Eurasian Empires
500 BCE to 500 CE

AP World History Notes
Chapter 4
What is an Empire?
Eurasian Empires of the Classical Era

- Persia
- Greece under Alexander the Great
- Rome
- China during the Qin and Han dynasties
- India during the Mauryan and Gupta dynasties
Common Problems of Empires
The Hittites

- 2000 BCE = Hittites conquered Asia Minor → very powerful military
- Set up city-states on plateau called Anatolia → evolved into a kingdom
- 1st military in Middle East to have large amounts of iron weapons
The Hittites

- Army used chariots on lighter wheels that could carry 2 soldiers + a driver
  - Gave them an advantage over their enemies using 2-person chariots
- Hittite Empire covered Asia Minor, Syria, & part of Mesopotamia
The Hittites

- Hittites got most of their culture from Mesopotamia and Egypt
  - They DID contribute a legal system considered less harsh than Hammurabi’s Code → emphasized payments for damages rather than harsh, violent punishments
The Assyrians

- Lived in northern Mesopotamia
- Most lethal army in the Middle East
  - Army organized into units: foot soldiers, charioteers & cavalry on horseback
  - Fought with iron weapons & used battering rams to run into walled cities
The Assyrians

• Treated people they conquered very cruelly
  – Burned cities; tortured and killed thousands of captives
  – Deported people from their homelands
  – Forced people to pay heavy taxes to pay for army, buildings, and roads
The Assyrians

- Empire stretched from the Persian Gulf to Egypt
  - Empire divided into provinces → each one ruled by a governor
- Conquered people began to rebel & the empire began to fall apart
  - 612 BCE = Chaldeans take down Assyrian empire
The Chaldeans

- Dominated the entire Fertile Crescent
- Great King = Nebuchadnezzar
  - Extended the empire
  - Made Babylon one of the most beautiful & richest cities
  - Created the Hanging Gardens (one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world)
The Hanging Gardens of Babylon
The Chaldeans

- Studied the stars & moon phases → foundation for modern astronomy
- Empire started to weaken due to poor harvests and slow trade
- 539 BCE = Conquered by the Persians
The Persians

- Lived in present-day Iran
- King Cyrus added many new territories to the empire
  - Northern Mesopotamia, Syria, Canaan, Phoenician cities, Lydia, Greek city-states in Asia Minor
  - Later his son conquered Egypt → brought the entire Middle East under Persian control
The Persians

- Ruled more than 35 million people
- Empire stretched more than 3000 miles – from Nile to Indus River
- Best organizer among Persian kings = Darius
  - Divided empire into 23 provinces
  - Each province ruled by a satrap = governor
The Persians

- Persians = very tolerant rulers
  - Allowed conquered people to keep own languages, religions, and laws

- Artisans built city of **Persepolis** = most magnificent city in the empire
The Persians

- Big network of roads
  - Allowed for trade between different peoples/cultures in the empire
  - Allowed for easy movement of soldiers
  - Royal Road = longest road in the empire → had stations along it so travelers could get food, water, and fresh horses
The Persians

- 480 BCE = Darius’s son Xerxes tried to conquer Greece to expand the empire
  - Failed to defeat the Greeks
Ancient Greece
The Aegean Area

• Ancient Greece included the Balkan Peninsula & small rocky islands in the Aegean Sea
The Aegean Area

- 3/4 of Greek mainland = mountains
  - Protected Greeks from foreign invaders/attackers
  - Kept Greeks isolated from other communities
  - Prevented Greeks from uniting under one government
- Between the mountain ranges = fertile plains good for farming
The Aegean Area

- Mild climate
  - So people spent much of their time outdoors
  - Meetings held in public squares
  - Teachers met students in public gardens
  - Actors performed in open theaters
The Aegean Area

• Despite lack of government -- Greeks spoke same language & practiced same religion (polytheistic)
• Greeks turned to the seas to earn a living --> no place in Greece is more than 50 miles from a coast
Aegean Civilization
[2500 BCE - 1100 BCE]
The Minoans

- Lived on the island of Crete (off the coast of Greece)
- Ruled by King Minos
  - Had a large palace that contained **labyrinths = mazes**
  - Story of Minos and the Minotaur (half man, half bull)
The Minoans

- Murals show that both men and women:
  - Curled their hair
  - Wore gold jewelry
  - Wore wide metal belts
  - Liked dancing, sporting events, and boxing
The Minoans

• Women enjoyed a higher status in society than in other civilizations
  – Chief deity = goddess of the Earth

• Made a living from sea trade -- dominated eastern Mediterranean Sea trade
  – Protected the seas from pirates
The Minoans

• Collapsed about 1350 BCE --> 2 theories why:
  – Large tidal wave destroyed cities
  – Mycenaeans (from mainland) attacked & invaded Crete
The Mycenaeans

• Migrated from central Asia to the Balkan Peninsula (Greece)
  – Intermarried with local people there (called Hellenes) and set up a group of kingdoms
The Mycenaeans

• Each kingdom centered around a hilltop with a royal fortress
  – Surrounded by stone walls for protection
  – Palaces = centers of government and production of goods
  – Officials kept track of the wealth of every person
  – People were taxed in the form of livestock, wheat, and honey
The Mycenaeans

• Adopted many parts of Minoan culture
  – Worshipped same Mother Earth
  – Metalworking, shipbuilding, navigation by sun & stars
The Mycenaeans

- Mycenaeans conquered the Minoans but were then themselves conquered by the Dorians from the north around 1100 BCE
  - Began “dark ages” of Greek culture
  - Trade stopped, people lost skills, poverty increased
  - Ionians reintroduced Greek culture 300 years later (Ionians = refugees that had escaped when the Dorians took over)
  - New Greek civilization emerged --> called Hellenic after the original people of Greece
Poets and Heroes

- **Bards** = singing storytellers that kept the Mycenaean traditions alive during the "dark ages"
Poets and Heroes

- Two most famous Greek epics = *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*
  - Written by blind poet named **Homer**
  - *The Iliad* = about the Trojan War & features the story of the Trojan Horse
  - *The Odyssey* = about the journey of King Odysseus after the fall of Troy
  - Stories were used to teach Greek values
A Family of Deities

• Greeks believed that gods caused the physical events of Earth to occur and controlled how people behaved, as well as what happened to people

• Unlike other early cultures, Greeks didn’t fear their deities
  – Stressed importance of the individual & self-worth --> this self-respect allowed them to approach the gods with dignity
A Family of Deities

• Greeks humanized their gods & goddesses
  – They had a totally human form
  – Had human behavior

• Chief god = Zeus
A Family of Deities

- Each city-state had a particular god as its protector
- Each god controlled a part of the natural world (ex: Zeus ruled the sky & weather; Hades ruled the underworld; Poseidon ruled the sea; etc.)
A Family of Deities

• 12 most important gods lived on Mount Olympus
A Family of Deities

• Every 4 years, athletic contests were held to honor Zeus
  – Called the Olympic Games -- held in Olympia
A Family of Deities

• Greeks began performing plays = beginnings of theater
  – 1st play = tribute to Dionysus = god of wine, fertility, and parties
  – Started off as songs then poems then dialogue
Ancient Greece: The Polis
The Polis

- **Polis** = city-state
- Each polis developed independently, but shared certain features with other city-states
The Typical Polis

• Polis included: a city and the surrounding villages, fields, and orchards

• At the center of the city = an Acropolis = fortified hill
  – On top of Acropolis = temple of the local god or goddess
  – Foot of Acropolis = the agora = public square
The Typical Polis

• Public square was political center of the polis
• Citizens gathered there to choose officials, pass laws, etc.
• Artisans & merchants did business there
The Typical Polis

• **Citizens** = those who took part in government
  – Could vote and hold public office
  – Could speak for themselves in court
  – Could own property
  – In return: expected to serve in government and protect the polis
The Typical Polis

- Most Greeks were **NOT** citizens
- Slaves, foreign-born, and women couldn’t be citizens
Greek Colonies & Trade

• Increase in population after the “dark ages” -- farmers couldn’t grow enough grain to feed everyone
• Each polis sent out groups of people to set up colonies
  – Colonists sent grain back to the “parent city”
Greek Colonies & Trade

• Farmers on mainland produced wine, olive oil, and other cash crops for export
  – Greek trade expanded throughout the Mediterranean region
Greek Colonies & Trade

• 600s BCE = Greeks replaced barter system with money system
• Began producing textiles (cloth) and pottery
Political and Social Change

• Greek communities first ruled by kings - kings soon lost power
• Each polis was then ruled by landholding aristocrats = nobles
Political and Social Change

• Disputes between aristocrats and commoners (especially farmers) often arose
  – Farmers often had to borrow money from the aristocrats until harvest --> when they couldn’t pay back the money, the aristocrats took the land, made farmers become sharecroppers/day laborers, or sold farmers into slavery
Political and Social Change

- Farmers began to protest
- Farmers were very powerful in Greek armies because they were the foot soldiers
- Greek armies relied on the **phalanx** = rows of foot soldiers close together with shields to form a wall
Greek military formation known as the Phalanx was instrumental in victory.
Political and Social Change

• Middle-class artisans & merchants wanted a voice in government & joined the farmers in protest
Political and Social Change

• As a result of the unrest: tyrannies arose
  – **Tyrant** = one man --> seized power and ruled the polis
  – Most were fair; a few were cruel and unjust
  – Tyrannies ruled until 500 BCE
Political and Social Change

• 500 BCE - 336 BCE = city-states were oligarchies or democracies
  – **Oligarchy** = a few wealthy people hold power
  – **Democracy** = government by the people
  – 2 most famous Greek city-states:
    • Athens = democracy
    • Sparta = oligarchy