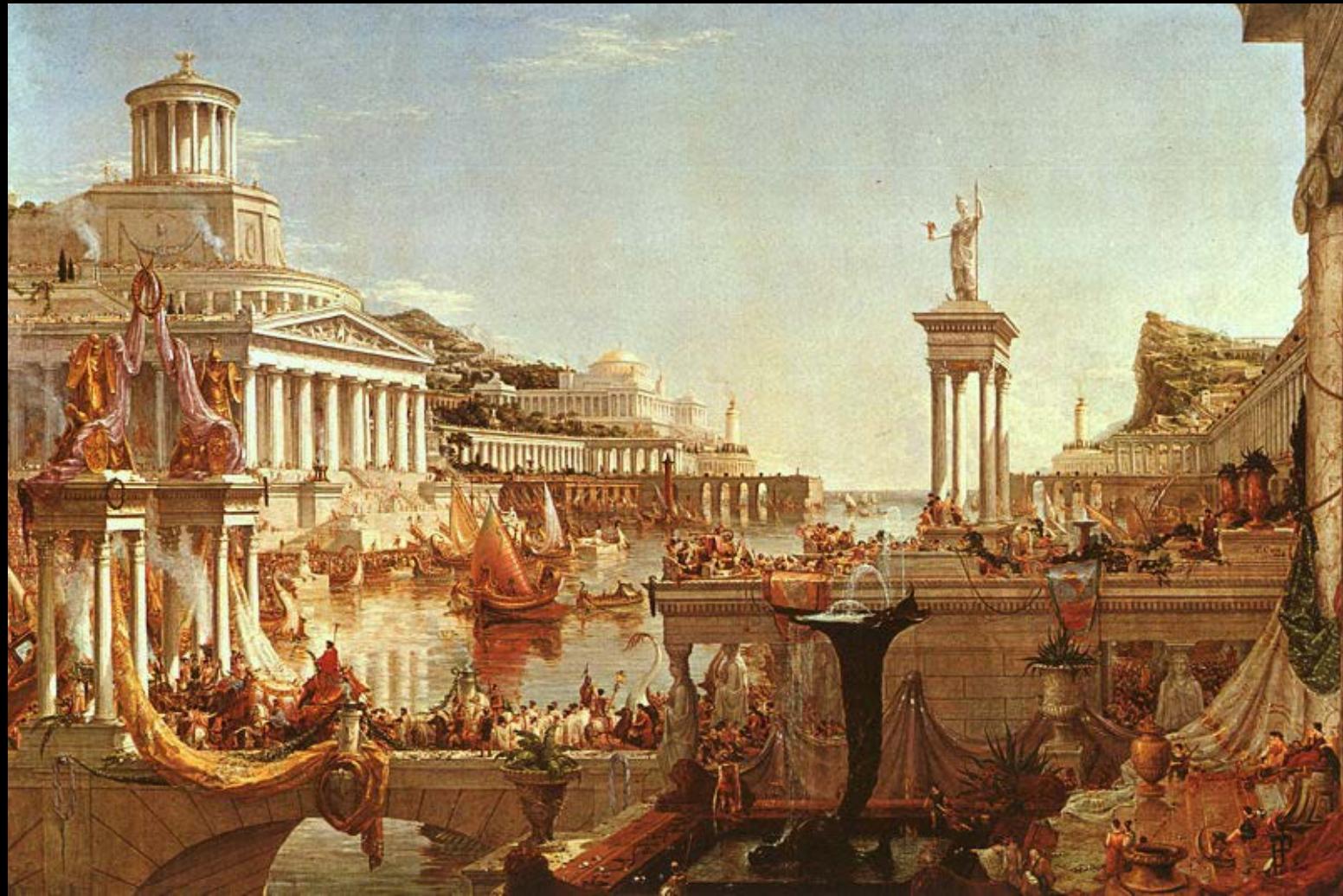


03 State and Empire in Eurasia / North Africa

500 BCE – 500 CE



Introduction

- The 2007 book *Are We Rome?* asked if the United States has become the new Roman Empire.
 - collapse of the Soviet Union
 - overextension of the United States
 - sense of unique, global mission
 - commitment to military dominance
 - reminder of continuing relevance of a long-dead empire
- Modern fascination with empires
 - earliest empires developed in era of First Civilizations
 - Akkadian Empire
 - Babylonian Empire
 - Assyrian Empire
 - empires have been central to world history for 4,000 years

- What is an empire?
 - simple answer: empires are political systems with coercive power
 - more typical: larger, more aggressive states
 - conquer other states
 - use their resources
 - usually include multiple peoples and cultures under a single political system
 - no clear line between empires and small multiethnic states
 - can have a common culture without a unified political system
- Eurasian empires of the classical era include:
 - Persian Empire
 - Greek empire of Alexander the Great
 - Roman Empire
 - Chinese empire (Qin and Han dynasties)
 - India (Mauryan and Gupta empires)

- Common problems of classical empires:
 - Would they try to impose their culture on varied subjects?
 - Would they rule conquered peoples directly or through local elites?
 - How should they extract wealth while maintaining order?
 - all eventually collapsed
- Why have empires always been so fascinating?
 - size was imposing
 - blood and violence of conquest
 - satisfaction in witnessing the fall of the mighty when they collapse
 - contrast to nonimperial civilizations
 - empires were *important*
 - majority of humans before twentieth century lived in empires
 - stimulated exchange of ideas, cultures, and values
 - » e.g., Roman Empire as vehicle for spread of Christianity
 - peace and security encouraged development, commerce, and cultural mixing

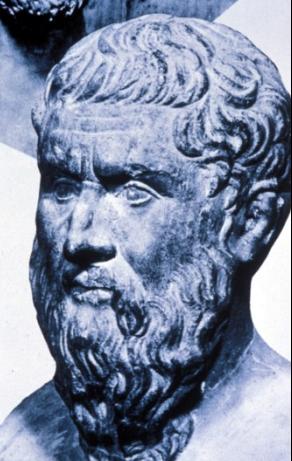
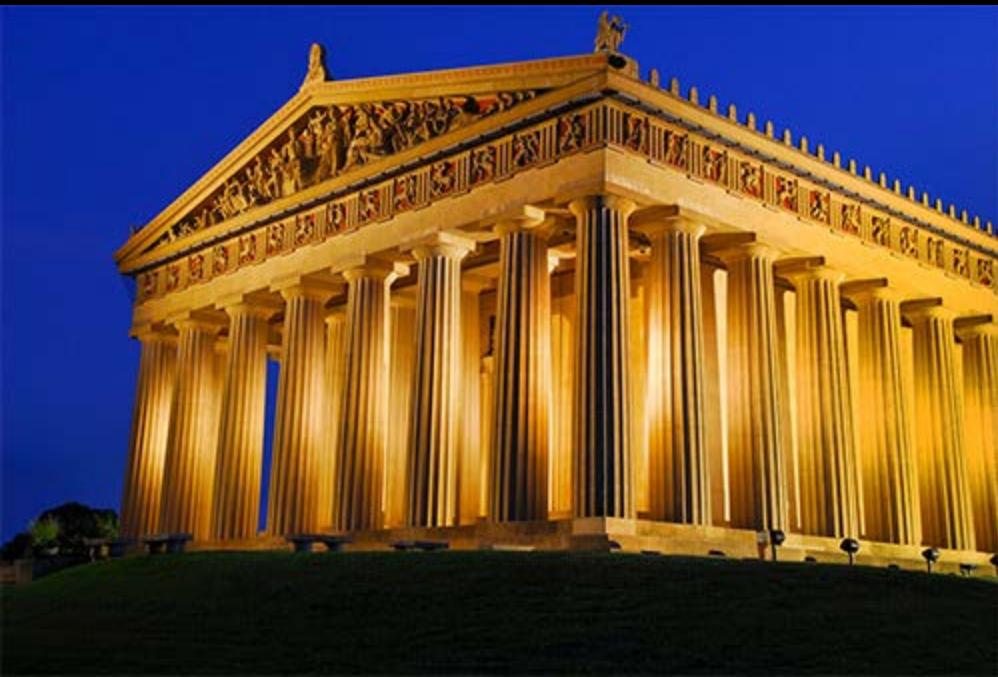
Timeline

750-336 BCE	Era of Greek city-states
553-330 BCE	Persian Achaemenid Empire
509 BCE	Founding of Roman Republic
500-221 BCE	Chinses age of warring states
490-479 BCE	Greco-Persian Wars
479-429 BCE	Golden Age of Athens
431-404 BCE	Pelopponesian Wars
336-323 BCE	Reign of Alexander the Great
321-185 BCE	India's Mauryan dynasty empire
221-206 BCE	China's Qin dynasty empire
206 BCE-220 CE	China's Han dynasty empire
200 BCE-200 CE	High point of Roman Empire
First Century BCE	Transition from republic to empire in Rome
184 CE	Yellow Turban revolt in China
220 CE	Collapse of Han dynasty
320-550 CE	India's Gupta dynasty empire
First Century CE	Collapse of western Roman Empire

Distinctive Features of Second-Wave Eurasian Civilizations

Civilization	Chinese	South Asian	Middle Eastern	Mediterranean
Political Features	Unified empire under Qin and Han dynasties; “Mandate of Heaven” concept; examinations for official positions	Mauryan and Gupta empires; frequent political fragmentation	Persian Empire; royal absolutism; conquest by Alexander the Great	Greek city-states; Athenian democracy; Roman Empire; unification of Mediterranean basin
Cultural Features	Confucianism / Daoism	Hinduism / Buddhism	Zoroastrianism; Judaism; Christianity	Greek rationalism; spread of Christianity
Social Features	Class hierarchy; dominance of bureaucratic and landholding elites; peasant rebellions	Caste system; purity and pollution; social position as indicator of spiritual development	Benevolent posture toward minorities in Persian Empire; Jews returned to homeland; tension between Greek and non Greeks	Unusually prominent role of slavery in Greek and Roman society

Empires and Civilizations in Collision: The Persians and the Greeks



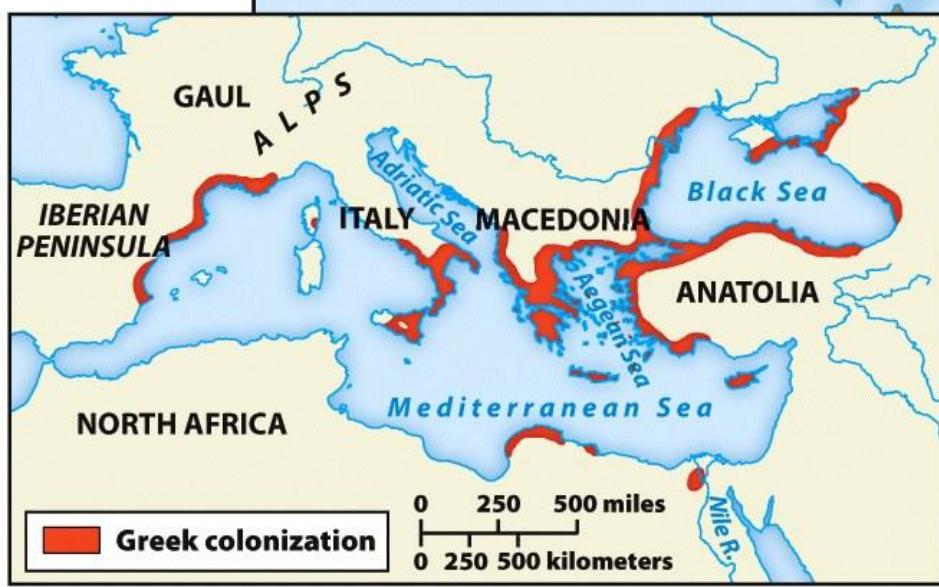
- The Eurasian classical era saw a flowering of second-wave civilizations.
 - civilizations did not usually encounter each other directly
 - Mediterranean world and Middle East were the important exceptions
 - Persians and Greeks were neighbors
 - very important cultural encounter



– The Persian Empire

- in 500 b.c.e., it was the largest and most impressive empire
 - Persians were Indo-Europeans, homeland on the Iranian plateau
 - imperial system drew on Mesopotamian prototypes
 - much larger and more splendid
 - Cyrus (r. 557–530 b.c.e.) and Darius (r. 522–486 b.c.e.) expanded empire from Egypt to India
 - diverse empire with population of around 35 million people
- elaborate cult of kingship
 - rule by will of the god Ahura Mazda
 - absolute monarchy

- holding the empire together
 - violent punishments by king
 - effective administrative system
 - » *satraps* governed the empire's 23 provinces
 - » lower-level officials were local
 - » system of imperial spies (“eyes and ears of the King”)
 - respect for non-Persian cultural traditions
 - » Cyrus allowed Jews to return from Babylonian exile and rebuild Jerusalem temple
 - » Herodotus: Persians adopt foreign customs readily
 - standardized coinage, predictable taxes
 - encouragement of communication and commerce
 - » canal dug between Nile and Red Sea
 - » “royal road” 1,700 miles long across empire
 - » imperial courier service
- immense wealth and power
 - elaborate imperial centers (especially Susa, Persepolis)



- The Greeks
 - Indo-Europeans
 - classical Greece emerged ca. 750 b.c.e., flourished for about 400 years
 - distinctiveness of Hellenistic civilization
 - population of Greece and the Aegean basin was 2 million to 3 million people
 - geography of mountains, valleys encouraged development of hundreds of city-states and small settlements
 - » most had 500–5,000 male citizens
 - » fierce independence, frequent conflict with neighbors
 - shared common language and common gods
 - » common participation in Olympic Games (founded 776 b.c.e.)
 - between 750 and 500 b.c.e., colonization around Mediterranean basin and Black Sea

- most distinctive feature: popular participation in political life of city-states
 - » equality of all citizens before the law
 - » extent of citizenship varied depending on time and city
 - early Greek history: only wealthy and well-born were citizens
 - gradually expanded to middle- and lower-class men
 - an important element was ability to afford armor and weapons to fight as *hoplites* for the city-state
 - » *tyrants* (dictators) emerged in many areas, supported by the poorer classes against the rich
 - » Sparta gave most political authority to Council of Elders
 - » Athens: most distinctive expression of political participation
 - period of intense class conflict
 - Solon's reforms began in 594 b.c.e.
 - extension of citizens' rights by Cleisthenes and Pericles
 - by 450 b.c.e., holders of public office chosen by lot, paid
 - the Assembly was open for participation by all citizens, was center of political life
 - » differences between Athenian and modern democracy
 - direct, not representative
 - women, slaves, and foreigners were excluded

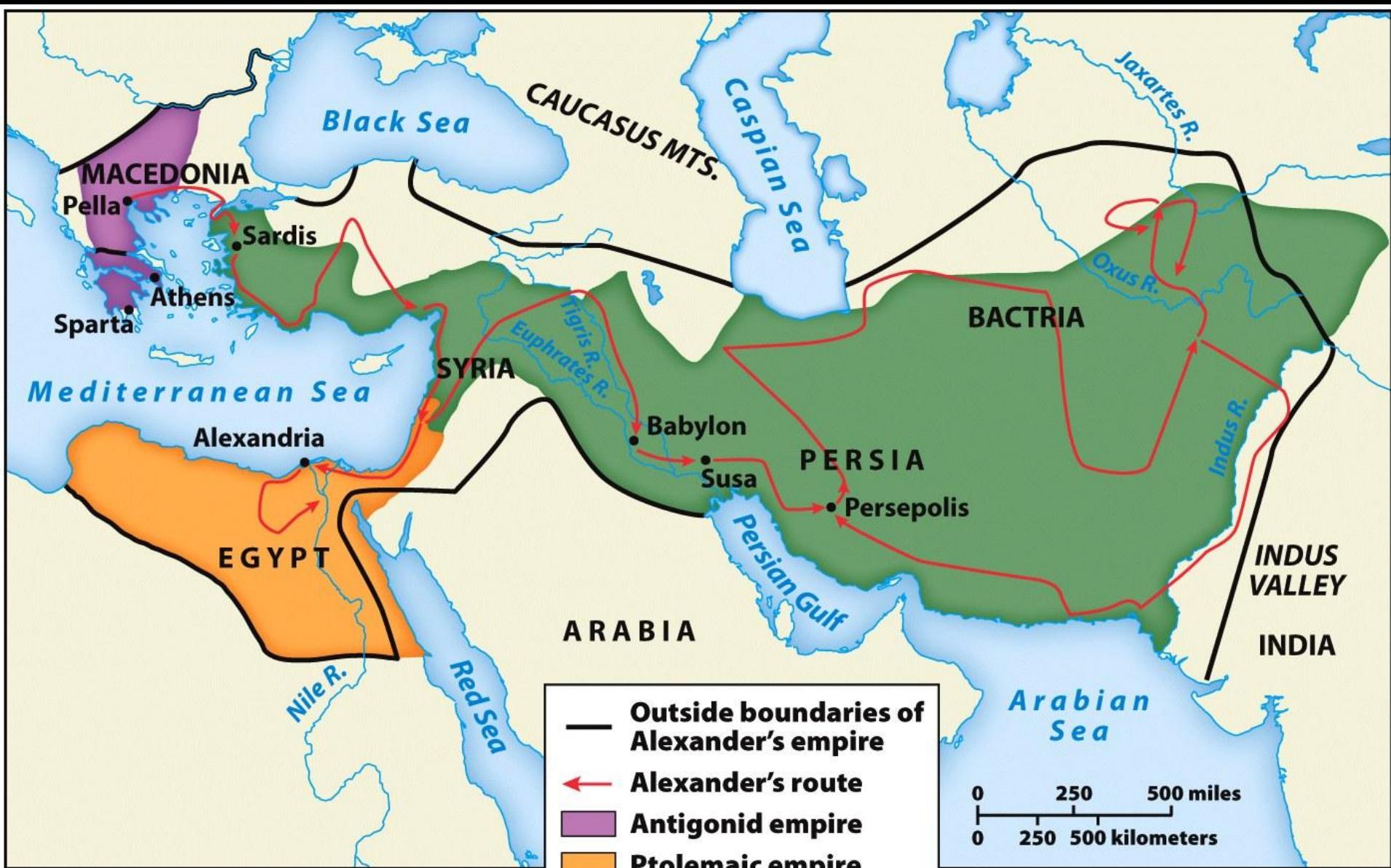
Key Moments in Classical Greek History

Traditional date for the first Olympic Games	776 b.c.e.
Emergence of Greek city-states and overseas colonization	750-700
Evolution of hoplite military tactics	700-650
Tyrants rule in many city-states	670-500
Sparta dominant in Peloponnesus	550
Cleisthenes' political reforms in Athens	507
Greco-Persian Wars	490-479
Golden Age of Athens (Parthenon, Athenian democracy)	479-429
Helot rebellion in Sparta	463
Peloponnesian War	431-404
Macedonian conquest of Greece	338
Conquests of Alexander the Great	333-323
Hellenistic era	323-30
Greece comes under Roman control	2 nd century b.c.e.

– Collision: The Greco-Persian Wars

- point of collision was Ionia (Greek settlements on Anatolian seacoast)
 - in 499 b.c.e., some Ionian Greeks revolted against Persia
 - were supported by Athens
- Persia responded with expeditions against Greeks in 490 and 480 b.c.e.
 - Greeks astonishingly defeated Persians on land and sea
 - Greeks believed they won Battle of Marathon (490 b.c.e.) because they were motivated by Greek freedoms
- notion of East/West divide as dominant theme in European thought
 - Greece = Europe, freedom
 - Persia = Asia, despotism

- victory radicalized Athenian democracy: poor rowers received full citizenship
 - fifty-year Golden Age of Greek culture after Persian Wars
 - » construction of Parthenon
 - » birth of Greek theatre (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides)
 - » early career of philosopher Socrates
 - beginnings of imperialism
 - » Athenian naval power led to dominance over allies
 - Peloponnesian War (431–404 b.c.e.)
 - » Sparta led resistance to Athenian imperialism
 - » Athens defeated
 - » Greek states were exhausted, distrusted each other
 - » opened the way to takeover by Macedonia (frontier region on northern edge of Greece)



- Collision: Alexander and the Hellenistic Era
 - Philip II of Macedon completed conquest of Greece by 338 b.c.e.
 - political unification of Greece by force
 - plan for great Greek expedition against Persia
 - Alexander’s expedition against Persia (333–323 b.c.e.)
 - created a massive Greek empire that reached from Egypt and Anatolia to Afghanistan and India
 - defeat of Persian Empire, destruction of Persepolis
 - Alexander anointed as pharaoh of Egypt, declared to be “son of the gods”
 - Alexander died in 323 b.c.e.; empire divided into three kingdoms, ruled by Macedonian generals

- Alexander's conquests were most important in world history terms for creation of the Hellenistic era (323–30 b.c.e.)
 - dissemination of Greek culture through much of Asia and Egypt
 - role of cities in spread of Greek culture
 - » Alexander and successors established many cities
 - » many thousands of Greek settlers
 - » Greek public centers and government
 - » Alexandria (Egypt) as great cosmopolitan center
 - library of 700,000 volumes
 - the Museum: sponsorship of scholars
- A simplified form of Greek was widely spoken from Mediterranean to India
 - Indian monarch Ashoka published some of his decrees in Greek
 - many Jews were attracted to Greek culture; Pharisees developed their own school system to counter the influence

- Hellenistic cities were much more culturally diverse than original Greek city-states
 - were not independent, but part of conquest states
 - Macedonians and Greeks formed the elite
 - » efforts to remain separate from the natives
 - » periodic rebellions against Greek exploitation
 - cultural interaction and blending were still possible
 - » Alexander encouraged intermarriage
 - » Greek rulers supported native cults
 - » many natives became Greek citizens by adopting Greek education and culture
 - » in India, Greeks became part of Ksatriya (warrior) caste
 - » some Bactrian Greeks converted to Buddhism, including King Menander
 - » depiction of the Buddha in human form, Greek style
- Roman rule replaced that of Greeks in western part of Hellenistic world
 - continued to spread Greek culture and ideas

Comparing Empires: Roman and Chinese



- The Roman and Chinese empires had little direct contact but interesting similarities.
 - both flourished ca. 200 b.c.e.–200 c.e.
 - were of similar size (about 1.5 million square miles)
 - both had 50 million to 60 million people
 - between them, they controlled nearly half the world’s population
 - interesting variations on imperial theme



– Rome: From City-State to Empire

- started as small, unimportant city-state in central Italy in eighth century b.c.e.
- overthrew monarchy and established a republic ca. 509 b.c.e.
 - dominance of wealthy patricians
 - rule by two consuls, with advice from Senate
- conflict with plebeians (poorer classes)
 - developed into political role for the plebeians
 - tribunes represented plebeians, could veto legislation
- pride in republican values: rule of law, citizens' rights, lack of pretension, morality—“the way of the ancestors”

- creation of the empire
 - began in 490s b.c.e. with wars to control Italian peninsula
 - 264–146 b.c.e.: Punic Wars with Carthage
 - » gave Rome control over western Mediterranean
 - » made Rome a naval power
 - conquest of Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and present-day Spain, France, and Britain
 - reached greatest geographical extent in early second century c.e.
 - gradual, unplanned pursuit of opportunities
 - skill and brutality of Roman army
 - usually generous treatment of conquered peoples
- political crisis of first century b.c.e.
 - rise of military leaders (Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Julius Caesar)
 - decline of republican values
 - Caesar Augustus (r. 27 b.c.e.–14 c.e.) was first emperor
 - » maintenance of republican forms
 - » reality: emperor as sole authority
- establishment of *pax Romana* (Roman peace)
 - security
 - relative prosperity

Key Moments in the History of the Roman Empire

Traditional date of Rome's founding as a monarchy	753 b.c.e.
Establishment of Roman Republic	509
Turmoil between patricians and plebeians (“struggle of the orders”)	509-287
Twelve Tables (Rome’s first written law code)	450
Punic Wars	264-146
Civil war; Julius Caesar appointed dictator and then assassinated	49-44
Reign of Caesar Augustus	27 b.c.e. – 14 c.e.
Great Fire in Rome; Nero blames Christians	64 c.e.
Roman citizenship extended to almost all free subjects	212
Constantine converts to Christianity	312
Founding of Constantinople as the “New Rome”	324
Roman Empire split into eastern and western halves	395
“Barbarian” invasions	4 th -5 th centuries
Collapse of western Roman Empire	476

0 250 500 miles
0 250 500 kilometers

BACTRIA

TAKLAMAKAN DESERT

INDIA

HIMALAYAS

Lake Baikal

GOBI DESERT

KOREA

Yellow Sea

East China Sea

Taiwan

VIETNAM

Xi'an
(Chang'an)

Luoyang

Yangzi R.

- Qin Empire
- Han Empire
- Xiongnu Confederation
- Great Wall
- Silk Road
- Imperial roads

South China Sea

– China: From Warring States to Empire

- creation of empire regarded as a restoration
 - Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties had created a Chinese state
 - system fell apart by 500 b.c.e.
 - age of warring states: seven competing kingdoms
 - multiple states were regarded as unnatural
- unification by Shihuangdi, ruler of Qin (r. 221–210 b.c.e.)
 - adopted Legalism as political philosophy: clear rules and harsh punishments to enforce state authority
 - Shihuangdi means “first emperor”
- expansion of empire into northern Vietnam and Korea and into steppes to northwest

- creation of empire was brutal
 - military force
 - execution of scholars, book burning
 - hundreds of thousands of laborers built Great Wall
 - Shihuangdi's monumental tomb, with about 7,500 life-size ceramic statues
 - standardized weights, measures, currency, written Chinese, and even axle lengths for carts
- Qin dynasty collapsed in 206 b.c.e.; followed by Han dynasty (206 b.c.e.–220 c.e.)
 - kept Qin centralization
 - less harsh

Key Moments in Classical Chinese History

Political fragmentation (“warring states” period)	500-221 b.c.e.
Unification of China: Qin Shihuangdi and Qin dynasty	221-206
Beginning of Han dynasty, with Liu Bang as its first emperor	206-195
Reign of Emperor Wudi, who established Confucian Academy for training imperial bureaucrats	141-87
Emperor Wang Mang attempts land reform, without success	9-23 c.e.
Yellow Turban peasant revolt	184
Collapse of Han dynasty	220
Renewed political fragmentation	220-581
China’s unity is restored (Sui dynasty)	589-618
Tang dynasty	619-907

– Consolidating the Roman and Chinese Empires

- both empires defined themselves in universal terms
- both invested heavily in public works
- both claimed supernatural sanctions
 - deceased Roman emperors as gods
 - » persecution of Christians for nonparticipation in cult
 - Chinese emperor as Son of Heaven
 - » rule by Mandate of Heaven
 - » dependent on just rule
 - » heavy ritual duties to maintain relationship between earth and heaven
 - » moral government spelled out by writings of Confucius and his followers

- both absorbed a foreign religious tradition
 - development of Christianity in Roman Empire
 - » eventually became dominant religion of Europe
 - introduction of Buddhism into China by traders
 - » not very popular until collapse of Han dynasty
 - » temporary state support under Sui dynasty
 - » never dominated in China
- relationships with societies they governed
 - Romans were always a minority in empire
 - » gradual expansion of Roman citizenship; was granted to nearly all free people of empire in 212 c.e.
 - » did not imply cultural assimilation
 - » some Roman culture was attractive to western Europeans
 - » Greek culture continued to dominate eastern empire
 - ethnic Chinese had much larger cultural heartland
 - » active assimilation of “barbarians”

- role of language differed in the two empires
 - Latin (alphabetic language) gave rise to Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Romanian
 - Chinese characters (represented words or ideas) could not be transferred easily to other languages
 - » but all literate people could understand written Chinese
 - » more important than Latin in assimilating the elites
- Roman Empire's peoples maintained separate cultural identities far more than in China
- Bureaucracy was much more elaborate in China than in Roman Empire
 - Chinese emperor Wudi (r. 141–87 b.c.e.) established an academy to train officials based on works of Confucius
 - » developed into civil service system
 - » lasted until twentieth century
 - Roman administration relied on regional elites and army
 - » unlike China, developed major body of law that was applicable equally to all people of the realm

– The Collapse of Empires

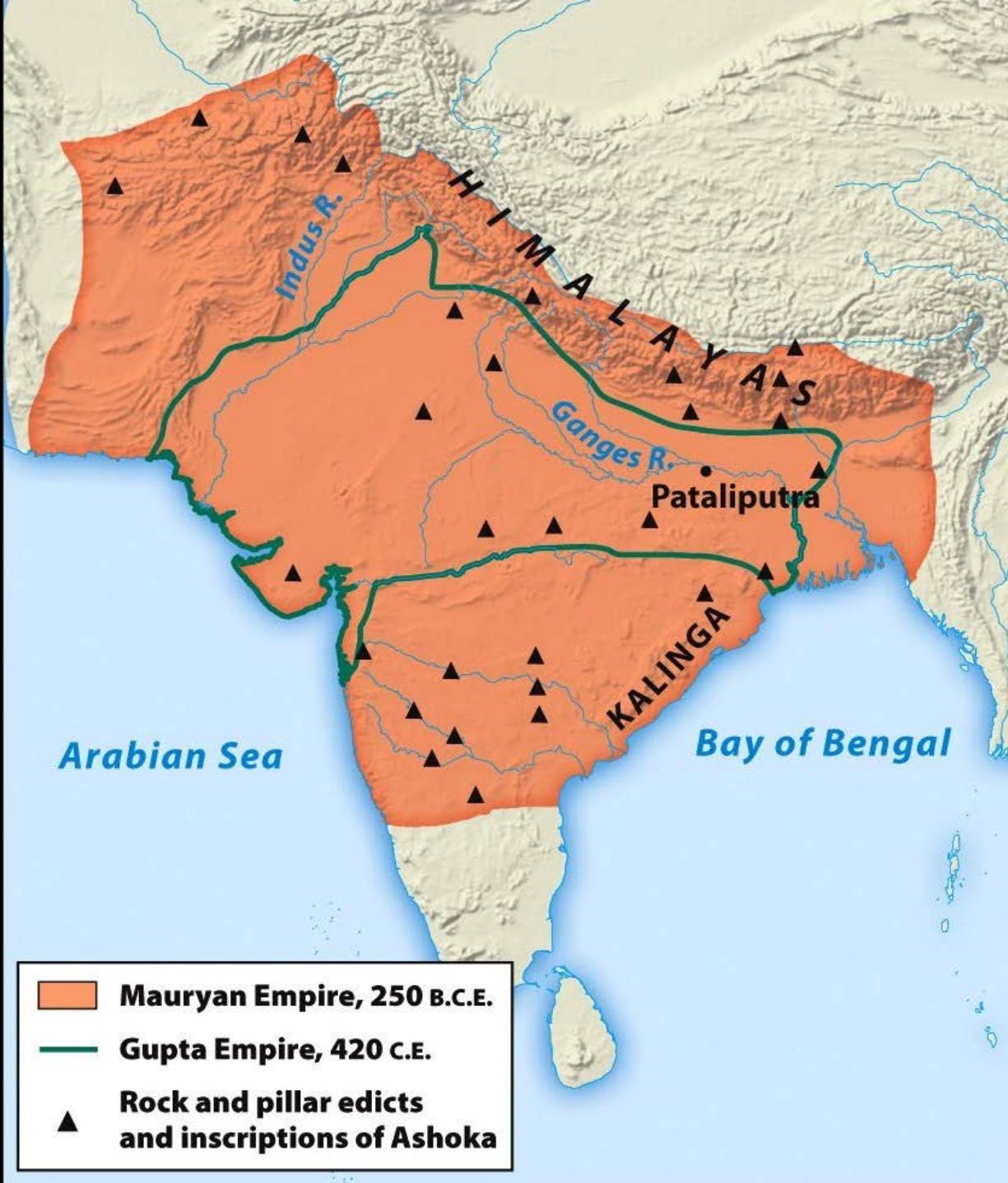
- Why do they fall?
 - Han dynasty ended in 220 c.e.
 - traditional date for fall of western Roman Empire is 476 c.e.; eastern half survived as Byzantine Empire

- common factors
 - excessive size, overextension, too expensive for available resources
 - no great technological breakthrough to enlarge resources
 - tax evasion by large landowning families
 - tax burden fell heavily onto the poor
 - » provoked Yellow Turban Rebellion, peasant revolt in China in 184 c.e
 - rivalry between elite factions created instability
 - epidemic disease
 - threat from nomadic or semi-agricultural peoples on frontier
 - » China had dealt with Xiongnu for centuries
 - as state weakened, nomadic peoples breached frontier defenses
 - establishment of “barbarian states” in north
 - gradual adoption of Chinese culture
 - » Rome: Germanic-speaking peoples
 - began to enter empire in fourth century c.e.
 - establishment of independent kingdoms
 - only partially adopted Roman culture
 - creation of Latin/Germanic hybrid culture

- effects of imperial collapse
 - decline of urban life
 - population decline
 - reduction of international trade
 - vast insecurity
- most important difference between collapse of Han and Roman Empires: what happened next
 - China: about 350 years of disorder, then creation of a similar imperial state (Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties)
 - Europe: no large-scale imperial system has *ever* been successfully established in western Europe since Romans
 - » division into large number of states with weak rulers
 - Why was China more successful in restoration?
 - » greater cultural homogeneity
 - » stronger bureaucratic tradition
 - » Confucianism valued state; Christianity often at odds with the state
 - » China had more advanced agriculture and metallurgy

Intermittent Empire: The Case of India





- The idea of empire was much less prominent in India than in Persia, the Mediterranean, or China.
 - fall of Indus Valley civilization by 1500 b.c.e.
 - creation of new civilization along Ganges River
 - debate continues over role of Aryan invaders
 - establishment in northern India of classic civilization of South Asia by 600 b.c.e.
 - enormous political, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity
 - Indian civilization as a whole shaped by political fragmentation and cultural diversity
 - identity provided by distinctive religious tradition and social organization
 - » Hinduism
 - » caste system

- Mauryan Empire (326–184 b.c.e.)
 - stimulated by Persian and Greek penetration of northwest
 - ruled all but southern tip of India
 - population of around 50 million
 - large military and civilian bureaucracy
 - state-operated industries
 - Ashoka (r. 268–232 b.c.e.) is best-known emperor, thanks to edicts
 - conversion to Buddhism
 - effort to rule empire peacefully
 - effort to develop a moral code for whole empire
 - Mauryan Empire broke apart after Ashoka's death

- Gupta Empire (320–550 c.e.) and other short-lived empires followed
- Why couldn't India maintain an empire?
 - states failed to command loyalty
 - great cultural diversity
 - frequent invasions from Central Asia
 - caste system encouraged local loyalties
- Indian trade flourished despite the lack of unity.
 - merchants and artisans patronized public buildings and festivals
 - Hinduism and Buddhism spread through much of Asia
 - Indian mathematics and astronomy flourished

Reflections: Classical Empires and the Twentieth Century

- Classical empires continue to be used as models and inspirations.
 - Mao Zedong compared himself to Shihuangdi
 - Modern Indians pride themselves on Ashoka's nonviolence and tolerance
 - Great Britain celebrated its empire as a modern Roman Empire
 - Mussolini regarded Italian expansion as the creation of a new Roman Empire
 - recent question: are Americans the new Romans?
- There is a danger of misusing historical analogies, but history is vital to understanding the complexities of contemporary life.