Handout 1A

Universal Religions

Source: Written by Donald Johnson for this unit.

During the period 500 to 1000, Mahayana Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and to some extent Hinduism, started out as local or regional religions and grew into universal religions. (Scholars debate whether Hinduism has all the characteristics of a universal religion, but one needs an understanding of Hinduism's core beliefs in order to comprehend Buddhism.) Each of these three world religions moved from a culture of origin into different cultural contexts. Broadly speaking, we have three different examples: moving from urbanized, settled civilization to another urbanized, settled civilization (Buddhism to China); urban, settled to recently nomadic and rural society (Christianity to Europe); and from a nomadic society to a settled, urbanized setting (Islam from Arabia to Persia and beyond).

Mahayana Buddhism developed out of the earlier Indian ethos and from earlier Buddhism. Christianity expanded from its Jewish roots to offer Gentiles its message. Islam, building on both Jewish and Christian beliefs, identified Allah as the universal divinity and Mohammed as the definitive Prophet. The spread of Christianity among the Germanic settlers in northwest Eurasia after the fall of the Roman Empire took place at the same time as Buddhist monks and teachers were bringing their faith to the nomadic peoples who had settled in northwestern China after the collapse of the Han. The religious teachers who carried these faiths to Europe, West and Central Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa also brought with them knowledge of language, mathematics, science, and philosophy that local people learned in church-sponsored schools and from religious teachers who served in the leaders' courts.

Underlying concepts

Religions, like other cultural systems, are always undergoing change and absorbing and adding new concepts to their foundational message. Christianity developed a synthesis of Hebraic monotheism, Persian Zoroastrianism, and Greek philosophy, especially the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. As it spread, Christianity also took on popular worship practices from a wide range of neighbors.

One of the most important underlying beliefs in the West Asian religious tradition is dualism. This outlook found its most dramatic expression in the Persian faith of Zoroastrianism and both Judaism and Christianity accepted many of its teachings. Monotheism is a second basic tenet of the West Asian religious outlook. It appears in early Egypt and develops in the Hebraic tradition and is at the core of Zoroastrianism, prophetic Judaism, and later Christianity and Islam.

The monotheism[1] of West Asia, Zoroastrianism dualism[2], and Greek rationalism[3] spread to the rest of the world and emerged as elements of Christianity and Islam. Zoroastrian philosophy lent itself to universalizing, and it had an enormous impact on Judaism, Christianity, and

Copyright © 2003 by College Entrance Examination Board. All rights reserved.
Available at apcentral.collegeboard.com

Islam. The religious practice of that faith, however, was very closely associated with Persia and the Iranian people and was never able to spread far beyond their cultural sphere.

In contrast to the West Asian worldview, we see in the geographic area in which Buddhism developed a far different cultural ethos. In South Asia, the earlier beliefs of the Indus and later Aryan migrations blended into a mix that was very pluralistic and tended to stress the oneness of all things expressed in a myriad of forms. The Buddha was born into this belief system in 563 B.C.E., and he accepted the major ideas of his time such as karma, samsara, release from the bounds of rebirth, and dharma.

In a very general comparison between these two worldviews, one of the major differences is between what we will call ethical or philosophical dualism and monism[4]. Certainly within the Christian and Muslim faiths there are monistic philosophers and also within Hinduism, Buddhism and Daoism there are dualistic philosophies, but there was an orientation toward monism in Eastern and Southern Asian and an orientation toward dualism in West Asia.

In dualism, one side or the other eventually must be chosen. We strive to join *the children of light or right* so that finally, evil will be trampled out and destroyed. Dualism is central to both Christianity and Islam: God and the devil, good and evil, right and wrong, choosing the side of good. This dualism spread through West Asia into Europe and the United States. Dualistic principles are evident in either/or arguments such as environment vs. heredity, masculine versus feminine, guilt or innocence, and almost any concept that can be reduced to opposing elements.

Conversely, the South Asian view that diffused into China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia tends to be more monistic, more pluralistic, and more inclusive. Even the early *Vedic* verses present the universe as a seamless web. In the *Rig Veda,* one of the foundational sacred texts of Hinduism, we read the story of Purusha, the cosmic man who filled the entire universe, and was willing to sacrifice himself and be rendered into little bits to make up the discreet parts of the universe.

In early China, people developed the tradition of *Yin* and *Yang*. Yin stands for soft, dark, moist, feminine, non-violent qualities and Yang symbolizes male, aggressive, hard, dry and active qualities. These two halves of the whole moved around and around or back and forth in symbiotic rhythms rather than clashing against one another dualistically as in Zoroastrianism.

We do not wish to exaggerate the difference in dualism and monism, but suggest, with Geertz, that these broad worldviews instill orientations that provide long lasting moods and motivations. So we have on one side conflicting opposites that battle each other and on the other, a relationship of opposites that is more harmonious, a seamless web, coming back together and reexperiencing the oneness of things.

Copyright © 2003 by College Entrance Examination Board. All rights reserved.
Available at apcentral.collegeboard.com

Donald Johnson

Changes in Society that Give Rise to Universal Religions

Before a religion can spread to new frontiers, it must have gained extensive support in a single area. For potential converts to be receptive to the religion expanding into their territory, they must be open to new ideologies, and at the same time, be experiencing a profound anxiety about their present beliefs. When human institutions seem to be crumbling around us or change is so rapid that old values no longer seem relevant, we often look to religion to help us find deeper meanings. People within the Roman Empire during the third and fourth cen-turies C.E., lived an increasingly precarious life. The political stability, system of laws, and dependable daily routines they had enjoyed for so long were deteriorating. In addition, German tribes to the north that they had managed to keep at bay for centuries began to migrate into the empire where they eventually took over the government in Rome. Life became increasingly capricious, particularly for those who lived in urban society. There must be a mood of receptivity among large numbers of people if they are going to make a radical shift in their lives by converting to a new faith. But there are other factors that facilitate the spread of religions:

- For a religion to become universal, it also needs to have a written canon so people in widely separated areas will have some common basis for thought and action.
- The faith must also have a vigorous community of believers who have the zeal to preach their religion to strangers and potential converts.
- It helps to have the support of political power. Can we think of the success of Christianity without Constantine, Henry VIII, and so many other kings? However, as we shall see, this kind of support comes at a high price.
- For a religion to have success with new groups of people — especially a rising middle class -- it should resonate with the economic values of the society it hopes to convert. For example, Christianity did not support charging interest on loans in Western Europe when that area had little or no commerce, but was supportive of commercial interests in the more prosperous Byzantine Empire. In India and China Buddhism found support with the numerous businessmen in these complex societies, and from its beginning, Islam supported traders and merchants; Muhammad was a trader and merchants played an impotent role in the spread of Islam.
- Finally, for a religion to become universal it must work within a wide-ranging and effective communication system so that information can be spread over a wide range of area and peoples.

[1] The doctrine or belief that there is but one God.
[2] A doctrine that the universe is under the dominion two opposing principles one of which is good and the other evil.
[3] A reliance on reason as the basis for establishment of religious truth.
[4] The theory that reality is a unified whole and is grounded in a single basic substance or principle.

Copyright © 2003 by College Entrance Examination Board. All rights reserved.
Available at apcentral.collegeboard.com

How to Achieve Enlightenment

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

One of the most famous passages in Buddhist literature is the sermon at Sarnath, which Siddhartha Gautama delivered to his followers in a deer park outside the holy city of Varanasi (Benares), in the Ganges River valley. Here he set forth the key ideas that would define Buddhist beliefs for centuries to come. During an official visit to Sarnath nearly three centuries later, Emperor Ashoka ordered the construction of a stupa (reliquary) in honor of the Buddha's message.

The Sermon at Benares

Thus have I heard: at one time the Lord dwelt at Benares at Isipatana in the Deer Park. There the Lord addressed the five monks:

"These two extremes, monks, are not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the world. What are the two? That conjoined with the passions and luxury, low, vulgar, common, ignoble, and useless; and that conjoined with self-torture, painful, ignoble, and useless. Avoiding these two extremes the Tathagata has gained the enlightenment of the Middle Path, which produces insight and knowledge and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment, Nirvana.

"And what, monks, is the Middle Path, of which the Tathagata has gained enlightenment, which produces insight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment, Nirvana? This is the noble Eightfold Way: namely, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, monks, is the Middle Path, of which the Tathagata has gained enlightenment, which produces insight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to higher knowledge, enlightenment, Nirvana.

"1. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of pain: birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are painful. Contact with unpleasant things is painful, not getting what one wishes is painful. In short the five groups of graspings are painful.

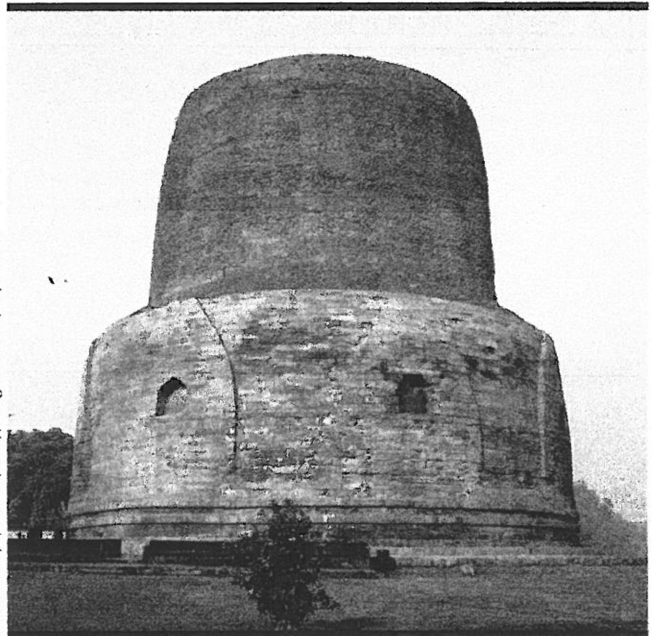
"2. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cause of pain: the craving, which tends to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, finding pleasure here and there; namely, the craving for passion, the craving for existence, the craving for nonexistence.

"3. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of pain, the cessation without a remainder of craving, the abandonment, forsaking, release, nonattachment.

"4. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the way that leads to the cessation of pain: this is the noble Eightfold Way; namely, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

"And when, monks, in these four noble truths my due knowledge and insight with its three sections and twelve divisions was well purified, then, monks . . . , I had attained the highest complete enlightenment. This I recognized. Knowledge arose in me, insight arose that the release of my mind is unshakable; this is my last existence; now there is no rebirth."

Q *How did Siddhartha Gautama reach the conclusion that the "four noble truths" were the proper course in living a moral life? How do his ideas compare with the commandments that God gave to the Israelites (see Chapter 1)?*



Dhamek Stupa, Sarnath, India//© age fotostock/SuperStock

The stupa at Sarnath.

Rama and Sita

ART & IDEAS

Over the ages, the conclusion of the Indian epic known as the Ramayana has been the focus of considerable debate. After a long period of captivity at the hands of the demon Ravana, Sita is finally liberated by her husband, King Rama. Although the two have a joyful reunion, the people of Rama's kingdom voice suspicions that she has been defiled by her captor, and Rama is forced to banish her to a forest, where she gives birth to twin sons. The account reflects the belief, expressed in the *Arthasastra*, that a king must place the needs of his subjects over his personal desires. Here we read of Rama's anguished decision as he consults with his brother, Lakshmana.

By accepting banishment, Sita bows to the authority of her husband and the established moral order. Subservient and long-suffering, she has been lauded as the ideal heroine and feminine role model, imitated by generations of Indian women. At the close of the Ramayana, Rama decides to take Sita back "before all my people." She continues to feel humiliated, however, and begs Mother Earth to open up and swallow her.

The Ramayana

"A king must be blameless."

"Such words pierce my heart," said Lakshmana. "Fire himself proved her innocent. She is fired gold, poured into golden fire!"

Rama said, "Lakshmana, consider what is a king. Kings cannot afford blame. Ill fame is evil to kings; they above all men must be beyond reproach. . . . See into what a chasm of sorrow a King may fall. . . ."

Lakshmana said, "Gradually everything seems to change again, and even an Emperor must pay his way through life."

Rama faced his brother. "It must be! It's all the same, can't you see? Where there is growth there is decay; where there is prosperity there is ruin; and where there is birth there is death."

Lakshmana sighed hopelessly. "Well, what will you do?"

"Sita expects to go to the forests tomorrow. Let Sumantra the Charioteer drive you both there, and when you arrive by the river Ganga abandon her."

"She will die. Your child will die!"

"No," said Rama. "I command you! Not a word to anyone."

Lakshmana said, "Surely a king is remote and lonely, and very far from reason. We cannot speak to you. . . ."

Rama said, "Each person can be told what he will understand of the nature of the world, and no more than that—for the rest, take my word. . . ."

Sita was forever beautiful. Wearing her ornaments she turned slowly around and looked at every person there. "Rama, let me prove my innocence, here before everyone."

"I give my permission," said Rama.

Then Sita stepped a little away from him and said, "Mother Earth, if I have been faithful to Rama take me home, hide me!"

Earth rolled and moved beneath our feet. With a great rumbling noise the ground broke apart near Sita and a deep chasm opened, lighted from below with bright lights like lightning flashes, from the castles of the Naga serpent kings. . . .

On that throne sat Mother Earth. Earth was not old, she was fair to look on, she was not sad but smiling. She wore flowers and a girdle of seas. Earth supports all life, but she feels no burden in all that. She is patient. She was patient then, under the Sun and Moon and through the rainfalls of countless years. She was patient with seasons and with kings and farmers; she endured all things and bore no line of care from it.

But this was the end of her long patience with Rama. Earth looked at her husband Janaka and smiled. Then she stretched out her arms and took her only child Sita on her lap. She folded her beautiful arms around her daughter and laid Sita's head softly against her shoulder as a mother would. Earth stroked her hair with her fair hands, and Sita closed her eyes like a little girl.

The throne sank back underground and they all were gone; the Nagas dove beneath the ground and the crevice closed gently over them, forever.

How does this story reflect some of the basic values of traditional Indian civilization? Why do you think it was necessary for the story to have an unhappy ending, unlike Homer's epic The Odyssey, *which ends with the return of the hero Odysseus to his wife, Penelope, after many arduous travels?*

famous stupa at Sanchi, begun under Ashoka and completed two centuries later.

The final form of early Indian architecture is the rock chamber carved out of a cliff on the side of a mountain. Ashoka began the construction of these chambers to provide rooms to house monks or wandering ascetics and to serve as halls for religious ceremonies. The chambers were rectangular, with pillars, an altar, and a vault, reminiscent of Roman basilicas in the West. The three most famous chambers of this period are at Bhaja, Karli, and Ajanta (uh-JUHN-tuh); the last one contains twenty-nine rooms (see the comparative illustration on p. 60).

All three forms of architecture were embellished with detailed reliefs and freestanding statues of deities, other human figures, and animals that are permeated with a sense of nature and the vitality of life. Many reflect an amalgamation of popular and sacred themes, of Buddhist, Vedic, and

Isidasi, a Buddhist Nun

Source: Kevin Reilly. *Readings in World Civilizations, Volume One: The Great Traditions.* 144-14. New York: St. Martins Press.1995.

In this reading, Isidasi, a mendicant nun "morally pure, skilled in meditation, wise, and free from painful vices," tells why she became a nun. Ididasi lived in Pataliputa, India, which later became Ashoka's capital.

In the great city of Ujjeni
my father was a merchant of high repute.
I was his only daughter,
deeply loved and pampered.
A wealthy merchant sent noblemen
from the city of Saketa
to arrange a marriage, and my father
gave me to be his son's wife.
Day and night I humbled myself
to honor my in-laws -
my training made me bow
my head down at their feet.
When I saw my husband's
sisters and brothers
I cringed and crept away
to free my seat for them.
I kept fresh-cooked food and drink
and spiced pickles ready.
to serve their demands.

I woke early every morning
to scrub my hands and feet
before I crossed the threshold
to beg my husband's blessing.
Like a slave girl,
I took combs and scented oils
and my mirror to groom him.
I cooked his rice gruel,
I washed his bowl,
I waited on this husband
like a mother dotting on her son.
Though I was diligent and humble,
meticulous and virtuous
in serving him,
my husband despised me.
He begged his parents,
'Give me your leave.
I must go away. I will not stay
in this house with Isidasi!'
They took me back
to my father's house.
'To keep our precious son
we sacrifice this goddess.'

Then my father married me
into another wealthy house. . . .
I lived in that house
for barely a month,
serving him [my new husband] like a slave
until he sent me back.
Then my father snared an ascetic
begging for alms; he said,
'Be my daughter's husband!

Throw away your robe and pot!'
He stayed for two weeks
before he told my father,
'Give me my robe and pot and cup!
I'll beg for alms again. . . .
I will not stay in this house
with Isidasi!'
They dismissed him and he left.

I brooded in my solitude:
'I'll tell them I'm going to die
unless I become a mendicant nun.'
And the great nun Jinadatta
came begging alms
at my father's house-she was
disciplined, wise, morally pure. . . .
I served her fresh-cooked food
and drink and spiced pickles.
When she had eaten, I said,
'Lady, I want to be a nun.'
My father argued, 'My child,
you may follow the Buddha's way
by giving food and drink to holy men and brahmin priests.'
I pleaded in tears, begging his blessing,
'I must destroy
the evil I have done!'

My father blessed me then,
'Attain enlightenment
and the Buddha's way
that leads to liberation!'

I bid farewell to my parents
and became a mendicant nun.
After only seven days
I reached the triple wisdom.
I know my former seven births
that ripened into this one.
I'll recount them.
Listen carefully!

In the city of Ekakaccha
I was a wealthy goldsmith,
intoxicated by youth's wine,
seducing other men's wives.
I died and boiled in hell
for some time; tormented,
I rose from my tortures
[and was born again as a castrated monkey,
then as a wild, blind, lame castrated goat,
and then a castrated cow that]
pulled a plough and cart,
wretched, blind, and sickly,
for seducing other men's wives.
I died again [and was born] an androgyne
in a slave girl's house [and then]
a female in low-caste family, . . .
enslaved
by money-lenders' loans.
A caravan trader claiming
interest on a loan
dragged me screaming
from my family. . . .
[His son's wife]
was moral and virtuous,
in love with her husband.
I sowed discord with her.

The fruit of seven former lives
made three husbands scorn me,
though I served them like a slave -
I have ended all this now.

Christianity: Melanie the Younger

Source: Averil Cameron. *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity; A.D. 395-600*, 146. London, Routlege, 1993.

Early Christian ascetics in Egypt and Palestine were later identified as "desert fathers." There were also "desert mothers" who withdrew from society to lead spiritual lives. Following the monks' example, these women also established communal societies. As a result, two types of clergy developed. The regular clergy included monks and nuns who lived in monasteries and nunneries. The secular clergy that was restricted to men worked in local parishes.

In addition, countless believers tried to live Christian lives in society. Melanie the Elder belonged to one of the richest families in Rome. She was a very pious Christian who spent 27 years in Palestine caring for pilgrims and reading and praying. She also gave money to found a monastery on the Mount of Olives where Jesus was crucified. When she returned to Rome in 399 she was famous throughout the Christian world for her piety and generosity.

Her granddaughter, Melanie the Younger, was the only heir to the family's palace in Rome and its extensive estates in Iberia, Africa, Britain, and Gaul. She decided to sell all the property, free the family's 8,000 slaves, and use the proceeds to buy land and build monasteries and nunneries for monks and virgins and give them generous stipends of gold.

Athenian Democracy: The Funeral Oration of Pericles

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

In his *History of the Peloponnesian War,* the Greek historian Thucydides presented his reconstruction of the eulogy given by Pericles in the winter of 431–430 B.C.E. to honor the Athenians killed in the first campaigns of the Great Peloponnesian War. It is a magnificent, idealized description of Athenian democracy at its height.

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. And, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other. We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbor if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks which, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings. We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect.

We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break. . . . Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics—this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all. We Athenians, in our own persons, take our decisions on policy or submit them to proper discussions: for we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds; the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated. . . . Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece, and I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility. And to show that this is no empty boasting for the present occasion, but real tangible fact, you have only to consider the power which our city possesses and which has been won by those very qualities which I have mentioned.

Q *In the eyes of Pericles, what are the ideals of Athenian democracy? In what ways does Pericles exaggerate his claims? Why would the Athenian passion for debate described by Pericles have been distasteful to the Spartans? On the other hand, how does eagerness for discussion perfectly suit democracy?*

The Art of War

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

With the possible exception of the nineteenth-century German military strategist Carl von Clausewitz, there is probably no more famous or respected writer on the art of war than the ancient Chinese thinker Sun Tzu (SOON dzuh). Yet surprisingly little is known about him. Recently discovered evidence suggests that he lived in the fifth century B.C.E., during the chronic conflict of the Period of Warring States, and that he was an early member of an illustrious family of military strategists who advised Zhou rulers for more than two hundred years. But despite the mystery surrounding his life, there is no doubt of his influence on later generations of military planners. Among his most avid followers in our day have been the revolutionary leaders Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh, as well as the Japanese military strategists who planned the attacks on Port Arthur and Pearl Harbor.

The following brief excerpt from his classic, *The Art of War*, provides a glimmer into the nature of his advice, still so timely today.

Selections from Sun Tzu

Sun Tzu said:

"In general, the method for employing the military is this: . . . Attaining one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of excellence. Subjugating the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence. . . .

"Thus the highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy's plans; next is to attack their alliances; next to attack their army; and the lowest is to attack their fortified cities.

"This tactic of attacking fortified cities is adopted only when unavoidable. Preparing large movable protective shields, armored assault wagons, and other equipment and devices will require three months. Building earthworks will require another three months to complete. If the general cannot overcome his impatience but instead launches an assault wherein his men swarm over the walls like ants, he will kill one-third of his officers and troops, and the city will still not be taken. This is the disaster that results from attacking [fortified cities].

"Thus, one who excels at employing the military subjugates other people's armies without engaging in battle, captures other people's fortified cities without attacking them, and destroys others people's states without prolonged fighting. He must fight under Heaven with the paramount aim of 'preservation.'. . .

"In general, the strategy of employing the military is this: If your strength is ten times theirs, surround them; if five, then attack them; if double, then divide your forces. If you are equal in strength to the enemy, you can engage him. If fewer, you can circumvent him. If outmatched, you can avoid him. . . .

"Thus, there are five factors from which victory can be known:

"One who knows when he can fight, and when he cannot fight, will be victorious.
"One who recognizes how to employ large and small numbers will be victorious.
"One whose upper and lower ranks have the same desires will be victorious.
"One who, fully prepared, awaits the unprepared will be victorious.
"One whose general is capable ad not interfered with by the ruler will be victorious.

"These five are the Way (Tao) to know victory. . . .

"Thus it is said that one who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. One who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes be victorious, sometimes meet with defeat. One who knows neither the enemy nor himself will invariably be defeated in every engagement."

Q *Why are the ideas of Sun Tzu about the art of war still so popular among military strategists after 2,500 years? How might he advise U.S. and other statesmen to deal with the problem of international terrorism today?*

Cincinnatus Saves Rome: A Roman Morality Tale

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

There is perhaps no better account of how the virtues of duty and simplicity enabled good Roman citizens to prevail during the travails of the fifth century B.C.E. than Livy's account of Cincinnatus (sin-suh-NAT-uss). He was chosen dictator, supposedly in 457 B.C.E., to defend Rome against the attacks of the Aequi. The position of dictator was a temporary expedient used only in emergencies; the consuls would resign, and a leader with unlimited power would be appointed for a specified period (usually six months). In this account, Cincinnatus did his duty, defeated the Aequi, and returned to his simple farm in just fifteen days.

Livy, *The Early History of Rome*

The city was thrown into a state of turmoil, and the general alarm was as great as if Rome herself were surrounded. Nautius was sent for, but it was quickly decided that he was not the man to inspire full confidence; the situation evidently called for a dictator, and, with no dissentient voice, Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was named for the post.

Now I would solicit the particular attention of those numerous people who imagine that money is everything in this world, and that rank and ability are inseparable from wealth: let them observe that Cincinnatus, the one man in whom Rome reposed all her hope of survival, was at that moment working a little three-acre farm . . . west of the Tiber, just opposite the spot where the shipyards are today. A mission from the city found him at work on his land—digging a ditch, maybe, or plowing. Greetings were exchanged, and he was asked—with a prayer for divine blessing on himself and his country—to put on his toga and hear the Senate's instructions. This naturally surprised him, and, asking if all were well, he told his wife Racilia to run to their cottage and fetch his toga. The toga was brought, and wiping the grimy sweat from his hands and face he put it on; at once the envoys from the city saluted him, with congratulations, as Dictator, invited him to enter Rome, and informed him of the terrible danger of Municius's army. A state vessel was waiting for him on the river, and on the city bank he was welcomed by his three sons who had come to meet him, then by other kinsmen and friends, and finally by nearly the whole body of senators. Closely attended by all these people and preceded by his lictors he was then escorted to his residence through streets lined with great crowds of common folk who, be it said, were by no means so pleased to see the new Dictator, as they thought his power excessive and dreaded the way in which he was likely to use it. . . .

[Cincinnatus proceeds to raise an army, march out, and defeat the Aequi.]

In Rome the Senate was convened by Quintus Fabius the City Prefect, and a decree was passed inviting Cincinnatus to enter in triumph with his troops. The chariot he rode in was preceded by the enemy commanders and the military standards, and followed by his army loaded with its spoils. . . . Cincinnatus finally resigned after holding office for fifteen days, having originally accepted it for a period of six months.

Q *What values did Livy emphasize in his account of Cincinnatus? How important were those values to Rome's success? Why did Livy say he wrote his history? As a writer in the Augustan Age, would he have pleased or displeased Augustus by writing a history with such a purpose?*

What Was Behind Mysterious Collapse of the Mayan Empire?

Wynne Parry, LiveScience Senior Writer | August 22, 2012 08:55am ET

The city states of the ancient Mayan empire flourished in southern Mexico and northern Central America for about six centuries. Then, around A.D. 900 Mayan civilization disintegrated.

Two new studies examine the reasons for the collapse of the Mayan culture, finding the Mayans themselves contributed to the downfall of the empire.

Scientists have found that drought played a key role, but the Mayans appear to have exacerbated the problem by cutting down the jungle canopy to make way for cities and crops, according to researchers who used climate-model simulations to see how much deforestation aggravated the drought.

"We're not saying deforestation explains the entire drought, but it does explain a substantial portion of the overall drying that is thought to have occurred," said the study's lead author Benjamin Cook, a climate modeler at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, in a statement. [Dry and Dying: Images of Drought]

Using climate-model simulations, he and his colleagues examined how much the switch from forest to crops, such as corn, would alter climate. Their results, detailed online in the journal Geophysical Research Letters, suggested that when deforestation was at its maximum, it could account for up to 60 percent of the drying. (The switch from trees to corn reduces the amount of water transferred from the soil to the atmosphere, which reduces rainfall.)

Other recent research takes a more holistic view.

"The ninth-century collapse and abandonment of the Central Maya Lowlands in the Yucatán peninsular region were the result of complex human–environment interactions," writes this team in a study published Monday (Aug 20) in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The team, led by B.L. Turner, a social scientist at Arizona State University, concurs that by clearing the forest, the Mayans may have aggravated a natural drought, which spiked about the time the empire came to an end and population declined dramatically.

But this is just one contributing factor to their demise, Turner and colleagues write, pointing out that the reconfiguration of the landscape may also have led to soil degradation. Other archaeological evidence points to a landscape under stress, for instance, the wood of the sapodilla tree, favored as construction beams, was no longer used at the Tikal and Calakmul sites beginning in A.D. 741. Larger mammals, such as white-tailed deer, appear to have declined at the end of empire.

Social and economic dynamics also contributed. Trade routes shifted from land transit across the Yucatán Peninsula to sea-born ships. This change may have weakened the city states, which were contending with environmental changes. Faced with mounting challenges, the ruling elites, a very small portion of the population, were no longer capable of delivering what was expected of them, and conflict increased.

"The old political and economic structure dominated by semidivine rulers decayed," the team writes. "Peasants, artisan – craftsmen, and others apparently abandoned their homes and cities to find better economic opportunities elsewhere.

YES **Adrian Goldsworthy**

How Rome Fell: Death of a Superpower

It will be enough for me, however, if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which will (human nature being what it is), at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.'—*Thucydides, writing at the very end of the fifth century B.C.*

The Western Roman Empire ceased to exist in the fifth century. Even those scholars who talk of transformation admit this simple fact. The Eastern Roman Empire lasted for another thousand years until it was overrun by the Turks. Even at its height it could never hope to dominate the world. It was a power, rather than a superpower. The sixth century demonstrated that it lacked the capacity to recapture the lost western provinces. In the seventh century the Arab conquests stripped it of even more territory. It continued to exist as just one amongst many powers in the known world, and some of these were geographically larger and both militarily and financially stronger. Even so, none could be said to have replaced the Roman Empire or matched its former size and power.

None of this happened quickly, but viewed in the long term it cannot be seen as anything other than decline and—in the case of the Western Empire—fall. It was a long process and no single event, lost war or decision can be said to have caused it. The basic question remains of why this occurred, and whether the most important cause was internal problems or external threats. Throughout their history the Romans had always fought a lot of wars against very varied opponents. They had suffered some serious defeats, but had always recovered. There was never any question that such defeats could cause the collapse of the empire. Yet this did happen in the west in the fifth century and therefore we must ask whether the threats faced by the Late Roman Empire were greater than those of earlier periods. This in turn raises two basic possibilities. Either one or more individual enemy was more formidable, or there were simply so many simultaneous threats that the empire could not cope.

It is usually asserted that the Sassanid Persians were far more formidable than the Parthians, or indeed any enemy the Romans had faced for centuries.

From *How Rome Fell: Death of a Superpower* by Adrian Goldsworthy (Yale University Press, 2009). Copyright © 2009 by Adrian Goldsworthy. Reprinted by permission of Yale University Press.

They certainly won more victories over the Romans than the Parthians. On the other hand, the levels of Persian aggression varied enormously and there were long periods of peace. Some Persian kings needed the wealth and glory offered by a successful war with Rome. Usually this was necessary to secure their own hold on power. The largest Roman armies of the period were those sent east to face the Persians and massive resources were expended on frontier fortifications. Having said that, only border territory was ever actually lost to Persia and even this was on a fairly modest scale. The idea that from its first appearance in the third century Persia was an especially deadly opponent—even a rival superpower—remains firmly entrenched in the minds of scholars. It is a belief that is very hard to reconcile with the evidence, but this does not mean that it will not continue to be asserted.

Groups from the tribal peoples of Europe eventually took control of the Western Empire. However, it is extremely difficult to see major change in the military efficiency of the tribal peoples of Europe from Julius Caesar's day to that of Stilicho's or Aetius'. To some degree larger tribal confederations appeared, but we should never exaggerate the degree of unity. It is convenient to talk of *the* Franks or *the* Goths, in spite of the fact that these remained divided into many separate and sometimes mutually hostile tribes. At no stage before the creation of the barbarian kingdoms inside the provinces was there a single king of all the Franks or any other people. Attila united both his own people and allied and subject races to a remarkable degree. Yet, once again, he was unable to take much territory from the Romans and was essentially a raider and extortionist on a grand scale. Other powerful barbarian leaders had emerged in the past and, like Attila, they had proved unable to pass on their power to a successor. The Huns were a frightening enemy, but it is worth remembering that their power had been broken before the final collapse of the Western Empire and that they had anyway devoted most of their attentions to the Eastern Empire.

There is no good case for claiming that the enemies of the Late Roman Empire were simply more formidable than those of earlier periods. This also makes it harder to argue that the Roman Empire had to adapt in the third century to face new and more dangerous threats, most of all the Sassanid 'superpower'. Does this mean that it was the sheer quantity rather than the scale of individual threats that was the problem? There certainly do seem to have been more major wars in the third and subsequent centuries than in the early Principate. In particular, raiding by barbarian groups in Europe is much more prominent in our sources. Such predatory attacks, often on a small scale, were not new. In the past they had always increased in scale and frequency whenever the frontier defences were perceived to be weak. An impression of vulnerability encouraged attacks and this makes it hard to judge whether an increase in raids and invasions was the consequence of a rise in barbarian numbers and strength or a result of Roman weakness. It is clear that all of Rome's enemies, including the Persians, exploited the empire's frequent internal disputes and civil wars.

There may be other reasons for Roman weakness and we need to consider these. Unfortunately, for so many of the theories about long-term problems

we lack the basic information either to confirm or deny them. There are no good figures for the population of the empire at any period and, therefore, we cannot say with any certainty that this was in long-term decline. Similarly, we must study the economy without any adequate statistics. It seems more than probable that levels of trade and prosperity fell from the end of the second century onwards and never again achieved the levels of the early Principate. However, sources at best hint at such trends, and some scholars will interpret these glimpses of the past in radically different ways. The same is true of the traditional picture of a Late Roman world where the burden of tax was oppressive and fell disproportionately heavily on the poor, who were already oppressed by their rich landlords. Land fell out of cultivation and the rural population was reduced to the level of serfs. None of this is implausible, but that is also true of other models and it is impossible to prove any of them. Far more data—the bulk of which must come from archaeology if it can ever be found—is needed before we can speak with some confidence on these topics. The same is true of claims about climate change and other wider problems.

The type of evidence we have, as well as the interests of scholars, has meant that a good deal of the work on Late Antiquity has focused on economy and society, law and government, intellectual life, culture and religion. Studies tend to concentrate on broad themes and inevitably this emphasises continuity rather than change. By comparison, narrative history has all too often been neglected and certainly has made only a minor contribution to most scholars' mental picture of the period. There are exceptions and study of the frontier relations and foreign wars has often been more traditional in style, since a narrative or chronological element is obviously essential. At the same time civil wars and internal conflict have not received such detailed and coherent treatment. This is odd, for these are the one aspect of the empire's internal problems for which we have considerable evidence.

It is worth once again emphasising that from 217 down to the collapse of the Western Empire there were only a handful of periods as long as ten years when a civil war did not break Out. Some of these conflicts were very brief and some were confined to a small region—the usurpers who were proclaimed and then suppressed, or rejected and murdered by their own men after a reign lasting just a few weeks. Challenges for imperial power were sometimes resolved without serious fighting. On the other hand, some conflicts were fought on a very large scale and lasted for years. It is easy to remember Constantine as the great emperor who united the entire empire under his control, but we should not forget that he was a usurper who fought or prepared for civil wars for the first half of his reign.

Civil war and challenges to the imperial throne were common occurrences. Every adult emperor from Septimius Severus onwards experienced at least one such conflict during their lifetime. Usurpers never wanted to destroy or change the empire. These were not conflicts about ideology, but purely for political power. A small minority of the losers in these wars were allowed to keep their lives, although only a tiny handful were permitted to continue in a public career. In the vast majority of cases such conflicts only ended with the death of one of the rivals. Usurpers were the most direct and personal threat faced by any

emperor and tended to be treated accordingly. It was normal for an emperor to abandon a war against a foreign enemy to deal with a Roman rival.

Usurpers did not act alone. They needed supporters and the most important of these expected rewards including promotion and riches if the rebellion was successful. If a usurper was suppressed, then many of his backers were likely to suffer with him. Punishment was often extended to their families, especially those holding any office or whose wealth made them appealing targets for informers. In this way even a localised rebellion could mean life, death, imprisonment or ruin to people in distant provinces who had not been involved in it in any direct way. This was a world of patronage, where the powerful exerted themselves to secure benefits for relatives and friends. Such webs of favour and gratitude could become very dangerous for all concerned at times of internal conflict.

All usurpers needed military backing to succeed. Emperors from Augustus onwards tried to keep their soldiers loyal through solemn oaths and regular donatives. On the whole, the army tended to stay loyal to an established dynasty unless the emperor seriously alienated them. Few usurpers could count on similar loyalty. Losses were considerable in some civil wars, as the army wasted its strength fighting against itself Soldiers fighting an internal struggle could not simultaneously operate on one of the frontiers. Time and again substantial parts of the army were drawn away and Roman military dominance across its borders reduced or utterly shattered. Successive civil wars dislocated the army's administrative and logistical structures, its training patterns, recruitment and also its discipline, which suffered whenever licence was given in an effort to win loyalty. Ordinary soldiers could usually expect to change sides to join the victors after a failed rebellion. This was not so easy for more senior officers.

Each civil war cost the empire. Anything gained by the winning side inevitably had to be taken from other Romans and a prolonged campaign was likely to involve widespread destruction within the provinces where fighting occurred. Almost as important as the physical price of civil war was its impact on attitudes and behaviour from the emperor down. Personal survival became the first objective of every emperor and shaped all of their decisions and the very structure of the empire. In the quest to protect themselves successive emperors gradually reshaped the empire itself and, ironically enough, often made themselves more rather than less vulnerable.

The biggest change was the marginalisation of the senatorial class in the third century and, along with them, the city of Rome as a real rather than merely spiritual capital of the empire. Senators—and most of all a handful of distinguished men and those trusted with senior provincial commands—were for a long time the only possible rivals for imperial power. At first the major military provinces were divided up so that no one man commanded too large an army. By the end of the third century senators had virtually ceased to hold military rank of any kind. They had also all but ceased to become emperor.

Emperors could now come from a far wider section of the empire's population. Any connection with the imperial family—even spurious claims to be

the illegitimate son of an emperor—was sufficient to make a claim. In the past Rome's emperors had had to be wary of only a small number of senators, men who were known to them personally and whose careers meant that they spent many years in and around Rome. Now a rival could be almost anyone. They did not need political connections or family reputation, simply the ability to persuade some troops to back them. Many emperors were equestrians, and almost all were army officers or imperial officials.

The trend towards smaller provinces continued. In addition, military and civil power were made separate. This helped to protect an emperor against challengers, but made it far harder to get things done. In particular, it was very difficult to raise and supply a large enough army to deal with a serious problem on the frontiers. From the emperor's point of view this was comforting, since the same army could easily have been turned against him by a rival. At times extraordinary commands were created so that one commander could deal with a problem, but emperors had to be wary of offering such power to a potential usurper. More often emperors chose to go themselves and take personal command of a campaign. From the middle of the third century onwards Roman emperors spent much of their time performing tasks that would once have been dealt with by an imperial legate. Again, it is worth emphasising that it was not the scale of the problems that had increased, but the ability of the empire to employ its resources to deal with them.

An emperor could not be everywhere at once. If he was unwilling to trust anyone else with sufficient power to deal with a distant problem, then it would simply not be dealt with at all. Time and again this sense of neglect by central government prompted a region to rebel and proclaim its own emperor. One solution was to have more than one emperor. The tetrarchic system is often praised, but its success was always limited and no one was able to repeat the dominance of Diocletian for any great length of time. In a way, the acceptance that more than one emperor would exist offered usurpers the prospect of advancing to supreme power in stages. It also tended to encourage regionalism as separate military and civil hierarchies developed in different parts of the empire. Each group was naturally inclined to give priority to its own aims and problems, and often proved reluctant to assist other parts of the empire.

Emperors had always travelled in some state, surrounded by members of their household, bureaucrats and guards. This increased massively in scale during the third century. All wanted to have sizeable military forces under their direct control. If the field armies were intended to perform a strategic role, then this was first and foremost to guard against Roman rivals. Emperors surrounded themselves with more and more attendants and personal bodyguards, and made court ceremonial increasingly elaborate. In part this was to dignify and secure the rule of men who had often seized power in brutal fashion comparatively recently. It was also intended to protect the emperor's person. Assassination was less common in the fourth century than the third. At the same time all of this tended to isolate the emperor. It made it harder for him to know personally even his more senior officials and commanders, let alone the vastly inflated number of bureaucrats who now worked in the

imperial administration. Control over the activities of the men who represented imperial authority throughout the provinces was extremely limited.

All emperors lived with the fear of usurpation. It shaped their behaviour and also that of all of the officials and officers who served under them. A career in the imperial service offered the prospect of legal privileges and wealth, gathered both through pay and, even more, from bribes and payments for services. The most successful achieved very high rank with all the patronage and influence this brought. A small minority were even able to reach imperial rank. However, alongside the advantages came serious risks. Any suspicion that an individual was plotting against the emperor was likely to be punished severely. The same was true of anybody associated with a failed usurper or their supporters. In a system where careers were routinely advanced by personal recommendation, such networks of patronage inevitably put many individuals in danger. Personal survival and personal success and profit were the foremost aims of most officials.

The imperial bureaucracy in the Late Roman Empire was certainly far larger than in the first and second centuries. The army mayor may not have been bigger, but certainly consisted of far more small, independent units. Size on its own does not mean that either of these institutions was more efficient. There were far more administrators than could readily be supervised, especially since they formed part of a bureaucracy that was both divided and confused in its structure. The imperial administration raised funds and resources to support both itself and the army. Such short-term expedients as debasing the coinage suggest that at times this supply proved inadequate. However, on the whole the system seems to have functioned in the third and fourth centuries, at the very least to a minimal necessary level. It still left plenty of room for inefficiency and corruption, and such wastage may well have been on a massive scale. Most individual members of the bureaucracy did their job well enough to keep the system functioning and prevent their peculation becoming too blatant. Some may genuinely have been both honest and competent.

Civil wars were most common in the third century, but remained frequent afterwards. The state developed in ways intended to protect emperors from internal rivals, but singularly failed to do so. Personal survival had always been an important concern for all emperors since the creation of the Principate. Augustus had fought his way to power through a series of civil wars. Assassination plots and open rebellion were threats faced by each of Rome's rulers from the very beginning. Augustus was a monarch, but created a system in which his power was carefully veiled. Since he was not formally a king, there was no clear institution to arrange the succession. Some have seen this as a fatal flaw in the system of the Principate—effectively, an accident waiting to happen. Others would go further and see the Augustan system as a 'millstone', revered by tradition that prevented proper reform of the empire in the third and fourth centuries.

This cannot explain the quite staggering difference berween the Principate and the Late Roman Empire. There was civil war for a year after the death of Nero in 68 and another longer conflict after Pertinax was murdered in 193. Claudius, Domitian and Marcus Aurelius each faced a challenge from

a rebellious governor, although all of these revolts swiftly collapsed. Assassination plots and attempted coups at Rome were a little more common, although some of these may have been imagined by nervous emperors or invented by their ruthless subordinates. The early Principate was not wholly free from the realiry or threat of internal conflict, but for more than rwo hundred years it still suffered only rarely from these. This is also in marked contrast to the last half-century of the Republic. If the system created by Augustus was so seriously flawed, then only remarkable luck could explain this. With Gibbon, we might stop 'inquiring *why* the Roman empire was destroyed', and instead 'be surprised that it lasted so long'.

It stretches credibility to see two centuries of largely unbroken internal peace as a mere fluke, especially when they were followed by a longer period when civil war was so very frequent. It is true that each fresh bout of internal conflict weakened imperial authority and the institutions of the state and therefore made future usurpations and rebellions more likely. Yet, once again, it cannot have been solely chance that such a cycle did not develop earlier. In the third century the empire largely lost the Republican façade so carefully constructed by Augustus. He and his successors ruled through the Senate. As a body this had no real political independence, but sensible emperors took care to respect its dignity. More importantly, they employed senators in virtually all important posts, effectively ruling the empire through them.

It may seem odd in this day and age to praise a system based on an aristocratic elite, consisting of men who were amateurs in the modern sense. Yet the system had many advantages in the Roman context. It provided a manageable group of senior soldiers and administrators—an emperor could know all of these men and their families. Only a minority were potential rivals and these could be closely observed. Public life remained focused on the fixed location of Rome itself, making it easier to sense the mood of the aristocracy. Emperors in the first and second centuries were able to trust selected senators to control substantial armies and large provinces. Only rarely—usually during times of major conflict with Parthia—was it necessary to appoint a commander to control more than one province and this did not automatically lead to an attempt at usurpation. In the first and second centuries emperors were able to delegate and did not feel obliged to direct campaigns in person. Rome was the centre of the empire in more than just a spiritual sense. We do not need to idealise the senatorial legates of the early period. Some were incompetent, a few untrustworthy and probably quite a lot were more or less corrupt. In all these respects they seem at the very least no worse than the senior officials of the Late Roman Empire. Politically, the small senatorial class was simply easier for an emperor to control. Reliance on the Senate was a Republican tradition, but actually made sound sense.

The governments of ancient states had limited ambitions and did not concern themselves with major programmes of health, education or the detailed day to day regulation of markets, industry and agriculture. For all its size and sophistication, the Roman Empire was not fundamentally different in this respect. It raised revenue and other resources and made use of these in a range of ways. The army was the biggest single cost, but there was also the maintenance of many

buildings, some ports and a vast road network, as well as the subsidised or free doles of food to the population of Rome and later Constantinople. None of these duties of the empire ground to a halt in the third or fourth century. However, this does not mean that they were functioning well.

The Roman Empire did not fall quickly, but to use this as proof that its institutions were essentially sound is deeply misguided. The empire was huge and faced no serious competitors. Persia was the strongest neighbour, but there was never a prospect of a Persian army reaching the Tiber. Rome was massive, heavily populated and rich. This remained true even if the population and economy were in decline. It had a transport system of all-weather roads and busy commercial routes by river, canal and sea on a scale unmatched again in Europe until recent centuries. Although we may note the difficulties emperors had in making their will felt in distant provinces, their capacity to do this at all was still far greater than the leaders of any other people. The Roman army was a large, sophisticated, permanent and professional force backed by an extensive logistical system. Like the empire itself, it was different from anything else in existence in the known world. The Romans possessed many great advantages over all of their competitors. None of these rivals had the power to push the empire over in the third or fourth centuries. The empire was huge and did not need to operate at the highest levels of efficiency to succeed. It possessed massively greater resources, technological and other advantages. There was also the probability that somewhere along the line some officers and officials would do their job at least moderately well. This meant that the Romans were likely to prevail in the long run. None of its enemies were capable of inflicting more than a limited defeat on the Romans.

None of this meant that the cost of repeated civil war was not felt. It is not difficult to make the case that the majority of emperors in the first and second centuries had the wider good of the empire as their main ambition. All were concerned with personal survival, but this had not become the overwhelming priority it would be for their successors in later eras. That is not to say that the later emperors were more selfish, but simply that they could never be as secure. Many may have had the best of intentions to rule well, but the government of the empire became first and foremost about keeping the emperor in power—and at lower levels, about the individual advantage of bureaucrats and officers.

The Late Roman Empire was not designed to be an efficient government, but to keep the emperor in power and to benefit the members of the administration. Many of these could enjoy highly successful careers by the standards of the day without ever being effective in the role that they were theoretically supposed to perform. Sheer size prevented rapid collapse or catastrophe. Its weakness was not obvious, but this only meant that collapse could come in sudden, dramatic stages, such as the loss of the African provinces to the Vandals. Gradually, the empire's institutions rotted and became less and less capable of dealing with any crisis, but still did not face serious competition. Lost wars were damaging, but the damage was not fatal to the empire itself. As an example, from 376–382 the Romans could not lose the war against the Goths, but they still struggled to win it. Even defeats at the hands of the Persians did not deprive the empire of major or essential resources.

The Roman Empire continued for a very long time. Successive blows knocked away sections of it, as attackers uncovered its weaknesses. Yet at times the empire could still be formidable and did not simply collapse. Perhaps we should imagine the Late Roman Empire as a retired athlete, whose body has declined from neglect and an unhealthy lifestyle. At times the muscles will still function well and with the memory of former skill and training. Yet, as the neglect continues, the body becomes less and less capable of resisting disease or recovering from injury. Over the years the person would grow weaker and weaker, and in the end could easily succumb to disease. Long decline was the fate of the Roman Empire. In the end, it may well have been 'murdered' by barbarian invaders, but these struck at a body made vulnerable by prolonged decay.

Peter Heather

NO

The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe

Based on the Mediterranean, the Roman Empire forged Europe as far as the rivers Rhine and Danube—and, for lengthy periods, extensive lands beyond those boundaries—together with North Africa and much of the Near East into a unitary state which lasted for the best part of 400 years. The protracted negotiations required to bring just some of this area together in the European Community put the success of this Empire into perspective. Yet since the publication of Gibbon's masterpiece (and long before), its very success has served only to stimulate interest in why it ended, 'blame' being firmly placed on everything from an excess of Christian piety to the effect of lead water pipes. The aim of this paper is to reconsider some of the processes and events which underlay the disappearance of the western half of the Roman Empire in the fifth century AD. This was an area encompassing essentially modern Britain, France, Benelux, Italy, Austria, Hungary, the Iberian Peninsula, and North Africa as far east as Libya, whose fragmentation culminated in the deposition of Romulus Augustulus on or around 4 September 476. That groups of outsiders—so-called 'barbarians'—played an important role in all this has never been doubted. A full understanding of the barbarians' involvement in a whole sequence of events, taking the best part of a hundred years, lends, however, an unrecognized coherence to the story of western imperial collapse.

There are two main reasons why this coherence has not been highlighted before. First, most of the main barbarian groups which were later to establish successor states to the Roman Empire in western Europe, had crossed the frontier by about AD 410, yet the last western Roman emperor was not deposed until 476, some sixty-five years later. I will argue, however, that the initial invasions must not be separated from the full working-out of their social and political consequences. Not just the invasions themselves need to be examined, but also the longer-term reactions to them of the Roman population of western Europe, and especially its landowning elites. While the western Empire did not die quickly or easily, a direct line of historical cause and effect nonetheless runs from the barbarian invasions of the late fourth and early fifth centuries to the deposition of Romulus Augustulus. The second reason lies in modern understandings of what caused the different groups of outsiders to cross into the Empire in the first place. These population movements

From *English Historical Review,* vol. 110, no. 435, February 1995. Copyright © 1995 by Oxford University Press Journals. Reprinted by permission via Rightslink.

did not happen all at once, but were stretched out over about thirty-five years, c. 376–410. Here again, however, a close re-examination of the evidence reveals that the years of invasion represent no more than different phases of a single crisis. In particular, the two main phases of population movement—c. 376–86 and 405–8—were directly caused by the intrusion of Hunnic power into the fringes of Europe.

The Huns were very much a new factor in the European strategic balance of power in the late fourth century. A group of Eurasian nomads, they moved west, sometime after AD 350, along the northern coast of the Black Sea, the western edge of the great Eurasian Steppe Illiterate, and not even leaving a second-hand account of their origins and history in any Graeco-Roman source, they remain deeply mysterious. Opinions differ even over their linguistic affiliation, but the best guess would seem to be that the Huns were the first group of Turkic, as opposed to Iranian, nomads to have intruded into Europe. Whatever the answer to that question, the first half of this study will reconsider their impact upon the largely Germanic groups of central and eastern Europe which had previously been the main focus of Roman foreign policy on Rhine and Danube.

This fundamental change in the nature of political activity from regimes independent of the immigrant groups to regimes which included them—a direct result of the disappearance of the Huns as an outside 'force—had important consequences. No group of supporters was ready (nor previously had any of the more traditional power-blocks ever been ready) to back a regime without some kind of pay-off. One effect of including immigrants in governing coalitions, therefore, was to increase the numbers of those expecting rewards, most obviously involvement in the running of the Empire. Burgundian kings took Roman titles, for instance, while the Visigoth Theoderic II attempted to order affairs in Spain. The Vandals' intervention in Italy in 455 should likewise be read as an attempt to stake their claim in the new political order. That they sacked the city of Rome has naturally received most attention; but Geiseric, the Vandal leader, also took back to North Africa with him Eudoxia and Eudocia—respectively wife and daughter of Valentinian III—and married the daughter to his son and heir Huneric. The two had been betrothed but not married under the treaty of 442, yet in 455 Petronius Maximus married her to his son, the Caesar Palladius. Thus Geiseric intervened in Italy at least partly out of fear that a match which should have cemented the Vandals' status within the western Empire was not going to take place. Subsequent years, similarly, saw Geiseric forward the imperial claims of Olybrius who married Placidia, the younger daughter of Valentinian, and was thus his relative by marriage.

Involvement in imperial affairs carried great prestige, and had been sought, as we have seen, since the time of Alaric and Athaulf. The western Empire only had this prestige, however, because it was, and was perceived to be, the most powerful institution of the contemporary world. Prestige certainly incorporates abstract qualities, but the attraction of the living Empire for

immigrant leaders was firmly based upon its military might and overall wealth. They wished to avoid potentially dangerous military confrontations with it, while its wealth, when distributed as patronage, could greatly strengthen a leader's position. By the 450s, however, the real power behind the western imperial facade was already ebbing away. As we have seen, Britain, parts of Gaul and Spain (at different times), and above all North Africa had removed themselves or been removed from central imperial control. The rewards—money or land, such wealth being the basis of power—which were given after 454 to new allies from among the barbarian immigrants therefore only depleted further an already shrunken base.

Take, for example, Avitus. Under him, the Goths were sent to Spain to bring the Suevi to heel. Unlike the 410s, however, Theoderic II's troops seem to have operated by themselves, and according to Hydatius' account basically ransacked northern Spain, including loyal Hispano-Romans, for all the wealth they could muster. This benefited the Goths, but not the Roman state; there is no indication that Roman administration and taxation were restored. Likewise the Burgundians: after participating in Spain, they received new and better lands in Savoy, which, an enigmatic chronicle entry tells us, they divided with local senators. Another prosperous agricultural area no longer formed part of central imperial resources.

After 454, there thus built up a vicious circle within the western Empire, with too many groups squabbling over a shrinking financial base. In political terms, this meant that there were always enough groups left out in the cold, after any division of the spoils, which wanted to undermine the prevailing political configuration. Moreover, with every change of regime, there had to be further gifts to conciliate supporters anew. Having been granted a free hand in Spain under Avitus, the Goths then received the city of Narbonne and its territory (especially, one supposes, its tax revenues) as the price of their support for Libius Severus, Majorian's successor, in the early 460s. Even worse, this concentration on the internal relations of the established power-blocks allowed the rise of other more peripheral forces, which would previously have been suppressed, and whose activities took still more territory out of central control. Particularly ominous in this respect was the expansion of the Armoricans, and, above all, the Franks in northern Gaul from the 460s, as increasingly independent leaders gathered around themselves ever larger power-bases.

There were only two possible ways to break the circle. Either the number of political players had to be reduced, or the centre's financial base had to expand. This clarifies the logic behind the policies pursued by the only effective western regimes put together after the death of Aetius: those of Majorian (457–61) and Anthemius (467–72). Majorian's regime combined the sufferance of all the western army groups with the support of Italian aristocrats and a careful courting of the Gauls who had previously backed Avitus. He also won at least the temporary acquiescence of the Goths and Burgundians, and Constantinople seems eventually to have recognized him. Anthemius was son-in-law of the former eastern Emperor Marcian, and came to Italy with an army and a blessing from the reigning eastern Emperor, Leo. His leading general was Marcellinus, commander in Dalmatia; Ricimer accepted him in Italy (they forged a marriage

alliance); Gallic landowners were again carefully courted; and, at the start of his reign at least, the major immigrant groups deferred to him. The central policy of both these regimes was to reconquer Vandal Africa, Majorian making his bid in 460, Anthemius in 468. Victory in either of these wars would have renewed imperial prestige, but, more important, would have removed from the political game one of its major players, and, perhaps above all, restored to the rump western Empire the richest of its original territories.

Both Vandal expeditions failed, and as a result both regimes fell apart. But what if either had succeeded? Particularly in 468, a really major expedition was put together and the later success of Belisarius shows that reconquering North Africa was not inherently impossible. There was, so to speak, a window of opportunity. Buoyed up by victory and the promise of African revenues, a victorious western emperor could certainly have re-established his political hold on the landowners of southern Gaul and Spain, many of whom would have instinctively supported an imperial revival. Sidonius, and the other Gallic aristocrats who organized resistance to Euric, for instance, would have been only too happy to reassert ties to the centre. Burgundians, Goths, and Suevi would have had to be faced in due course, but victory would have considerably extended the active life of the western Empire. The failure of the expeditions foreclosed the possibility of escaping the cycle of decline. With the number of players increasing rather than diminishing, as the Franks in particular grew in importance, and with the Empire's financial base in decline, the idea of empire quickly became meaningless, since the centre no longer controlled anything anyone wanted. In consequence, the late 460s and 470s saw one group after another coming to the realization that the western Empire was no longer a prize worth fighting for. It must have been an extraordinary moment, in fact, when it dawned on the leaders of individual interest groups, and upon members of local Roman landowning elites, that, after hundreds of years of existence, the Roman state in western Europe was now an anachronism.

The first to grasp the point seems to have been Euric the Visigoth. After the Vandals defeated Anthemius, he quickly launched a series of wars which, by 475, had brought under his control much of Gaul and Spain. There is a striking description of his decision to launch these campaigns in the Getica of Jordanes:

> Becoming aware of the frequent changes of [western] Roman Emperor, Euric, King of the Visigoths, pressed forward to seize Gaul on his own authority.

This extract captures rather well what it must have been like suddenly to realize that the time had come to pursue one's own aims with total independence. The correspondence of Sidonius Apollinaris likewise shows members of the Roman landowning elite of southern Gaul transferring their allegiance piecemeal to Euric's colours at much the same time: some had taken stock of the terminal decline of the Empire as early as the 460s; others, like Sidonius himself, did not accept the situation until the mid-470s. Euric's lead was followed at different times by the other interested parties.

The eastern Empire, for instance, abandoned any hope in the west when it made peace with the Vandals, probably in 474. As we have seen, Constantinople had previously viewed North Africa as the means of reinvigorating the western Empire. Making peace with the Vandals was thus a move of huge significance, signalling the end of attempts to sustain the west; diplomatic recognition as western emperor was subsequently granted to Julius Nepos, but he never received any practical assistance. That the western Empire had ceased to mean anything dawned on the Burgundians at more or less the same time. Gundobad, one of the heirs to the throne, played a major role in central politics in the early 470s; a close ally of Ricimer, he helped him defeat Anthemius, supported the subsequent regime of Olybrius, and, after Ricimer's death, even persuaded Glycerius to accept the throne in 473. Sometime in 473 or 474, however, he 'suddenly' (as one chronicler put it) left Rome. Possibly this was due to his father's death, or perhaps he just gave up the struggle; either way, he never bothered to return. Events at home were now much more important than those at the centre, which now, of course, was the centre no longer.

The army of Dalmatia made one final attempt to sponsor a regime when Julius Nepos marched into Italy in 474, but one year later he left again—definitively—in the face of the hostility of Orestes and the army of Italy. Fittingly, it was the army of Italy which was the last to give up. In 475, its commander Orestes proclaimed his son Romulus Emperor, but within a year lost control of his soldiers. Not surprisingly, given all the resources which had by now been seized by others, it was shortage of money which caused the unrest. Odovacar was able, therefore, to organize a putsch, murder Orestes, and depose Romulus Augustulus. He then sent an embassy to Constantinople which did no more than state the obvious: there was no longer any need for an emperor in the west. With this act, the Roman Empire in western Europe ceased to exist.

That the Huns and other outside, 'barbarian', groups were a fundamental cause of western imperial collapse is not a novel conclusion. The real contribution of this paper to scholarly debate, outside matters of detail, lies in three main lines of argument. First, the invasions of 376 and 405–8 were not unconnected events, but two particular moments of crisis generated by a single strategic revolution: the emergence of Hunnic power on the fringes of Europe. This was not a sudden event, but a protracted process, and the movements of the Huns provide a real unity and coherence to thirty-five years of instability and periodic invasion along Rome's European frontiers in the later fourth and early fifth centuries.

Second, while some sixty-five years separate the deposition of Romulus Augustulus from these invasions, they are, nonetheless, intimately linked. The regular crises for the Empire in intervening years represent no more than the slow working-out of the full political consequences of the invasions, with the events of 476 marking the culmination of the process whereby the after-effects of invasion steadily eroded the power of the western Roman state. The loss of territory to the invaders—sometimes sanctioned by treaty, sometimes not—meant a loss of revenue, and a consequent loss of power. As the state lost power, and was perceived to have done so, local Roman landowning

elites came to the realization that their interests would best be served by making political accommodations with the outsiders, or, in a minority of cases, by taking independent responsibility for their own defence. Given that the Empire had existed for four hundred years, and that the east continued to prop up the west, it is not surprising that these processes of political erosion, and of psychological adjustment to the fact of erosion, took between two and three generations in the old Empire's heartlands of southern Gaul, Italy, and Spain (even if elites in other areas, such as Britain, were rather quicker off the mark). Despite the time-lag, the well-documented nature of these processes substantiates a very direct link between the period of the invasions and the collapse of the Empire. There was no separate additional crisis. Simply, the overwhelming consequences of the arrival, inside the body politic of the western Roman state, of new military forces, with independent political agendas, took time to exert their full effect.

A third line of argument has concerned the paradoxical role of the Huns in these revolutionary events. In the era of Attila, Hunnic armies surged across Europe from the Iron Gates of the Danube towards the walls of Constantinople, the outskirts of Paris, and Rome itself. But Attila's decade of glory was no more than a sideshow in the drama of western collapse. The Huns' indirect impact upon the Roman Empire in previous generations, when the insecurity they generated in central and eastern Europe forced Goths, Vandals, Alans, Suevi, Burgundians across the frontier, was of much greater historical importance than Attila's momentary ferocities. Indeed, the Huns had even sustained the western Empire down to c. 440, and in many ways their second greatest contribution to imperial collapse was, as we have seen, themselves to disappear suddenly as a political force after 453, leaving the west bereft of outside military assistance.

I would like to finish by trying to place these lines of argument in broader historical perspective. Taken together, they indicate firmly, of course, that it was a foreign policy crisis which brought down the western Empire, and thus cast further fuel on long-raging fires of debate over whether it was internal or external factors which caused the fall of Rome. Indeed, there exists a vast secondary literature—what Peter Brown once labelled the 'sacred rhetoric'—which would argue precisely the opposite, seeing internal social, economic, and psychological developments as fully explaining imperial collapse. According to this view, the balance of power on the frontier was broken by progressive Roman enfeeblement, rather than by developments in areas beyond Rome's control.

Transformations within the Roman world must obviously be taken into account when we look at the ability of outside groups to create increasing mayhem inside its borders. Despite possible appearances, the argument of this paper is itself very far from monocausal, since internal and external factors obviously interrelate. On a very basic level, the economic, demographic and other resources of a society fundamentally explain its success or failure in the face of outside threat. If the Empire had a sufficiently large and wealthy population, it would have been able to resist even the new forces unleashed by the Huns. More particularly, as we have seen, the appearance of barbarian powers

actually within the Empire's borders, in the fifth century, opened up a pre-existing fault line in the relationship between imperial centre and local Roman landowning elites. The centre relied on a mixture of constraint and reward to focus the loyalties of landowners, some of them many hundreds of miles distant, upon the Empire. The new barbarian powers of the fifth century undermined the ability of the Empire to prop up the position of its local supporters, to reward them, or even to constrain their loyalty. The Empire thus fell apart as local landowners found alternative methods to guarantee their elite status, making accommodations with the new powers in the land.

Even so, it remains very much to the point to ask a hypothetical question. What would have happened had barbarians not invaded the Empire en masse in the face of the Hunnic threat? Despite continued attempts of late to stress the importance of internal factors, there is still not the slightest sign that the Empire would have collapsed under its own weight. Indeed, a great body of recent (and not so recent) research in two separate areas would collectively support the contention of this paper, derived from a close examination of the sequence of events, that it was developments beyond, rather than within, the imperial frontier which upset the prevailing balance between Rome and its neighbours. There is no space here to deal with either fully, but brief summaries can at least set an agenda for further debate.

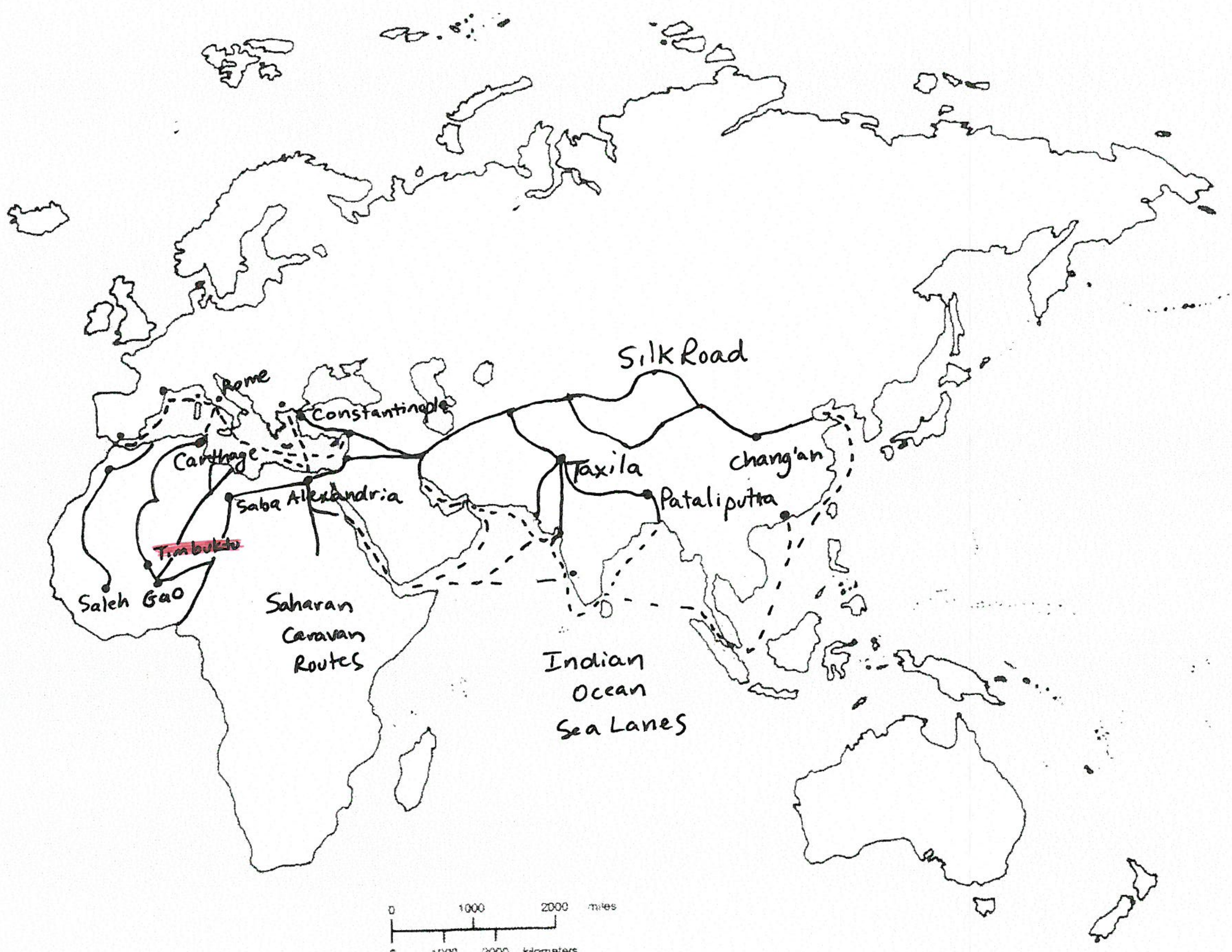
First, there have been substantial reappraisals of different aspects of the later Roman Empire, whose cumulative effect, to my mind, has been to overturn the 'sacred rhetoric'. The fourth-century Empire was not socially rigid, economically stagnant, culturally dead, or politically dislocated to an obviously greater degree than earlier Roman societies. Much, of course, was problematic about the late Roman world, but perfect societies exist only in historians' imaginations. Recent studies have revealed that there was no fundamental dislocation in the rural economy, the power-house of the Empire; that trade was flourishing in a far from demonetarized economy; and that local elites were participating in imperial structures in unprecedented numbers. Traditional classicists' prejudice has also given way—in some cases, at least—to a fuller appreciation of the cultural dynamism generated by the incorporation of Christianity within the existing political and social edifice.

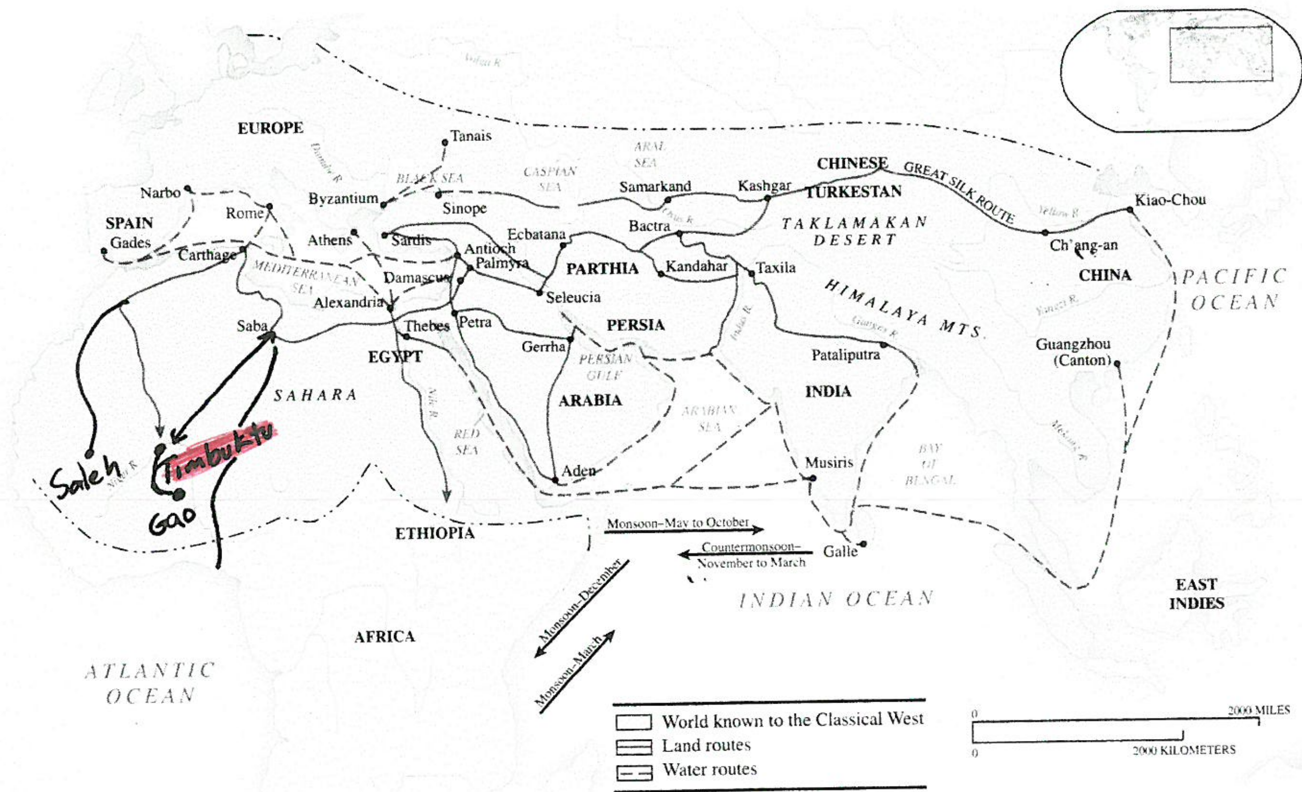
On a second front, archaeological investigations have also revealed a total transformation in the nature of Germanic societies in the first three centuries or so AD. Causes are still a matter for debate, but agricultural output and economic sophistication both grew exponentially, generating in their wake profound social change. In particular, differentiation in status and wealth expanded markedly, creating much more pronounced social hierarchies. All this is consonant with the literary evidence, which shows the existence of much larger political entities and of real dynasties among at least some Germanic groups of the fourth century. Demonstrably true of Goths on the Danube, it also seems to be the case with the Franks and Alamanni of the Rhine frontier. Fourth-century Alamannic society threw up a succession of leaders with pre-eminent power—Chnodomarius, Vadomarius, and Macrianus being described as such by Ammianus—and Roman policy was precisely directed towards containing the threat they posed: kidnapping them at banquets being a preferred

approach. These new, larger entities, as might be expected, acted more assertively towards the Roman state. In the aftermath of a Roman civil war, for instance, Chnodomarius actually attempted to annex Roman territory (and was matched in this by some Prankish groups), and the later 360s and early 370s saw both Alamannic and Gothic groups demand (and succeed in establishing) less subservient diplomatic relationships.

Taken together, these entirely separate areas of research suggest that any substantial change in the strategic balance of power was prompted by the growing strength and cohesion of Germanic groups, not the enfeeblement of the Roman Empire. Even so, the effects of those changes should not be overstated. Germanic groups were stronger in the fourth century; but when it came to direct confrontation, the Roman Empire was still overwhelmingly victorious in the vast majority of cases. And this, perhaps, finally allows us to bring the role of the Huns in the destruction of the western Empire into clear focus. Individually, the new Germanic powers were still no match for the Roman state in the fourth century. By themselves, they could generate some adjustment in relations along the frontiers, but were not about to pull the Empire apart. The most important effect of the Huns, therefore, was to make sufficient numbers of these new Germanic powers, which were not themselves politically united, act in a sufficiently similar way at broadly the same time. If ambition had prompted just one new dynast to invade the Empire on his own, his fate would have been the same as that of Chnodomarius, crushed by Julian at Strasbourg (or, indeed, of Radagaisus). The Huns, however, induced too many of these more substantial groups to cross the frontier in too short a space of time for the Roman state to be able to deal with them effectively. The balance of power on the frontier was already swinging away from the Empire, but only within a limited arc. By creating an accidental unity of purpose among Rome's neighbours, the Huns shattered frontier security, and set in motion processes which generated—out of unprecedented combinations of outside military power and existing local Roman elites—a new political order in western Europe.

Trade Routes (ca 500 BCE to 500 CE)





Map 5.1 Trade Routes at the End of the Classical Era

Important Items Traded

Mediterranean – Glass, textiles, Iron, dyes

India – Precious stones, Spices, cotton, incense, ivory

China – Silk, Paper, Spices, Incense

Africa – Pepper, Ivory, Gold, Slaves

omads and Cross-Civilization ontacts and Exchanges

ırough much of recorded human history, noıdic peoples have been key agents of contact tween sedentary, farming peoples and town vellers in centers of civilization across the əbe. Nomadic peoples pioneered all the great erland routes that linked the civilized cores of ırasia in ancient times and the Middle Ages. ıe most famous was the fabled **Silk Road** that n from western China across the mountains ıd steppes of central Asia to the civilized centers of Mesopotamia in ıe last millennium B.C.E., and to Rome, the Islamic heartlands, and 'estern Europe in the first millennium and a half C.E.

Chinese rulers at one end of these trading networks, and oman emperors and later Islamic sultans at the other end, often ad to send their armies to do battle with hostile nomads whose ıids threatened to cut off the flow of trade. But perhaps more ften, pastoral peoples played critical roles in establishing and exanding trading links. For periodic payments by merchants and imerial bureaucrats, they provided protection from bandits and aiding parties for caravans passing through their grazing lands. For urther payments, nomadic peoples supplied animals to transport ıoth the merchants' goods and the food and drink needed by those n the caravan parties. At times, pastoralists themselves took charge of transport and trading, but it was more common for the trading operations to be controlled by specialized merchants. These merchants were based either in the urban centers of the civilized cores or in the trading towns that grew up along the Silk Road in central Asia, the oases of Arabia, and the savanna zones that bordered on the north and south the vast Sahara desert in Africa.

Pastoral peoples played critical roles in establishing and expanding trading links.

Until they were supplanted by the railroads and steamships of the Industrial Revolution, the overland trading routes of Eurasia and the Americas, along with comparable networks established for sailing vessels, were the most important channels for contacts between civilizations. Religions such as Buddhism and Islam spread peacefully along the trading routes throughout central Asia, Persia, and Africa. Artistic motifs and styles, such as those developed in the cosmopolitan Hellenistic world created by Alexander the Great's conquests, were spread by trading contacts in northern Africa, northern India, and western China.

Inventions that were vital to the continued growth and expansion of the civilized cores were carried in war and peace by traders or nomadic peoples from one center to another. For example, central Asian steppe nomads who had converted to Islam clashed with the armies of China in the 8th century C.E. The victorious Muslims found craftspeople among their prisoners who knew the secrets of making paper, which had been invented many centuries earlier by the Chinese. The combination of nomadic mobility and established trading links resulted in the rapid diffusion of papermaking techniques to Mesopotamia and Egypt in the 8th and 9th centuries and across northern Africa to Europe in the centuries that followed.

Nomadic warriors also contributed to the spread of new military technologies and modes of warfare, particularly across the great Eurasian land mass. Sedentary peoples often adopted the nomads' reliance on heavy cavalry and hit-and-run tactics. Saddles, bits, and bow and arrow designs developed by nomadic herders were avidly imitated by farming societies. And defense against nomadic assaults inspired some of the great engineering feats of the preindustrial world, most notably the Great Wall of China (discussed in Chapter 2). It also spurred the development of gunpowder and cannons in China, where the threat of nomadic incursions persisted well into the 19th century.

In addition, nomadic peoples have served as agents for the transfer of food crops between distant civilized cores, even if they

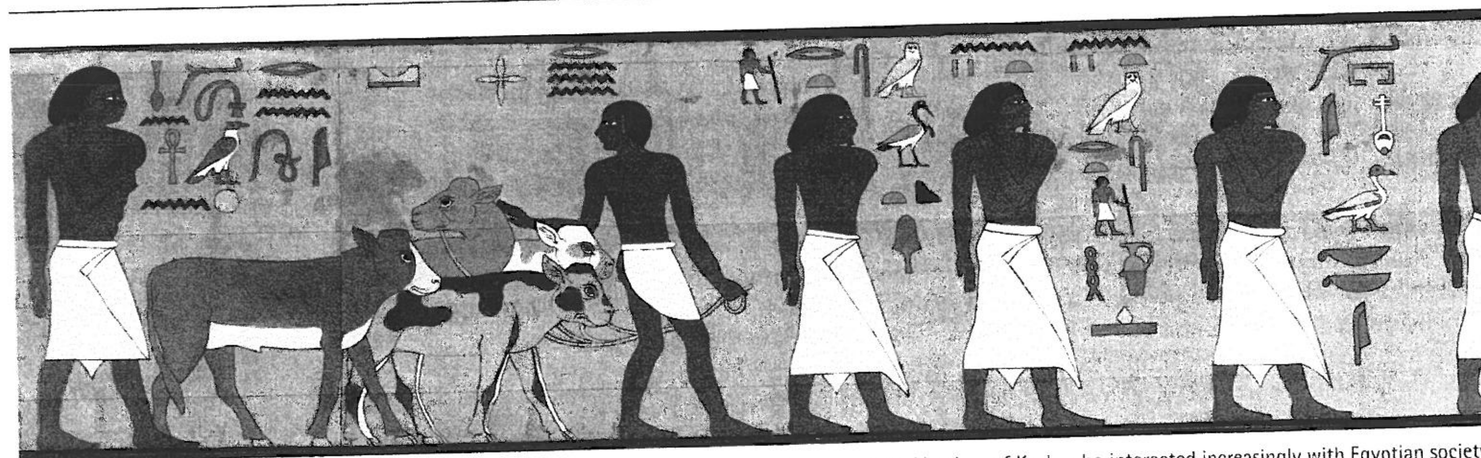
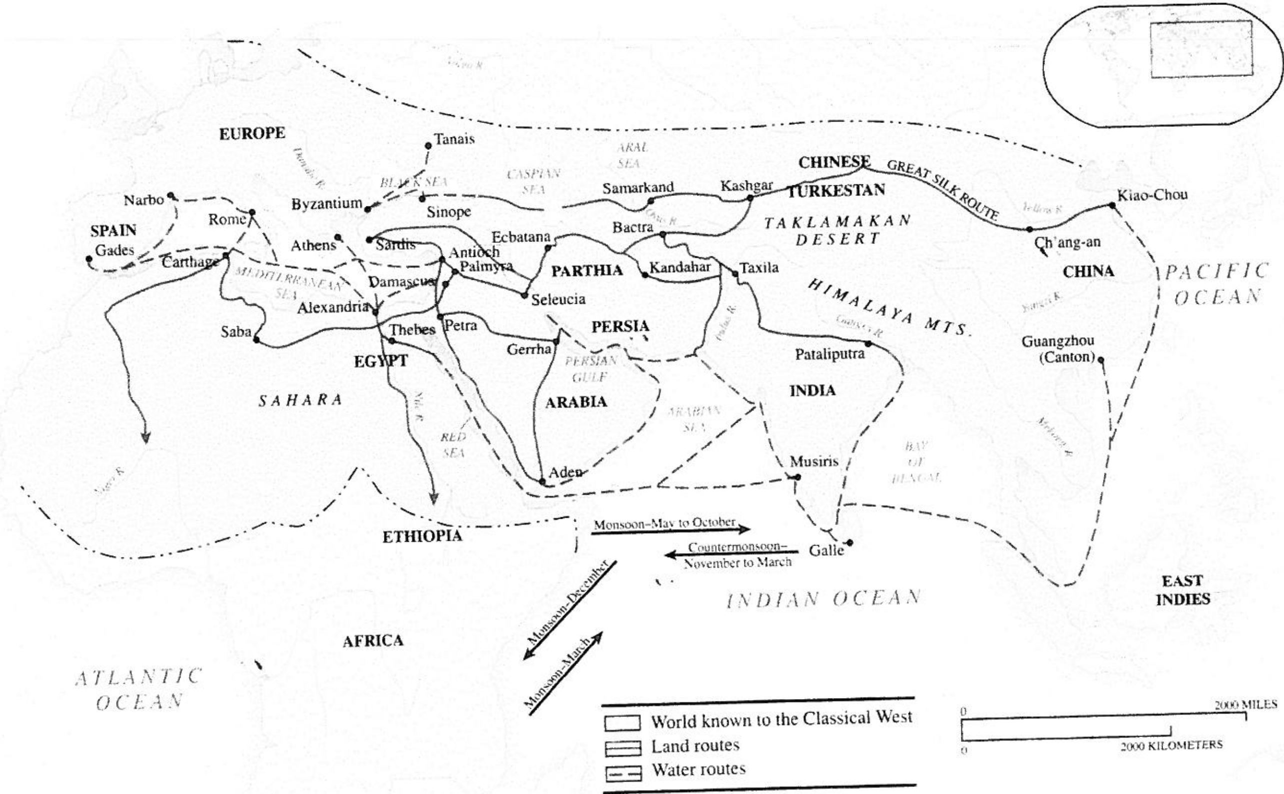


Figure 5.2 This tomb painting from about 1300 B.C.E. highlights black-skinned people from the rising kingdom of Kush, who interacted increasingly with Egyptian society and at one point controlled Egypt directly.

did not usually themselves cultivate the plants being exchanged. In a less constructive vein, nomadic warriors have played a key role in transmitting diseases. In the best-documented instance of this pattern, Mongol cavalry carried the bacterium that causes the strain of the plague that came to be known as the Black Death from central Asia to China in the 14th century. They may also have transmitted it to the West, where it devastated the port cities of the Black Sea region and was later carried by merchant ships to the Middle East and southern Europe.

QUESTIONS What other groups played roles as intermediaries between civilizations in early global history? What features of the nomads' culture and society rendered them ideal agents for transmitting technology, trade goods, crops, and diseases between different cultural zones? Why have the avenues of exchange they provided been open only for limited time spans and then blocked for years or decades at a time? What agents of transmission have taken the place of nomadic peoples in recent centuries?



Map 5.1 Trade Routes at the End of the Classical Era

through some contact with the Kushite tradition or independently is not known. Knowledge of Kushite writing did not spread, which suggests that the impact of this first case of civilization below the Sahara was somewhat limited.

For most of Africa below the Sahara but north of the great tropical jungles, the major development up to 500 C.E. was the further extension of agriculture. Well organized villages arose, often very similar in form and structure to those that still exist. Farming took earliest root on the southern fringes of the **Sahara,** which was less arid than it is today. Toward the end of the classical era, important regional kingdoms were forming in western Africa, leading to the first great state in the region: Ghana. Because of the barriers of dense vegetation and the impact of African diseases on domesticated animals, agriculture spread only slowly southward. However, the creation of a strong agricultural economy prepared the way for the next, more long-lasting and influential wave of African kingdoms, far to the west of the Nile. New crops, including root crops and plantains introduced through trade with southeast Asia about 100 C.E., helped African farmers push into new areas.

Sahara Desert running across northern Africa; separates the Mediterranean coast from southern Africa.