

LESSON 2

Acquainted Cultures

THINKING FOCUS

In what ways did the peoples of various cultures benefit from their contact with each other?

Key Term

- dynasty

► This image of a Sassanid king is made from gold and silver. The staring eyes and elaborate curls are distinctive features of Persian art.

It's hard to imagine any benefits arising from war. Yet, all around the Mediterranean, as peoples fought with each other, they also learned from each other. In fact, any encounter between people of different cultures, whether in war or in trade, leads to

an exchange of ideas. Thus, the peoples of Rome, Persia, India, and China, being acquainted, or in touch with one another, influenced each other's beliefs, customs, arts, and sciences. Look at the timelines on page 33 to see how these cultures came into contact.

Sassanid Persia

Perhaps no two Mediterranean peoples encountered each other as frequently in battle as did the peoples of the Roman Empire and Persia. Two of the major causes of conflict between Rome and Persia were fights about the border between these two empires and disagreement about political control of Armenia. Armenia acted as an important buffer zone between the two powers. It was in the best interest of both Rome and Persia to have some control over the leadership in Armenia. As long as both countries had some control over this leadership, neither one could use Armenia as a base

for a full-scale invasion of the other's territory or as a starting point for a surprise attack.

At War

The first member of the Sassanid family to rule Persia recognized this fact, as did all the members of his family who ruled after him. So from the beginning of the Sassanid **dynasty**, or family rule, in A.D. 224, until its end in 641, the Persians and Romans often fought for control of Armenia.

At the same time, the Persians were also busy defending their borders against invasions by barbarians from the plains of Europe and against the Huns from Asia.



Rome

44 B.C., Julius Caesar is killed.

25 B.C., Augustus receives two trade groups from India.

c. A.D. 200, Barbarian invasions and civil wars begin.

248, Rome celebrates its 1,000th birthday.

410, Rome is sacked by the Visigoths.

200 100 B.C. A.D. 100 200 300 400 500 600

27 B.C., Octavian becomes ruler of the Roman Empire and is named Augustus.



395, The will of Theodosius I officially splits the Roman Empire in two.

476, Last Roman emperor is overthrown; the Byzantine Empire continues.

Persia

53 B.C., Persians defeat Romans.

c. 140, Persians begin to frequently trade with Romans and Chinese.

c. 350, Huns invade Persia.

200 100 B.C. A.D. 100 200 300 400 500 600

c. A.D. 109, Silk is carried by caravan from China to Persia for the first time.

224, Sassanids come to power.



642, Arabs conquer Sassanids.

India

300, Gupta Dynasty begins.

525, Gupta Dynasty ends.

200 100 B.C. A.D. 100 200 300 400 500 600

c. 400, Kalidassa writes great Indian literature.

450, Hun invasions of India begin.

China

c. 119 B.C., Huns invade China.

c. A.D. 100, First Chinese dictionary is compiled.

166, Roman traders reach China.

200 100 B.C. A.D. 100 200 300 400 500 600

202 B.C., Han Dynasty begins.

105, Paper is developed.

220, Han Dynasty ends.





▲ A Sassanid warrior mounted for battle rides across this silver bowl from c. 364.

Across Time & Space

"Nothing stops these couriers from covering their allotted stages in the quickest possible time—neither snow, rain, heat, nor darkness." This saying closely resembles the motto of the United States Postal Service, but it was actually written in the 400s B.C. by the Greek historian Herodotus to describe a mail delivery system developed by the Persians in about 500 B.C.

► Some of the things available at Persian rest stops were grasses for horses, lard and poultry for cooking, and coal for fires.

■ How did Persia become a wealthy trading nation?

But the Persians were well prepared to defend themselves against these attackers. Their soldiers fought on horseback and wore armor to protect themselves. In addition, they built large walls around their towns and fields. These walls enabled them to maintain possession of their food supply and shelter while under enemy attack.

At Trade

Despite all this fighting, trade thrived in Persia for many reasons. The overland trade routes connecting China, India, and Rome all ran through Persia. Also, the government aided trade in several ways. It established one common currency throughout the country so that anywhere in Persia a traveler could use the same money. It maintained the roads and even assigned soldiers to patrol those roads to keep travelers safe. The government also set up resting places in the desert for merchants who had come to trade in Persia. These resting places were equipped with water, supplies, and meeting halls.

The Persian government recognized that any

increase in trade in turn increased Persia's prosperity, for it brought money into the country. In addition, the government found a way to make even more money by charging a tax on any goods that were carried in or out of the country.

While trade made the Persians wealthy, it also indirectly enriched the Persian culture. For most encounters with foreign merchants led to an exchange of ideas that increased Persian knowledge. The Persians used this knowledge in a variety of ways. For example, they adopted Roman building techniques to construct bridges, towns, and forts. They modeled their ships after the single-sail vessels of Greece. They borrowed heavily from Indian art, science, medicine, mathematics, and literature. ■



Gupta India

Not long after the founding of the Sassanid dynasty in Persia, a thriving economy and culture began developing in India. The well-run government of the Gupta dynasty existed from A.D. 300 to 467. It maintained the roads to ensure that traders had easy passage to and from India. In addition, the government did not subject its people to heavy taxes, so they had a decent standard of living.

Many of India's merchants also engaged in a prosperous trade with the Eastern Roman Empire, Persia, China, and the countries in Southeast Asia. India sold brassware, ivory, jewels, and even monkeys. The Gupta government profited from this trade by taxing both imports and exports.

The arts and sciences received great attention in this prospering society. Both painting and writing flourished. One of the greatest Indian writers and poets, Kalidassa, describes the results of a battle between the war god Kumara (*koo MAH rah*) and the demon Taraka (*tah RAH kah*) in the following excerpt.

The sun put on a ghastly robe
of great and terrible snakes,
curling together,
as if to mark his joy
at the death of the enemy
demon.

Kalidassa, "Kumara's Fight Against the Demon Taraka", c. 400

UNDERSTANDING CIVILIZATION

The civilizations of Rome, Persia, India, and China were all very different. But they shared common traits. According to historians, a civilization is a society that has cities, a written language, specialized jobs, an organized government, technology, and skilled craftspeople.

Not all societies are complex enough to be civilizations. Early hunter-gatherers never settled long enough in one place to build cities or organize a government. They had a

distinctive culture, but not a civilization.

Development

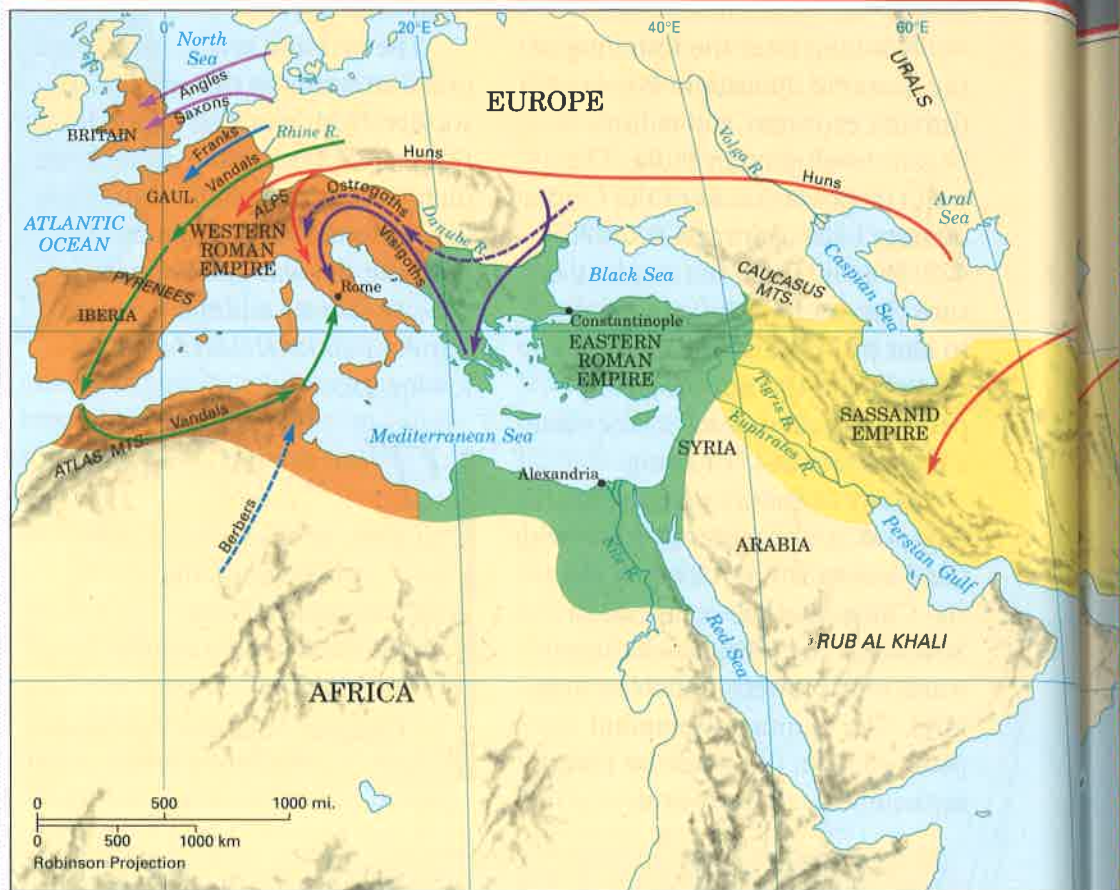
Civilizations first developed as people learned how to increase their food supply. Farming freed people from spending all of their time looking for food. With more spare time, people began to develop specialized skills. Soon they were producing surplus goods as well as surplus food. People traded surpluses for things that they did not have. For example, a person who specialized in

making baskets could trade them for food. Thus, someone who did not grow food could get it.

People needed places to meet and trade goods, so they built towns and marketplaces. To keep business records, they developed systems of writing and numbers.

Today, trade still plays a major role in the way civilizations grow and change. Through trade, civilizations exchange ideas, inventions, and goods. In that process they become acquainted.

Invasions at the Fall of Rome



► Which invading group attacked both China and the Western Roman Empire?

■ In what ways did India's culture benefit from the prosperity that existed between 300 and 500?

▼ The Hun invasions of China are documented by these Chinese statues of Huns from the 500s.



In the sciences, Indians created a number system, developed the concept of zero, and discovered that the earth rotates on its axis.

However, in 480, Hun invasions began to weaken the

prosperous Gupta dynasty. By 525, the Hun invaders had conquered India. They ruled over the people there for the next 200 years. ■

China

To the north of Gupta India lay the vast lands of China. Look at the map on page 37 to find China's boundaries. The Silk Road, a major overland trade route for Chinese silk and other goods, ran through northwest China, Persia, and the Roman Empire. Chinese junks, or ships, also sailed

to India to trade their valuable silk and gold for glass and pearls.

The Chinese learned the teachings of Buddhism from Indian traders and missionaries they encountered. Indian ideas also influenced Chinese religious art. Large Chinese statues of Buddha are similar in pose and style to those created by Indian sculptors.





India was not the only area from which China imported goods. From the Middle East, the Chinese imported grapes, beans, and nut trees for their gardens. From Central Asia, they imported horses, which were extremely useful in warfare.

Like India, China was plagued by Hun invaders. In fact, emperors of the Han dynasty, who ruled

China from 202 B.C. to A.D. 220, had to fight long and costly wars against the Huns. By 220, the Han dynasty had lost control of China completely. Chinese generals and upper class families, as well as Huns and other invading tribes, then fought each other for control of the country. For the next 360 years, China remained in a state of chaos. ■



■ *What were some of the goods China traded? What are some of the goods they obtained in exchange for these items?*

REVIEW

- FOCUS** In what ways did the peoples of various cultures benefit from their contact with each other?
- CONNECT** How might Rome's battles with Persia have contributed to the Western Roman Empire's decline?
- CULTURE** In what ways did the peoples of Persia, India, and China influence each other's cultures, and how did they come into contact with one another?
- CULTURE** What are some aspects of Chinese culture that were influenced by Gupta Indians?
- CRITICAL THINKING** How might the barbarians and Huns have furthered the cultural exchange between Rome, Persia, India, and China?
- WRITING ACTIVITY** The cultures of Rome, Persia, India, and China have all influenced the United States. Write about how one of these cultures has influenced our beliefs, customs, arts, or sciences.