

AP World History Course Key Concepts

Period 2 – Organization and Reorganization of Human Societies, c. 600 BCE to c. 600 CE

Key Concept 2.1. The Development and Codification of Religious and Cultural Traditions

As states and empires increased in size and contacts between regions multiplied, religious and cultural systems were transformed. Religions and belief systems provided a bond among the people and an ethical code to live by. These shared beliefs also influenced and reinforced political, economic and occupational stratification. Religious and political authority often merged as rulers (some of whom were considered divine) used religion, along with military and legal structures, to justify their rule and ensure its continuation. Religions and belief systems could also generate conflict, partly because beliefs and practices varied greatly within and among societies.

I. Codifications and further developments of existing religious traditions provided a bond among the people and an ethical code to live by.

- A. The association of monotheism with Judaism was further developed with the codification of the Hebrew Scriptures, which also showed Mesopotamian influences. Around 600 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., the Assyrian and Roman empires, respectively, created Jewish diasporic communities and destroyed the kingdom of Israel as a theocracy.
- B. The core beliefs outlined in the Sanskrit scriptures formed the basis of the Vedic religions — often known as Hinduisms — which show some influence of Indo-European traditions in the development of the social and political roles of a caste system and in the importance of multiple manifestations of Brahma to promote teachings about reincarnation.

II. New belief systems and cultural traditions emerged and spread, often asserting universal truths.

- A. The core beliefs preached by the historic Buddha and recorded by his followers into sutras and other scriptures were, in part, a reaction to the Vedic beliefs and rituals dominant in South Asia. Buddhism changed over time as it spread throughout Asia — first through the support of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, and then through the efforts of missionaries and merchants, and the establishment of educational institutions to promote its core teachings.
- B. Confucianism's core beliefs and writings originated in the writings and lessons of Confucius and were elaborated by key disciples who sought to promote social harmony by outlining proper rituals and social relationships for all people in China, including the rulers.
- C. In the major Daoist writings (such as the *Daodejing*), the core belief of balance between humans and nature assumed that the Chinese political system would be altered indirectly. Daoism also influenced the development of Chinese culture (such as medical theories and practices, poetry, metallurgy or architecture).
- D. The core beliefs preached by Jesus of Nazareth drew on the basic monotheism of Judaism, and initially rejected Roman and Hellenistic influences. Despite initial Roman imperial hostility, Christianity spread through the efforts of missionaries and merchants through many parts of Afro-Eurasia, and eventually gained Roman imperial support by the time of Emperor Constantine.
- E. The core ideas in Greco-Roman philosophy and science emphasized logic, empirical observation, and the nature of political power and hierarchy.

III. Belief systems affected gender roles (such as Buddhism's encouragement of a monastic life or Confucianism's emphasis on filial piety).

IV. Other religious and cultural traditions continued parallel to the codified, written belief systems in core civilizations.

- A. Shamanism and animism continued to shape the lives of people within and outside of core civilizations because of their daily reliance on the natural world.
- B. Ancestor veneration persisted in many regions (such as in Africa, the Mediterranean region, East Asia or the Andean areas).

V. Artistic expressions, including literature and drama, architecture, and sculpture, show distinctive cultural developments.

- A. Literature and drama acquired distinctive forms (such as Greek tragedy or Indian epics) that influenced artistic developments in neighboring regions and in later time periods (such as in Athens, Persia or South Asia).
- B. Distinctive architectural styles can be seen in Indian, Greek, Mesoamerican and Roman buildings.
- C. The convergence of Greco-Roman culture and Buddhist beliefs affected the development of unique sculptural developments, as seen in the Gandhara Buddhas, which exemplify a syncretism in which Hellenistic veneration for the body is combined with Buddhist symbols.

Key Concept 2.2. The Development of States and Empires

As the early states and empires grew in number, size and population, they frequently competed for resources and came into conflict with one another. In quest of land, wealth and security, some empires expanded dramatically. In doing so, they built powerful military machines and administrative institutions that were capable of organizing human activities over long distances, and they created new groups of military and political elites to manage their affairs. As these empires expanded their boundaries, they also faced the need to develop policies and procedures to govern their relationships with ethnically and culturally diverse populations: sometimes to integrate them within an imperial society and sometimes to exclude them. In some cases, these empires became victims of their own successes. By expanding their boundaries too far, they created political, cultural and administrative difficulties that they could not manage. They also experienced environmental, social and economic problems when they overexploited their lands and subjects and permitted excessive wealth to be concentrated in the hands of privileged classes.

I. The number and size of imperial societies grew dramatically by imposing political unity on areas where previously there had been competing states.

NOTE: Students should know the location and names of the key states and empires below.

- A. Southwest Asia: Persian Empires (such as Achaemenid, Parthian or Sassanid)
- B. East Asia: Qin and Han dynasties
- C. South Asia: Maurya and Gupta Empires
- D. Mediterranean region: Phoenician and Greek colonization, Hellenistic and Roman Empires
- E. Mesoamerica: Teotihuacan, Maya city-states
- F. Andean South America: Moche

II. Empires and states developed new techniques of imperial administration based, in part, on the success of earlier political forms.

- A. In order to organize their subjects, the rulers created administrative institutions, including centralized governments, elaborate legal systems and bureaucracies (such as in China, Persia, Rome or South Asia).
- B. Imperial governments projected military power over larger areas using a variety of techniques, including diplomacy; developing supply lines; building fortifications, defensive walls and roads; and drawing new groups of military officers and soldiers from the local populations or conquered peoples.
- C. Much of the success of the empires rested on their promotion of trade and economic integration by building and maintaining roads and issuing currencies.

III. Imperial societies displayed unique social and economic dimensions.

- A. Cities served as centers of trade, public performance of religious rituals, and as political administration for states and empires (such as Persepolis, Chang'an, Pataliputra, Athens, Carthage, Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople or Teotihuacan).
- B. The social structures of all empires displayed hierarchies that included cultivators, laborers, slaves, artisans, merchants, elites and caste groups.
- C. Imperial societies relied on a range of labor systems to maintain the production of food and provide rewards for the loyalty of the elites, including corvée, slavery, rents and tributes, peasant communities, and family and household production.
- D. Patriarchy continued to shape gender and family relations in all imperial societies of this period.

IV. The Roman, Han, Maurya and Gupta empires created political, cultural and administrative difficulties that they could not manage, which eventually led to their decline, collapse and transformation into successor empires or states.

- A. Through excessive mobilization of resources, imperial governments caused environmental damage (such as deforestation, desertification, soil erosion or silted rivers) and generated social tensions and economic difficulties by concentrating too much wealth in the hands of elites.
- B. External problems resulted from security issues along their frontiers, including the threat of invasions (such as between Northern China and Xiongnu; between Gupta and the White Huns; or among Romans, Parthians, Sassanids and Kushan).

Key Concept 2.3. Emergence of Transregional Networks of Communication and Exchange

With the organization of large-scale empires, the volume of long-distance trade increased dramatically. Much of this trade resulted from the demand for raw materials and luxury goods. Land and water routes linked many regions of the Eastern Hemisphere, while separate networks connected the peoples and societies of the Americas somewhat later. The exchange of people, technology, religious and cultural beliefs, food crops, domesticated animals, and disease pathogens developed alongside the trade in goods across far-flung networks of communication and exchange.

I. Land and water routes created transregional trade, communication and exchange networks in the Eastern Hemisphere, while separate networks connected the peoples and societies of the Americas somewhat later.

NOTE: Students should know how factors, including the climate and location of the routes, the typical trade goods, and the ethnicity of people involved, shaped the distinctive features of the following trade routes.

- A. Eurasian Silk Roads
- B. Trans-Saharan caravan routes
- C. Indian Ocean sea lanes
- D. One of the following: Mediterranean sea lanes; American trade routes; or the north-south Eurasian trade routes linking the Baltic region, Constantinople and Central Asia

II. New technologies facilitated long-distance communication and exchange.

- A. New technologies (such as yokes, saddles or stirrups) permitted the use of domesticated pack animals (such as horses, oxen, llamas or camels) to transport goods across longer routes.
- B. Innovations in maritime technologies (such as the lateen sail or dhow ships), as well as advanced knowledge of the monsoon winds, stimulated exchanges along maritime routes from East Africa to East Asia.

III. Alongside the trade in goods, the exchange of people, technology, religious and cultural beliefs, food crops, domesticated animals, and disease pathogens developed across far-flung networks of communication and exchange.

- A. The spread of crops, including sugar, rice and cotton from South Asia to the Middle East, encouraged changes in farming and irrigation techniques (such as the development of the qanat system).
- B. The spread of disease pathogens diminished urban populations and contributed to the decline of some empires (such as Rome or China).
- C. Religious and cultural traditions, including Chinese culture, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, were transformed as they spread.