Dancing Girl Wearing Silk Garment, Second–Third Century c.e. This Roman mosaic depicts a musician accompanying a dancer who is wearing a sheer garment of silk imported from China. (Scala/Art Resource, NY)

— How did Rome create and maintain its vast Mediterranean empire?

— How did imperial China evolve from its beginnings into the Han state?

— What were the most important similarities and differences between these two empires, and what do the similarities and differences tell us about the circumstances and the character of each?

5

AN AGE OF EMPIRES: ROME AND HAN CHINA, 753 B.C.E.–600 C.E.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Rome's Mediterranean Empire, 753 B.C.E.–600 C.E.

The Origins of Imperial China, 221 B.C.E.–220 C.E.

Comparative Perspectives

DIVERSITY AND DOMINANCE: The Treatment of Slaves in Rome and China

ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY: Water Engineering in Rome and China

According to Chinese sources, in the year 166 C.E. a group of travelers identifying themselves as delegates from Andun, the king of distant Da Qin, arrived at the court of the Chinese emperor Huan, one of the Han rulers. Andun was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the emperor of Rome. As far as we know, these travelers were the first "Romans" to reach China, although they probably were residents of one of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, perhaps Egypt or Syria, and they may have stretched the truth in claiming to be official representatives of the Roman emperor. More likely they were merchants hoping to set up a profitable trading arrangement at the source of the silk so highly prized in the West. Chinese officials, however, were

in no position to disprove their claim, since there was no direct contact between the Roman and Chinese Empires.

We do not know what became of these travelers, and their mission apparently did not lead to more direct or regular contact between the empires. Even so, the episode raises some interesting points. First, in the early centuries C.E. Rome and China were linked by far-flung international trading networks encompassing the entire Eastern Hemisphere, and they were dimly aware of each other's existence. Second, the last centuries B.C.E. and the first centuries C.E. saw the emergence of two manifestations of a new kind of empire.

The Roman Empire encompassed all the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea as well as substantial portions of continental Europe and the Middle East. The Han Empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the oases of Central Asia. The largest empires the world had yet seen, they managed to centralize control to a greater degree than earlier empires; their cultural impact on the lands and peoples they dominated was more pervasive; and they were remarkably stable and lasted for many centuries.

Thousands of miles separated Rome and Han China; neither influenced the other. Why did two such unprecedented political entities flourish at the same time? Historians have put forth theories stressing supposedly common factors—such as climate change and the pressure of nomadic peoples from Central Asia on the Roman and Chinese frontiers— but no theory has won the support of most scholars.

ROME'S MEDITERRANEAN EMPIRE, 753 B.C.E.–600 C.E.

Rome's central location contributed to its success in unifying Italy and then all the lands ringing the Mediterranean Sea (see Map 5.1). Italy was a crossroads in the Mediterranean, and Rome was a crossroads within Italy. Rome lay at the midpoint of the peninsula, about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the western coast, where a north-south road intersected an east-west river route. The Tiber River on one side and a double ring of seven hills on the other afforded natural protection to the site.

Italy is a land of hills and mountains. The Apennine range runs along its length like a spine, separating the eastern and western coastal plains, while the arc of the Alps shields it on the north. Many of Italy's rivers are navigable, and passes through the Apennines and the Alps allowed merchants and armies to travel overland. The mild Mediterranean climate affords a long growing season and conditions suitable for a wide variety of crops. The hillsides were well forested in ancient times, providing timber for construction and fuel. The region of Etruria in the northwest was rich in iron and other metals.

Even though 75 percent of the total area of the Italian peninsula is hilly, there is still ample arable land in the coastal plains and river valleys. Much of this land has fertile volcanic soil and sustained a much larger population than was possible in Greece. While expanding within Italy, the Roman state created effective mechanisms for tapping the human resources of the countryside.

A Republic of Farmers, 753–31 B.C.E.

According to popular legend, Romulus, who was cast adrift on the Tiber River as a baby and was nursed by a she-wolf, founded the city of Rome in 753 B.C.E. Archaeological research, however, shows that the Palatine Hill—one of the seven hills on the site of Rome—was occupied as early as 1000 B.C.E. The merging of several hilltop communities to form an urban nucleus, made possible by the draining of a swamp on the site of the future Roman Forum (civic center), took place shortly before 600 B.C.E.

The Latin speech and cultural patterns of the original inhabitants of the site were typical of the indigenous population of most of the peninsula. However, tradition remembered Etruscan immigrants arriving in the seventh century B.C.E., and Rome came to pride itself on offering hospitality to exiles and outcasts.

Agriculture was the essential economic activity in the early Roman state, and land was the basis of wealth. As a consequence, social status, political privilege, and fundamental values were related to landownership. The vast majority of early Romans were self-sufficient independent farmers who owned small plots of land. A relatively small number of families managed to acquire large tracts of land. The heads of these wealthy families were members of the Senate—a "Council of Elders" that played a

C H R O N O L O G Y

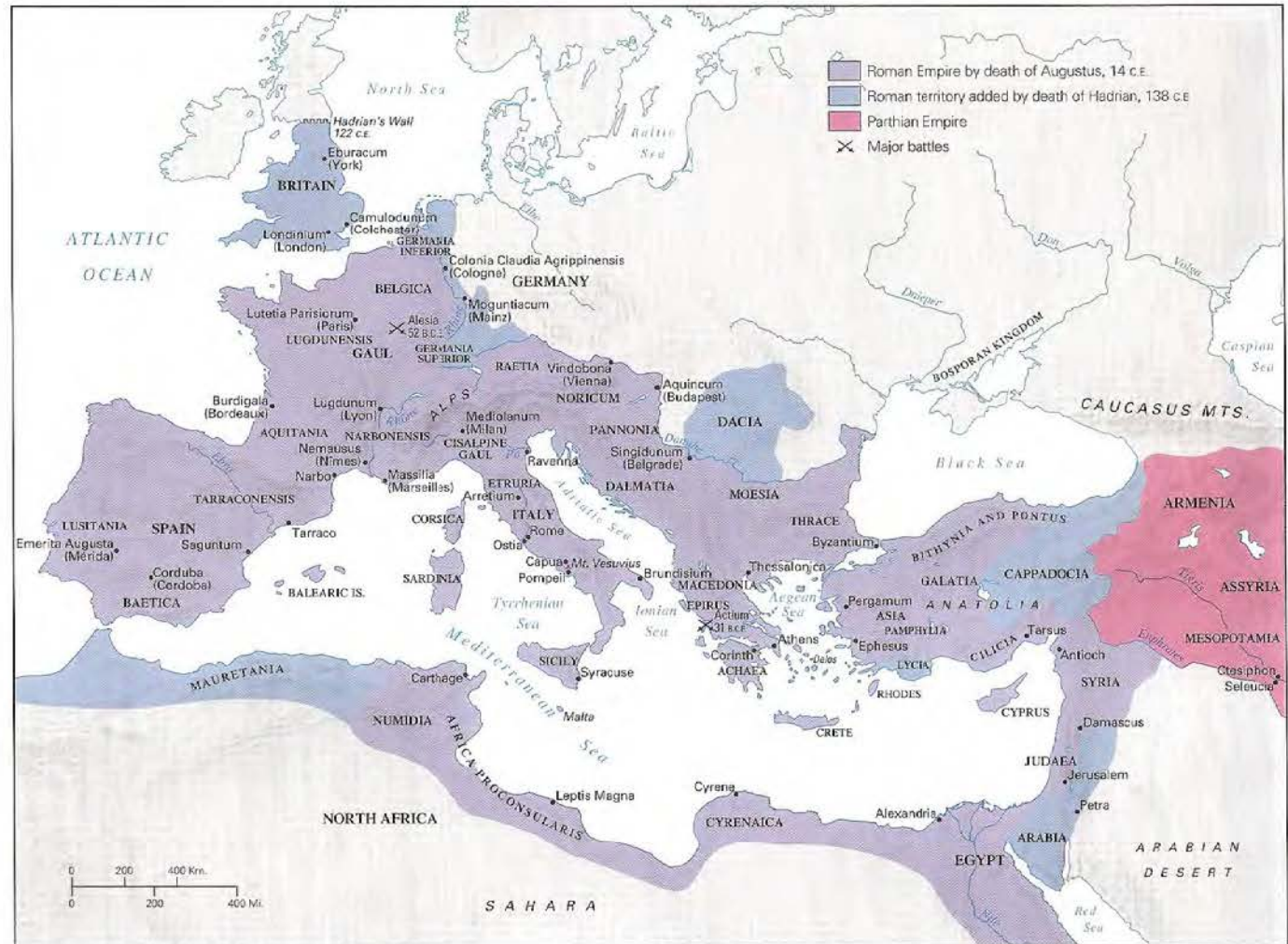|	Rome	China
1000 B.C.E.	**1000 B.C.E.** First settlement on site of Rome	
500 B.C.E.	**507 B.C.E.** Establishment of the Republic	
		480–221 B.C.E. Warring States Period
300 B.C.E.	**290 B.C.E.** Defeat of tribes of Samnium gives Romans control of Italy	
	264–202 B.C.E. Wars against Carthage guarantee Roman control of western Mediterranean	
		221 B.C.E. Qin emperor unites eastern China
		202 B.C.E. Han dynasty succeeds Qin
200 B.C.E.	**200–146 B.C.E.** Wars against Hellenistic kingdoms lead to control of eastern Mediterranean	
		140–87 B.C.E. Emperor Wu expands the Han Empire
100 B.C.E.	**88–31 B.C.E.** Civil wars and failure of the Republic	
	31 B.C.E.–14 C.E. Augustus establishes the Principate	
		23 C.E. Han capital transferred from Chang'an to Luoyang
	45–58 C.E. Paul spreads Christianity in the eastern Mediterranean	
100 C.E.		
200 C.E.		**220 C.E.** Fall of Han dynasty
	235–284 C.E. Third-Century Crisis	
300 C.E.	**324 C.E.** Constantine moves capital to Constantinople	
	476 Deposing of the last Roman emperor in the West	
500 C.E.	**527–565** Justinian and Theodora rule Byzantine Empire; imperial edicts collected in single law code	

dominant role in the politics of the Roman state. These families constituted the senatorial class.

According to tradition, there were seven kings of Rome between 753 and 507 B.C.E. The first was Romulus; the last was the tyrannical Tarquinius Superbus. In 507
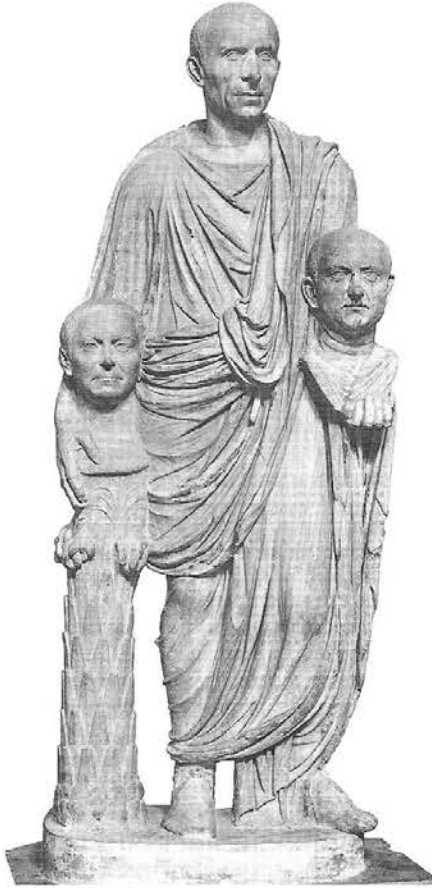
B.C.E. members of the senatorial class, led by Brutus "the Liberator," deposed Tarquinius Superbus and instituted a *res publica*, a "public possession," or republic.

The **Roman Republic**, which lasted from 507 to 31 B.C.E., was not a democracy. Sovereign power resided in

Legend:
- Roman Empire by death of Augustus, 14 c.e.
- Roman territory added by death of Hadrian, 138 c.e.
- Parthian Empire
- ✕ Major battles

North Sea
Baltic Sea
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Hadrian's Wall 122 c.e.
Eburacum (York)
BRITAIN
Londinium (London)
Camulodunum (Colchester)
GERMANIA INFERIOR
Colonia Claudia Agrippinensis (Cologne)
GERMANY
BELGICA
Lutetia Parisiorum (Paris)
Alesia 52 B.C.E.
Moguntiacum (Mainz)
LUGDUNENSIS
GAUL
GERMANIA SUPERIOR
RAETIA
Vindobona (Vienna)
Aquincum (Budapest)
NORICUM
Burdigala (Bordeaux)
Lugdunum (Lyon)
ALPS
Mediolanum (Milan)
PANNONIA
DACIA
AQUITANIA
NARBONENSIS
CISALPINE GAUL
Nemausus (Nîmes)
Ravenna
Singidunum (Belgrade)
Narbo
Massilia (Marseilles)
ETRURIA
Arretium
DALMATIA
MOESIA
TARRACONENSIS
CORSICA
ITALY
Rome
THRACE
Byzantium
BITHYNIA AND PONTUS
LUSITANIA
SPAIN
Saguntum
Tarraco
Ostia
BOSPORAN KINGDOM
Caspian Sea
CAUCASUS MTS.
Black Sea
ARMENIA
Emerita Augusta (Mérida)
Corduba (Cordoba)
Capua
Mt. Vesuvius
Pompeii
Brundisium
MACEDONIA
Thessalonica
GALATIA
CAPPADOCIA
ASSYRIA
BAETICA
BALEARIC IS.
SARDINIA
Tyrrhenian Sea
Ionian Sea
EPIRUS
Actium 31 B.C.E.
Aegean Sea
Pergamum
ASIA
ANATOLIA
PAMPHYLIA
Tarsus
MESOPOTAMIA
MAURETANIA
Carthage
SICILY
Syracuse
Athens
Corinth
ACHAEA
Delos
Ephesus
LYCIA
CILICIA
Antioch
Ctesiphon
Seleucia
SYRIA
Mediterranean Sea
Malta
CRETE
RHODES
CYPRUS
Damascus
NUMIDIA
AFRICA PROCONSULARIS
JUDAEA
Jerusalem
Petra
Leptis Magna
Cyrene
CYRENAICA
Alexandria
ARABIA
ARABIAN DESERT
NORTH AFRICA
EGYPT
SAHARA
Red Sea

0 200 400 Km.
0 200 400 Mi.

Map 5.1 The Roman Empire The Roman Empire came to encompass all the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, as well as parts of continental Europe. When Augustus died in 14 c.e., he left instructions to his successors not to expand beyond the limits he had set, but Claudius invaded southern Britain in the mid-first century and the soldier-emperor Trajan added Romania early in the second century. Deserts and seas provided solid natural boundaries, but the long and vulnerable river border in central and eastern Europe would eventually prove expensive to defend and vulnerable to invasion by Germanic and Central Asian peoples.

The real center of power was the Roman Senate. Technically an advisory council, first to the kings and later to the annually changing Republican officials, the Senate increasingly made policy and governed. Senators nominated their sons for public offices and filled Senate vacancies from the ranks of former officials. This self-perpetuating body, whose members served for life, brought together the state's wealth, influence, and political and military experience.

The inequalities in Roman society led to periodic unrest and conflict between the elite (called "patricians°") and the majority of the population (called "plebeians°"), a struggle known as the Conflict of the Orders. On a number of occasions the plebeians refused to work or fight, and even physically withdrew from the city, in order to pressure the elite to make political concessions. One result was publication of the laws on twelve stone tablets ca. 450 B.C.E., a check on arbitrary decisions by judicial officials. Another important reform was the creation of new officials, the tribunes°, who were drawn from and elected by the lower classes, and who had the power to veto, or block, any action of the Assembly or patrician officials that they deemed to be against the interests of the lower orders. The elite, though forced to give in on key points, found ways to blunt the reforms, in large part by bringing the plebeian leadership into an expanded elite.

The basic unit of Roman society was the family, made up of several generations of family members plus domestic slaves. The oldest living male, the *paterfamilias*, exercised absolute authority over other family members.

Complex ties of obligation, such as the patron/client relationship, bound together individuals and families. Clients sought the help and protection of patrons, men of wealth and influence. A senator might have dozens or even hundreds of clients, to whom he provided legal advice and representation, physical protection, and loans of money in tough times. In turn, the client was expected to follow his patron into battle, support him in the political arena, work on his land, and even contribute toward the dowry of his daughter. Throngs of clients awaited their patrons in the morning and accompanied them to the Forum for the day's business. Especially large retinues brought great prestige. Middle-class clients of aristocrats might be patrons of poorer men. In Rome inequality was accepted, institutionalized, and turned into a system of mutual benefits and obligations.

Nearly all our information about Roman women pertains to those in the upper classes. In early Rome, a woman

Statue of a Roman Carrying Busts of His Ancestors, First Century B.C.E. Roman society was extremely conscious of status, and the status of an elite Roman family was determined in large part by the public achievements of ancestors and living members. A visitor to a Roman home found portraits of distinguished ancestors in the entry hall, along with labels listing the offices they held. Portrait heads were carried in funeral processions. (Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

several assemblies, and while all male citizens were eligible to attend, the votes of the wealthy classes counted for more than the votes of poor citizens. A slate of civic officials was elected each year, and a hierarchy of state offices evolved. The culmination of a political career was to be selected as one of the two consuls who presided over meetings of the Senate and assemblies and commanded the army on military campaigns.

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patrician (puh-TRISH-uhn)   **plebeian** (pluh-BEE-uhn)
tribune (TRIH-byoon)

never ceased to be a child in the eyes of the law. She started out under the absolute authority of her paterfamilias. When she married, she came under the jurisdiction of the paterfamilias of her husband's family. Unable to own property or represent herself in legal proceedings, she had to depend on a male guardian to advocate her interests.

Despite the limitations put on them, Roman women seem to have been less constrained than their counterparts in the Greek world (see Chapter 4). Over time they gained greater personal protection and economic freedom: for instance, some took advantage of a form of marriage that left a woman under the jurisdiction of her father and independent after his death. There are many stories of strong women who had great influence on their husbands or sons and thereby helped shape Roman history. Roman poets confess their love for women who appear to have been educated and outspoken, and the accounts of the careers of the early emperors are filled with tales of self-assured and assertive queen-mothers and consorts.

Like other Italian peoples, early Romans believed in invisible, shapeless forces known as *numina*. Vesta, the living, pulsating energy of fire, dwelled in the hearth. Janus guarded the door. The Penates watched over food stored in the cupboard. Other deities resided in nearby hills, caves, grottoes, and springs. Romans made small offerings of cakes and liquids to win the favor of these spirits. Certain gods had larger spheres of operation—for example, Jupiter was the god of the sky, and Mars initially was a god of agriculture as well as of war.

The Romans tried to maintain the *pax deorum* ("peace of the gods"), a covenant between the gods and the Roman state. Boards of priests drawn from the aristocracy performed sacrifices and other rituals to win the gods' favor. In return, the gods were expected to bring success to the undertakings of the Roman state. When the Romans came into contact with the Greeks of southern Italy (see Chapter 4), they equated their major deities with gods from the Greek pantheon, such as Zeus (Jupiter) and Ares (Mars), and they took over the myths attached to those gods.

Expansion in Italy and the Mediterranean

The expansion of the Roman Republic began slowly, then picked up momentum, reaching a peak in the third and second centuries B.C.E. Some scholars attribute this expansion to the greed and aggressiveness of a people fond of war. Others observe that the structure of the Roman state encouraged war, because the two consuls had only one year in office in which to gain military glory. The Romans invariably claimed that they were only defending themselves. It is possible that, as fear drove the Romans to expand the territory under their control in order to provide a buffer against attack, each new conquest became vulnerable and a sense of insecurity led to further expansion.

All male citizens who owned a specified amount of land were subject to military service. The Roman soldiers' equipment—body armor, shield, spear, and sword—was not far different from that of Greek hoplites, but the Roman battle line was more flexible than the phalanx, being subdivided into units that could maneuver independently. Roman armies were famous for their training and discipline. One observer noted that, whereas a Greek army would minimize its exertions by finding a hill or some other naturally defended location to camp for the night, a Roman army would go to the trouble of fortifying an identical camp in the plain on every occasion.

Rome's conquest of Italy was sparked by ongoing friction between the pastoral hill tribes of the Apennines, whose livelihood depended on driving their herds to seasonal grazing grounds, and the farmers of the coastal plains. In the fifth century B.C.E. Rome rose to a position of leadership within a league of central Italian cities organized for defense against the hill tribes.

Unlike the Greeks, who were reluctant to share the privileges of citizenship with outsiders (see Chapter 4), the Romans granted the political, legal, and economic privileges of Roman citizenship to conquered populations. Rome also demanded soldiers from its Italian subjects, and a seemingly inexhaustible reservoir of manpower was a key element of its military success. In a number of crucial wars, Rome was able to endure higher casualties than the enemy and to prevail by sheer numbers.

Between 264 and 202 B.C.E. Rome fought two protracted and bloody wars against the Carthaginians, those energetic descendants of Phoenicians from Lebanon who had settled in present-day Tunisia and dominated the commerce of the western Mediterranean (see Chapter 3). The Roman state emerged as the unchallenged master of the western Mediterranean and acquired its first overseas provinces in Sicily, Sardinia, and Spain (see Map 5.1). Between 200 and 146 B.C.E. a series of wars pitted the Roman state against the major Hellenistic kingdoms in the eastern Mediterranean. The Romans were at first reluctant to occupy such distant territories and withdrew their troops at the conclusion of several wars. But when the settlements that they imposed failed to take root, the frustrated Roman government took over direct administration of the turbulent lands. The conquest of the Celtic peoples of Gaul (modern France) by Rome's most brilliant general, Gaius Julius Caesar, between 59

and 51 B.C.E. led to its first territorial acquisitions in Europe's heartland.

At first the Romans resisted extending their system of governance and citizenship rights to the distant provinces. Indigenous elite groups willing to collaborate with the Roman authorities were given considerable autonomy, including responsibility for local administration and tax collection. Every year a senator, usually someone who recently had held a high public post, was dispatched to each province to serve as governor. The governor was primarily responsible for defending the province against outside attack and internal disruption, overseeing the collection of taxes and other revenues due Rome, and deciding legal cases.

Over time, this system of provincial administration proved inadequate. Officials were chosen because of their political connections and often lacked competence or experience. Yearly changes of governor meant that incumbents had little time to gain experience or make local contacts. Also, although many governors were honest, some were unscrupulous and extorted huge sums of money from the provincial populace.

The Failure of the Republic

Rome's success in creating a vast empire unleashed forces that eventually destroyed the Republican system of government. In the third and second centuries B.C.E., Italian peasant farmers were away from home on military service for long periods of time. While they were away, it was easy for investors to take possession of their farms by purchase, deception, or intimidation. Most of the wealth generated by the conquest and control of new provinces ended up in the hands of the upper classes, who used it to purchase Italian land. As a result, the small, self-sufficient farms of the Italian countryside, whose peasant owners had been the backbone of the Roman legions (units of 6,000 soldiers), were replaced by *latifundia*, literally "broad estates."

The owners of these large estates found it more lucrative to graze herds or to make wine, undertakings that brought in big profits, than to grow wheat, the staple food of ancient Italy. Much of Italy, especially the burgeoning cities, became dependent on imported grain. Meanwhile, the cheap slave labor provided by prisoners of war (see Diversity and Dominance: The Treatment of Slaves in Rome and China) made it hard for peasants who had lost their farms to find work in the countryside. When they moved to Rome and other cities, they found no work there either, and they lived in dire poverty. The growing urban masses, idle and prone to riot, would play a major role in the political struggles of the late Republic.

One consequence of the decline of peasant farmers in Italy was a shortage of men who owned the minimum amount of property required for military service. During a war in North Africa at the end of the second century B.C.E., Gaius Marius—a "new man," as the Romans called politically active individuals who did not belong to the traditional ruling class—achieved political prominence by accepting into the Roman legions poor, propertyless men to whom he promised farms upon retirement from military service. These troops became devoted to Marius and helped him get elected to an unprecedented (and illegal) six consulships.

Between 88 and 31 B.C.E., a series of ambitious individuals—Sulla, Pompey, Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, and Octavian—commanded armies that were more loyal to them than to the state. Their use of Roman troops to increase their personal power and influence led to bloody civil wars between military factions. The city of Rome itself was taken by force on several occasions, and victorious commanders executed political opponents and exercised dictatorial control of the state.

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Primary Source: A Man of
Unlimited Ambition: Julius Caesar

The Roman Principate, 31 B.C.E.–330 C.E.

Julius Caesar's grandnephew and heir, Octavian (63 B.C.E.– 14 C.E.), eliminated all rivals by 31 B.C.E. and painstakingly set about refashioning the Roman system of government. He was careful to maintain the forms of the Republic—the offices, honors, and social prerogatives of the senatorial class—but he fundamentally altered the realities of power. A military dictator in fact, he never called himself king or emperor, claiming merely to be *princeps*, "first among equals," in a restored Republic. For this reason, the period following the Roman Republic is called the **Roman Principate**.

Augustus, one of the many honorific titles that the Roman Senate gave Octavian, connotes prosperity and piety, and it became the name by which he is best known to posterity. Augustus's ruthlessness, patience, and intuitive grasp of psychology enabled him to manipulate all the groups that made up Roman society. When he died in 14 C.E., after forty-five years of rule, almost no one could remember the Republic. During his reign Egypt and parts of the Middle East and Central Europe were added to the empire, leaving only the southern half of Britain and modern Romania to be added later.

The Treatment of Slaves in Rome and China

Although slaves were found in most ancient societies, Rome was one of the few in which slave labor became the indispensable foundation of the economy. In the course of the frequent wars of the second century B.C.E., large numbers of prisoners were carried into slavery. The prices of such slaves were low, and landowners and manufacturers found they could compel slaves to work longer and harder than hired laborers. Periodically, the harsh working and living conditions resulted in slave revolts.

The following excerpt, from one of several surviving manuals on agriculture, gives advice about controlling and efficiently exploiting slaves:

When the head of a household arrives at his estate, after he has prayed to the family god, he must go round his farm on a tour of inspection on the very same day, if that is possible, if not, then on the next day. When he has found out how his farm has been cultivated and which jobs have been done and which have not been done, then on the next day after that he must call in his manager and ask him which are the jobs that have been done and which remain, and whether they were done on time, and whether what still has to be done can be done, and how much wine and grain and anything else has been produced. When he has found this out, he must make a calculation of the labor and the time taken. If the work doesn't seem to him to be sufficient, and the manager starts to say how hard he tried, but the slaves weren't any good, and the weather was awful, and the slaves ran away, and he was required to carry out some public works, then when he has finished mentioning these and all sorts of other excuses, you must draw his attention to your calculation of the labor employed and time taken. If he claims that it rained all the time, there are all sorts of jobs that can be done in rainy weather—washing wine-jars, coating them with pitch, cleaning the house, storing grain, shifting muck, digging a manure pit, cleaning seed, mending ropes or making new ones; the slaves ought to have been mending their patchwork

cloaks and their hoods. On festival days they would have been able to clean out old ditches, work on the public highway, prune back brambles, dig up the garden, clear a meadow, tie up bundles of sticks, remove thorns, grind barley and get on with cleaning. If he claims that the slaves have been ill, they needn't have been given such large rations. When you have found out about all these things to your satisfaction, make sure that all the work that remains to be done will be carried out. . . . The head of the household [on his tour of inspection] should examine his herds and arrange a sale; he should sell the oil if the price makes it worthwhile, and any wine and grain that is surplus to needs; he should sell any old oxen, cattle or sheep that are not up to standard, wool and hides, an old cart or old tools, an old slave, a sick slave—anything else that is surplus to requirements. The head of a household ought to sell, and not to buy. (Cato the Elder, *Concerning Agriculture*, bk. 2, second century B.C.E.)

Cato, the Roman author of that excerpt, was notorious for his stern manner and hard-edged traditionalism, and while he does not represent the approach of all Roman masters—in reality, the treatment of slaves varied widely—he expresses a point of view that Roman society found acceptable.

Slavery was far less prominent in ancient China. During the Warring States Period, dependent peasants as well as slaves worked the large holdings of the landowning aristocracy. The Qin government sought to abolish slavery, but the institution persisted into the Han period, although it involved only a small fraction of the population and was not a central component of the economy. The relatives of criminals could be seized and enslaved, and poor families sometimes sold unwanted children into slavery. In China slaves, whether they belonged to the state or to individuals, generally performed domestic tasks, as can be seen in the following text:

Wang Ziyuan of Shu Commandery went to the Jian River on business, and went up to the home of the widow Yang Hui, who had a male slave named Bianliao. Wang Ziyuan requested him to go and buy some wine. Picking up a big stick, Bianliao climbed to the top of the grave mound and said: "When my

master bought me, Bianliao, he only contracted for me to care for the grave and did not contract for me to buy wine for some other gentleman."

Wang Ziyuan was furious and said to the widow: "Wouldn't you prefer to sell this slave?"

Yang Hui said: "The slave's father offered him to people, but no one wanted him."

Wang Ziyuan immediately settled on the sale contract.

The slave again said: "Enter in the contract everything you wish to order me to do. I, Bianliao, will not do anything not in the contract."

Wang Ziyuan said: "Agreed."

The text of the contract said:

Third year of Shenjiao, the first month, the fifteenth day, the gentleman Wang Ziyuan, of Zizhong, purchases from the lady Yang Hui of Anzhi village in Zhengdu, the bearded male slave, Bianliao, of her husband's household. The fixed sale [price] is 15,000 [cash]. The slave shall obey orders about all kinds of work and may not argue.

He shall rise at dawn and do an early sweeping. After eating he shall wash up. Ordinarily he should pound the grain mortar, tie up broom straws, carve bowls and bore wells, scoop out ditches, tie up fallen fences, hoe the garden, trim up paths and dike up plots of land, cut big flails, bend bamboos to make rakes, and scrape and fix the well pulley. In going and coming he may not ride horseback or in the cart, [nor may he] sit crosslegged or make a hubbub. When he gets out of bed he shall shake his head [to wake up], fish, cut forage, plait reeds and card hemp, draw water for gruel, and help in making zumo [drink]. He shall weave shoes and make [other] coarse things. . . .

In the second month at the vernal equinox he shall bank the dikes and repair the boundary walls [of the fields]; prune the mulberry trees, skin the palm trees, plant melons to make gourd [utensils], select eggplant [seeds for planting], and transplant onion sets; burn plant remains to generate the fields, pile up refuse and break up lumps [in the soil]. At midday he shall dry out things in the sun. At cockcrow he shall rise and pound grain in the mortar, exercise and curry the horses, the donkeys, and likewise the mules. . . . [The list of tasks continues for two-and-a-half pages.]

He shall be industrious and quick-working, and he may not idle and loaf. When the slave is old and his strength spent, he shall plant marsh grass and weave mats. When his work is over and he wishes to rest he should pound a picul [of grain]. Late at night when there is no work he shall wash clothes really white. If he has private savings they shall be the master's gift, or from guests. The slave may not have evil secrets; affairs should be open and reported. If the slave does not heed instructions, he shall be whipped a hundred strokes.

The reading of the text of the contract came to an end. The slave was speechless and his lips were tied. Wildly he beat his head on the ground, and beat himself with his hands; from his eyes the tears streamed down, and the drivel from his nose hung a foot long.

He said: "If it is to be exactly as master Wang says, I would rather return soon along the yellow-soil road, with the grave worms boring through my head. Had I known before I would have bought the wine for master Wang, I would not have dared to do that wrong." (Wang Bao, first century B.C.E.)

This story was meant to be humorous and no doubt exaggerates the amount of work that could be demanded from a slave, but it shows that Chinese slaves could be forced to work hard and engaged in many of the same menial tasks as their Roman counterparts. It is hard to imagine a Roman slave daring to refuse a request and arguing publicly with a nobleman without being severely punished. It also appears that slaves in China had legal protections provided by contracts specifying and limiting what could be demanded of them.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Why might slavery have been less important in Han China than in the Roman Empire? Why would the treatment of slaves have been less harsh in China than in Rome?

2. In what ways were slaves treated like other forms of property, such as animals and tools? In what ways was a slave's "humanity" taken into account?

3. What are some of the passive-resistance tactics that slaves resorted to, and what did they achieve by these actions?

Augustus had allied himself with the *equites*°, the class of well-to-do Italian merchants and landowners second in wealth and social status only to the senatorial class. This body of competent and self-assured individuals became the core of a new civil service that helped run the Roman Empire. At last Rome had an administrative bureaucracy up to the task of managing a large empire with considerable honesty, consistency, and efficiency.

So popular was Augustus when he died that four members of his family succeeded to the position of "emperor" (as we call it) despite their serious personal and political shortcomings. However, due to Augustus's calculated ambiguity about his role, the position of emperor was never automatically regarded as hereditary, and after the mid-first century C.E. other families obtained the post. In theory the early emperors were affirmed by the Senate; in reality they were chosen by the armies. By the second century C.E. a series of very capable emperors instituted a new mechanism of succession: each adopted a mature man of proven ability as his son, designated him as his successor, and shared offices and privileges with him.

While Augustus had felt it important to appeal to Republican traditions and conceal the source and extent of his power, this became less necessary over time, and later emperors exercised their authority more overtly. In imitation of Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic kings, many Roman emperors were officially deified (regarded as gods) after death. A cult of worship of the living emperor developed as a useful way to increase the loyalty of subjects.

The terse Law of the Twelve Tables, ca. 450 B.C.E., was supplemented by decrees of the Senate, bills passed in the Assembly, and the annual proclamations of the praetors°, elected public officials responsible for hearing cases and administering the law. In the later Republic a small group of legal experts began to emerge who analyzed laws and legal procedures to determine the underlying principles, then applied these principles to the creation of new laws required by a changing society. These experts were less lawyers in the modern sense than teachers, though they were sometimes consulted by magistrates or the parties to legal actions.

During the Principate the emperor became a major source of new laws. In this period the law was studied and codified with a new intensity by the class of legal experts, and their opinions and interpretations often were given the force of law.

Scene from Trajan's Column, Rome, ca. 113 C.E.   The Roman emperor Trajan erected a marble column 125 feet (38 meters) in height to commemorate his triumphant campaign in Dacia (modern Romania). The relief carving, which snakes around the column for 656 feet (200 meters), illustrates numerous episodes of the conquest and provides a detailed pictorial record of the equipment and practices of the Roman army in the field. This panel depicts soldiers building a fort.   (Peter Rockwell, Rome)

An Urban Empire

The Roman Empire of the first three centuries C.E. was an "urban" empire. This does not mean that most people were living in cities and towns. Perhaps 80 percent of the 50 to 60 million people living within the borders of the empire engaged in agriculture and lived in villages or on isolated farms in the countryside. The empire, however, was administered through a network of towns and cities, and the urban populace benefited most.

equites (EH-kwee-tays)   **praetor** (PRAY-tuhr)

Numerous towns had several thousand inhabitants. A handful of major cities—Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and Carthage—had populations of several hundred thousand. Rome itself had approximately a million residents. The largest cities strained the limited technological capabilities of the ancients; providing adequate food and water and removing sewage were always problems.

In Rome the upper classes lived in elegant townhouses on one or another of the seven hills. Such a house was centered around an *atrium*, a rectangular courtyard with a skylight that let in light and rainwater for drinking and washing. Surrounding the atrium were a dining room for dinner and drinking parties, an interior garden, a kitchen, and possibly a private bath. Bedrooms were on the upper level. The floors were decorated with pebble mosaics, and the walls and ceilings were covered with frescoes (paintings done directly on wet plaster) of mythological scenes or outdoor vistas, giving a sense of openness in the absence of windows.

The poor lived in crowded slums in the low-lying parts of the city. Damp, dark, and smelly, with few furnishings, their wooden tenements were susceptible to frequent fires.

The cities, towns, and even the ramshackle settlements that sprang up on the edge of frontier forts were miniature replicas of the capital city in political organization, physical layout, and appearance. A town council and two annually elected officials drawn from prosperous members of the community maintained law and order and collected both urban and rural taxes. In their desire to imitate the manners and values of Roman senators, this "municipal aristocracy" endowed cities and towns, which had very little revenue of their own, with attractive elements of Roman urban life—a forum (an open plaza that served as a civic center), government buildings, temples, gardens, baths, theaters, amphitheaters, and games and public entertainments of all sorts.

The concentration of ownership of the land in ever fewer hands was temporarily reversed during the civil wars that brought an end to the Roman Republic, but it resumed in the era of the emperors. However, after the era of conquest ended in the early second century C.E., slaves were no longer plentiful or inexpensive, and landowners needed a new source of labor. Over time, the independent farmers were replaced by "tenant farmers" who were allowed to live on and cultivate plots of land in return for a portion of their crops. The landowners still lived in the cities and hired foremen to manage their estates. Thus wealth was concentrated in the cities but was based on the productivity of rural agricultural laborers.

Some urban dwellers got rich from manufacture and trade. Commerce was greatly enhanced by the **pax romana** ("Roman peace"), the safety and stability guaranteed by Roman might. Grain, meat, vegetables, and other bulk foodstuffs usually could be exchanged only locally because transportation was expensive and many products spoiled quickly. However, the city of Rome depended on the import of massive quantities of grain from Sicily and Egypt.

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Aspect of the Pax Romana

Glass, metalwork, delicate pottery, and other fine manufactured products were exported throughout the empire. Roman armies stationed on the frontiers were a large market, and their presence promoted the prosperity of border provinces. Other merchants traded in luxury items from far beyond the boundaries of the empire, especially silk from China and spices from India and Arabia.

Romanization—the spread of the Latin language and Roman way of life—was one of the most enduring consequences of empire, primarily in the western provinces. Greek language and culture, a legacy of the Hellenistic kingdoms, continued to dominate the eastern Mediterranean (see Chapter 4). As towns sprang up and acquired the features of Roman urban life, they served as magnets for ambitious members of the indigenous populations. The empire gradually and reluctantly granted Roman citizenship, with its attendant privileges, legal protections, and exemptions from some types of taxation, to people living outside Italy. Men who completed a twenty-six-year term of service in the native military units that backed up the Roman legions were granted citizenship and could pass this status on to their descendants. Emperors made grants of citizenship to individuals or entire communities as rewards for good service. In 212 C.E. the emperor Caracalla granted citizenship to all free, adult, male inhabitants of the empire.

The gradual extension of citizenship mirrored the empire's transformation from an Italian dominion over Mediterranean lands into a commonwealth of peoples. As early as the first century C.E. some of the leading literary and intellectual figures came from the provinces. By the second century even the emperors hailed from Spain, Gaul, and North Africa.

Roman Shop Selling Food and Drink The bustling town of Pompeii on the Bay of Naples was buried in ash by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 C.E. Archaeologists have unearthed the streets, stores, and houses of this typical Roman town. Shops such as this sold hot food and drink served from clay vessels set into the counter. Shelves and niches behind the counter contained other items. In the background can be seen a well-paved street and a public fountain where the inhabitants could fetch water. (Courtesy, Leo C. Curran)

The Rise of Christianity

The Jewish homeland of Judaea (see Chapter 3), roughly equivalent to present-day Israel, was put under direct Roman rule in 6 C.E. Over the next half-century Roman governors insensitive to the Jewish belief in one god managed to increase tensions, and opposition to Roman rule sprang up. Many waited for the arrival of the Messiah, the "Anointed One," presumed to be a military leader who would liberate the Jewish people and drive the Romans out of the land.

It is in this context that we must see the career of Jesus, a young carpenter from the Galilee region in northern Israel. While scholars largely agree that the portrait of Jesus found in the New Testament reflects the viewpoint of followers a half-century after his death, it is difficult to determine the motives and teachings of the historical Jesus. Some experts believe that he was essentially a rabbi, or teacher, and that, offended by what he perceived as Jewish religious and political leaders' excessive concern with money and power and by the perfunctory nature of mainstream Jewish religious practice in his time, he prescribed a return to the personal faith and spirituality of an earlier age. Others stress his connections to the apocalyptic fervor found in certain circles of Judaism, such as John the Baptist and the community

that authored the Dead Sea Scrolls. They view Jesus as a fiery prophet who urged people to prepare themselves for the imminent end of the world and God's ushering in of a blessed new age. Still others see him as a political revolutionary, upset by the downtrodden condition of the peasants in the countryside and the poor in the cities, who was determined to drive out the Roman occupiers and their collaborators among the Jewish elite. Whatever his real motivations, the charismatic Jesus eventually attracted the attention of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, who regarded popular reformers as potential troublemakers. They turned him over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Jesus was imprisoned, condemned, and executed by crucifixion, a punishment usually reserved for common criminals. His followers, the Apostles, carried on after his death and sought to spread his teachings and their belief that he was the Messiah and had been resurrected (returned from death to life) among their fellow Jews.

Paul, a Jew from the city of Tarsus in southeast Anatolia, converted to the new creed. Between 45 and 58 C.E. he threw his enormous energy into spreading the word. Traveling throughout Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, and Greece, he became increasingly frustrated with the refusal of most Jews to accept his claim that Jesus was the Messiah and had ushered in a new age. Many Jews, on the other hand,

were appalled by the failure of the followers of Jesus to maintain traditional Jewish practices. Discovering a spiritual hunger among many non-Jews (sometimes called "gentiles"), Paul redirected his efforts toward them and set up a string of Christian (from the Greek name *christos*, meaning "anointed one," given to Jesus by his followers) communities in the eastern Mediterranean. Speaking both Greek and Aramaic, he moved comfortably between the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds.

In 66 C.E. long-building tensions in Roman Judaea erupted into a full-scale revolt that lasted until 73. One of the casualties of the Roman reconquest of Judaea was the Jerusalem-based Christian community, which focused on converting the Jews. This left the field clear for Paul's non-Jewish converts, and Christianity began to diverge more and more from its Jewish roots.

For more than two centuries, the sect grew slowly but steadily. Many of the first converts were from disenfranchised groups—women, slaves, the urban poor. However, as the religious movement grew and prospered, it developed a hierarchy of priests and bishops and became subject to bitter disputes over theological doctrine (see Chapter 9).

As monotheists forbidden to worship other gods, early Christians were persecuted by Roman officials who regarded their refusal to worship the emperor as a sign of disloyalty. Despite occasional government-sponsored attempts at suppression and spontaneous mob attacks, or perhaps because of them, the young Christian movement continued to gain strength and attract converts. By the late third century C.E. its adherents were a sizable minority within the Roman Empire and included many educated and prosperous people with posts in the local and imperial governments.

The expansion of Christianity should be seen as part of a broader religious tendency. By the Greek Classical period a number of "mystery" cults had gained popularity by claiming to provide secret information about the nature of life and death and promising a blessed afterlife to their adherents. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, a number of cults making similar promises arose in the eastern Mediterranean and spread throughout the Greco-Roman lands, presumably in response to a growing spiritual and intellectual hunger not satisfied by traditional pagan practices. As we shall see, the ultimate victory of Christianity over these rivals had as much to do with historical circumstances as with its spiritual appeal.

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Interactive Map: The Expansion
of Christianity to 600

The relative ease and safety of travel brought about by Roman arms and engineering enabled merchants to sell their wares and helped the early Christians spread their faith. Surviving remnants of roads, fortification walls, aqueducts, and buildings testify to the engineering expertise of the ancient Romans. Some of the best engineers served with the army, building bridges, siege works, and ballistic weapons that hurled stones and shafts. In peacetime soldiers were often put to work on construction projects. Aqueducts—long elevated or underground conduits—carried water from a source to an urban center, using only the force of gravity (see Environment and Technology: Water Engineering in Rome and China). The Romans were pioneers in the use of arches, which allow the even distribution of great weights without thick supporting walls. The invention of concrete—a mixture of lime powder, sand, and water that could be poured into molds—allowed the Romans to create vast vaulted and domed interior spaces.

Defending borders that stretched for thousands of miles was a great challenge. In a document released after his death, Augustus advised against expanding the empire because the costs of administering and defending subsequent acquisitions would be greater than the revenues. The Roman army was reorganized and redeployed to reflect the shift from an offensive to a defensive strategy. At most points the empire was protected by mountains, deserts, and seas. But the lengthy Rhine and Danube river frontiers in Germany and Central Europe were vulnerable. They were guarded by a string of forts with relatively small garrisons, adequate for dealing with raiders. On particularly desolate frontiers, such as in Britain and North Africa, the Romans built long walls to keep out the peoples who lived beyond.

The Roman state prospered for two and a half centuries after Augustus stabilized the internal political situation and addressed the needs of the empire with an ambitious program of reforms. In the third century C.E. cracks in the edifice became visible. Historians use the expression "third-century crisis" to refer to the period from 235 to 284 C.E., when political, military, and economic problems beset and nearly destroyed the Roman Empire. The most visible symptom of the crisis was the frequent change of rulers. Twenty or more men claimed the office of emperor during this period. Most reigned for only a few months or years before being overthrown by rivals or killed by their own troops. Germanic tribesmen on the Rhine/Danube frontier took advantage of the frequent civil wars and periods of anarchy to raid deep into the empire. For the first time in centuries, Roman cities began to erect walls for protection.

The political and military emergencies had a devastating impact on the empire's economy. Buying the loyalty

Water Engineering in Rome and China

People needed water to drink; it was vital for agriculture; and it provided a rapid and economical means for transporting people and goods. Some of the most impressive technological achievements of ancient Rome and China involved hydraulic (water) engineering.

Roman cities, with their large populations, required abundant and reliable sources of water. One way to obtain it was to build aqueducts—stone channels to bring water from distant lakes and streams to the cities. The water flowing in these conduits was moved only by the force of gravity. Surveyors measured the land's elevation and plotted a course that very gradually moved downhill.

Some conduits were elevated atop walls or bridges, which made it difficult for unauthorized parties to tap the water line for their own use. Portions of some aqueducts were built underground. Still-standing aboveground segments indicate that the Roman aqueducts were well-built structures made of large cut stones closely fitted and held together by a cement-like mortar. Construction of the aqueducts was labor-intensive, and often both design and construction were carried out by military personnel. This was one of the ways in which the Roman government could keep large numbers of soldiers busy in peacetime.

Sections of aqueduct that crossed rivers presented the same construction challenges as bridges. Roman engineers lowered prefabricated wooden cofferdams—large, hollow cylinders—into the riverbed and pumped out the water so workers could descend and construct cement piers to support the arched segments of the bridge and the water channel itself. This technique is still used for construction in water.

When an aqueduct reached the outskirts of a city, the water flowed into a reservoir, where it was stored. Pipes connected the reservoir to different parts of the city. Even within the city, gravity provided the motive force until the water reached the public fountains used by the poor and the private storage tanks of individuals wealthy enough to have plumbing in their houses.

In ancient China, rivers running generally in an east-west direction were the main thoroughfares. The earliest development of complex societies centered on the Yellow River Valley, but by the beginning of the Qin Empire the Yangzi River Valley and regions farther south were becoming increasingly important to China's political and economic vitality. In this era the Chinese began to build canals connecting the northern and southern zones, at first for military purposes but eventually for transporting commercial goods as well. In later periods, with the acquisition of more

The Magic Canal Engineers of Shi Huangdi, "First Emperor" of China, exploited the contours of the landscape to connect the river systems of northern and southern China. (From Robert Temple, *The Genius of China* [1986]. Photographer: Robert Temple)

advanced engineering skills, an extensive network of canals was built, including the 1,100-mile-long (1,700-kilometer-long) Grand Canal.

One of the earliest efforts was the construction of the Magic Canal. A Chinese historian tells us that the Qin emperor Shi Huangdi ordered his engineers to join two rivers by a 20-mile-long (32.2-kilometer-long) canal so that he could more easily supply his armies of conquest in the south. Construction of the canal posed a difficult engineering challenge, because the rivers Hsiang and Li, though coming within 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) of one another, flowed in opposite directions and with a strong current.

The engineers took advantage of a low point in the chain of hills between the rivers to maintain a relatively level grade. The final element of the solution was to build a snout-shaped mound to divide the waters of the Hsiang, funneling part of that river into an artificial channel. Several spillways further reduced the volume of water flowing into the canal, which was 15 feet wide and 3 feet deep (about 4.5 meters wide and 1 meter deep). The joining of the two rivers completed a network of waterways that permitted continuous inland water transport of goods between the latitudes of Beijing and Guangzhou (Canton), a distance of 1,250 miles (2,012 kilometers). Modifications were made in later centuries, but the Magic Canal is still in use.

of the army and paying to defend the increasingly permeable frontiers drained the treasury. The unending demands of the central government for more tax revenues from the provinces, as well as the interruption of commerce by fighting, eroded the towns' prosperity. Short-sighted emperors, desperate for cash, reduced the amount of precious metal in Roman coins. As the devalued coinage became less and less acceptable in the marketplace, parts of the empire reverted to a barter economy, a far less efficient system that further curtailed large-scale and long-distance commerce.

The municipal aristocracy, once the most vital and public-spirited class in the empire, was slowly crushed out of existence. As town councilors, its members were personally liable for shortfalls in taxes owed to the state. The decline in trade eroded their wealth, which often was based on manufacture and commerce, and many began to evade their civic duties and even went into hiding. Population shifted out of the cities and into the countryside. Many people sought employment and protection from both raiders and government officials on the estates of wealthy and powerful country landowners.

Just when things looked bleakest, one man pulled the empire back from the brink of self-destruction. A commoner by birth, Diocletian had risen through the ranks of the army and gained power in 284. His success is indicated by the fact that he ruled for more than twenty years and died in bed.

Diocletian implemented radical reforms that saved the Roman state by transforming it. To halt inflation (the process by which prices rise as money becomes worth less), Diocletian issued an edict that specified the maximum prices that could be charged for various commodities and

services. To ensure an adequate supply of workers in vital services, he froze many people into their professions and required them to train their sons to succeed them. This unprecedented government regulation of prices and vocations had unforeseen consequences. A "black market" arose among buyers and sellers who chose to ignore the government's price controls and establish their own prices for goods and services. Many inhabitants of the empire began to see the government as an oppressive entity that no longer deserved their loyalty.

When Diocletian resigned in 305, the old divisiveness reemerged as various claimants battled for the throne. The eventual winner was Constantine (r. 306–337), who reunited the entire empire under his sole rule by 324.

In 312 Constantine won a key battle at the Milvian Bridge over the Tiber River near Rome. He later claimed that he had seen a cross (the sign of the Christian God) superimposed on the sun before this battle. Believing that the Christian God had helped him achieve the victory, in the following year Constantine issued the so-called Edict of Milan, ending the persecution of Christianity and guaranteeing freedom of worship to Christians and all others. Throughout his reign he supported the Christian church, although he tolerated other beliefs as well. Historians disagree about whether Constantine was spiritually motivated or was pragmatically seeking to unify the peoples of the empire under a single religion. In either case his embrace of Christianity was of tremendous historical significance. Large numbers of people began to convert when they saw that Christians seeking political office or favors from the government had clear advantages over non-Christians.

In 324 Constantine transferred the imperial capital from Rome to Byzantium, an ancient Greek city on the

Roman Aqueduct Near Tarragona, Spain How to provide an adequate supply of water was a problem posed by the growth of Roman towns and cities. Aqueducts channeled water from a source, sometimes many miles away, to an urban complex, using only the force of gravity. To bring an aqueduct from high ground into the city, Roman engineers designed long, continuous rows of arches that maintained a steady downhill slope. Roman troops were often used in such large-scale construction projects. Scholars sometimes can roughly estimate the population of an ancient city by calculating the amount of water that was available to it. (Rober: Frerck/Woodfin Camp & Associates)

Bosporus° strait leading from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea. The city was renamed Constantinople°, "City of Constantine." This move both reflected and accelerated changes already taking place. Constantinople was closer than Rome to the most-threatened borders in eastern Europe (see Map 5.1). The urban centers and prosperous middle class in the eastern half of the empire had better withstood the third-century crisis than had those in the western half. In addition, more educated people and more Christians were living in the eastern provinces.

Byzantines and Germans

Though conversion to the Christian faith affected all parts of the empire, a deep gulf opened between the eastern, Greek-speaking lands and the lands in the west that came under the

influence of Germanic rulers. The term **Byzantine Empire**, derived from Constantinople's original name, came into use for the eastern realm. Constantine (and his pious mother Helena) studded the city with churches, controlled the appointment of the newly created Christian patriarch of Constantinople, and involved himself in doctrinal disputes over which beliefs constituted heresy.

In 325 he called hundreds of bishops to a council at the city of Nicaea° (modern Iznik in northwestern Turkey) to resolve disputes over religious doctrine. The bishops rejected the views of a priest from Alexandria named Arius, who maintained that Jesus was of lesser importance than God the Father. However, the Arian doctrine enjoyed great, though temporary, popularity among the Germanic peoples then

Bosporus (BAHS-puhr-uhs)
Constantinople (cahn-stan-tih-NO-pul)

Nicaea (nye-SEE-uh)

migrating along the Danube frontier and into the western Roman lands.

The next several centuries were crowded with disputes over theology and quarrels among the patriarchs, or paramount church officials, of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome. The patriarchs appointed bishops, and each bishop consecrated priests within his area of jurisdiction, called a diocese. Church rules set by the patriarch or by councils of bishops guided priests in serving ordinary believers.

Christianity progressed most rapidly in urban centers. Though the country folk (Latin *pagani*, whence the word *pagan* used as a negative label for polytheists) long retained customs deriving from worship of the old gods, the emperor Julian (r. 361–363) tried in vain to restore the old polytheism as the state cult. In 392 the emperor Theodosius banned all pagan ceremonies.

The heavy involvement with religion of the emperors in Constantinople did not prevent them from playing the traditional roles of conqueror and lawmaker. The emperor Justinian (r. 527–565) sent armies to regain control of Roman North Africa, which had been conquered by Germans invading from Spain, and of parts of Italy. His historians celebrated these deeds, but his collection of Roman laws proved more enduring. At his command a team of seventeen legal scholars made a systematic compilation, in Latin, of a thousand years of Roman legal tradition. Five hundred years later the *Corpus Juris Civilis (Body of Civil Law)*, as it came to be called, began to be studied in western Europe under the influence of a legal scholar named Irnerius (ca. 1055–ca. 1130), whose establishment of legal studies at the University of Bologna° in Italy laid the foundation for most modern European legal systems.

Continuing imperial vitality in the eastern empire contrasted with deepening decline in the western empire, which formally became a separate entity after 395. Byzantine armies and diplomats warded off most assaults on the comparatively short Danube River frontier, thereby persuading migrating German warrior bands to keep moving westward. Crossing the Rhine, they overwhelmed the Roman legions in the west. Gaul, Britain, Spain, and North Africa fell to various Germanic peoples in the early fifth century. Visigoths sacked Rome itself in 410, and the last Roman emperor was deposed in 476.

By 530, with the old Roman economy and urban centers in shambles, the Western Roman Empire had fragmented into a handful of kingdoms under Germanic rulers. The city of Rome had lost its political importance but retained prominence as the seat of the most influential Western churchman, the patriarch of Rome. Local noble families competed for control of this position, which over several centuries acquired the title *Pope* along with supreme power in the Latin-speaking church.

The educated few, increasingly only Christian priests and monks, still spoke and wrote a somewhat simplified form of Latin. But the Latin of the uneducated masses who had lived under Roman rule rapidly evolved into the Romance dialects that eventually became modern Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and Romanian. In the north and east of the Rhine River, where Roman culture had scarcely penetrated, people spoke Germanic and related Scandinavian languages. East of the Elbe River, speakers of Slavic languages formed a third major group.

From a Roman point of view, the rise of the Germanic kingdoms represented the triumph of the barbarians. Yet the society that developed on the ruins of Rome in the west was to prove more dynamic and creative than the Byzantine realm that preserved intact much more of the Roman tradition.

THE ORIGINS OF IMPERIAL CHINA, 221 B.C.E.–220 C.E.

The early history of China (see Chapter 2) was characterized by the fragmentation that geography seemed to dictate. The Shang (ca. 1750–1027 B.C.E.) and Zhou (1027–221 B.C.E.) dynasties ruled over a relatively compact zone in northeastern China. The last few centuries of nominal Zhou rule—the Warring States Period—saw rivalry and belligerence among a group of small states with somewhat different languages and cultures. As in the contemporary Greek city-states (see Chapter 4), competition and conflict gave rise to many distinctive elements of a national culture.

In the second half of the third century B.C.E. one of the warring states—the Qin° state of the Wei° Valley—rapidly conquered its rivals and created China's first empire (221–206 B.C.E.). Built at a great cost in human lives and labor, the Qin Empire barely survived the death of its founder, Shi Huangdi°. Power soon passed to a new dynasty, the Han, which ruled China from 206 B.C.E. to 220 C.E. (see Map 5.2). Thus began the long history of imperial China—a tradition of political and cultural unity and continuity that lasted into the early twentieth century.

Bologna (boe-LOAN-yuh)

Qin (chin)   Wei (way)   Shi Huangdi (shee wahng-dee)
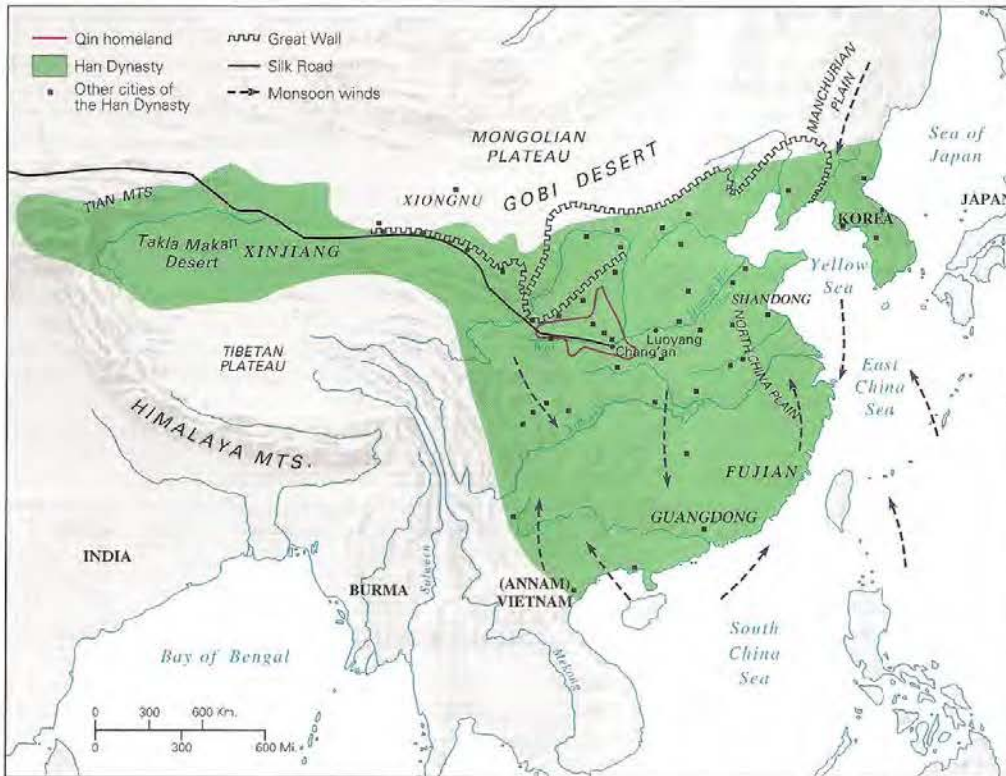
Map 5.2   Han China   The Qin and Han rulers of northeast China extended their control over all of eastern China and extensive territories to the west. A series of walls in the north and northwest, built to check the incursions of nomadic peoples from the steppes, were joined together to form the ancestor of the present-day Great Wall of China. An extensive network of roads connecting towns, cities, and frontier forts promoted rapid communication and facilitated trade. The Silk Road carried China's most treasured product to Central, South, and West Asia and the Mediterranean lands.

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Han China

Resources and Population

Agriculture produced the wealth and taxes that supported the institutions of imperial China. The main tax, a percentage of the annual harvest, funded government activities ranging from the luxurious lifestyle of the royal court to the daily tasks of officials and military units throughout the country and on the frontiers. Large populations in China's capital cities, first **Chang'an°** and later Luoyang°, had to be fed. As intensive agriculture spread in the Yangzi River Valley, the need to transport southern crops to the north spurred the construction of canals to connect the Yangzi with the Yellow River (see Environment and Technology: Water Engineering in Rome and China). During prosperous times, the government also collected and stored surplus grain that could be sold at reasonable prices in times of shortage.

Chang'an (chahng-ahn)

Luoyang (LWOE-yahng)

Rubbing of Salt Mining
Found in a Chinese tomb of the first century C.E., this rubbing illustrates a procedure for mining salt. The tower on the left originally served as a derrick for drilling a deep hole through dirt and rock. In this scene workers are hauling up buckets full of brine (saltwater) from underground deposits. In the background are hunters in the mountains.
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)
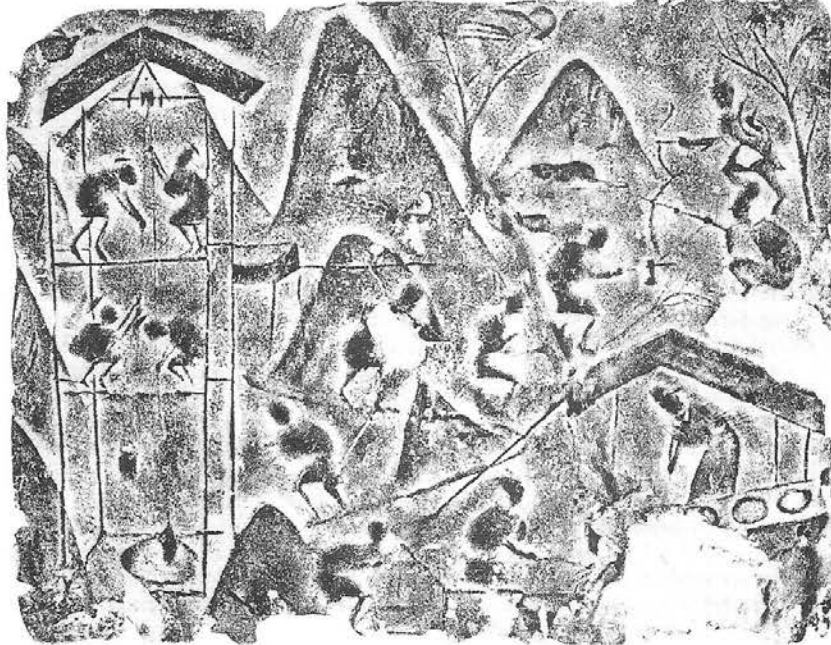
The government periodically conducted a census of inhabitants, and the results for 2 C.E. and 140 C.E. are available today. The earlier survey counted approximately 12 million households and 60 million people; the later, not quite 10 million households and 49 million people. The average household contained 5 persons. Then, as now, the vast majority of the people lived in the eastern portion of the country, the river-valley regions where intensive agriculture could support a dense population. At first the largest concentration was in the Yellow River Valley and North China Plain, but by early Han times the demographic center had begun to shift to the Yangzi River Valley.

In the intervals between seasonal agricultural tasks, every able-bodied man donated one month of labor a year to public works projects—building palaces, temples, fortifications, and roads; transporting goods; excavating and maintaining canal channels; laboring on imperial estates; or working in the mines. The state also required two years of military service. On the frontiers, young conscripts built walls and forts, kept an eye on barbarian neighbors, fought when necessary, and grew crops to support themselves. Annually updated registers of land and households enabled imperial officials to keep track of money and services due. Like the Romans, the Chinese

government depended on a large population of free peasants to contribute taxes and services to the state.

The Han Chinese gradually but persistently expanded at the expense of other ethnic groups. Population growth in the core regions and a shortage of good, arable land spurred pioneers to push into new areas. Sometimes the government organized new settlements, at militarily strategic sites and on the frontiers, for example. Neighboring kingdoms also invited Chinese settlers so as to exploit their skills and learn their technologies.

Han people preferred regions suitable for the kind of agriculture they had practiced in the eastern river valleys. They took over land on the northern frontier, pushing back nomadic populations. They also expanded into the tropical forests of southern China and settled in the western oases. In places not suitable for their preferred kind of agriculture, particularly the steppe and the desert, Han Chinese did not displace other groups.

Hierarchy, Obedience, and Belief

As the Han Chinese expanded into new regions, they took along their social organization, values, language, and other cultural practices. The basic unit of Chinese society was the family, which included not only

the living generations but also all the previous generations—the ancestors. The Chinese believed that their ancestors maintained an ongoing interest in the fortunes of living family members, so they consulted, appeased, and venerated them in order to maintain their favor. The family was viewed as a living, self-renewing organism, and each generation was required to have sons to perpetuate the family and maintain the ancestor cult that provided a kind of immortality to the deceased.

The doctrine of Confucius (Kongzi), which had its origins in the sixth century B.C.E. (see Chapter 2), became very influential in the imperial period. Confucianism regarded hierarchy as a natural aspect of human society and laid down rules of appropriate conduct. People saw themselves as part of an interdependent unit rather than as individual agents. Each person had a place and responsibilities within the family hierarchy, based on his or her gender, age, and relationship to other family members. Absolute authority rested with the father, who was an intermediary between the living members and the ancestors, presiding over the rituals of ancestor worship.

The same concepts operated in society as a whole. Peasants, soldiers, administrators, and rulers all made distinctive and necessary contributions to the welfare of society. Confucianism optimistically maintained that people could be guided to the right path through education, imitation of proper role models, and self-improvement. The family inculcated the basic values of Chinese society: loyalty, obedience to authority, respect for elders and ancestors, and concern for honor and appropriate conduct. Because the hierarchy in the state mirrored the hierarchy in the family, these same attitudes carried over into the relationship between individuals and the state.

The experiences of women in ancient Chinese society are hard to pinpoint because, as elsewhere, contemporary written sources tell us little. Confucian ethics stressed the impropriety of women participating in public life. Traditional wisdom about conduct appropriate for women is preserved in an account of the life of the mother of the Confucian philosopher Mencius (Mengzi):

> A woman's duties are to cook the five grains, heat the wine, look after her parents-in-law, make clothes, and that is all! . . . [She] has no ambition to manage affairs outside the house. . . . She must follow the "three submissions." When she is young, she must submit to her parents. After her marriage, she must submit to her husband. When she is widowed, she must submit to her son.[1]

That is an ideal perpetuated by males of the upper classes, the social stratum that is the source of most of the written texts. Upper-class females probably were under considerable pressure to conform to those expectations. Women of the lower classes, less affected by Confucian ways of thinking, may have been less constrained than their more "privileged" counterparts.

After her parents arranged her marriage, a young bride went to live with her husband's family, where she was a stranger who had to prove herself. Ability and force of personality—as well as the capacity to produce sons—could make a difference. Dissension between the wife and her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law grew out of competition for influence with husbands, sons, and brothers and for a larger share of the family's economic resources.

Like the early Romans, the ancient Chinese believed that divinity resided within nature rather than outside and above it, and they worshiped and tried to appease the forces of nature. The state erected and maintained shrines to the lords of rain and winds as well as to certain great rivers and high mountains. Gathering at mounds or altars where the local spirit of the soil was thought to reside, people sacrificed sheep and pigs and beat drums loudly to promote the fertility of the earth. Strange or disastrous natural phenomena, such as eclipses or heavy rains, called for symbolic restraint of the deity by tying a red cord around the sacred spot. Because it was believed that supernatural forces flowed through the landscape, bringing good and evil fortune, experts in *feng shui*, meaning "earth divination," were consulted to determine the most favorable location and orientation for buildings and graves. The faithful learned to adapt their lives to the complex rhythms they perceived in nature.

The First Chinese Empire, 221–207 B.C.E.

For centuries eastern China was divided among rival states whose frequent hostilities gave rise to the label "Warring States Period" (480–221 B.C.E.). In the second half of the third century B.C.E. the state of the Qin suddenly burst forth and took over the other states one by one. By 221 B.C.E., the first emperor had united the northern plain and the Yangzi River Valley under one rule, marking the creation of China and the inauguration of the imperial age. Many scholars maintain that the name "China," by which this land has been known in the Western world, is derived from "Qin."

Several factors account for the meteoric rise of the Qin. The Qin ruler, who took the title *Shi Huangdi* ("First

Emperor"), and his adviser and prime minister Li Si° were able and ruthless men who exploited the exhaustion resulting from the long centuries of interstate rivalry. The Qin homeland in the valley of the Wei, a tributary of the Yellow River, was less urbanized and commercialized than the kingdoms farther east, with a large pool of sturdy peasants to serve in the army. Moreover, long experience in mobilizing manpower for the construction of irrigation and flood-control works had strengthened the authority of the Qin king at the expense of the nobles and endowed his government with superior organizational skills.

Shi Huangdi and Li Si created a totalitarian structure that subordinated the individual to the needs of the state. By publicly burning large numbers of books, they symbolically expressed a radical break with the past. They cracked down on Confucianism, regarding its demands for benevolent and nonviolent conduct from rulers to be a check on the absolute power they sought. They instead drew from a stream of political thought known as Legalism (see Chapter 2). Developing earlier Legalist thinking, Li Si insisted that the will of the ruler was supreme, and that it was necessary to impose discipline and obedience on the subjects through the rigid application of rewards and punishments.

The new regime was determined to eliminate rival centers of authority. Its first target was the landowning aristocracy of the conquered rival states and the system on which aristocratic wealth and power had been based. Because primogeniture—the right of the eldest son to inherit all the landed property—allowed a small number of individuals to accumulate vast tracts of land, the Qin government abolished it, instead requiring estates to be broken up and passed on to several heirs.

The large estates of the aristocracy had been worked by slaves (see Diversity and Dominance: The Treatment of Slaves in Rome and China) and peasant serfs, who gave their landlords a substantial portion of their harvest. The Qin abolished slavery and took steps to create a free peasantry who paid taxes and provided labor, as well as military service, to the state.

The Qin government's commitment to standardization helped create a unified Chinese civilization. During the Warring States Period, small states had found many ways to emphasize their independence. For example, states had had their own forms of music, with different scales, systems of notation, and instruments. The Qin imposed standard weights, measures, and coinage; a uniform law code; a common system of writing; and

even regulations governing the axle length of carts so as to leave just one set of ruts on the roads.

The Qin built thousands of miles of roads—comparable in scale to the roads of the Roman Empire—to connect the parts of the empire and to move Qin armies quickly. They also built canals connecting the river systems of northern and southern China (see Environment and Technology: Water Engineering in Rome and China). The frontier walls of the old states began to be linked into a continuous barricade, the precursor of the Great Wall, to protect cultivated lands from raids by northern nomads. Large numbers of people were forced to donate their labor and often their lives to build the walls and roads. So oppressive were the financial exploitation and demands for forced labor that a series of rebellions broke out when Shi Huangdi died in 210 B.C.E., bringing down the Qin dynasty.

The Long Reign of the Han, 206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.	

When the dust cleared, Liu Bang°, who may have been born a peasant, had outlasted his rivals and established a new dynasty, the Han (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.). The new emperor promised to reject the excesses and mistakes of the Qin and to restore the institutions of a venerable past. To sustain and protect a large empire, however, the Han administration maintained much of the Qin's structure and Legalist ideology, though with less fanatical zeal. The Han tempered Legalist government with a Confucianism revised to serve a large, centralized political entity. This Confucianism emphasized the government's benevolence and the appropriateness of particular rituals and behaviors in a manifestly hierarchical society. The Han system of administration became the standard for later ages, and the Chinese people today refer to themselves ethnically as "Han."

After eighty years of imperial consolidation, Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 B.C.E.) launched a period of military expansion, south into Fujian, Guangdong, and present-day north Vietnam, and north into Manchuria and present-day North Korea. Han armies also went west to inner Mongolia and Xinjiang° to secure the lucrative Silk Road (see Chapter 7). Controlling the newly acquired territories was expensive, however, so Wu's successors curtailed further expansion.

The Han Empire endured, with a brief interruption between 9 and 23 C.E., for more than four hundred years. From 202 B.C.E. to 8 C.E.—the period of the Early, or Western,

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Li Si (luh suh)

Lui Bang (le-oo bahng)   **Xinjiang** (SHIN-jyahng)

Terracotta Soldiers from the Tomb of Shi Huangdi, "First Emperor of China," Late Third Century B.C.E. Near the monumental tomb that he built for himself, the First Emperor filled a huge underground chamber with more than seven thousand life-size, baked-clay statues of soldiers. The terracotta army was unearthed in the 1970s.   (© Dennis Cox/ChinaStock)

Han—the capital was at Chang'an, in the Wei Valley, an ancient seat of power from which the Zhou and Qin dynasties had emerged. From 23 to 220 C.E. the Later, or Eastern, Han established its base farther east, in the more centrally located Luoyang.

Protected by a ring of hills but with ready access to the fertile plain, Chang'an was surrounded by a wall of pounded earth and brick 15 miles (24 kilometers) in circumference. Contemporaries described it as a bustling place, filled with courtiers, officials, soldiers, merchants, craftsmen, and foreign visitors. In 2 C.E. its population was 246,000. Part of the city was carefully planned. Broad thoroughfares running north and south intersected with others running east and west. High walls protected the palaces, administrative offices, barracks, and storehouses of the imperial compound, and access was restricted. Temples and marketplaces were scattered about the civic center. Chang'an became a model of urban planning, and its main features were imitated in the cities and towns that sprang up throughout the Han Empire.

Moralizing writers who criticized the elite provide glimpses of their private lives. Living in multistory houses, wearing fine silks, and traveling about Chang'an in ornate horse-drawn carriages, well-to-do officials and merchants devoted their leisure time to art and literature, occult religious practices, elegant banquets, and various entertainments—music and dance, juggling and acrobatics, dog and horse races, cock and tiger fights. In stark contrast, the common people inhabited a sprawling warren of alleys, living in dwellings packed "as closely as the teeth of a comb," as one poet put it.

As in the Zhou monarchy (see Chapter 2), the emperor was the "Son of Heaven," chosen to rule in accordance with the Mandate of Heaven. He stood at the center of government and society. As the father held authority in the family and was a link between the living generations and the ancestors, so was the emperor supreme in the state. He brought the support of powerful imperial ancestors and guaranteed the harmonious interaction of heaven and earth. To a much greater degree than his Roman counterpart, he was regarded as a divinity and his word was law.

Living in seclusion within the walled palace compound, surrounded by his many wives, children, servants, courtiers, and officials, the emperor presided over unceasing pomp and ritual emphasizing the worship of

Heaven and imperial ancestors as well as the practical business of government. The royal compound was also a hive of intrigue, no more so than when the emperor died and his chief widow chose his heir from among the male members of the ruling clan.

The central government was run by a prime minister, a civil service director, and nine ministers with military, economic, legal, and religious responsibilities. Like the imperial Romans, the Han depended on local officials for day-to-day administration of their far-flung territories. Local people collected taxes and dispatched revenues to the central government, regulated conscription for the army and for labor projects, provided protection, and settled disputes. The remote central government rarely impinged on the lives of most citizens.

As part of their strategy to weaken the rural aristocrats and exclude them from political posts, the Qin and Han emperors allied themselves with the gentry—the class next in wealth below the aristocrats. To serve as local officials the central government chose members of this class of moderately prosperous landowners, usually men with education and valued expertise who resembled the Roman equites favored by Augustus and his successors. These officials were a privileged and respected group within Chinese society, and they made the government more efficient and responsive than it had been in the past.

The guiding philosophy of the new gentry class was a modified Confucianism that provided a system for training officials to be intellectually capable and morally worthy of their role; it also set forth a code of conduct for measuring their performance. According to Chinese tradition, an imperial university with as many as thirty thousand students was located outside Chang'an, and provincial centers of learning were established. (Some scholars doubt that such a complex institution existed this early.) Students from these centers were chosen to enter various levels of government service.

In theory, young men from any class could rise in the state hierarchy. In practice, sons of the gentry had an advantage because they were most likely to receive the necessary training in the Confucian classics. As civil servants advanced in the bureaucracy, they received distinctive emblems and privileges of rank, including preferential treatment in the legal system and exemption from military service. Over time, the gentry became a new aristocracy of sorts, banding together in cliques and family alliances that had considerable clout and worked to advance the careers of group members.

Daoism, which also had its origins in the Warring States Period (see Chapter 2), took deeper root, becoming popular with the common people. Daoism emphasized the search for the *Dao*, or "path," of nature and the value of harmonizing with the cycles and patterns of the natural world. Enlightenment was achieved not so much by education as by solitary contemplation and physical and mental discipline. Daoism was skeptical, questioning age-old beliefs and values and rejecting the hierarchy, rules, and rituals of the Confucianism of the elite classes. It urged passive acceptance of the disorder of the world, denial of ambition, contentment with simple pleasures, and trust in one's own instincts.

Technology and Trade

Chinese tradition recognized the importance of technology for the success and spread of Chinese civilization, crediting legendary rulers of the distant past with the introduction of major technologies.

The advent of bronze tools around 1500 B.C.E. helped clear the forests and open land for agriculture on the North China Plain. Almost a thousand years later iron arrived. Chinese metallurgists employed more advanced techniques than did their counterparts elsewhere in the hemisphere. Whereas Roman blacksmiths produced wrought-iron tools and weapons by hammering heated iron, the Chinese hammered ores with a higher carbon content to produce steel, and they mastered the technique of liquefying iron and pouring it into molds. The resulting steel and cast-iron tools and weapons were considerably stronger.

In the succeeding centuries, the crossbow and the use of cavalry helped the Chinese military repel nomads from the steppe regions. The watermill, which harnessed the power of running water to turn a grindstone, was used in China long before it appeared in Europe. The development of a horse collar that did not constrict the animal's breathing allowed Chinese horses to pull much heavier loads than European horses could. The Chinese also were the first to make paper, perhaps as early as the second century B.C.E. They pounded soaked plant fibers and bark with a mallet, then poured the mixture through a porous mat. Once the residue left on the mat surface dried out, it provided a relatively smooth, lightweight medium for writing.

The Qin began and the Han rulers continued an extensive program of road building. Roads enabled rapid movement of military forces and supplies. The network of couriers that carried messages to and from the central administration used horses, boats, and even footpaths, and they found food and shelter at relay stations. The network of navigable rivers was improved and connected by

canals (see Environment and Technology: Water Engineering in Rome and China).

Population growth and increasing trade gave rise to local market centers. These thriving towns grew to become county seats from which imperial officials operated. Between 10 and 30 percent of the population lived in Han towns and cities.

China's most important export commodity was silk. For a long time the fact that silk cocoons are secreted onto the leaves of mulberry trees by silkworms was a closely guarded secret that gave the Chinese a monopoly on the manufacture of silk. As silk was carried on a perilous journey westward through the Central Asian oases to the Middle East, India, and the Mediterranean, it passed through the hands of middlemen who raised the price to make a profit. The value of a beautiful textile may have increased a hundredfold by the time it reached its destination. The Chinese government sought to control the Silk Road by launching periodic campaigns into Central Asia. Garrisons were installed, and colonies of Chinese settlers were sent out to occupy the oases.

Decline of the Han Empire

For the Han government, as for the Romans, maintaining the security of the frontiers—particularly the north and northwest frontiers—was a primary concern. In general, the Han Empire successfully controlled lands occupied by farming peoples, but it met resistance from nomadic groups whose livelihood depended on their horses and herds. The different ways of life of farmers and herders gave rise to insulting stereotypes on both sides. The settled Chinese thought of nomads as "barbarians"—rough, uncivilized peoples—much as the inhabitants of the Roman Empire looked down on the Germanic tribes living beyond their frontier.

Along the boundary, the closeness of the herders and farmers often led to significant commercial activity. The nomadic herders sought the food and crafted goods produced by the farmers and townsfolk, and the settled farmers depended on the nomads for horses and other herd animals and products. Sometimes, however, nomads raided the settled lands and took what they needed or wanted. Tough and warlike because of the demands of their way of life, mounted nomads could strike swiftly and just as swiftly disappear.

Although nomadic groups tended to be relatively small and often fought with one another, from time to time circumstances and a charismatic leader could create a large coalition. In response, the Chinese developed cavalry forces that could match the mobility of the nomads, and China made access to good stocks of horses and pasture lands a state priority. Other strategies included maintaining colonies of soldier-farmers and garrisons on the frontier; settling compliant nomadic groups inside the borders to serve as a buffer against warlike groups; paying bribes to promote dissension among the nomad leadership; and paying protection money. One frequently successful approach was a "tributary system" in which nomad rulers nominally accepted Chinese supremacy and paid tribute, for which they were rewarded with marriages to Chinese princesses, dazzling receptions at court, and gifts from the Han emperor that exceeded the value of the tribute.

In the end, continuous military vigilance along the frontier burdened Han finances and worsened the economic troubles of later Han times. Despite the earnest efforts of Qin and Early Han emperors to reduce the power and wealth of the aristocracy and to turn land over to a free peasantry, by the end of the first century B.C.E. nobles and successful merchants again controlled huge tracts of land, and many peasants sought their protection against the demands of the imperial government. Over the next two centuries strongmen who were largely independent of imperial control emerged, and the central government was deprived of tax revenues and manpower. The system of military conscription broke down, forcing the government to hire more and more foreign soldiers and officers. These men were willing to serve for pay, but they were not very loyal to the Han state.

Several factors contributed to the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E.: factional intrigues within the ruling clan, official corruption and inefficiency, uprisings of desperate and hungry peasants, the spread of banditry, attacks by nomadic groups on the northwest frontier, and the ambitions of rural warlords. China entered a period of political fragmentation and economic and cultural regression that lasted until the rise of the Sui° and Tang° dynasties in the late sixth and early seventh centuries C.E.

Sui (sway) **Tang** (tahng)

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Both the Roman Empire and the first Chinese empire arose from relatively small states that, because of their discipline and military toughness, were initially able to subdue small and quarreling neighbors. Ultimately they unified widespread territories under strong central governments.

Agriculture was the fundamental economic activity and source of wealth in both civilizations. Government revenues were primarily derived from a percentage of the annual harvest. Both empires depended initially on a free peasantry—sturdy farmers who could be pressed into military service or other forms of compulsory labor. Conflicts over who owned the land and how it was to be used were at the heart of the political and social turmoil in both places. The autocratic rulers of the Roman and Chinese states secured their positions by breaking the power of the old aristocratic families, seizing their excess land, and giving land to small farmers (as well as keeping extensive tracts for themselves). The later reversal of this process, when wealthy noblemen once again gained control of vast tracts of land and reduced the peasants to dependent tenant farmers, signaled the erosion of the authority of the state.

Both empires spread out from an ethnically homogeneous core to encompass widespread territories containing diverse ecosystems, populations, and ways of life. Both brought those regions a cultural unity that has persisted, at least in part, to the present day. This development involved far more than military conquest and political domination. As the population of the core areas outstripped the available resources, Italian and Han settlers moved into new regions, bringing their languages, beliefs, customs, and technologies with them. Many people in the conquered lands were attracted to the culture of the ruler nation and chose to adopt these practices and attach themselves to a "winning cause." Both empires found similar solutions to the problems of administering far-flung territories and large populations in an age when men on horseback or on foot carried messages. The central government had to delegate considerable autonomy to local officials. These local elites identified their own interests with the central government

they loyally served. In both empires a kind of civil service developed, staffed by educated and capable members of a prosperous middle class.

Technologies that facilitated imperial control also fostered cultural unification and improvements in the general standard of living. Roads built to expedite the movement of troops became the highways of commerce and the thoroughfares by which imperial culture spread. A network of cities and towns served as the nerve center of each empire, providing local administrative bases, further promoting commerce, and radiating imperial culture out into the surrounding countryside. The majority of the population still resided in the countryside, but most of the advantages of empire were enjoyed by people living in urban centers. Cities and towns modeled themselves on the capital cities of Rome and Chang'an. Travelers could find the same types and styles of buildings and public spaces, as well as other attractive features of urban life, in outlying regions that they had seen in the capital.

The empires of Rome and Han China faced similar problems of defense: long borders located far from the administrative center and aggressive neighbors who coveted the prosperity of the empire. Both empires had to build walls and maintain a chain of forts and garrisons to protect against incursions. The cost of frontier defense was staggering and eventually eroded the economic prosperity of the two empires. As the imperial governments became ever more beholden to the military and demanded more taxes and services from the hard-pressed civilian population, they lost the loyalty of their own people, many of whom sought protection on the estates of powerful rural landowners. Eventually, both empires were so weakened that their borders were overrun and their central governments collapsed. Ironically, the newly dominant immigrant groups had been so deeply influenced by imperial culture that they tried their best to maintain it.

In referring to the eventual failure of these two empires, we are brought up against important differences between the empires that led to different long-term consequences. In China the imperial model was revived in subsequent eras, but the lands of the Roman Empire never again achieved

the same level of unification. Several interrelated factors help account for the different outcomes.

First, these cultures had different attitudes about the relationship of individuals to the state. In China the individual was deeply embedded in the larger social group. The Chinese family, with its emphasis on a precisely defined hierarchy, unquestioning obedience, and solemn rituals of deference to elders and ancestors, served as the model for society and the state. Respect for authority was deep-seated. Moreover, Confucianism, which sanctified hierarchy and provided a code of conduct for professionals and public officials, had arisen long before the imperial system and could be revived and tailored to fit subsequent political circumstances. Although the Roman family had its own hierarchy and traditions of obedience, the cult of ancestors was not as strong as among the Chinese, and the family was not the organizational model for Roman society and the Roman state. Also, there was no Roman equivalent of Confucianism—no ideology of political organization and social conduct that could survive the dissolution of the Roman state.

Moreover, opportunities for economic and social mobility were greater in the Roman Empire than in ancient China. Whereas the merchant class in China was frequently disparaged and constrained by the government, the absence of government interference in the Roman Empire resulted in greater economic mobility and a thriving and influential middle class in the towns and cities. And the Roman army, because it was composed of professional soldiers who served for decades and who constituted a distinct and increasingly privileged group, frequently played a decisive role in political conflict. In China, on the other hand, the army, which was composed of draftees who served for two years, was much less likely to take the initiative in struggles for power.

To a much greater extent than the Chinese emperor, then, the Roman emperor had to resort to persuasion, threats, and promises in order to forge a consensus for his initiatives. Although Roman emperors tried to create an ideology to bolster their position, they were hampered by the persistence of Republican traditions and the ambiguities about the position of emperor that were deliberately cultivated by Augustus. As a result, Roman rulers were likely to be chosen by the army or by the Senate; the dynastic principle never took deep root; and the cult of the emperor had little spiritual content. This stands in sharp contrast to the clear-cut Chinese belief that the emperor was the divine Son of Heaven with privileged access to the beneficent power of the royal ancestors.

Finally, Christianity, with its insistence on monotheism and one doctrine of truth, negated the Roman emperors' pretensions to divinity and was essentially unwilling to come to terms with pagan beliefs. The spread of Christianity through the provinces during the Late Roman Empire, and the decline of the western half of the empire in the fifth century C.E., constituted an irreversible break with the past. On the other hand, Buddhism, which came to China in the early centuries C.E. and flourished in the post-Han era (see Chapter 10), was more easily reconciled with traditional Chinese values and beliefs.

SUMMARY

— How did Rome create and maintain its vast Mediterranean empire?

— How did imperial China evolve from its beginnings into the Han state?

— What were the most important similarities and differences between these two empires, and what do the similarities and differences tell us about the circumstances and the character of each?

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The creation of the Roman Empire was a slow process in which solutions were discovered by trial and error. The Republican form of government, developed to meet the needs of an Italian city-state, proved inadequate to the demands of empire, and Rome's military success led to social and economic disruption and an acute political struggle. Out of this crisis emerged the Principate, which persevered for several centuries. The emperors created a more effective administrative bureaucracy, and local elites embraced Roman culture and values. Even so, the Roman

emperors were never able to develop an effective ideology of rule.

In China the Qin Empire emerged rapidly, in the reign of a single ruler, because many of the elements for unification were already in place. The "First Emperor" looked back to the precedents of the Shang and Zhou states, which had controlled large core areas in the North China Plain. He drew upon the preexisting concept of the Mandate of Heaven, a claim to divine backing for the ruler, who was the Son of Heaven; and the Legalist political philosophy justified authoritarian measures. The harshness of the new order generated discontent and resistance that soon brought down the Qin dynasty, but Han successors built on Qin structures to create a durable imperial regime. The Han also tempered the Legalism of the Qin with Confucianism.

In both empires, large armies maintained social order and defended the frontiers. An administrative bureaucracy staffed by educated civil servants kept records and collected taxes to support the military and the government. Roads, cities, standardized systems of money and measurement, and widely understood languages facilitated travel, commerce, and communication. The culture of the imperial center spread throughout the lands under its control, and this shared culture, as well as shared self-interest, bonded local elites to the empire's ruling class.

In the end, both empires succumbed to a combination of external pressures and internal divisions. In China the imperial tradition and the class structure and value system that maintained it were eventually revived (see Chapter 10), and they survived with remarkable continuity into the twentieth century c.e. In Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, in contrast, there was no restoration of the Roman Empire, and the later history of those lands was marked by great political changes and cultural diversity.

KEY TERMS

Roman Republic   *p. 137*
Roman Senate   *p. 139*
patron/client
    relationship   *p. 139*
Roman Principate   *p. 141*
Augustus   *p. 141*
equites   *p. 144*

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Han   *p. 151*
Chang'an   *p. 152*
gentry   *p. 157*

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SUGGESTED READING

Tim Cornell and John Matthews, *Atlas of the Roman World* (1982), offers a general introduction, pictures, and maps to illustrate many aspects of Roman civilization. Richard J. A. Talbert, ed., *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (2000), is the definitive cartographic resource. Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger, eds., *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean*, 3 vols. (1988), is an invaluable collection of essays with bibliographies by specialists on every major facet of life in the Greek and Roman worlds. A good new survey of Roman history is Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola, and Richard J. A. Talbert, *The Romans: From Village to Empire* (2004). Also useful are

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A number of the chapters in John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray, eds., *The Roman World* (1988), survey the intellectual and literary achievements of the Romans. Ronald Mellor, ed., *The Historians of Ancient Rome* (1998), provides context for reading the historical sources. Stephen Harrison, ed., *A Companion to Latin Literature* (2005); Michael von Albrecht, *History of Roman Literature: From Livius Andronicus to Boethius: With Special Regard to Its Influence on World Literature* (1997); Michael Grant, *Art in the Roman Empire* (1995); and Nancy H. Ramage and Andrew Ramage, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Roman Art* (1991), are

surveys of Roman creative arts. Robert Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome: Religion in Everyday Life from Archaic to Imperial Times* (2000), and R. M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (1969), are accessible introductions to Roman religion in its public and private manifestations. Michael Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World* (1973), and Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (2002), explore the complicated situation of Jews in the Roman Empire. Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (2005); Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society* (2004); and Joseph F. Kelly, *The World of the Early Christians* (1997), investigate the rise of Christianity. Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (2nd ed., 1998), contains articles and bibliographies on a wide range of topics. Noel Lenski, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (2006); Peter J. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (2006); and Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (2005), examine the momentous changes occurring in Rome's last centuries.

For the geography and demography of China see the well-illustrated *Cultural Atlas of China* (1983) by Caroline Blunden and Mark Elvin. Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (2000), emphasizes social history and China's interactions with other societies. Other basic surveys of Chinese history include Patricia Buckley Ebrey, Anne Walthall, and James B. Palais, *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (2006); John K. Fairbank, *China: A New History* (1992); and Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (1982). In greater depth for the ancient period are Edward L. Shaughnessy and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (1998); Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*. vol. 1, *The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220* (1986); and Michele Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, *The Han Dynasty* (1982). Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (2002), explores the interactions of Chinese and nomads on the northern frontier. Kwang-chih Chang, *The Archaeology of Ancient China*, 4th ed. (1986), and Ronald G. Knapp, *China's Walled Cities* (2000), emphasize the archaeological record.

For social history see Michael Loewe, *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China During the Han Period, 202 B.C.–A.D. 220* (1988). Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China* (2002); Anne Behnke Kinney, "Women in Ancient China," in *Women's Roles in Ancient Civilizations: A Reference Guide*, ed. Bella Vivante (1999); and Paul Rakita Golden, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China* (2002), examine issues of gender and sexuality. For economic history and foreign relations see Xinru Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges, A.D. 1–600* (1994), and Ying-shih Yu, *Trade and Expansion in Han China* (1967).

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sources in translation. Grant Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian's Conquest of History* (1999), is a thorough introduction to the father of Chinese history. Selections from Sima's history covering the Qin are in Raymond Dawson, *Sima Qian: Historical Records* (1994); selections on the early Han period are in Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty*, vols. 1 and 2 (1993). Rhapsodies describing the Han capital cities are translated in David R. Knechtges, *Wen Xuan, or, Selections of Literature* (1982). J. D. Frodsham, *An Anthology of Chinese Verse* (1967), and Burton Watson, *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry* (1984), include poems composed throughout the Han period that illustrate everyday life and concerns. Benjamin I. Schwartz addresses intellectual history in *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (1985), while G. E. R.

Lloyd, *The Ambitions of Curiosity: Understanding the World in Ancient Greece and China* (2002), compares Chinese and Greco-Roman approaches to philosophy, history, and science. For scientific and technological achievements see Robert Temple, *The Genius of China: 3,000 Years of Science, Discovery, and Invention* (1986). Spiritual matters are taken up by Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (1979). For art see Michael Sullivan, *A Short History of Chinese Art*, rev. ed. (1970), and Jessica Rawson, *Ancient China: Art and Archaeology* (1980).

For a stimulating comparison of the Roman and Han Empires that emphasizes the differences, see the first chapter of S. A. M. Adshead, *China in World History*, 2nd ed. (1995).

NOTES

1. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, ed., *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook* (New York: Free Press, 1981), 33–34.