

The Classical Period: Directions, Diversities, and Declines by 500 C.E.

Expansion and Integration

- Common themes for the classical civilization involve **territorial expansion** and related **efforts to integrate the new territories**.
- China united through **centralization**, India united through **religious values**, and the Mediterranean world united through **cultural achievements**.
- Integration required **territorial and social cohesion**. Each civilization valued social distinctions.

Beyond the Classical Civilizations

- Outside the centers of civilization important developments occurred. Significant civilizations operated in **the Americas** (the Olmecs, Maya, and Incas) and also in **Africa** (Kush, Axum, and Ethiopia).
- Agriculture and other developments spread across **northern Europe** and **north-ern Asia**, where semi-civilized peoples developed extensive contacts with older civilizations.
- **Nomadic societies** played a vital role, particularly in central Asia, in linking and occasionally disrupting classical civilizations. Important popular migrations across Eurasia led to the rise of new cultures.

Decline in China and India

- A combination of **internal weakness** and **nomadic invasions** led to important changes, first in China, and then in India.
- The central Asian nomadic **Huns** attacked all three classical civilizations.
- About 100 C.E., the Han dynasty began a serious decline. Weakened central government, social unrest led by overtaxed peasants, and epidemics were the most prominent sources of decline, combining to make the government unable to stop invading nomads.
- However, by 600, China revived, first with the brief **Sui** dynasty and later (and more gloriously) with the **Tang**.
- The decline in India was not as drastic as in China. By 600, Huns destroyed the Gupta Empire. For several centuries, no native Indian led a large state there. Hinduism gained ground as Buddhism, unappealing to the warrior caste, declined.

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- After 600, **Islam** entered India and **Arab traders** took control of Indian ocean trade routes. What survived was Hinduism (Islam never gained adherence from a majority of the population) and the caste system.

Decline and Fall in Rome

- **Decline in Rome was particularly complex.** Although its causes have been much debated, certain issues may have contributed: population declined, leadership faltered, the economy flagged, tax collection became more difficult, a series of plagues swept the empire, and a **sense of despondency** pervaded much of the citizenry.
- When **Germanic tribes** invaded in the 400s, there was little power or will to resist.
- Developments also varied between the eastern and western portions of the Empire, as the Mediterranean world **fell apart**. The eastern, or **Byzantine Empire**, continued for another 1,000 years after the western empire collapsed.

The New Religious Map

- The period of classical decline saw the **rapid expansion** of Buddhism and Christianity. This religious change had wider cultural, social, and political implications.
- Later, Islam **appeared, and spread**, following the previous spread of Hinduism across south and southeast Asia.

The World Around 500 C.E.

- Developments around 500 C.E. produced **three major themes** for world history in subsequent periods.
- First, there was a **collapse** of classical civilizations. Societies across Eurasia faced the task of reviving or reworking their key institutions and values after decline and invasion.
- Second, **new religions arose and older ones spread**. These would form the basis of future civilizations.
- Finally, new developments across the globe, whether through indigenous developments or contacts with older centers led to **the rise of new civilizations**.