

CHAPTER IV OUTLINE

I. Opening Vignette

A. *The 2007 book Are We Rome? asked if the United States has become the new Roman Empire.*

1. collapse of the Soviet Union
2. overextension of the United States
3. sense of unique, global mission
4. commitment to military dominance
5. reminder of continuing relevance of a long-dead empire

B. *Modern fascination with empires*

1. earliest empires developed in era of First Civilizations
 - a. Akkadian Empire
 - b. Babylonian Empire
 - c. Assyrian Empire
2. empires have been central to world history for 4,000 years

C. *What is an empire?*

1. simple answer: empires are political systems with coercive power
2. more typical: larger, more aggressive states
 - a. conquer other states
 - b. use their resources
 - c. usually include multiple peoples and cultures under a single political system
3. no clear line between empires and small multiethnic states

D. *Eurasian empires of the classical era include:*

1. Persian Empire
2. Greek empire of Alexander the Great
3. Roman Empire
4. Chinese empire (Qin and Han dynasties)
5. India (Mauryan and Gupta empires)

E. *Common problems of classical empires:*

1. Would they try to impose their culture on varied subjects?
2. Would they rule conquered peoples directly or through local elites?
3. How should they extract wealth while maintaining order?
4. All eventually collapsed

F. *Why have empires always been so fascinating?*

1. Size was imposing
2. Blood and violence of conquest
3. Satisfaction in witnessing the fall of the mighty when they collapse
4. Contrast to nonimperial civilizations

5. Empires were *important*
 - a. Majority of humans before twentieth century lived in empires
 - b. Stimulated exchange of ideas, cultures, and values
 - c. Peace and security encouraged development, commerce, and cultural mixing

II. Empires and Civilizations in Collision: The Persians and the Greeks

A. The Eurasian classical era saw a flowering of second-wave civilizations.

1. Civilizations did not usually encounter each other directly
2. Mediterranean world and Middle East were the important exceptions
 - a. Persians and Greeks were neighbors
 - b. Very important cultural encounter

B. The Persian Empire

1. in 500 B.C.E., it was the largest and most impressive empire
 - a. Persians were Indo-Europeans, homeland on the Iranian plateau
 - b. Imperial system drew on Mesopotamian prototypes
 - c. Much larger and more splendid
 - d. Cyrus (r. 557–530 B.C.E.) and Darius (r. 522–486 B.C.E.) expanded empire from Egypt to India
 - e. Diverse empire with population of around 35 million people
2. Elaborate cult of kingship
 - a. Rule by will of the god Ahura Mazda
 - b. Absolute monarchy
3. Holding the empire together
 - a. Violent punishments by king
 - b. Effective administrative system
 - c. Respect for non-Persian cultural traditions
 - d. Standardized coinage, predictable taxes
 - e. Encouragement of communication and commerce
4. Immense wealth and power

C. The Greeks

1. Indo-Europeans
2. Classical Greece emerged ca. 750 B.C.E., flourished for about 400 years
3. Distinctiveness of Hellenistic civilization
 - a. Population of Greece and the Aegean basin was 2 million to 3 million people
 - b. Geography of mountains, valleys encouraged development of hundreds of city-states and small settlements
 - c. Shared common language and common gods
4. Between 750 and 500 B.C.E., colonization around Mediterranean basin and Black Sea

5. most distinctive feature: popular participation in political life of city-states
 - a. equality of all citizens before the law
 - b. extent of citizenship varied depending on time and city
 - c. *tyrants* (dictators) emerged in many areas, supported by poorer classes against the rich
 - d. Sparta gave most political authority to Council of Elders
 - e. Athens: most distinctive expression of political participation
 - f. differences between Athenian and modern democracy

D. Collision: The Greco-Persian Wars

1. Point of collision was Ionia (Greek settlements on Anatolian seacoast)
 - a. in 499 B.C.E., some Ionian Greeks revolted against Persia
 - b. were supported by Athens
2. Persia responded with expeditions against Greeks in 490 and 480 B.C.E.
 - a. Greeks astonishingly defeated Persians on land and sea
 - b. Greeks believed they won Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.E.) because they were motivated by Greek freedoms
3. Notion of East/West divide as dominant theme in European thought
 - a. Greece = Europe, freedom
 - b. Persia = Asia, despotism
4. Victory radicalized Athenian democracy: poor rowers received full citizenship
 - a. fifty-year Golden Age of Greek culture after Persian Wars
 - b. beginnings of imperialism
 - c. Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.E.)

E. Collision: Alexander and the Hellenistic Era

1. Philip II of Macedon completed conquest of Greece by 338 B.C.E.
 - a. political unification of Greece by force
 - b. plan for great Greek expedition against Persia
2. Alexander's expedition against Persia (333–323 B.C.E.)
 - a. created a massive Greek empire from Egypt and Anatolia to Afghanistan and India
 - b. defeat of Persian Empire, destruction of Persepolis
 - c. Alexander anointed as pharaoh of Egypt, declared to be "son of the gods"
3. Alexander died in 323 B.C.E.; empire divided into three kingdoms, ruled by Macedonian generals
4. Alexander's conquests were most important in terms of world history for creation of the Hellenistic era (323–30 B.C.E.)
 - a. dissemination of Greek culture through much of Asia and Egypt
 - b. role of Hellenistic cities in spread of Greek culture
 - c. Alexandria in Egypt had enormous harbor, library of 700,000 volumes, and Museum

5. A simplified form of Greek was widely spoken from Mediterranean to India
 - a. Indian monarch Ashoka published some of his decrees in Greek
 - b. many Jews were attracted to Greek culture; Pharisees developed their own school system to counter the influence
6. Hellenistic cities were much more culturally diverse than original Greek city-states
 - a. were not independent, but part of conquest states
 - b. Macedonians and Greeks formed the elite
 - c. cultural interaction and blending were still possible
7. Roman rule replaced that of Greeks in western part of Hellenistic world

III. Comparing Empires: Roman and Chinese

A. The Roman and Chinese empires had little direct contact but interesting similarities.

1. both flourished ca. 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.
2. were of similar size (about 1.5 million square miles)
3. both had 50 million to 60 million people
4. between them, they controlled nearly half the world’s population
5. interesting variations on imperial theme

B. Rome: From City-State to Empire

1. started as small, unimportant city-state in central Italy in eighth century B.C.E.
2. overthrew monarchy and established a republic ca. 509 B.C.E.
3. conflict between patricians (wealthy class) and plebeians (poorer classes)
4. pride in republican values: rule of law, citizens’ rights, lack of pretension, morality— “the way of the ancestors”
5. creation of the empire
 - a. began in 490s B.C.E. with wars to control Italian peninsula
 - b. 264–146 B.C.E.: Punic Wars with Carthage
 - c. conquest of Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and present-day Spain, France, and Britain
 - d. reached greatest geographical extent in early second century C.E.
 - e. gradual, unplanned pursuit of opportunities
 - f. skill and brutality of Roman army
 - g. usually generous treatment of conquered peoples
6. political crisis of first century B.C.E.
 - a. rise of military leaders (Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Julius Caesar)
 - b. decline of republican values
 - c. Caesar Augustus (r. 27 B.C.E.–14 C.E.) was first emperor
7. establishment of *pax Romana* (Roman peace)
 - a. security
 - b. relative prosperity

C. China: From Warring States to Empire

1. creation of empire regarded as a restoration
 - a. Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties had created a Chinese state
 - b. system fell apart by 500 B.C.E.
 - c. age of warring states: seven competing kingdoms
 - d. multiple states were regarded as unnatural
2. Unification by Shihuangdi, ruler of Qin (r. 221–210 B.C.E.)
 - a. adopted Legalism as political philosophy: clear rules and harsh punishments to enforce state authority
 - b. Shihuangdi means “first emperor”
3. expansion of empire into northern Vietnam and Korea and into steppes to northwest
4. creation of empire was brutal
 - a. military force
 - b. execution of scholars, book burning
 - c. hundreds of thousands of laborers built Great Wall
 - d. Shihuangdi’s monumental tomb, with about 7,500 life-size ceramic statues
 - e. standardized weights, measures, currency, written Chinese, and axle lengths for carts
5. Qin dynasty collapsed in 206 B.C.E.; followed by Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.)
 - a. kept Qin centralization
 - b. less harsh

D. Consolidating the Roman and Chinese Empires

1. both empires defined themselves in universal terms
2. both invested heavily in public works
3. both claimed supernatural sanctions
 - a. deceased Roman emperors as gods
 - b. Chinese emperor as Son of Heaven
4. both absorbed a foreign religious tradition
 - a. development of Christianity in Roman Empire
 - b. introduction of Buddhism into China by traders
5. relationships with societies they governed
 - a. Romans were always a minority in empire
 - b. ethnic Chinese had much larger cultural heartland
6. role of language differed in the two empires
 - a. Latin (alphabetic language) gave rise to Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Romanian
 - b. Chinese characters (which represented words or ideas) could not be transferred easily to other languages
7. Roman Empire’s peoples maintained separate cultural identities far more than in China

8. Bureaucracy was much more elaborate in China than in Roman Empire
 - a. Chinese emperor Wudi (r. 141–87 B.C.E.) established an academy to train officials based on works of Confucius
 - b. Roman administration relied on regional elites and army

E. The Collapse of Empires

1. Why do they fall?
 - a. Han dynasty ended in 220 C.E.
 - b. traditional date for fall of western Roman Empire is 476 C.E.; eastern half survived as Byzantine Empire
2. common factors
 - a. excessive size, overextension, too expensive for available resources
 - b. no great technological breakthrough to enlarge resources
 - c. tax evasion by large landowning families
 - d. tax burden fell heavily onto the poor
 - e. rivalry between elite factions created instability
 - f. epidemic disease
 - g. threat from nomadic or semi-agricultural peoples on frontier: China dealt with Xiongnu; Roman Empire, with Germanic-speaking peoples
3. effects of imperial collapse
 - a. decline of urban life
 - b. population decline
 - c. reduction of international trade
 - d. vast insecurity
4. most important difference between collapse of Han and Roman empires: what happened next
 - a. China: about 350 years of disorder, then creation of a similar imperial state (Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties)
 - b. Europe: no large-scale imperial system has *ever* been successfully established in Western Europe since Romans
 - c. Why was China more successful in restoration?

IV. Intermittent Empire: The Case of India

A. The idea of empire was much less prominent in India than in Persia, the Mediterranean, or China.

1. fall of Indus Valley civilization by 1500 B.C.E.
2. creation of new civilization along Ganges River
3. establishment in northern India of classic civilization of South Asia by 600 B.C.E.
 - a. enormous political, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity
 - b. Indian civilization as a whole shaped by political fragmentation and cultural diversity
 - c. identity provided by distinctive religious tradition (Hinduism) and social organization (caste system)

B. Mauryan Empire (326–184 B.C.E.)

1. stimulated by Persian and Greek penetration of northwest
2. ruled all but southern tip of India
3. population of around 50 million
4. large military and civilian bureaucracy
5. state-operated industries
6. Ashoka (r. 268–232 B.C.E.) is best-known emperor, thanks to edicts
7. Mauryan Empire broke apart after Ashoka's death

C. Gupta Empire (320–550 C.E.) and other short-lived empires followed

D. Why couldn't India maintain an empire?

1. states failed to command loyalty
2. great cultural diversity
3. frequent invasions from Central Asia
4. caste system encouraged local loyalties

E. Indian trade flourished despite the lack of unity.

1. merchants and artisans patronized public buildings and festivals
2. Hinduism and Buddhism spread through much of Asia
3. Indian mathematics and astronomy flourished

V. Reflections: Classical Empires and the Twentieth Century

A. Classical empires continue to be used as models and inspirations.

1. Mao Zedong compared himself to Shihuangdi
2. Modern Indians pride themselves on Ashoka's nonviolence and tolerance
3. Great Britain celebrated its empire as a modern Roman Empire
4. Mussolini regarded Italian expansion as the creation of a new Roman Empire
5. recent question: are Americans the new Romans?

B. There is a danger of misusing historical analogies, but history is vital to understanding the complexities of contemporary life.