures and divisions.

The growth of Christianity and the persecution of Christians also created great strife within the empire.

Rome would eventually divide into two empires: the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Byzantine Empire. The goal was to make the management of Rome easier by having two emperors who would work together to manage the massive land, resources, and people. The Western Roman Empire fell apart and the city of Rome was sacked by Visigoths and Vandals and the last Roman Emperor was removed from power in 476 CE. The Byzantine Empire would survive for another 1,000 years, but would struggle to match the success of the full Roman Empire.

What was life like in the capital city of Rome? What did they do for work and what did they do for fun? We will seek to discover some of these answers as we learn more about the Romans.

How Romans lived was impacted by their economic and social status. Wealthy Romans lived in large houses located on the

outskirts of the city that were taken care of by slaves and servants. These wealthy Romans had access to delicious food and nearly any luxury they could want. Poor Romans, on the other hand, tended to live within the city itself in small houses or apartment-style complexes. These houses were dangerous and food could be scarce, but these Romans wielded a lot of power.

The “mob” as they were called had to be kept happy and controlled.

Romans, regardless of wealth, enjoyed many of the same social activities. A favorite of the rich and poor alike were the gladiatorial games. Romans would gather and watch executions, animal hunts, and gladiators battle each other to the death.

Gladiators were like the rock stars of Rome, gaining fame and recognition, despite often times being slaves.

Romans also visited the public baths practically every single



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day. Here Romans would gather to wash themselves and to socialize with one another. The public baths were just one of many amazing innovations that the Romans created. Follow this link to learn more about it!

Interactive 4.6 Roman Innovation



Top 10 Roman Innovations page and video

China (Han Dynasty)

The Han Dynasty in China was one of the largest in China and is responsible for developing some of the most important and lasting technologies of the age. The Han Dynasty began in 206 BCE and ended a tumultuous time in Chinese history. While the Qin Dynasty before it was the first true empire in Chinese history, it was marked by social, political, and religious upheavals. The Han Dynasty was the first cultural “Golden Age” in

Chinese history that saw a durable and stable government, economic growth, extensive record keeping, and historically important innovations.

The government in Han China was organized similar to the Qin Empire that came before it. It was organized into centralized areas like states with appointed government officials. These government officials were well educated, given an official salary, and were given raises and promotions based on how well they worked. The Han Dynasty also based their governing principles on the ideas of Confucius. This helped them to create a system of governing that was able to manage society while keeping people unaware of the authoritarian governing style.

The Han Chinese were a very literate society and were known as some of the greatest record keepers of the ancient world. They wrote everything down and compiled massive histories, the most famous of



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漢朝
漢朝
汉朝

which was written by a historian named Sima Qian. The history is known as the “Records of the Grand Historian” and is one of the most complete histories of China. It not only included a history of the Chinese people but it also included information about the people they interacted with, especially the Romans.

The rulers of Han China worked to open up trade routes to the West by helping to establish the Silk Roads. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Silk Roads were crucial in not only connecting the people of this era, but also in the trade of resources, goods, and ideas. The Chinese secret to making silk, combined with a craze for it in Rome, led to a lucrative trade between Han China and the Romans.

As the Chinese continued to gain more and more wealth from trade they continued to advance and develop their empire.

The Han Chinese are also responsible for creating many



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inventions, which, in some form or another, are still in use across the world today. Paper was invented in Han China, but they did not use it for record keeping; they primarily wrote on wood and bamboo slips. The Han also worked to develop advanced crossbows and other military technology. They also created a working compass which used a magnetic spoon to point South as well as creating one of the world’s first seismographs to detect earthquakes. The Chinese were also known for their high-quality lacquered pottery and their ability to mass produce iron through smelting.



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India (Mauryan)

The Mauryan Empire was created in the wake of Alexander the Great's empire collapsing. The first leader of the Mauryan Empire, Chandragupta, worked to control an area that covered nearly the entire Indian subcontinent. Chandragupta passed rule to his son Bindusara who continued to expand the empire farther South into the Indian subcontinent. Ashoka was one of one of the most famous emperors in all of Indian history.

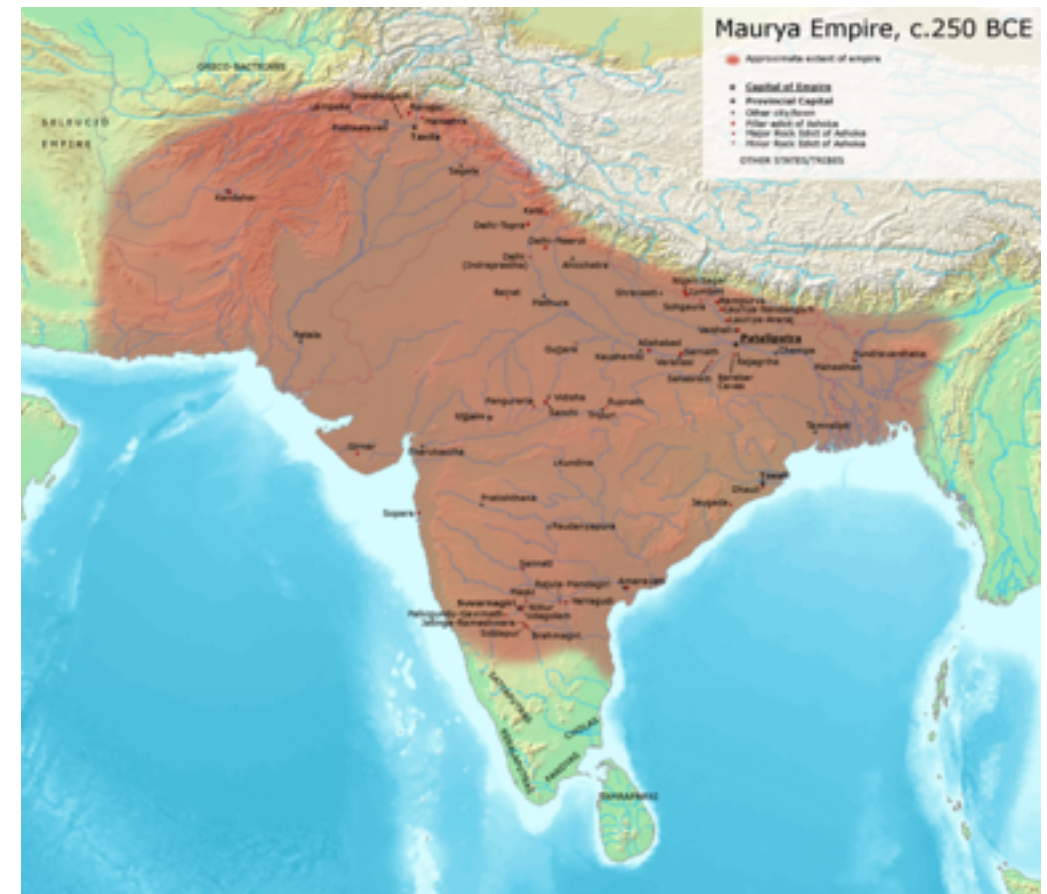
Ashoka took control of India around 250 CE and began to expand and bring new territories under his control. In taking control over a neighboring kingdom, Ashoka and his army not only inflicted but also suffered huge losses. Some estimates have stated that as many as 100,000 soldiers and civilians were killed or wounded in the conflict. Ashoka was so affected by the losses that he



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decided to never use armed conflict again. He learned about Buddhism and made the decision to convert to the faith. You will learn more about Buddhism in the next chapter.

Ashoka's most important



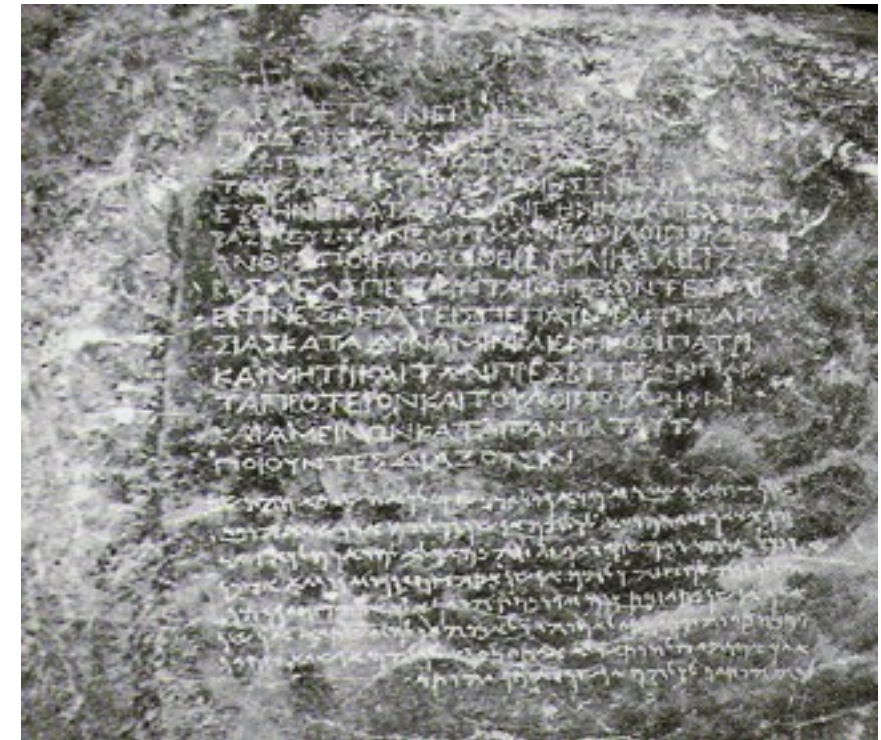
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contribution to the Mauryan Empire was his conversion to and his support of Buddhism within his empire. Instead of spreading his empire through military conquest, he decided to create an empire of the spirit. Ashoka sent religious envoys to places as far away as Egypt and Macedonia because he was more concerned with expanding religion than his own empire. Ashoka also constructed monumental stone pillars that were placed all across the empires. These stone pillars contained edicts that described the various years of his reign and provided insight into the things he was thinking and doing.

These edicts provided much of the information that we have today about the Mauryan Empire. These edicts have also given us clues as to who the Mauryans may have interacted with and how they were able to be so successful. Several edicts were found to be written in Greek indicating that not only were Greek people living in the Mauryan Empire but it is very likely that the Mauryans traded and interacted with different Greek city-states.



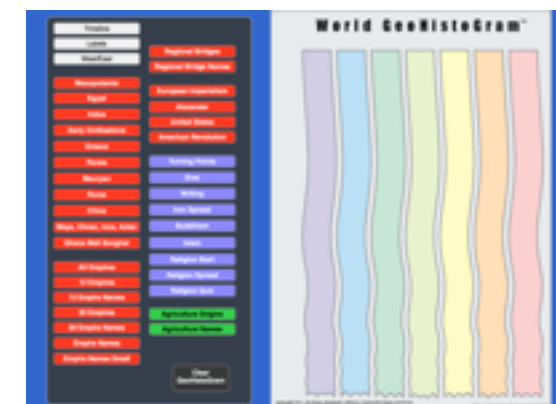
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The Mauryan empire began to collapse and shrink after the death of Ashoka as many empires do after the loss of a strong leader. Invading groups picked away at their borders while they suffered through internal strife and turmoil. The Mauryan empire officially ended in 185 BCE with the death of their last leader.

Interactive 4.7 World GeoHistoGram



Fire up the World GeoHistoGram once again and add all of the civilizations and empires you have studied so far. (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley, China, Mauryan, Persia, Greece, and Rome) How many of these civilizations overlapped?

Why do Empires Collapse?

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What are the shared characteristics of the classical civilizations?
2. What are the defining characteristics of city- states, civilizations, and empires?

Terms, places, and people:

internal causes

external causes

Throughout the course of this chapter we have looked at the different ways that empires were created, governed, expanded, and succeeded. None of these empires lasted forever and it is important to understand the ways in which they collapsed. No two empires collapsed the same way, just as no two empires grew the same way. Some collapsed quickly in a matter of years, for others the end came slowly over time, with the reasons being subtle and difficult to pick apart. But in the end all of them fell. This section will look at some of the reasons why.

There is much debate among historians as to why these empires collapsed and for what reasons. It is safe to say, however, that we can organize potential causes into different categories to help make sense of everything. The simplest way to break this down is to decide if the causes were internal or external. **Internal causes** were things that happened within the empire to cause it to splinter and fracture. This could be things like unfair taxes, tension within social hierarchies, poor leadership, religious beliefs, or bad laws. **External causes** were things that happened to an empire from outside forces. This could be things like being attacked by an outside group, natural disasters, diseases, and having extensive borders. Most empires fell due to a combination of both internal and external problems.

To fully understand this concept we can look at two different empires from this time period and how they collapsed. The Han Dynasty began to slowly weaken around 100 CE when they had a number of emperors die without having an heir. This meant that many young children were made emperor and the true power was in the hands of other officials. These officials were very corrupt and unfairly taxed the people. After a number of natural disasters the people believed it was a sign that the dynasty needed to be changed. A group of peasants attempted to overthrow the dynasty but failed. All of the internal struggles led to a weakened empire that was able to be attacked and invaded by neighboring tribes and states. By the year 220 CE the Han Dynasty was over.



The collapse of the Roman Empire was a much more complicated process. Most historians will point to the fact that Rome had expanded to have massive borders that required protection and patrolling. Rome required huge numbers of soldiers to control their very large borders which was very expensive and very difficult. Over time Rome was required to hire people from neighboring areas to help patrol and defend their borders, many of whom would later help to invade Rome. There was also a lot of instability inside the Empire as well. Roman citizens were suffering through poverty and disease, and, instead of helping, the ruling classes began to keep more and more money for themselves. There was also a lot of tension within the Roman

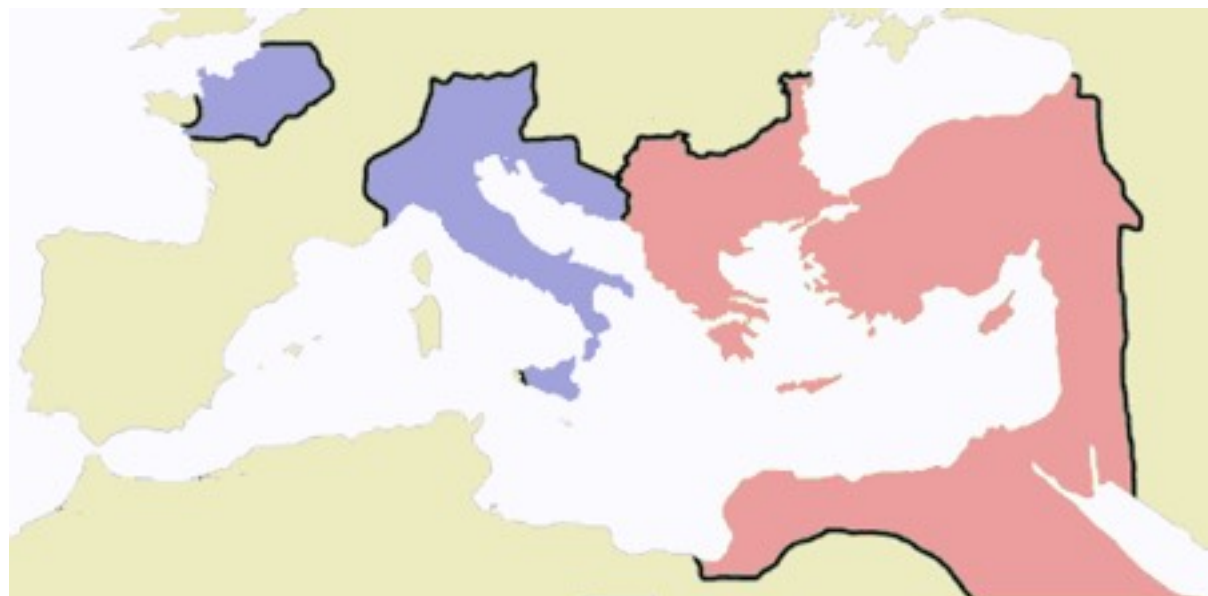
Empire regarding a new religion called Christianity. Emperors had persecuted the Christians, thinking they were the reason the empire was struggling. Later the Emperor Constantine would convert to Christianity and so would the whole empire along with him.

The most significant event in the fall of the Roman Empire was the decision to split Rome into an eastern and western half in the year 330 CE. By splitting the empire in half it made it easier to rule and manage, with a capital at Rome and Constantinople. Over time, however, the two sides became less and less alike. They spoke different languages, practiced different religions, and even began to develop different cultures. All of this weakened Rome to the point that Germanic tribes began attacking and invading. Rome was first invaded in 410

CE by the Visigoths and the Roman Empire officially ended in 476 CE. The Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire would survive, but never be as powerful as the Roman Empire had been.



How were the collapses of these two empires similar? How were they different? Is it possible to save an empire once it starts to decline?



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Tying it all together

Task

1. Create a timeline for Era 3 focusing on when empires began and when they ended.
2. Create a map for Era 3 showing the major empires and what parts of the world they controlled at their greatest extent.
3. On the same map, draw the important trade routes that stretched between the empires.

Interactive 4.8 Fall of Empires



Identify whether each marker is an internal or external factor contributing to the fall of empires.



Using the information from this text and your task above, explain what led to the emergence and collapse of large scale empires.