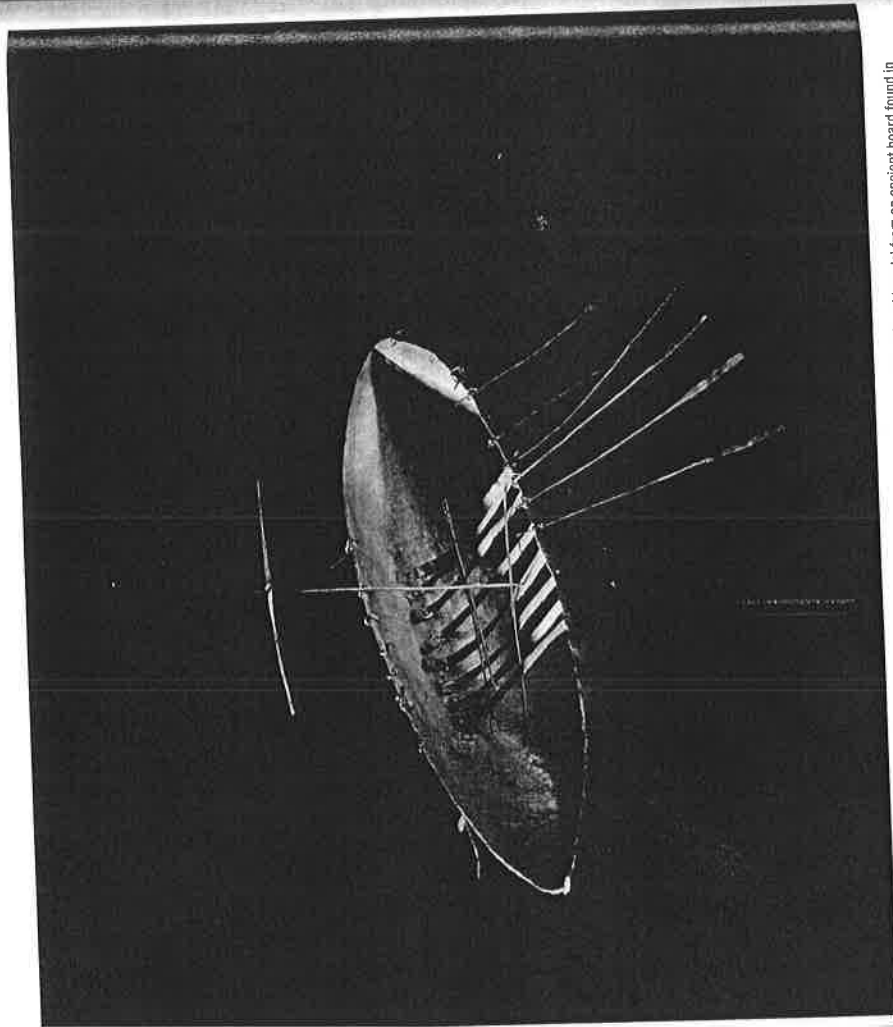


6 Empire Building and Cultural Exchange from India to the Mediterranean 600-200 B.C.E.



The Greek voyager Pytheas may have sailed northern European seas on a ship resembling this gold model from an ancient hoard found in northern Ireland.

Near the end of the fourth century B.C.E., a Greek-speaking official named Megasthenes traveled more than two thousand miles on a diplomatic mission from the Seleucid (sh-LOO-sid) empire in Southwest Asia to the court of the king Chandragupta in northern India. The ambassador settled for a time in the royal capital, where he carefully observed Indian society and politics. Later, he compiled his observations in a literary work titled the *Indika*. The surviving fragments of this text constitute the only eyewitness record we have of life in India during that period.

About the same time that Megasthenes traveled east, a Greek navigator named Pytheas boarded a sailing vessel at Massalia (Marseilles) on the Mediterranean coast of what is today France. He and his crew sailed west through the Strait of Gibraltar to the Atlantic, then north to Britain. Perhaps he aimed to trade with Celtic-speaking people in northern Europe. After circumnavigating Britain, he returned to Massalia to write a report of his travels. In his account he described an island called Thule Ultima, possibly Iceland, where midsummer days lasted twenty hours. He also included practical information on such subjects as the position of the North Pole and the correlation between tides and the phases of the moon.

The careers of Megasthenes and Pytheas vividly illustrate the far-flung activities of Greek-speaking people between the sixth and third centuries B.C.E. Greeks (known as "Hellenes" in the ancient world) were on the move, strengthening colonial settlements along the shores of the Mediterranean and Black Seas, plying long-distance trade, and offering their skills abroad as scholars, artisans, and soldiers. In the Aegean Sea basin, the Hellenic city-states of Athens, Sparta, and several others achieved impressive economic and military power.

The explosion of Greeks onto the world scene was one sign of intensifying human communication across Afroeurasia as a whole. Population continued to grow, more cities appeared, and migrating farmers and herders moved into new territories in Inner Eurasia and the tropical latitudes of Africa and Asia. The greatest concentrations of both cultivators and city dwellers were to be found in two regions: in the zone from the Ganges River valley to the lands rimming the eastern Mediterranean and in northern and central China. Throughout most of those four hundred years, China continued on a long trajectory of technological advancement and commercial growth but remained politically fragmented. We come back to East Asia in Chapter 7.

Chapter Outline

PERSIA ASCENDING

Empire Building on a New Scale
The Achaemenids as "Universal" Rulers
The Persian Empire as Communication Hub
The Achaemenids and the Teachings of Zoroaster
Achaemenid Multiculturalism

INVENTIVE GREEKS

Government and Society
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ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE HELLENISTIC ERA

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BUDDHISM AND THE MAURYA EMPIRE IN INDIA

Foundations of Buddhism
The Reign of Ashoka Maurya
WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE Rock Edicts
of the Emperor Ashoka

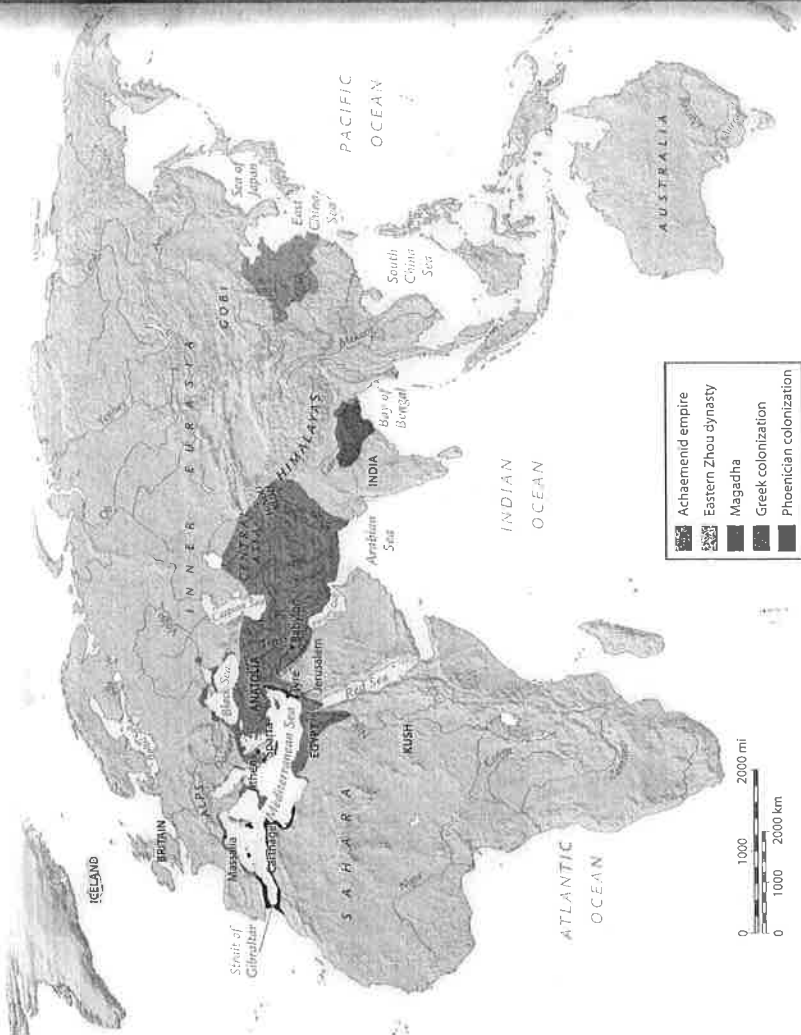
CAVALRY AND CARAVANS IN INNER EURASIA

Nomad Power
Early Times on the Silk Roads

• • •

This chapter opens on the rise of the Achaemenid (uh-KEE-muh-nid) empire of Persia, the largest state in both territory and population that the world had so far seen. On the Iranian plateau east of Mesopotamia, people speaking Persian (Farsi) founded the Achaemenid dynasty around 550 B.C.E. Persian horse troops and infantry seized the territories of the former Assyrian and Babylonian empires, and for several decades in the sixth and fifth centuries, Achaemenid governors ruled provinces stretching from northwestern India to Libya west of the Nile. For the first time in history, the three great river valleys—Tigris-Euphrates, Nile, and Indus—were incorporated into a single state, if only briefly. With this

A Panoramic View



MAP 6.1 Major states in Afroeurasia, 500 B.C.E.
The voyages of Pytheas to the north Atlantic and Megasthenes to India suggest Greek speakers were interested in the world far beyond their Mediterranean homeland. Would educated Greeks of the Mediterranean in the fourth century B.C.E. likely have had more knowledge of India or of Britain?

integration, more farmers, artisans, and merchants entered into the interregional web of exchange.

Early in the fifth century B.C.E., the Achaemenids tried to bring the Greek poleis (city-states) of the Aegean into submission. In the second part of the chapter, we turn to that region in the period after the Persian threat receded, a time when several poleis participated in a remarkable flowering of science, literature, philosophy, art, and architecture. Athens stood brightest in this firmament of ideas. For about a century and a half, that city and a few others also experimented with novel institutions of government centered on the idea that a sovereign state may be founded on the collective will of a body of citizens rather than on the decrees of a monarch claiming divine authority.

In the later fourth century B.C.E., the political landscape of Southwest Asia and the eastern Mediterranean changed dramatically. In the third part of the chapter, we introduce Alexander the Great, the young ruler of the Balkan kingdom of Macedonia who conquered the Aegean, Egypt, and Southwest Asia. With Alexander, both Athenian democracy and the colossal Achaemenid empire came to an end. After Alexander's death in 323 B.C.E., Greek-speaking monarchs continued to rule from the eastern Mediterranean to India as late as the first century B.C.E. During that era, Greek-inspired ideas and styles radiated far beyond the Aegean.

In the fourth part, we shift to South Asia. The monarchs of the Maurya (MORE-yuh) dynasty, the first to unite northern and central India under one authority, arose nearly simultaneously with the Hellenistic states that succeeded Alexander's empire. The Maurya established diplomatic ties with those states, a policy that also encouraged east-west trade. The empire reached its zenith under Ashoka Maurya, who warmly embraced the teachings of the Buddha, the moral sage who had lived more than two hundred years earlier. Consequently, Ashoka advanced Buddhist thought and practice in India, to some extent at the expense of the older Brahmanist (early Hindu) religion.

In the final section of the chapter, we return to Inner Eurasia, where the growing population of pastoral nomads, valley farmers, and city merchants began to have a more serious impact on developments in neighboring agrarian and urbanized lands than in any earlier time. Around 500 B.C.E., Inner Eurasian chieftains began to organize larger alliances of clans and tribes capable of attacking towns and cities to the south and east. But even as tensions grew between pastoral and settled peoples along the edges of the steppes, traders busied themselves developing inner Eurasia's town markets, caravan trails, and commercial institutions, thereby pushing pastoral and agrarian societies into greater mutual dependence.

Persia Ascending

FOCUS In what ways did the Achaemenid empire of Persia contribute to increasing commercial and cultural exchange in Afroeurasia?

Since at least the third millennium B.C.E., trade routes have crisscrossed historic Persia, whose central regions roughly coincide with the modern Republic of Iran. As exchanges on Afroeurasia's long-distance land and sea routes became progressively busier, warrior groups with territorial conquest in mind became increasingly aware of Persia's strategic importance as an east-west funnel of trade. The region might be likened to the narrow stem of an hourglass, a conduit of routes wedged between the Caspian and Arabian Seas (see Map 6.1). Along these trails, goods, people, and ideas moved between the eastern and western expanses of Afroeurasia. No wonder that starting in the first millennium B.C.E., ambitious conquerors made Persia the core of one empire after another. Some of these rulers in fact pushed their armies beyond Persia—northward to Central Asia, eastward to India, and westward to Mesopotamia, Syria, and even Egypt—in order to absorb more routes, cities, and taxable populations.

Empire Building on a New Scale

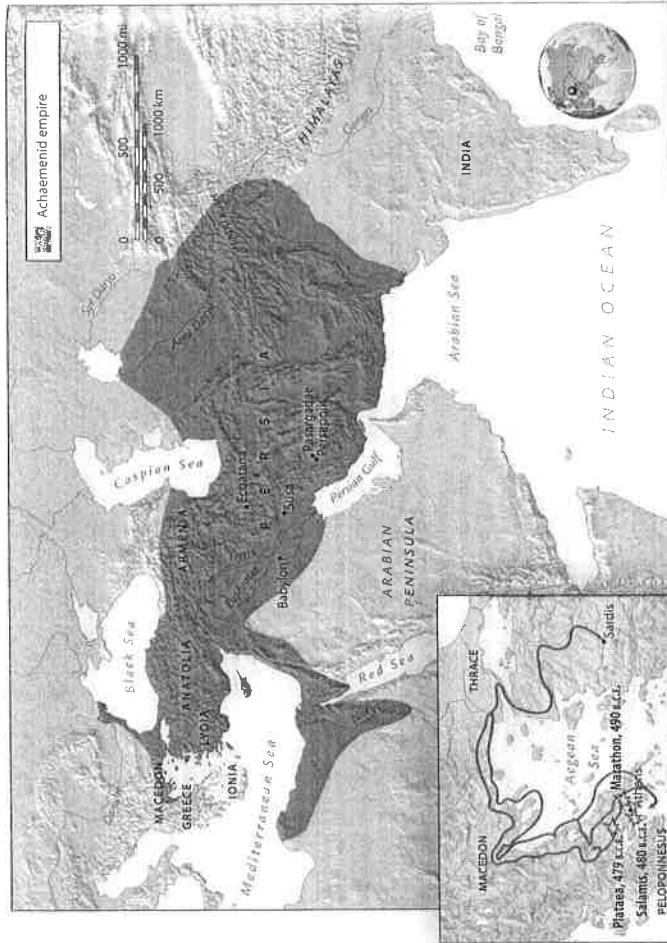
The Achaemenid dynasty founded the first Persia-centered empire in the sixth century B.C.E. The rise of this state represented a regional power shift in Southwest Asia from the Tigris-Euphrates valley to the Iranian plateau, the arid region that stretches from the Zagros Mountains to Afghanistan. Near the end of the second millennium B.C.E., pastoral peoples speaking Indo-European languages migrated from the Inner Eurasian steppes across Central Asia to the Iranian Plateau. Two of these groups, the Persians and the Medes (mehds), took up mixed farming and herding on the western plateau. In the eighth or seventh century B.C.E., they founded modest monarchies. Compared to fertile Mesopotamia, Iran might have seemed an unlikely place to build a state that required revenue from agriculture. Much of the land is barren, including vast expanses of salt desert. Nevertheless, the slopes and valleys of the mountain ranges that nearly ring the plateau supported numerous villages and irrigated farms.

Persian conquests. In the mid-sixth century B.C.E., Persian forces, probably responding to the weakening condition of the Babylonian empire in Mesopotamia, launched an offensive. Advancing northwestward along the Zagros range, they overpowered their rivals the Medes. Under the leadership of Cyrus II (r. 559–530 B.C.E.), a brilliant strategist and head of a clan named the Achaemenids, Persian horse

archers and infantry, joined by defeated Medes and other fighters, seized northern Mesopotamia, then advanced westward all the way across Anatolia to the Aegean Sea, destroying the kingdom of Lydia and converting its capital, Sardis, into an Achaemenid royal center. Other Persian troops moved northeastward across Central Asia, where they occupied the fertile Amu Darya (Oxus) River valley and the commercial towns that bordered Inner Eurasia. By the end of the century, Babylonian, the major Syrian cities, and the coastal ports of the Levant were all in Persian hands. Reaping huge agrarian revenues from Mesopotamia, the imperial government financed even wider conquests, occupying Egypt upriver to the borders of Nubia (525–523 B.C.E.) and, far to the east, a large part of the Indus valley (518 B.C.E.).

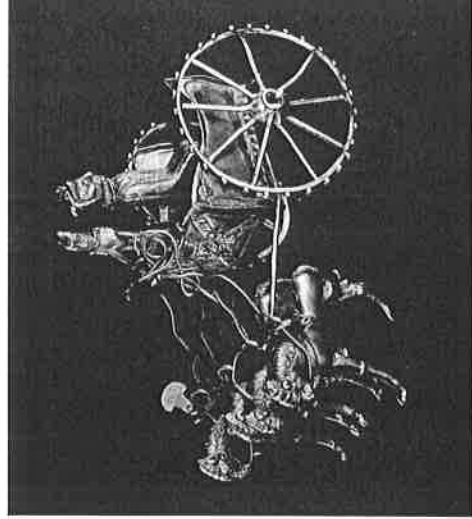
Battles in the Aegean. The Achaemenids also muscled their way into the Mediterranean, occupying Cyprus and launching warships from Levant ports in collaboration with the Phoenicians. Having gained control of the interior of Anatolia and its rich metal deposits, Persian soldiers subjugated the small, prosperous Greek poleis of Ionia, the coastland facing the Aegean Sea.

Larger and militarily stronger Hellenic poleis, however, lay across the sea on mainland Greece. When the Ionian poleis rose in rebellion against their Persian governors, Athens sent ships to support them. This provocation convinced King Darius I (r. 522–486 B.C.E.) that if Persia were to dominate the Aegean basin and its commerce, it must attack mainland Greece. In 490 B.C.E. the Athenian army fought the Persians on the plain of Marathon northeast of Athens



MAP 6.2 The Achaemenid empire 550 B.C.E.
What factors of physical geography might help explain the directions of expansion of the Achaemenid empire?

Persian campaigns into Greece



An Achaemenid official on state business. The figure facing backward in this model chariot of gold is probably a satrap, or Achaemenid governor. The horses represent a stout Iranian breed. The model comes from a site in the upper Amu Darya valley in Central Asia, the empire's far northeastern corner. A protective image of the Egyptian god Bes is stamped on the front of the chariot. What might that detail suggest about cultural exchange within the Achaemenid realm?

Ecbatana, Susa, Pasargadae, and Persepolis in western Iran and Babylon on the Euphrates. The palace center at Persepolis, which Darius started building about 515 B.C.E., occupied a giant platform commanding spectacular views of the countryside in three directions. The complex included military quarters, an imperial treasury, royal residences, and a vast throne room, whose seventy-two marble pillars supported a cedar wood ceiling nearly sixty-five feet high. Thirteen of those pillars still stand in the sprawling ruins that amaze visitors today.

The vast majority of the empire's subjects were farmers or herders. There were also minority classes of merchants, artisans, scribes, office holders, and priests, plus a large population of slaves, most of whom lost their freedom as prisoners of war. Many slaves labored in affluent households, craft shops, or temples. Others worked on imperial construction projects under harsh, life-shortening conditions. We do not know much about the daily lives of women, but the record of inscriptions suggests that the Achaemenid government had a more open-minded view of females in public life than earlier Southwest Asian states had. Some high-ranking women attended the emperor at court and owned their own landed estates. Moreover, because powerful families used marriage to tighten their political alliances, aristocratic mothers and wives exerted considerable public influence from within their houses.

and turned them back. A decade later, the emperor Xerxes (r. 486–465 B.C.E.) invaded Greece, but a Hellenic navy of 370 warships defeated a larger Persian fleet off the island of Salamis. Greek victory in a land battle (Plataea) followed in 479 B.C.E. Fighting between Greeks and Persians continued for decades but sporadically and with no conclusive victory for either side.

The Achaemenids as "Universal" Rulers

The Assyrians and Babylonians provided the Achaemenids with a model of how to organize an empire in the Mesopotamian tradition of state building developed over the previous three thousand years (see Map 6.2). The Persians, however, enlarged on the possibilities of power. The emperors promoted an ideology suitable for a state of great ethnolinguistic diversity. In both royal inscriptions and architectural imagery, the emperors explicitly represented themselves as the custodians of a prosperous society whose diverse peoples happily joined together in service to the sovereign. Indeed, the Persian state claimed the right to bring all peoples into its orbit. More insistently than earlier Southwest Asian states it proclaimed a "universal" mission to rule the world. As Darius I declared in a royal inscription, "I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King of countries containing all kinds of people, [king] of this great earth far and wide. . . ." The sheer technological limitations of the first millennium B.C.E. made any imperial claim to global rule, or anything close to it, a practical absurdity. Since the Achaemenids, however, many regimes have claimed the mantle of

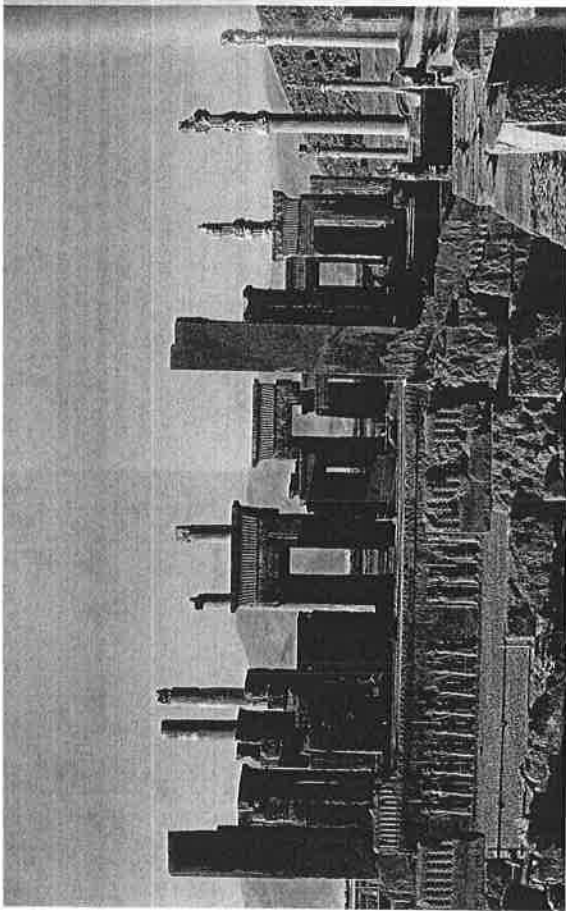
universal empire. A multiethnic state whose ruler claims a right to authority over all of humankind.

Persian nobles, drawn from families proud of their heritage as conquering warriors, served the emperor's government. This class of aristocrats, a tiny minority of the population, held key positions as royal court officials, provincial governors, and high army officers. Following the Assyrian model, however, the emperors systematically stripped their nobles of special powers and rights, transforming them into political servants of the state. They rewarded aristocratic families generously for loyal service with titles, gold, horses, estates, and royal daughters in marriage. But officials branded as corrupt, incompetent, or treasonous might expect to be summarily fired or even gruesomely executed. Darius I devoted much effort to bu-

recreating organization, creating approximately twenty large provinces known as satrapies (SAX-trap-eez). An administrative unit of the Persian empire under the authority of a satrap, or provincial governor.

Each provincial governor, or satrap, had the job of keeping order, provisioning garrisons, and, most important, collecting taxes from the population and forwarding them to the royal treasury.

The empire had no single capital. Rather, the emperors and their royal entourage moved regularly between



The Achaemenid palace at Persepolis. Artisans decorated the walls and staircases of this royal center with reliefs of nobles, tribute bearers, and, in this view, imperial guards moving in stately procession.

The Persian Empire as Communication Hub

The Achaemenid communication network was essential to effective government over territories that at the imperial zenith extended east to west nearly 2,500 miles. Much of Southwest Asia already had an infrastructure of roads and trails connecting major cities and ports. The Achaemenids, however, extended this network, broadening highways and equipping them with forts and way stations. People working for the emperor had travel priority, though trade caravans certainly used the roads as long as they had government permission. Imperial officers, diplomats, and spies moved incessantly along the routes, monitoring regional political conditions, checking on the loyalty of local leaders, and suppressing any sign of rebellion.

The Achaemenids commanded the central zone of the growing India-to-Mediterranean trade web. They not only built roads but also encouraged sea trade between the Indus and the Persian Gulf, sponsoring maritime expeditions to gather information on the routes across the Arabian Sea. Persia functioned as a kind of

economic pump, sucking in products from neighboring lands near and far, and discharging city-made luxury goods in all directions. The emperor Darius I completed construction of the first “Suez canal” linking the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, a project that an Egyptian pharaoh had started earlier. To promote commerce, Achaemenid officials introduced both gold and silver coins of standardized weight, adapting the idea of metal money, which appears to have originated in the Anatolian kingdom of Lydia.

On the periphery of this exchange system were the oasis cities that the Achaemenids dominated in Central Asia and the Greek city-states of the Aegean. Both benefited from their position, however, because they linked the Persian center to immense, mostly rural commercial hinterlands. The towns of Central Asia fronted the Inner Eurasian steppes, and the Aegean cities connected Persia with the whole Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and continental Europe. Products that flowed from those outer regions toward the Achaemenid center included iron, gold, silver, gems, grain, timber, wool, and livestock.



An Achaemenid coin. This gold Daric from fifth-century B.C.E. Persia depicts the emperor, perhaps Xerxes, carrying a bow and a spear.

The Achaemenids and the Teachings of Zoroaster

The Persian emperors declared themselves to be worshipers and devout agents of the Ahura Mazda, supreme creator of the world, the Lord of Wisdom. According to an inscription from the reign of Darius I, “a great god is Ahura Mazda, who created this earth, who created yonder heaven, who created man, who created welfare for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many.”⁶ In their early days on the Iranian Plateau, the Persians had very likely made ritual sacrifices to deities of sky and earth, as did other pastoral peoples. The emergence of Ahura Mazda as supreme god and guardian of all that is good, peaceful, and just in the universe is associated with the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster (the Greek version of the name Zarathustra).

The puzzle of Zoroaster. If we know less than we might like about the lives of the Buddha or Jesus, we know even less about Zoroaster. He may have been born anywhere from Iran to the Inner Eurasian steppes and lived anytime between the thirteenth and sixth centuries B.C.E. Priests preserved hymns that embodied Zoroaster’s teachings by ritually transmitting them orally for many generations. In their expressive language, these hymns have much in common with the *Rig Veda*, the sacred songs and prayers of early Indo-European peoples of northern India (see Chapter 3). Only in the early centuries C.E., however, did scholars put in writing the seventeen hymns (the *Gathas*) attributed to Zoroaster plus other sacred traditions. This compilation, titled the *Avesta*, recounts that Ahura Mazda appointed Zoroaster, a member of a priestly family, to preach a divine message to a world that had become chaotic and brutal. The prophet’s own society would not listen to him (a typical fate of religious reformers), so he wandered abroad and eventually attracted disciples.

Zoroastrian beliefs. Like the ancient Israelites, Zoroaster and his followers preached a monotheistic conception of deity, that is, one, universal God exclusively deserving of worship. The *Avesta* acknowledges the existence of a limited number of other divinities but conceives of them as dependent emanations of Ahura Mazda. Zoroaster also taught that evil operates in the world as Angra Mainyu, the “hostile spirit,” which wars against Ahura Mazda for domination of the cosmos. At the End of Time, Ahura Mazda will defeat Angra Mainyu, and universal good will triumph. In the meantime, human beings must make moral choices between good and evil in their everyday lives. If they consistently dedicate themselves to the good, they will ascend at death to the presence of Ahura Mazda. If they behave wickedly, they risk being pitched into hell, where Angra Mainyu awaits them. Zoroaster’s vision of moral living did not require renunciation of the world and its pleasures but demanded honest, just, and compassionate dealings with others. Scholars commonly characterize Zoroaster’s teachings as

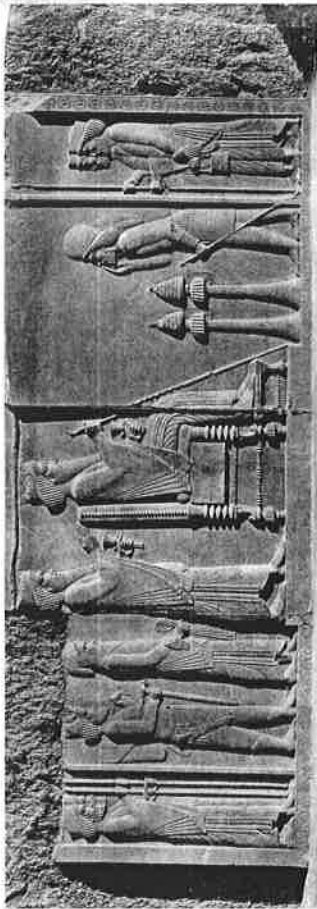
“dualist,” describing a universe in which humans have a choice of allegiance between good and evil, light and dark, the truth and the lie. This idea of a cosmic conflict in which God will inevitably prevail had a great impact in later centuries on both Christianity and Islam, monotheistic faiths that nonetheless acknowledged the stark power of evil. The Persian term *dæwar*, which Zoroaster associated with malign spirits allied with Angra Mainyu, is derived from the same Indo-European root as the English *devil*.

Zoroastrian beliefs and rituals appear to have gained gradual acceptance among the Achaemenid elite class. Zoroaster commanded his followers to pray to Ahura Mazda five times a day and always in the presence of light from the sun or from fire. These were the prime agents of human purification and the focus of thanks to God. We have abundant archaeological evidence that “fire temples,” where priests performed rites dedicated to Ahura Mazda, began to be built in Persia during the Achaemenid era. Only several centuries later, however, did Zoroastrian beliefs and rituals take form as the codified and coherent belief system known as Zoroastrianism (zohr-oh-AHS-tree-ahn-ism), a faith that exists today among minorities, mostly in South Asia.

Achaemenid Multiculturalism

From at least the time of Darius I, the Achaemenid emperors claimed the right to rule on the grounds that Ahura Mazda put monarchs on the earth to ensure social order and justice. Both Darius and his successor, Xerxes, had these words inscribed: “By the favor of Ahura Mazda I am of such a kind that I am a friend to what is right It is not my wish that the weak is . . . hurt because of the mighty, that the mighty is hurt because of the weak.”⁷ The idea that the emperor must govern all his subjects fairly shared similarities with the political ideology emerging in China about the same time (see Chapter 5). That is the ruler’s enjoyment of divine blessing, whether the Mandate of Heaven or the endorsement of Ahura Mazda, depended on his commitment to justice for all.

In this spirit the Achaemenid emperors generally encouraged their provincial officers to honor local customs and religious practices in return for loyal obedience and cooperation. King Cyrus, the Achaemenid founder, claimed to have seized the great city of Babylon in 538 B.C.E. amid “acclamation and rejoicing” and to have bowed before Marduk, the city’s patron deity. “My numerous troops marched peacefully through Babylon All its cult centers I maintained in well-being.”⁸ Conceiving of Ahura Mazda as a boundless cosmic presence, the Achaemenids had little trouble thinking of him as the force animating all local deities, whether Marduk or the Israelite god Yahweh. Indeed, Cyrus permitted Israelites who had been deported from Judea to Mesopotamia by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar a half-century earlier (see Chapter 5) to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their sacred temple. Some did go back, though by that time the prophet Jeremiah had successfully



The emperor at court. King Darius holds audience in the ceremonial complex at Persepolis. Behind him stands his son Xerxes, the royal heir. Who do you think the figures on the left and right of the relief might be?

preached that Yahweh was the god of all humankind, not just the Israelites' territorial deity, and that they could justly worship him wherever they lived. It was in the Achaemenid era that Israelites, shortly to be known as Jews (*Yehudi*, or people of Judea), began to form communities throughout much of Southwest Asia and the Mediterranean basin, creating the Jewish diaspora.

The dispersion of Jews was just one example of the complex social and cultural cross-fertilization that took place in the Achaemenid empire. The Persian army grew into a diverse assortment of soldiers drawn from all the imperial lands. The armies that invaded Greece constituted a motley ethnic mix, including numerous Greeks who fought on the Achaemenid side. Visitors to urban marketplaces or imperial audience halls heard a cacophony of languages. The Persian warrior class originally spoke an ancient form of Farsi, the main language of Iran today. The Achaemenids, however, also promoted Aramaic, the Semitic language already widely spoken and written in Southwest Asia, as a medium of imperial administration and diplomacy. When an emperor built a new palace, his agents looked far and wide to find engineers, artisans, laborers, and construction materials. In an inscription praising the construction of a royal center at Susa in southwestern Iran, Darius captured the rich multicultural character of the Achaemenid realm:

The silver and the ebony were brought from Egypt. The ornamentation with which the wall was adorned, that from Ionia was brought. The ivory, which was worked here, was brought from Kush (Nubia) and from India and from Arachosia (Afghanistan). . . . The goldsmiths who worked the gold, those were Medes and Egyptians. The men who worked the wood, those were Sardsians [from Anatolia] and Egyptians. The men who worked the baked brick, those were Babylonians. The men who adorned the wall, those were Medes and Egyptians. . . . At Susa a very excellent [work] was ordered.³

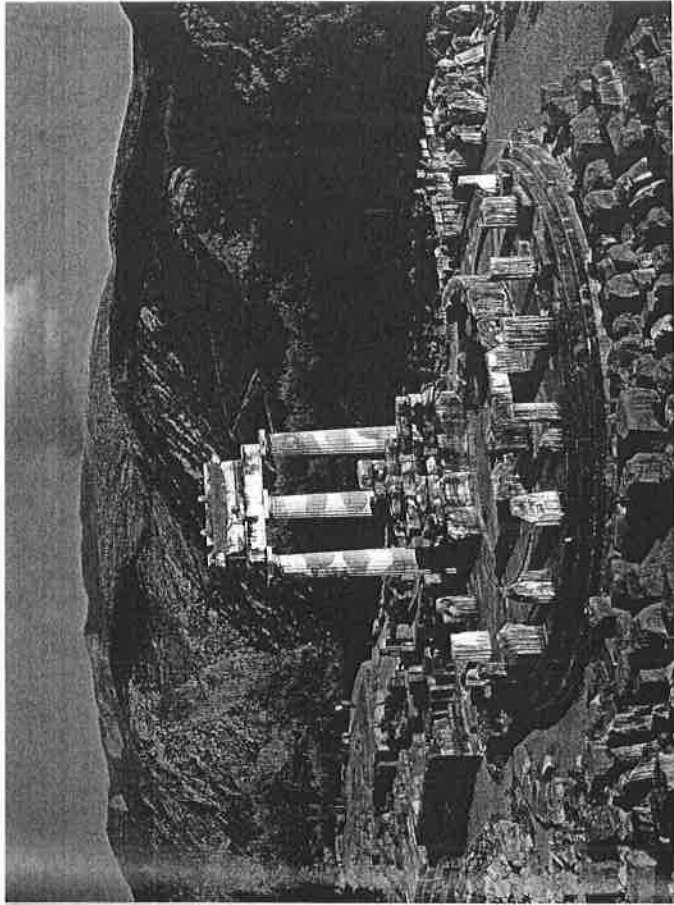
Inventive Greeks

FOCUS What factors contributed to the emergence of Greek city-states as important centers of political and cultural innovation from the sixth century B.C.E.?

As we have seen, Persian armies failed to subjugate the poleis of mainland Greece or most of the Hellenic cities and settlements of the Black Sea basin. In fact, many Greek cities enjoyed an economic boom in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. Those cities took a leading part in the expanding market networks of the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins. This was economic activity in which private traders and shippers sought personal profit by looking for new products to sell and new populations to buy them. Greek farmers found that by selling olive oil, wine, pottery, and other products abroad, they could afford to import much-needed grain, timber, and iron. Greek city artisans also turned out painted ceramic vessels, silver jewelry, and other luxury merchandise that commanded markets in growing Mediterranean ports and among the affluent urban elites of Egypt and Southwest Asia. Agricultural and commercial prosperity, together with proud victories over the formidable Persians, gave the poleis a new political confidence. Wealth and independence also permitted some of the cities, especially Athens, to encourage creative citizens to devote themselves to literature, art, and philosophical speculation. For about 150 years, that single city emitted extraordinary waves of cultural energy.

Government and Society in Greek City-States

If we situate Greece in the very long term of history, we see that most of the time from the second century B.C.E. to the nineteenth century C.E., it was a colonial territory within one



A temple at Delphi. A sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Athena occupies the smaller of two shrine complexes at the spectacular site of ancient Delphi. This circular building, whose purpose is not known, dates to the fourth century B.C.E.

empire or another. In that long-term perspective, the existence of hundreds of self-governing city-states, separated from one another by mountains and rugged coastlines, was a distinctive circumstance of just a few centuries. Most poleis, which included both a city and surrounding agricultural lands and villages, had ten thousand or fewer inhabitants. These centers typically had defensive walls and an imposing temple dedicated to a patron deity in the manner of Mesopotamian cities. The poleis traded, exchanged emissaries, and fought with one another, forming political alliances that grew, changed, and fell apart from one decade to another. In the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., Greek identity was based on shared cultural bonds, not political unity. Foremost among the elements that set Greeks apart from non-Greeks was a common alphabetically written language, which embraced many dialects. Greeks also generally shared the same household of gods and goddesses with numerous local variations; reverence for mythic heroes of the past, especially the military champions in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the epic narratives attributed to the eighth-century B.C.E. poet Homer; and participation in religious

ceremonies at the holy centers of Delphi, Delos, and Olympia, where, from 776 B.C.E., male Greeks from many cities took part in competitive games.

Governments in the poleis took a variety of forms. In some of them, the citizens chose a single individual to govern; in others, a small minority of aristocrats, that is, rich and influential men, ruled as an oligarchy. Before about 600 B.C.E., only the wealthiest land-owning males, most of them of aristocratic birth, could decide who would lead and participate in government. In the following two centuries, however, several poleis gradually broadened their laws to allow nonaristocratic and less advantaged men into the political process, granting them the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship.

Militaristic Sparta. Occupying a broad plain in the Peloponnese (pell-uh-puh-NEE-sus), the peninsula at the southern end of mainland Greece, Sparta was one of the largest city-states. Its male citizens created a government

oligarchy A political system in which a relatively small number of individuals or families control the government.

and social system unlike that found in any other polis. The duties of citizenship included full-time army training from age seven. Men typically married at eighteen, but they lived and ate together in barracks until they were about thirty. While girls in other poleis occupied themselves with textile weaving and other domestic chores, Spartan girls undertook tough physical training, presumably to prepare them to produce strong, healthy sons. In fact, Sparta had the character of a permanent army base. When its forces conquered the neighboring state of Messenia, they reduced most of its inhabitants to the status of servile laborers (*hektois*). Understandably, the oppressed classes, which came to constitute a majority of Sparta's population, periodically rose in rebellion and had to be repressed. In the sixth century B.C.E. the city-state coerced all the poleis on the Peloponnese into submission. Consequently, the city-state's harsh military culture could never be relaxed.

Athenian democracy: direct and limited. In striking contrast to the Spartans, the inhabitants of Athens and some other city-states established governments founded on *demokratia*, meaning "rule of the people." The "people" here did not mean everyone but only adult male citizens who had rights to vote and hold office. In the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., Athens instituted a type of collective government in which as many as 60,000 men out of a total population of about 350,000 could legally participate. In a world of divinely anointed monarchs, this system was remarkable, though direct democracy in one form or another was not unique to the ancient Aegean. For as far back in history as we have any record, farming communities and herding bands, probably in all parts of the world, made decisions by group consensus. Like Athens, these communities defined which members of the group had the right to take part and which did not.

In Athens beginning in the late seventh century B.C.E., a succession of judicious leaders, notably Solon, Cleisthenes, and Pericles, engineered political and legal reforms that extended rights to vote and own property, as well as the privilege of speaking in the popular assembly, to all adult, native-born, free (not enslaved) males. The authority to govern was vested in this citizenry, not in a monarch. By drawing lots, citizens took turns serving on civil juries and on the Council of Five Hundred, which managed the city's day-to-day affairs. In practice, the wealthiest Athenian families continued to have great influence over daily affairs, a limitation on democracy that should not surprise us.

Male citizens professed equality among themselves, responsibility for the welfare of the polis, and the right to primacy over women, children, and all noncitizen residents. Free women did not have public rights, but despite their formal exclusion from government, they contributed a great deal to the city-state's economy and cultural life. The wives and daughters of free men not only managed domestic economies but also did farm work, wove textiles for market, labored in craft shops, and ran small businesses. They played important roles in religious sacrifices, processions, and festivals dedicated to one or another of the numerous deities that Greeks worshipped, including Athena, the patron goddess of the city. Some cults and festivals, which Athenians regarded as vital to the city-state's well-being, were reserved for women only.

Slavery and slave trade grew in tandem with economic expansion in the whole Mediterranean basin. In the fifth century B.C.E., slaves in Athens probably ran to the tens of thousands, though this number would have been small relative to the servile population of the Achaemenid empire. Most slaves reached Greece as prisoners of war or as captives of pirates, though impoverished or debt-ridden men and women sometimes offered themselves as slave laborers in order to survive. Slaves might serve as domestic servants, scribes, tutors, artisans, construction workers, or prostitutes. The silver and lead mines of Attica, the peninsula that was part of the Athenian state, consumed slaves at a voracious rate. According to Athenian law, an owner could physically assault slaves but not kill them wantonly.

Aside from a few restrictions, slaves had no legal rights. Rather, they were chattels, comparable in status to domestic animals. As the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote, "A slave is a living possession."¹⁶

In the aftermath of the wars with Persia, Athens emerged as probably the biggest and richest polis. The farm production of Attica plus imports of grain from the Black Sea and northern Africa fed the urban population. Attica's mines swelled the city's treasury and financed a powerful navy. Foreigners (*metics*) flocked to the city, energizing craft industries, banking, and overseas trade. The fortified port of Piraeus, located five miles southwest of the city, swarmed with sailing ships that exported wine, oil, figs, pottery, and



A Greek warrior. This woman standing before an altar embrazons a vase from the sixth century B.C.E. Oil stored in this flask may have been used in religious rituals.

other goods and brought in grain, fish, timber, and numerous exotic wares from lands near and far.

Greek military prowess. The evolution of self-governing city-states was linked to military changes initiated in the late eighth century B.C.E. In Chapter 5, we described how, after the twelfth century B.C.E., infantry progressively replaced chariot riders in Southwest Asia and the eastern Mediterranean. As Greek city-states multiplied, their inhabitants organized infantry militias. All male citizens trained and fought to defend the polis or to enlarge its territory at the expense of neighbors. Consequently, when farmers and artisans joined their city's army or navy, they had good cause to demand citizenship rights and duties equal to men who were wealthy and well born.

Except in Sparta, militia service was typically part time but also a basic duty of citizenship. Soldiers outfitted themselves with bronze helmets and body armor; they carried round wooden shields and spears designed for close-in fighting. Massing together shoulder-to-shoulder and shield-to-shield six-to-eight ranks deep, these fighters, or *hoplites* (from *hoplon*, a Greek word for shield) marched into battle in close formation. This ingenious tactical formation, called a phalanx, was designed to charge, smash into, and crush an enemy force. As long as a phalanx maneuvered on level ground and maintained its cohesion, it could wreak havoc on any opposing force that was deployed more loosely or that tried to stop an advancing wall of shields by firing arrows from a distance. On the political and social sides, the phalanx also

phalanx A military formation in which soldiers march and fight in closely packed, disciplined ranks.

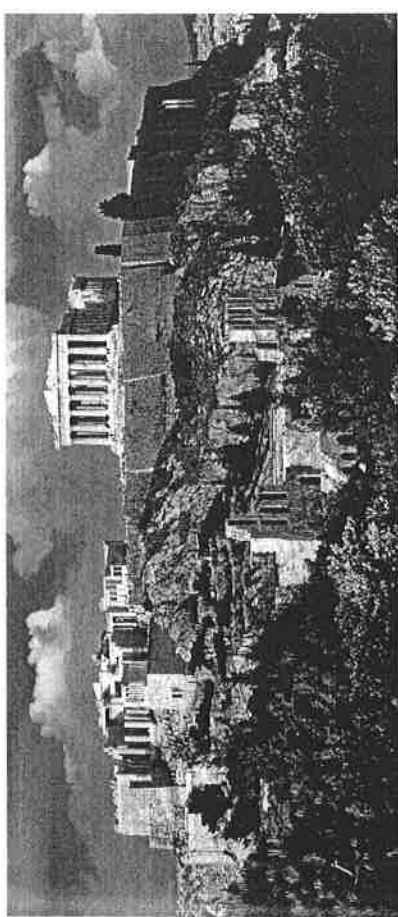
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fostered civic solidarity within the polis because military success depended absolutely on intense physical and psychological cooperation. Cohesion, however, did not necessarily extend beyond a city-state's frontiers. On the contrary, the more unified a polis perceived itself to be, the more it might be inclined to attack other cities.

The Flowering of Athens

Athens in fact attacked cities near and far. After the Persian threat receded, the city's leaders continued to invest lavishly in its citizen navy. The prime weapon was the trireme, a fast, quick-turning ship powered with three ranks of rowers and designed to ram enemy vessels head on. Young citizens, not slaves, powered the ships. The trireme fleet freed many poleis from Persia but then made them into tax-paying dependencies of Athens. Under the leadership of Pericles (495–429 B.C.E.), Athens reduced former military allies to the status of tribute-paying dependent states. The navy also took control of the major Aegean Sea passages, including the Bosphorus, the strait leading to the Black Sea. On the Greek mainland, however, Sparta and its dependencies remained powerful rivals.

Whenever in world history a country has displayed great cultural creativity, wealth and labor have been marshaled to pay for it. In the case of Athens, riches pouring in from the seaborne empire, including slave labor, financed a period of intense intellectual and aesthetic innovation that began about 480 B.C.E. and lasted nearly a century and a half. As the Athenian empire grew, artisans, builders, and scholars converged on the teeming capital. Athenian wealth, funneled through the public treasury and the most affluent



The Acropolis. The Parthenon and the other public buildings on the fortified hill that dominates Athens display the city-state's wealth and power in the decades following Greek victory over Persian invaders. Athens obliged its allied cities to contribute generously to the lavish beautification of the Acropolis.

families, financed an ambitious building program, notably construction of a complex of temples, statues, and public spaces on the Acropolis, the hill that commanded the city. The crowning glory was the Parthenon, an exquisitely proportioned temple dedicated to the cult of Athena. The polis also patronized artists and thinkers, who dedicated themselves to painting, sculpture, architectural design, music, drama, history, philosophy, mathematics, and science.

The Athenian cultural inheritance. This burst of ingenuity was not entirely self-generated. The inventive people who lived and worked in Athens were all heirs to the stream of ideas that had been emanating from Southwest Asia and the Nile valley during the previous three thousand years. Much of this accumulated knowledge became available to Greek thinkers, and they took great interest in it. The philosopher Aristotle, for example, contended that "it was in Egypt that the mathematical arts were first formed" thanks to the scientific work of its priestly class in earlier millennia.⁷

Despite the wars with the Achaemenids, Persia also contributed significantly to Athenian cultural achievement. Greeks spoke of the Persian elite as barbarians (mainly because they did not speak Greek) and expressed contempt for their extravagant lifestyle. Even so, the wars did not prevent Persian luxury goods—gems, jewelry, textiles, gold ware—from arriving in Greek ports. Athens sent envoys to the Achaemenid court, and Greeks in substantial numbers resided in the empire's western provinces as political exiles, mercenaries, artisans, and scribes.

Herodotus (484–425 B.C.E.), the Greek historian who wrote the classic account of the Persian Wars, traveled extensively in the empire, including Egypt. Affluent Athenians took warmly to Persian finery, clothing styles, and other status symbols, for

Servants attend an affluent woman. Scenes of everyday life decorate this lekythos, a water container used in marriage and funeral rituals. Made in Greek style in a polis in southern Italy, the vase depicts a status symbol borrowed from Persian custom—the subordinate parasol carrier. What factors help explain the diffusion of Persian cultural practices as far west as Italy?

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example, using slaves in the Achaemenid manner to carry parasols, fans, and fly-whisks.⁸

Religion and philosophy. The citizens of Greek poleis participated in rituals and sacrifices to win favor from the gods and goddesses believed to reside on Mount Olympus in northern Greece. Religious life, however, was also diverse and jarringly incoherent. The Greeks had no sacred scripture or set of doctrines comparable to either the Hebrew Bible or the moral teachings of Zoroaster. Various cults to cure illnesses, ensure fertility, and predict the future flourished. The most influential individuals in Greek urban communities were secular, or nonreligious, civic leaders, rather than priests, who enforced codes of belief and behavior. This relatively open-minded religious climate is likely to have encouraged adventuresome thinkers to engage in wide-ranging speculation about nature, the human condition, and cosmic truth. Moreover, the civic culture of some poleis, especially Athens, stimulated remarkably open debate among free male citizens on questions of public duty, moral justice, and proper community behavior.

In the sixth century B.C.E., Greek scholars inhabiting cities of Ionia on the eastern Aegean shore led the way in formulating a method of scientific and moral inquiry that became known as natural philosophy. This discipline was founded on the idea that just as the polis thrived because citizens subscribed to underlying laws, so fundamental rules might also govern nature, including human action. These laws might even transcend the will of the quarrelsome, unreliable gods on Mount Olympus, who offered little help in making sense of the world. Natural laws, rather, might be discovered through the exercise of human logic and reason and, at least for some philosophers, careful observation of the external world.

The Ionian tradition of abstract speculation blossomed in Athens in the fifth century B.C.E. Scientific work focused on mathematics and on the natural constitution of the earth and heavens. Cultural and psychological studies aimed to fathom the universal principles underlying moral and political behavior. Drama, which got its start in festivals dedicated to Dionysus, the god of wine, explored the complex relationships between individuals, society, and the gods. Sculptors and architects sought to find universal principles to represent harmonious order and symmetry, especially in the human body. Greek intellectuals heartily disagreed with one another over questions of moral truth, the proper ranking of social classes, and whether democracy was a good idea or not. They founded their speculations on the premise that humans might achieve the good life by using their reasoning power to discover natural explanations for things rather than merely waiting helplessly while the gods bul-

lied, seduced, and played tricks on them.

Socrates (470–399 B.C.E.), the earliest of the great philosophers, set the agenda for human action founded on reason with his celebrated declaration that "the unexamined life is not worth living." Plato (428–347 B.C.E.), who tells us almost everything we know about Socrates, and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), Plato's student, wrote on a colossal range of subjects. Plato was the idealist, interested in metaphysics, that is, speculation on the "first causes" of things. He argued that the world we see with our senses is merely a flickering silhouette of perfect reality. Among many other implications, this idea led Plato to imagine the ideal political state, which in his view would not be a democracy but a system ruled by Guardians, or philosopher-kings.

In contrast to Plato, Aristotle was an empiricist, a seeker of concrete, observable knowledge about humankind and the world. Beyond that, he sought to understand the fundamental interconnectedness and coherence of all phenomena. In the process he produced a huge body of work on politics, economics, mathematics, logic, poetry, astronomy, chemistry, and biology. The ideas of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and numerous other Greek thinkers endured, probably less because of the theories they formulated and observations they made than because of the questions they asked. As Socrates reputedly said, "All I know is that I know nothing." This was certainly an invitation to inquiry. Greek philosophers had no monopoly on logical reasoning or high-flying speculation about the nature of reality. But the questions they posed continued to intrigue and confound thoughtful people in the succeeding centuries and indeed down to our own time.

Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Era

FOCUS To what extent did societies within the region from northern India to the eastern Mediterranean embrace Greek-style cultural and political forms between the fourth and second centuries B.C.E.?

In the fifth century B.C.E., Greek warriors defended themselves against the Persian empire. In the last third of the fourth century, Greek and Macedonian soldiers destroyed it. The conquests of Alexander (r. 336–323 B.C.E.), the young king who led that campaign, figure among the most extraordinary military adventures in history. Marching from Greece to the Indus valley, Alexander carved out an empire even bigger than the Achaemenid state. He succeeded only fleetingly, but his conquests led to a drastic rewriting of the political map of Southwest Asia and the eastern Mediterranean (see Map 6.3). Following the conqueror's withdrawal from India, the Maurya dynasty, a third large state, united the Indus and Ganges River valleys for the first time in history. The existence of these and several smaller monarchies, most of them under the authority of Greek-speaking elites, stimulated more than two centuries of intense commercial and cultural interchange from India and Central Asia to the Mediterranean.

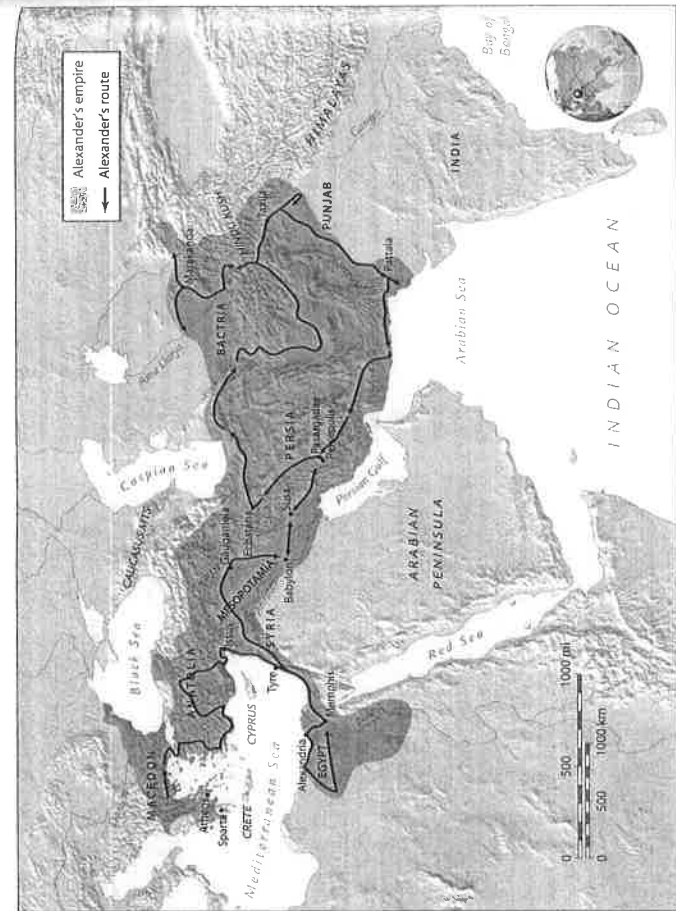
Alexander's Short, Brilliant Career

In the Aegean the rise of the Athenian sea-based empire sparked more than one hundred years of inter-polis conflict, starting with the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.E.). Athens, Sparta, and the powerful city-states of Thebes took turns dominating the scene. Within the cities, land-owning and commercial minorities continued to accumulate wealth at the expense of ordinary people, causing bitter alienation between rich and poor. To the east, the Achaemenid empire also showed signs of stress. Imperial leadership deteriorated, rebels pushed the Achaemenids out of Egypt for fifty-seven years, and the Indus valley's subject populations reasserted their independence.

Amid these unstable circumstances, Macedonia, one of a number of woodland kingdoms on the Balkan Peninsula north of Greece, arose to regional power. A small class of warrior-aristocrats who spoke Macedonian, which may have been either a dialect of Greek or a language closely related to it, ruled a population of mostly farmers and herdsmen. Athens and the other culturally sophisticated city-states to the south tended to regard Macedonia as a useful source of timber, gold, and horses but otherwise as a wild frontier. In 358 B.C.E., however, Philip II ascended the Macedonian throne and initiated a vigorous program to strengthen his kingdom, obliging the Greek poleis to take him seriously. He had no use for Athenian-style democracy, but he "Hellenized" his royal court, adopting Greek ceremonies and cultural refinements and hiring Greek artists and intellectuals to model proper standards of civilization. On the military side, he expanded his cavalry of heavily armored aristocrats, and he trained Balkan peasants to fight in a phalanx of eighteen thousand strong. He armed these foot soldiers with the *sarissa*, a bronze-tipped pike fifteen to eighteen feet long. Macedonia's enemies therefore faced a massed infantry bristling with spears.

In 339–338 B.C.E., Philip advanced south, crushing the disunited poleis, including Athens, and proclaiming himself supreme leader of a unified Macedonian and Greek federation. Within the city-states, the ideal of citizenship endured, but the brief era of Athenian democracy came to an end. Philip planned to cross the Aegean and attack western Anatolia, where thousands of Greeks still lived under Persian rule. In 336 B.C.E., however, a bodyguard, who might have been the tool of an aristocratic conspiracy, assassinated him.

Alexander's campaigns. The kingship then passed to Philip's son Alexander, who was barely twenty years old. Philip had given this bright boy a Greek education, Aristotle serving for a time as the lad's tutor. When the king was killed, Alexander moved with great speed to carry forward his father's plan. In 334 B.C.E., he invaded Anatolia at the head of an army of thirty-five thousand Macedonians and Greek allies. During the next eleven years, he blazed a trail of conquest nearly three thousand miles to the east. From 334 to 330 B.C.E., he fought his way to the heart of Persia,



MAP 6.3 Alexander's empire, 325 B.C.E.

Compare this map with Map 6.2 of the Achaemenid empire. What similarities and differences do you notice in the directions of conquest? Why do you think the conquered territories on the two maps overlap to such a great extent?

subduing Anatolia, Syria, Egypt, and Babylonia along the way. He engaged Achaemenid armies in three great battles, brilliantly deploying both cavalry and phalanx infantry, and he won every time against unfavorable odds. He forced the emperor Darius III (r. 336–330 B.C.E.) to flee for his life, occupied the great Persian capitals, and seized the imperial treasuries.

Marching onward to the northeastern Achaemenid provinces, Alexander led his army over an eleven-thousand-foot pass of the Hindu Kush mountains to Central Asia and the populous Amu Darya River valley. As if destruction of the Persian empire were not enough, he then pushed his exhausted troops back over the Hindu Kush and across Afghanistan to the Indus valley, where in 325 B.C.E. he routed the army of a local king. At this point even Alexander's toughest warriors refused to go farther. Relucting, he returned west, crossing the deserts of southern Iran to reach

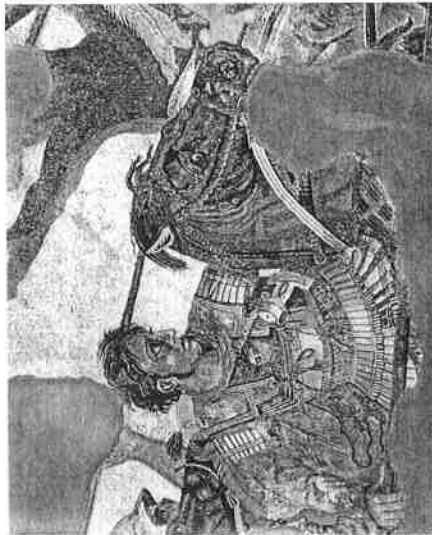
Babylon in 325 B.C.E. In the final period of his career, from 325 to 323 B.C.E., he applied himself to organizing his empire. But before he could do much, he died suddenly after falling ill in the extreme heat of a Mesopotamia summer—and possibly after a night of heavy drinking with his officers. With no provision for a successor, his leading generals gave him a glorious funeral, then set quickly to fighting one another for his throne.

In thirteen years, Alexander created an empire larger than any state in history. He was personally charismatic and a phenomenal military tactician. Like most warlords of that era, he was also ruthless—terrorizing, killing, and enslaving countless numbers of people from Greece to India. For example, when the leaders of the Greek city of Thebes challenged his authority, he assaulted the city and razed every building except the temples and the house of a famous poet. He then sent most of the population into

slavery. In Alexander's attack on the Mediterranean port of Tyre, his forces killed six thousand defenders, then had two thousand more crucified on the beach.

What did Alexander want? Alexander almost certainly aimed to create a state centered on Mesopotamia and Persia, not on Greece. He conceived of himself as ruler of a transimperial Persian empire that would one day incorporate the entire Mediterranean and Black Sea basins. He introduced elaborate Persian rituals to his royal court and held audience there dressed in the flowing robe and sash of an Achaemenid potentate. Moreover, he linked his authority to Egyptian and Mesopotamian notions of divine monarchy, which were foreign to Greek tradition. After occupying Egypt, for example, he accepted the pharaoh's crown, in effect making himself a god.

Yet Alexander also assumed that the members of his governing class, whatever their ethnic origin, would accept the Greek model of culture, the only one he knew. He ordered new cities built in the Greek style, twenty-five or more of them in eastern Persia alone. These towns were to serve as military and administrative colonies and as regional economic centers. Army veterans, as well as civilian settlers drawn partly from crowded Aegean cities, formed a privileged elite over local non-Greeks, though Alexander permitted the new towns varying degrees of local self-government. Thousands of Greeks settled across the empire, facilitating Greek cultural diffusion into parts of Afroeurasia where such influences had previously been unknown.



Alexander at war. This detail from a mosaic that decorated a house in Pompeii, Italy, in the first century C.E. illustrates Alexander in combat. The mosaic commemorates his victory over the Persian emperor Darius III at the Issus River in Anatolia in 333 B.C.E. What sort of impression of Alexander do you think the artist might be trying to make?

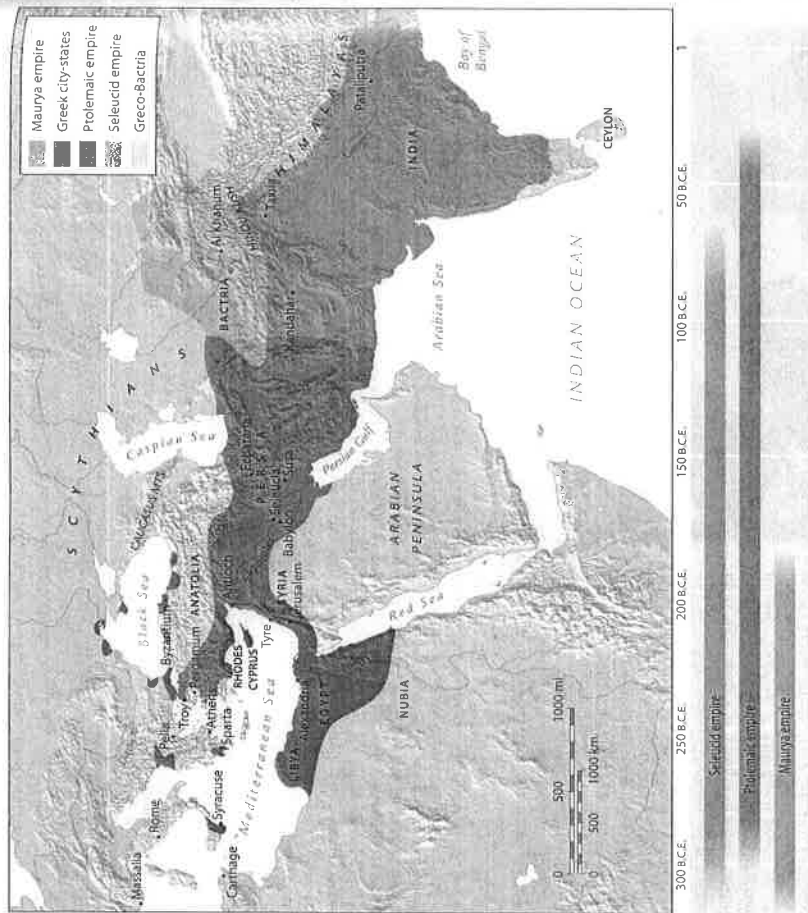
Foundations of the Hellenistic World

The term *Hellenistic* refers to the political and cultural developments that occurred across much of the India-to-Mediterranean region in the three centuries following Alexander's death. The Hellenistic Age describes the period when Alexander's successors ruled much of this region and when Greek speakers interacted with peoples of diverse ethnolinguistic identity—Persians, Mesopotamians, Syrians, Arabs, Egyptians, Central Asians, North Indians—creating novel cultural amalgamations.

For about fifty years after Alexander's death, Macedonian commanders competed brutally for domination of the conquered lands. The unitary empire broke up but did not simply disintegrate. Rather, three of Alexander's former generals founded regional monarchies and established governments whose highest officials had Macedonian or Greek backgrounds, forming a Greco-Macedonian ruling class. The largest and richest of these new states was the Seleucid empire (312–64 B.C.E.), named after the former Macedonian officer Seleucus I (r. 305–281 B.C.E.). This monarchy embraced the greatest cities of Southwest Asia and the overland routes from the Mediterranean to Central Asia and India. Roughly speaking, it overlaid the defunct Achaemenid domain. A second Hellenistic state emerged in Egypt under Ptolemy I, another of Alexander's generals. The Ptolemaic (TAWL-oh-may-ihk) dynasty (305–30 B.C.E.) endured for 275 years, dominating at the height of its power the Nile valley plus the island of Cyprus and parts of Libya, Anatolia, and Syria.

The Macedonian officer Antigonus the One-Eyed took control of Philip's original Balkan kingdom, but this third state (the Antigonid dynasty) lost control of the Greek poleis, which once again formed their own alliance leagues. Far to the northeast in Central Asia, Greek commanders broke away from the Seleucid empire about 240 B.C.E. and founded the kingdom of Bactria. In short, Greek-speaking ruling groups continued to dominate an immense range of territory long after Alexander's empire had broken apart (see Map 6.4).

Hellenistic governments. Like the Achaemenids before them, the Seleucid and Ptolemaic monarchs regarded their authority as theoretically absolute. To them, monarchy existed chiefly to pump revenue from ordinary people to enrich the ruling elite, defend the imperial territories, and, when the opportunity arose, extend them by war. Hellenistic rulers also took responsibility for rituals that had to



MAP 6.4 The Hellenistic world and the Maurya empire, ca. 300–200 B.C.E.
Which of the states on this map is likely to have had the greatest volume of trade passing through its cities?

be performed to appease the gods in order to avert bad harvests and other disasters. The statecraft of the Seleucids and Ptolemies centered on massive displays of military might and quick repression of any outbreak of popular opposition.

Hellenistic monarchs ruled in association with an intimate circle of friends, advisors, and high officers, most of them from Greek or Macedonian families. The Seleucid realm numbered about thirty million people, and the road network the Achaemenids had built enabled state officials to collect taxes and administer justice with remarkable efficiency. The Ptolemaic government was even better organized. It had the advantage of ruling a core population

(about seven million) tightly concentrated in the Nile valley and fully accustomed to taking orders from the top. Hellenistic rulers collaborated with local village elders, nomad chiefs, and religious leaders, relying on them to help keep order in return for political and economic privileges. Both the Seleucids and the Ptolemies went to great lengths to inspire awe in their subjects, ordering construction of giant statues and temples in their honor.

In the Ptolemaic state, which became particularly good at managing economic life, a hierarchy of Egyptian officials, clerks, and secretaries supervised by Greco-Macedonian bosses regulated farming, irrigation, artisanry, commerce,

and prices. They also monopolized the manufacture and trade of numerous products, including papyrus, linen, oil, and beer. This centralized economic management generally inhibited private economic initiative. The rulers expended revenue mainly on military procurement, payments to officials, regal pomp, and self-aggrandizing monuments. Conversely, the living standards of ordinary men and women appear to have declined steadily during the third century B.C.E.

Like the pharaohs before them, the Ptolemies sponsored commercial expeditions up the Nile to Nubia. In the third century B.C.E., they also sent seaborne trade missions to the southern end of the Red Sea, partly to purchase Indian goods coming across the Arabian Sea. Egyptian agents cultivated relations with local African traders and hunters as far south along the East African coast as modern Somalia. The commodity they most wanted was elephants, which they transported back to Egypt on ships specially designed to carry them. When Alexander invaded northwestern India, he learned the value of tamed elephants as weapons of war—ancient tanks, as it were. Subsequently, both the

Seleucids and the Ptolemies traded in battle elephants, incorporating them into their armies.

Hellenistic society. Because of the ambitious building program started by Alexander, the number of cities in the lands his empire encompassed rose dramatically in the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. (see Map 6.4). Some of these cities, including Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, Seleucia on the Tigris, and Pergamum in Anatolia, became large sprawling hubs of manufacture, trade, and cultural interchange. Others were no more than modest military colonies. Like Alexander, the Hellenistic rulers wanted their cities to conform to Greek cultural ideals in layout, architecture, and ornamentation. A new center should have a temple, theater, marketplace, gymnasium for athletic training and education, and comfortable villas on a neat grid of streets. New towns as far from Greece as Al Khanum in northwestern Afghanistan resembled the cityscapes of Athens and Thebes.

The populations of these cities varied greatly from one region to another. Though thousands of Greek migrants and visitors poured into Seleucid cities, the majority of inhabitants were local people. In the bigger towns, a floating, polyglot populace of soldiers, merchants, artisans, and scholars came and went incessantly. We know little about everyday society in these places. Ethnic neighborhoods may have been a feature

of some of them, but recent archaeology has turned up no general evidence that different language communities lived in isolation from one another. Excavations at Susa east of the Tigris show that houses inhabited by Greeks and other groups stood side by side, suggesting that men and women of different origins mingled freely in daily life.

The Ptolemies built few new cities, but they transformed Alexandria on the Nile delta into the greatest metropolis anywhere in Afroeurasia in the third century B.C.E. The city surpassed all other Hellenistic centers in population, wealth, and concentrated intellectual achievement. The Greek and Macedonian elite



A war elephant. The baby trailing its parent softens this image of an African elephant carrying soldiers into battle. The fighting lower may have been a Greek invention. This terra-cotta plate, dated to the third century B.C.E., comes from southern Italy.

Queen Arsinoe II: Ruler of Ptolemaic Egypt

Conquer, high priestess, and goddess, Queen Arsinoe II (316–270 B.C.E.) was one of the most powerful royal women in Egypt's long dynastic history. Her father was the Macedonian general Ptolemy I, who founded the Ptolemaic dynasty following the death of Alexander the Great. About 300 B.C.E., when Arsinoe was fifteen or sixteen years old, her father arranged her marriage, an entirely political transaction, to Lysimachus, the sixty-one-year-old king who ruled territory on either side of the Bosphorus Strait. The couple had three sons in rapid succession, but Agathocles, a child from Lysimachus's previous marriage, stood ahead of them in the line of royal succession. To improve her sons' political positions, as well as her own, Arsinoe accused Agathocles of plotting to kill his father. Consequently, Lysimachus ordered him executed, a vile act that triggered violent uprisings. In 281 B.C.E., less than a year after the murder, the elderly Lysimachus died in battle against Seleucus, ruler of the Seleucid empire of Persia.

When she lost her husband, Arsinoe fled to Macedonia. Once there, she soon accepted a second marriage, this time to her own half-brother Ptolemy Keraunos. Greeks generally regarded marriage between siblings as indecent, but Arsinoe and her new spouse took their cue from Egypt, where such royal unions were customary. Ptolemy Keraunos had

Arsinoe II strikes a characteristically Egyptian pose, but she sports a Greek hairstyle.

seized part of the dead Lysimachus's territories, and he assured Arsinoe that he would place her sons back in the line of succession as his adopted heirs. He deceived her, however, and fearing these sons as potential threats to his power, murdered the two younger boys, while the eldest escaped. Arsinoe fled once again, this time back to Egypt and the protection of her full brother Ptolemy II (r. 282–246 B.C.E.), who was by this time Egypt's king.

Arsinoe lost no time getting back on her feet and maneuvering for power. She persuaded Ptolemy II that his wife was plotting against him and deserved to be sent into exile. Ptolemy not only complied but also made Arsinoe his new queen. The evidence from surviving texts and images demonstrates convincingly that, although she lived only for another five or six years, she enjoyed equality with her husband-brother as co-ruler and may have governed more energetically than he did. Historians think she may have helped design the strategy that led to Egypt's victory in a war against the Seleucids for control of territory in Syria. She may also have supervised a major expansion of the Egyptian navy. She appears with her brother on some coins of the period but alone on others, implying her commanding status.

In the years leading to her death in 270 B.C.E., at about the age of forty-five, Arsinoe became not only priestess of her own cult, a typical practice among Egyptian rulers, but also a goddess, worshiped warmly during her own lifetime and for a long time after. A grand shrine was dedicated to her in Alexandria, and towns were named after her in Greece.

Historians, both ancient and modern, have often represented Arsinoe as conniving and power hungry, though these qualities were hardly rare among monarchs of the Hellenistic centuries. She doubtless exercised great political influence during her brief reign, and she offered a model for ambitious Ptolemaic queens that followed her. For example, Cleopatra VII (r. 51–30 B.C.E.), the last of the Ptolemaic rulers, adopted Arsinoe's crown as her own.

Thinking Critically

What political advantages might Arsinoe have gained by encouraging her subjects to worship her as a deity while she shared the throne with her brother?

Public life in Hellenistic cities was as patriarchal, that is, as dominated by males, as it generally was in urban societies throughout Afroeurasia. We have some evidence, however, that in the bustling, impersonal climate of the larger cities, upper-class women had somewhat wider scope to pursue private interests than they had in fifth-century B.C.E. Athens, where a tight guard of male relatives kept them close

to home. Elite Hellenistic women engaged more openly in commercial and financial affairs, sought more education, and in some cases took up careers as poets or artists. In Egypt the Ptolemaic monarchs sometimes married their sisters in order to keep the Macedonian dynasty free of foreign blood. Queen Arsinoe II (316–270 B.C.E.), for example, married her brother Ptolemy II (r. 282–246 B.C.E.) and shared the throne with him for five or six years.

Cultural Trends

The power of the Hellenistic states, the multiplying of cities, and expansion of long-distance trade all worked together to intensify cultural interchange among peoples of different languages and ethnic identities from the Mediterranean to India. By the sixth century B.C.E., the Greek language, as well as Greek religious, political, literary, and artistic ideas, had become known in Southwest Asia. But following Alexander's campaigns, these ideas and styles imposed themselves quite suddenly on the consciousness of numerous other peoples who had previously heard nothing about them. The conqueror and his successors built numerous cities as islands of Hellenistic culture, projects that required Greek merchants, artisans, architects, scholars, poets, and musicians to move to these new centers to implant civilized standards.

In the early third century B.C.E., a person could journey across Southwest Asia without ever losing the company of Greek speakers. Koine (common tongue), a dialect of Greek that developed in the Hellenistic world and incorporated vocabulary from other, mostly Semitic languages, became the premier medium of trade, business, and intellectual conversation wherever Greco-Macedonians dominated society. Like Aramaic in the Persian empire, Koine served as a *lingua franca*, facilitating diplomacy and business across

cultural and linguistic frontiers. A traveler in Southwest Asia would also see temples and homes reminiscent of Athens, painted pottery made in the Aegean, Greek statuary, Greek plays performed in Greek-style amphitheaters, and silver and gold coins bearing Greek inscriptions and the likenesses of Greek rulers and gods.

It is hard to know to what extent local people who lived under Greco-Macedonian rule accepted Hellenistic culture. Certainly only a small minority became fully converted to Greek ways. This group included local elites, notably political climbers who voluntarily cloaked themselves in Greek habits and styles to improve their chances of entering the charmed circles of influential men and women. Also, Greco-Macedonian army veterans and male civilian settlers typically severed personal attachments when they migrated to distant cities. Instead, they wedded local women, and the children of these mixed marriages usually had Greek names, spoke Greek, and grew up in a Hellenistic cultural milieu.

Philosophers and scientists. Literate residents of Hellenistic cities were likely familiar with the utterances of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek thinkers. For example, archaeologists have found faint physical traces of a treatise on Aristotle's philosophy as far from Athens as Ai Khanum in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Hellenistic centuries also inspired new philosophical movements concerned with the practical problems of living a calm and stable life in cities characterized by social flux, commercial hubbub, and authoritarian governments. Cynicism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism were three of these movements. All of them focused on ethical choices individuals must make to find peace in an unpredictable and perplexing world. All of them extolled human reason as the proper guide to the

Hellenistic Philosophies

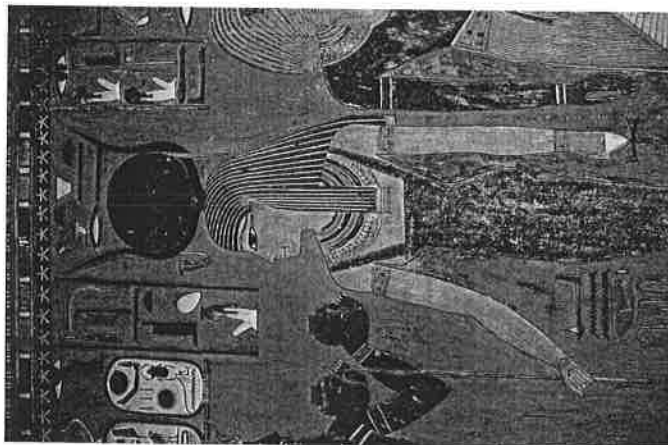
Philosophical School	A Key Idea	Key Thinkers	Quotation	Modern Use of Related Words
Cynicism (Cynics)	Individuals should seek freedom and self-reliance to the point of repudiating material possessions, social ties, and yearnings for pleasure.	Antisthenes (d. 350 B.C.E.) Diogenes of Sinope (d. 323 B.C.E.)	"I would rather go mad than enjoy myself." —Antisthenes	Cynical: distrustful of human motivations; sincerity, or honesty
Epicureanism (Epicureans)	Reality has no ultimate sense or structure, so the individual should strive to avoid pain by pursuing pleasure grounded in tranquility, self-control, and moderation practiced in the company of loyal friends.	Epicurus (d. 271 B.C.E.)	"Pleasure is the beginning and end of a happy life." —Epicurus	Epicurean: an individual fond of sensual enjoyment, especially in eating and drinking
Stoicism (Stoics)	Individuals have a fundamental duty to accept the role nature has assigned them. Neither pleasure nor pain is of any account; only the practice of virtue, which comes naturally by living in accordance with nature.	Zeno of Citium (d. 262 B.C.E.)	"Our individual natures are part of universal nature. Hence the chief good is life according to nature." —Zeno, after Diogenes Laertius (third-century C.E. biographer)	Stoic: an individual who is able to suffer pain or misfortune without complaining or revealing personal feelings

art of living. Though their founders all lived and worked in Athens, these schools attracted followers in the wider Hellenistic world.

Hellenistic intellectuals who studied mathematics, physics, and astronomy worked from the premise that general theories could be formulated to explain how the universe worked. Like Aristotle, they observed, measured, and classified rather than simply speculated. Some of their findings were way ahead of their time. For example, Aristarchus (d. ca. 230 B.C.E.) proposed a heliocentric solar system in which the earth turned on its axis and revolved around the sun, a theory that gained general world acceptance only two thousand years later. Eratosthenes (d. ca. 195 B.C.E.) used an ingenious geometric procedure to measure the circumference of the earth, coming up with a figure only fifteen miles off the mark. Euclid (d. ca. 270 B.C.E.) synthesized geometric knowledge whose axioms and theorems schools teach

today. Archimedes (d. 212 B.C.E.) pioneered the geometry of cylinders and spheres and calculated the value of pi more precisely than any earlier scholar had done. He is also said to have invented a screw device for raising irrigation water from one level to another.

Athens remained intellectually lively in the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., and new centers of learning blossomed in Pergamum and on the Mediterranean island of Rhodes. Alexandria in Egypt attracted intellectuals from near and far. The leading institution was the Museum, a kind of government-sponsored think tank for scientific, literary, and philosophical research. Next to it, the Ptolemies built a library that came to house nearly half a million books, probably the largest concentration of accumulated knowledge anywhere in the world. Among Hellenistic cities, Alexandria was undoubtedly the most cosmopolitan, a "world city" that had both a diverse population and an educated class



Egyptian and Greek representations of Isis. The goddess Isis was associated with nature and magic and revered as an ideal mother and wife. On the left, an Egyptian tomb mural from the fourth century B.C.E. shows Isis carrying an ankh, a symbol of eternal life, in one hand and a scepter, an emblem of dominion, in the other. On the right, the statue of a Hellenistic Isis dated to the second or first century B.C.E. holds a cornucopia, a Greek symbol of fertility. What other artistic elements in the two images would you characterize as distinctively Egyptian or Greek?

that shared philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic ideas with similarly minded people scattered in other cities.

Cultural cross-currents. Despite the influence of Greek language and cultural forms thousands of miles from Athens, the immense region exposed to them remained a complex cultural stew. Koine Greek gradually became the dominant language in Anatolia, but this did not happen in Syria or Egypt. In the Seleucid domain, Aramaic appears to have remained as important as Greek for government and commerce. Cultural forms not of Greek origin also gained importance within the Hellenistic zone. For example, Greco-Macedonians abroad adopted Egyptian or Persian gods into their pantheon by associating them symbolically with Hellenic divinities having similar character traits. The Egyptian goddess Isis took on a quasi-Greek identity and became popular in the Seleucid lands. Worship of deities like Isis sometimes metamorphosed into religious cults devoted to secret rituals, spiritual fellowship, and exercises to achieve union with the divine. Several of these mystery religions, as they are known, spread widely in the Hellenistic world and became popular among people of all classes. Among cultural fashions, rich Hellenistic families acquired tastes for female slaves of South Asian origin. These women fetched attractive prices because their exotic origins and looks elevated their value as servants in the households and bedchambers of the wealthy.

Jewish communities continued to multiply across Southwest Asia and the eastern Mediterranean between the fourth and second centuries B.C.E. The Jewish population in Alexandria rose to around 180,000, as much as a third of the city's total. Thousands learned to speak Greek, rather than Hebrew or Aramaic, as their first language. Jewish intellectuals produced a substantial body of religious, philosophical, and dramatic literature in that language. In the third century B.C.E., Ptolemy II sponsored translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, a work known as the Septuagint. Greek-speaking Jews who were losing their knowledge of Hebrew needed this new edition, and non-Jews now had greater opportunity to become familiar with Jewish belief and practice. On the other hand, many Jews either resisted Hellenistic culture or had little contact with it, notably in Jerusalem and its vicinity. Some educated Jews studied Greek philosophical ideas but as worshippers of one God had nothing to do with the deities on Mount Olympus.

Buddhism and the Maurya Empire in India

FOCUS In what circumstances did Buddhist beliefs and practices achieve success among growing numbers in South Asia between the fifth and third centuries B.C.E.?

The first state to unify much of South Asia arose nearly simultaneously with the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires. In

321 B.C.E., two years after Alexander died, the young warlord Chandragupta seized Magadha, the most powerful of several neighboring states and then advanced to the Indus River, where about 303 B.C.E. he defeated Greco-Macedonian occupiers, forcing them out of most of northwestern India. Ashoka, Chandragupta's grandson and the third ruler in the Maurya dynasty line, conquered more of India (see Map 6.4) and tried to create more efficient and orderly centralized government founded on a set of moral principles. He derived these precepts from the teachings of Buddhism, which was just then emerging in India as a popular religious movement.

Foundations of Buddhism

We saw in Chapter 5 that Brahmanism took root in northern and central India in the later second millennium B.C.E. Brahmanism was an intricate lacework of metaphysical ideas, sacred sacrifices, and social rules. In its spiritual dimension, it offered the individual hope of eventual release from earthly tribulation and endless cycles of rebirth. It involved worship of numerous gods and goddesses (Shiva and Vishnu chief among them), all of these deities manifestations of Brahman, the transcendent essence of the universe. This multisided religion gave the individual a spiritual anchor through the medium of daily rituals, whose performance varied from one locality to another.

The Brahmins, or male members of the privileged priestly class, aspired to define and regulate the religious and social conduct of all social groups, including the ruling warrior families. As their ritual power grew, Brahmins tended to neglect the longings of ordinary people for spiritual salvation. Instead, they devoted themselves to elaborate animal sacrifices and magical practices on which, they insisted, the well-being of the universe depended. Salvation was possible to those of low station, but only if they worked their way up the ladder of ritual purity to the Brahmin level, a process likely to require multiple rebirths, perhaps thousands of them. The sign of advancement was purer karma, the principle that good deeds done in a previous lifetime determined an individual's status in the present one. The Brahmins, however, defined good deeds mainly as scrupulous attention to ceremony and unquestioning acceptance of the rules that ritually separated the social classes, known in modern times as castes, from one another in matters of occupation, social relations, marriage, and physical contact.

The Buddha's message. Whereas Brahmins collaborated with aristocratic warriors (the Kshatriya class) to maintain the hierarchy of social inequality, teachers and preachers began to offer alternative paths to moral living and divine salvation, sometimes denouncing Brahmin dogmatism. One of these sages was Siddhartha Gautama, known to his followers as the Buddha, or Enlightened One (ca. 563–ca. 483 B.C.E.). He was born into a Kshatriya family in what is



The great stupa at Sanchi. According to tradition, when the Buddha died, his cremated remains were placed in eight earthen burial mounds, or stupas. The emperor Ashoka later redistributed the ashes among more than 60,000 stupas. To house some of the ashes and other relics of the Buddha, Ashoka also built monumental stupas, including an early form of this celebrated shrine at Sanchi in central India. Pilgrims replicate the Buddha's exodus from the world by entering the stupa's stone enclosure through one of four gates. Then they walk clockwise around the spherical structure, whose vault represents the dome of the cosmos.

today Nepal. He gave up family wealth and power to become an ascetic, an individual who renounced worldly cares and pleasures for a life of self-denial and spiritual reflection. Accompanied by a growing body of followers, he preached a message of moral renewal and the possibility of freedom from suffering.

All men and women, the Buddha taught, are responsible for right living, not mainly by acting out rituals but by giving up material desire, greed, and all conduct that kept them enslaved to pain and distress. In his best-known sermon, he expounded the Four Noble Truths: first, that earthly life is inevitably unfulfilling; second, that this suffering is a consequence of our cravings for transient things and experiences; third, that the way out of suffering is renunciation of craving; and fourth, that the only course of action is to walk the Eightfold Path, a plan for attentive, decent, meditative living. This commitment included *ahimsa* (uh-HIM-suh), or the practice of nonviolence, on the principle that all life-forms are sacred and cosmically interrelated. At the end of the Eightfold Path lies nirvana, a limitless, indescribable

state where the self is extinguished and thereby released from the cycle of rebirth and suffering. Many historians have noticed similarities between Buddhist thought as it evolved from the fifth century B.C.E. and Hellenistic philosophical movements that offered moral designs for living in harmony with the cosmos.

The Buddha's words and acts, first put in writing long after his death, originated from the Brahmanist tradition, not in opposition to it. He accepted the validity of rebirth and karma, and he did not preach social revolution against the rigid class hierarchy. He associated karma, however, with day-to-day righteousness, not ritual conformity. People of all social ranks could escape from suffering if they fulfilled the demands of the Eightfold Path. The quest, however, required great dedication.

In the centuries following the Buddha's passing, the new religion germinated mainly in self-contained communities, or monasteries. There, early devotees gathered to work, meditate, and perform charitable works. Laypeople, those who stayed "in the world" and did not become monks, also

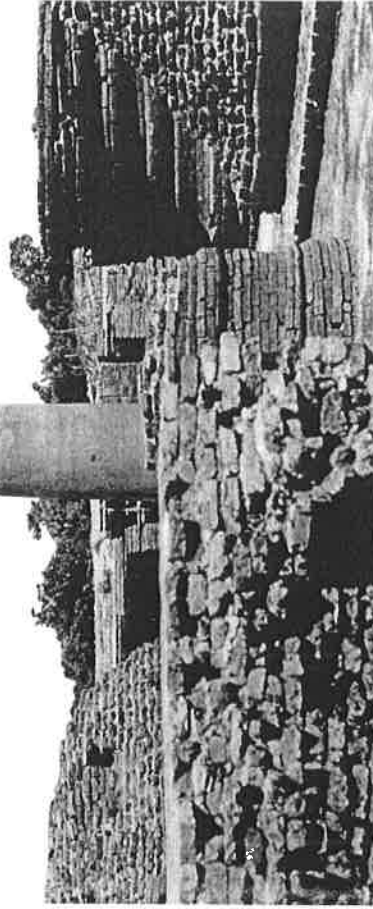
flocked to Buddhism by frequenting the monasteries or materially supporting them. Brahmanism categorized women as having essential roles in society but nonetheless as innately inferior and a source of ritual pollution to men. The Buddha, however, admitted after much consideration that both women and men could achieve nirvana and that women should be admitted to monasteries. He did not, however, preach equality between the sexes and except in Tibet female monasteries never took root. The archaeological record shows that between the fifth and third centuries B.C.E., Buddhist stupas, structures in which holy relics associated with the Buddha or other saintly individuals were placed, multiplied across northern India. By the time of the Maurya empire, Buddhist practice was well established among urban mercantile and professional classes in much of the subcontinent.

Jainism. Numerous schools of philosophical thought flourished in India in the Buddha's time, but among these only Jainism (JYEN-ism, from a Sanskrit word meaning "saint") endured as a significant religious movement into the modern era. The founding teacher, Mahavira (the "Great Hero," ca. 540–468 B.C.E.), left his warrior class family to seek enlightenment, just as the Buddha had done. Both of those worthies taught that self-centered material desires obstructed the individual's path to salvation—the attainment of a state of pure bliss. But, in contrast to the Buddha, Mahavira recommended a life of self-denial so strict that only the most zealous monk could hope to meet its demands. The members of Jain monasteries were prohibited from owning property, having sexual

relations, or killing any life-form. Monks often carried brooms to brush away insects before sitting down, and they hired people outside the monastery to harvest their crops since no devotee could do that without murdering, as it were, tiny animals. Mahavira himself is reputed to have set the highest standard by going naked and eventually starving himself to death. In contrast to the Buddhist way, Jainism did not spread beyond South Asia before modern times. But there it grew into a significant religious minority, categorized by some as a sect within Hinduism.

The Reign of Ashoka Maurya

Buddhist teachings had wide impact in India during the reign of Ashoka (273–232 B.C.E.), who commanded an empire of about fifty million people employing many of the bureaucratic methods of the earlier Achaemenids of Persia. Pataliputra, Ashoka's capital in the middle Ganges valley, was reportedly nine and a half miles long and defended by mammoth timber walls. Here, the emperor received diplomatic missions, dispensed justice, and coordinated the work of his ministries, which regulated taxation, commerce, and agriculture. He launched his reign as an autocratic conqueror, but in a moment of regret over a particularly bloody military campaign, he repudiated repression and cruelty and formulated a philosophy of moral government. The key concept in his ideology, which drew heavily from Buddhist teachings, was *dharma* (or *dharma*). For the emperor this meant commitment to nonviolence, political moderation, family



Pillar with a lion capital. The emperor Ashoka had this pillar erected at the town of Vaishali north of the Ganges River to commemorate the day the Buddha preached his last sermon. The use of the lion icon as an emblem of royalty points to Persian cultural influence on Ashoka's India.

Rock Edicts of the Emperor Ashoka

Most of Emperor Ashoka's rock edicts were written in a South Asian script that later fell out of use. While later generations knew about the inscriptions, they were unable to read the texts. Instead, people passed on oral legends about what the stone markers were thought to say. These legends claimed that Ashoka had erected the rocks at important Buddhist sites to commemorate people or events, so that pilgrims passing by would be aware of the locations' significance. As Buddhism waned in India over several centuries, people forgot the connection between Ashoka and the rock inscriptions altogether.

It was not until 1837 that the British scholar James Prinsep deciphered the ancient script and read the edicts. Only then did their subject matter become known. Prinsep did not realize that Ashoka was the author of the texts because the emperor referred to himself on the known inscriptions only as the Beloved of the Gods. Although other scholars suspected that the edicts were Ashoka's, they confirmed this only in 1915, when an inscription with the emperor's name in it was finally discovered.

The texts here are short selections from rock edicts in which Ashoka sought to explain how to rule justly and to spread Buddhist values in the empire.

ROCK EDICT 1

Formerly, in the kitchen of Beloved-of-the-Gods, . . . hundreds of thousands of animals were killed every day to make curry. But now with the writing of this Dhamma edict only

three creatures, two peacocks and a deer are killed, and the deer not always. And in time, not even these three creatures will be killed.

ROCK EDICT 5

In the past there were no Dhamma Mahamatras [officials who looked after the spiritual and material needs of people], but such officers were appointed by me thirteen years after my coronation. Now they work among all religions for the establishment of Dhamma, for the promotion of Dhamma, and for the welfare and happiness of all who are devoted to Dhamma. They work among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Gandharas, the Rastrikas, the Pitrikas and other peoples on the western borders. They work among soldiers, chiefs, Brahmins, householders,

the poor, the aged and those devoted to Dhamma—for their welfare and happiness—so that they may be free from harassment. They [Dhamma Mahamatras] work for the proper treatment of prisoners, towards their unfettering, and if the Mahamatras think, "This one has a family to support," "That one has been bewitched," "This one is old," then they work for the release of such prisoners. They work here, in outlying towns, in the women's quarters belonging to my brothers and sisters, and among my other relatives. They are occupied everywhere,

ROCK EDICT 6

Beloved-of-the-Gods . . . speaks thus: In the past, state business was not transacted nor were reports delivered to the king at all hours. But now I have given this order, that at any time, whether I am eating, in the women's quarters, the bed chamber, the chariot, the palanquin, in the park or wherever, reporters are to be posted with instructions to report to me the affairs of the people so that I might attend to these affairs wherever I am. And whatever I orally order in connection with donations or proclamations, or when urgent business presses itself on the Mahamatras, if disagreement or debate arises in the Council, then it must be reported to me immediately. This

is what I have ordered. I am never content with exerting myself or with dispatching business. Truly, I consider the welfare of all to be my duty, and the root of this is exertion and the prompt dispatch of business. There is no better work than promoting the welfare of all the people and whatever efforts I am making is to repay the debt I owe to all beings to assure their happiness in this life, and attain heaven in the next.

Sources: "The Edicts of King Ashoka," an English rendering by Ven. S. Dharmapala (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1959).

Thinking Critically

What does the passage from Edict 1 infer regarding Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism and the effect it had on his actions? According to Edict 5, how did the Dhamma Mahamatras spread the value of compassion in their work? How did their efforts transcend social class barriers? Why do you think Ashoka was inclined to publish an edict about the importance of conducting imperial business promptly? What particular moral qualities does Ashoka think a good Buddhist monarch should have? How would you compare Ashoka's approach to kingship with that of Alexander the Great and other Greco-Macedonian rulers?

harmony, toleration among social groups, and dedication to the well-being and prosperity of all imperial subjects. Ashoka did not aim to reform the Indian social hierarchy, but he encouraged his subjects to accept social responsibility for one another beyond the boundaries of class and ethnicity. We know quite a bit about his conception of *dhamma* because he had proclamations inscribed on rocks and pillars near population centers and along well-traveled roads. In one of his rock edicts, he described the event that set him on a new path, referring to himself in the third person as the Beloved of the Gods:

Beloved-of-the-Gods . . . conquered the Kalingas eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died (from other causes). After the Kalingas had been conquered, Beloved-of-the-Gods came to feel a strong inclination towards the Dhamma, a love for the Dhamma and for instruction in Dhamma. Now Beloved-of-the-Gods feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas.⁹

As "Beloved of the Gods," Ashoka, like monarchs to the west, claimed universal authority over humankind and vowed to rule justly. However, he seems to have differed from the Greco-Macedonian rulers of his era in his explicit appeal to his subjects to behave toward one another in a spirit of toleration and generosity. He appointed special officials to travel the provinces, spreading Buddhist teachings on moral behavior. Putting into practice the Buddhist precept of *ahimsa*, he also preached against the killing of animals, promoted vegetarianism, and admonished the Brahmins to halt bloody animal sacrifices.

Ashoka's philosophy was almost certainly calculated to address real problems of social conflict in a time of rapid economic change. Agricultural production in the two great river valleys was rising. Cities were mushrooming, and artisans were forming guilds to organize an array of urban industries such as metalworking, textile manufacturing, and banking. This commercialization no doubt aggravated social tensions. Although merchants and crafts workers were becoming more prosperous, the Brahmin and warrior classes generally treated them as inferiors. Consequently, many productive members of society patronized Buddhist monasteries, which practiced social egalitarianism and offered brighter hopes of salvation. Buddhism also appealed to farmers and laborers (Shudras) for the same reasons.

Dhamma as a philosophy of government did not outlast Ashoka, but it nonetheless had important long-term consequences. The emperor tried to achieve his aims of social integration partly by developing South Asia's infrastructure of communication and transport. He improved the great trunk road that ran from the city of Taxila in the upper Indus valley to Palaliputra on the Ganges, accommodating travelers with shade trees, wells, and rest houses. Other tracks stimulated exchange of foodstuffs and manufactures between the northern grain-growing plains and the tropical forests of the

far south. Long after the Maurya dynasty vanished, the road network expedited trade and cultural interchange across South Asia. Ashoka also appears to have had his edicts carved into rocks and pillars as a way of building social consensus across class lines regarding the aims of *dhamma*. We have no idea how well these messages worked as mass communication, but edicts that survive represent precious historical evidence of developments in India 2,300 years ago.

A second major consequence of Ashoka's reign was that Buddhism became for several centuries the most dynamic religious force in India. The tenets embodied in *dhamma*, extensive conversions among merchants and artisans, and improved communication network all facilitated the spread of this faith. For several centuries Buddhism competed vigorously with Brahmanism as an alternative vision of cosmic truth and righteous living. Ashoka himself propagated Buddhist teachings by sending missionaries far and wide. Ancient sources report that he dispatched one of his sons to broadcast *dhamma* on the island of Ceylon, where Buddhism became firmly established. To the northwest his messengers carried *dhamma* into Afghanistan. A rock edict located near the Afghan city of Kandahar is inscribed, not in Prakrit, the Indic language of the Maurya state, but in both Greek and Aramaic, as if Ashoka were deliberately reaching out to peoples of the west.¹⁰ Yet despite Buddhist success in South Asia and beyond, the Brahmin class continued to dominate the yearly cycle of sacrifices and festivals in the rural villages. And after a few centuries, Buddhism gradually declined in the land of its birth, though flowering elsewhere in Eurasia, as we see in later chapters.

When Ashoka died after a forty-two-year reign, the *dhamma* experiment ended abruptly. Succeeding Maurya kings possessed little of his energy and none of his moral vision. Revolts broke out on the edges of the empire, and the imperial bureaucracy decayed. Within a few decades South Asia's first universal empire collapsed. The next great enterprise to unify India would not appear for another six hundred years.

Cavalry and Caravans in Inner Eurasia

FOCUS How did dense agrarian societies from the Mediterranean to China change as a result of developments in Inner Eurasia in the 600–200 B.C.E. period?

Monarchs from India to the Mediterranean, as well as rulers in China, kept a watchful eye on peoples of Inner Eurasia, the northerly land of steppes, forests, mountains, and deserts that stretches nearly five thousand miles across Afroeurasia. As their numbers grew, Inner Eurasia's pastoral nomadic groups began to organize politically on a larger scale than merely local chieftaincies. At the same time, trade across the region grew busier. Dusty trails connected

Inner Eurasian societies both with one another and with the densely populated, urbanized lands to the south and east.

Nomad Power

On the Inner Eurasia steppes, pastoral communities organized themselves in extended kinship groups, a social system suited to societies that moved from pasture to pasture as the seasons changed rather than inhabiting a fixed territory year round. That is, people expressed their social identity not primarily in terms of *where* they lived but in terms of *who* their shared paternal ancestors were, their grandfathers, great grandfathers, and so on. A group that interacted regularly in daily life and that claimed descent from a forebear who lived a few generations back constituted a lineage (see Chapter 3). Lineages were typically embedded in larger social groups, numbering hundreds or even thousands of living men and women, that we may call “clans.” All the lineages constituting a clan claimed descent from a common ancestor that lived in the more distant past. On an even larger scale, several clans might regard themselves as genealogically related, constituting a tribe. Clan and tribal identities did not have much significance in daily life. Rather, leaders called on loyalties at those levels mainly when large numbers of people had to be mobilized for defense or war.

From about the eighth century B.C.E., we have some evidence of clans and tribes forming large military coalitions led by elite families. These allied bands of mounted archers took advantage of technological innovations, including improved leather and metal horse harnesses, the riding saddle (though without stirrups), iron as well as bronze weaponry, and, perhaps most important, the light but powerful composite bow (see Chapter 5). Pastoral and agricultural communities regularly traded with one another, but some herding societies built up enough destructive potential to entertain ideas of attacking farm settlements, cities, or even densely populated agrarian regions. In the first millennium B.C.E., therefore, a recurring theme in world history appears: persistent political tensions and periodic warfare between mounted nomads and their settled neighbors.

Ancient texts identify Inner Eurasian warrior alliances under a variety of names—Scythians, Cimmerians, Sakas, Sarmatians, and several others. From the eighth century B.C.E., mounted bands harried the northwestern frontiers of China, and in the following century a throng of Cimmerian archers attacked the Assyrian empire in northern Mesopotamia. Of all these marauders, we know most about the Scythians. Herodotus, the Greek historian of the fifth century B.C.E., described them in detail, and archaeologists have uncovered elite Scythian tombs

littered with worked gold and other precious grave goods. Scythians inhabited the Pontic-Caspian steppes north of the Black Sea, and they spoke one or more Indo-European languages. From the sixth century B.C.E., Scythians established commercial links with Greek settlements around the rim of the Black Sea, trading grain, furs, livestock, honey, and slaves for Mediterranean commodities and manufactures. Affluent Scythian families acquired tastes for Greek wine and olive oil. Some groups added Greek gods and goddesses to their own collection of deities and displayed Greek ceramic ware in their tents.

Near the end of the seventh century B.C.E., Scythian cavalry crossed the Caucasus Mountains to pillage farms and towns from Syria to Iran. According to Herodotus, Scythian archers took part in the final destruction of the Assyrian state. These warriors, Herodotus reports, were particularly disposed to headhunting:

As for the actual skulls—the skulls of their enemies, that is, not all skulls—they saw off the bottom part of the skull at



Scythian warriors. The two hardy-looking men on this vessel of Greek workmanship hold long spears.

the level of the eyebrows and clean out the top bit. A poor Scythian then wraps a piece of untanned cowhide tightly around the outside of the skull and puts it to use like that, while a rich Scythian goes further: after wrapping it in cowhide he gilds the inside and then uses it as a cup. Also, if a Scythian falls out with one of his relatives, they fight to the death in the presence of their king, and the winner treats the loser's skull in the way I have just described. When he has important visitors, he produces these skulls and tells how they had once been his relatives, and how they made war on him, but he defeated them.¹

Ancient legends about Amazons, or ferocious women fighters, probably originated with the Scythians. According to one Greek text, “Their women ride horses and shoot arrows and hurl javelins from horseback and they fight in campaigns as long as they are virgins.”² A significant number of graves excavated on the Pontic-Caspian steppe have revealed the skeletons of women in full battle gear.

The rulers of agrarian states eventually understood they had to push back at pastoral intruders. For example, in both Central Asia and on the plains west of the Black Sea, Achaemenid armies campaigned aggressively against the Scythians and other nomads. The Persians demonstrated that a strong centralized state with ample agrarian resources, many soldiers, and the skills to build walls and forts could turn the tables, challenging militarized herders on their own territory. But by the late first millennium B.C.E., pastoralists were discovering ways to organize even larger military alliances and hold them together longer.

Early Times on the Silk Roads

Trade across Inner Eurasia became significant from at least the late third millennium B.C.E., when a cluster of small walled cities sprang up in Central Asia (see Chapter 3). These cities became key centers for transshipping goods of high value and low bulk—silk, gems, furs, metalwork, ceramics—overland between East Asia and westerly lands. An unbroken chain of Inner Eurasian trails, known by the modern term “silk roads,” gradually formed. There were several alternate routes not just one, and their locations

tended to shift over time. Some goods might have been relayed very long distances. For example, archaeologists have discovered strands of East Asian silk on the mummy of a woman who lived in Egypt about 1000 B.C.E.

We know little about commercial organization in the early silk road centuries. Associations of merchants, guides, packers, and armed guards likely banded together temporarily to share costs and risks and, if they reached their destination safely, to sell their merchandise at a profit. If we can infer from later times how this trade worked, merchants who shared common language, culture, and business customs likely set up their own associations to facilitate trade, much as the Phoenicians and Greeks established diasporas, or scatterings of merchants and commercial agents across the Mediterranean. The silk roads therefore became regular channels of human interchange, not only for material goods but also for “cultural capital” of all kinds—new technologies, religious teachings, and artistic styles.

Why did the silk roads become busier in the first millennium B.C.E.? One factor is certainly the continuing agrarian and urban expansion taking place in the agrarian lands from China to the Mediterranean, a growth that generated rising demand for products that could not be produced locally. Inner Eurasia's population also grew steadily in that millennium. This happened mainly because the specialized economy of pastoral nomadism, together with farming in river valleys here and there, allowed relatively more people to inhabit these dry latitudes. Most herding societies wanted to encourage ties with the villages and cities that lay along the edges of the steppes in order to trade grain, livestock products, metals, and furs for goods they could not make themselves. Moreover trade moved not only east and west on the silk roads but also north and south across contrasting climatic and ecological zones. To the north, foragers and hunters of the temperate Siberian forests joined the commercial web, trading furs to pastoral peoples for wares that in some cases originated in distant cities to the south. In short, Inner Eurasia was by no means a vacant land that caravans scurried across to get from one civilization to another. Rather, it became a locus of both military and economic power, exerting a huge impact on neighboring regions of much denser population.

Conclusion

The political ascendancy of Alexander the Great and his Greco-Macedonian successors over a large piece of Afroeurasia lasted less than two hundred years in some places and no more than three hundred anywhere. Even so, we can only marvel that the young son of the king of a modest Balkan state instigated a run of conquests that reached from the Nile to the Indus. Alexander, together with the Achaemenid emperors who came before him, demonstrated that by the later first millennium B.C.E. the technology of overland transport, road building, army supply, and weaponry reached a level of sophistication that permitted a determined conqueror to subjugate populations numbering in the tens of millions. The Greco-Macedonian and Indian rulers who came after Alexander also showed that many millions of subjects could actually be organized, made answerable to royal laws, and taxed. In the era of the Hellenistic kings and the Maurya emperors, authoritarian governments supported construction of dozens of new cities and the expansion of farming and trade. Wealth piled up in splendid capitals as never before, and

class divisions between rich minorities and ordinary people remained rigid or became more so, and long-distance communication intensified not only across the India-to-Mediterranean lands but also in lesser measure between that region and China by way of the emerging silk roads.

By the late third century B.C.E., the Afroeurasian political map was changing in significant ways. To the east the Maurya dynasty disintegrated and for the next six centuries smaller states competed for power in South Asia while also battling invaders from the steppes. The Greco-Macedonian rulers of Persia progressively lost territory, some of it to Inner Eurasian horse archers. The Athenians' lively experiment with direct democracy proved to be, not a new trend, but a political oddity. In the far west, Rome, a modest city-state on the west side of Italy, gradually rose to regional dominance. Far to the east, the leaders of the Qin and Han dynasties united much of northern and central China after several centuries of rivalry among several regional kingdoms. A new era of grand empire building was about to begin.

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Key Terms

Achaemenid empire of Persia 161	Jainism 182	Scythians 185
Alexander the Great's empire 173	Maurya empire 181	Seleucid empire 175
Athenian empire 171	natural philosophy 172	silk roads 187
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change over Time

9th-4th centuries B.C.E.	Scythian pastoral society flourishes north of the Black Sea.
8th-4th centuries B.C.E.	Self-governing Greek poleis dominate the Aegean Sea region.
ca. 563-483 B.C.E.	Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, lives.
550-330 B.C.E.	The Achaemenid empire centered on Persia proclaims a universal mission to rule the world.
6th century B.C.E.	Achaemenid rulers adopt Zoroastrian beliefs and rituals.
ca. 540-468 B.C.E.	Mahavira, founding teacher of Jainism, lives in India.
480 B.C.E.	The Greek naval victory over Persia at the Battle of Salamis thwarts Persian expansion farther west.
470-399 B.C.E.	Greek philosopher Socrates teaches in Athens.
ca. 461-429 B.C.E.	Pericles leads in Athens and the Athenian maritime empire rises.
431-404 B.C.E.	Greek city-states engage in Peloponnesian War.
336-323 B.C.E.	Alexander the Great conquers and rules the largest state in world history to this point.
321-185 B.C.E.	Northern and central India are united under the Maurya empire, which reaches its zenith during the reign of Ashoka Maurya.
312-64 B.C.E.	The Seleucid empire, the largest and richest of the Hellenistic states, dominates Southwest Asia.
305-30 B.C.E.	The Ptolemaic dynasty rules a Hellenistic state in Egypt.

Please see end of book reference section for additional reading suggestions related to this chapter.