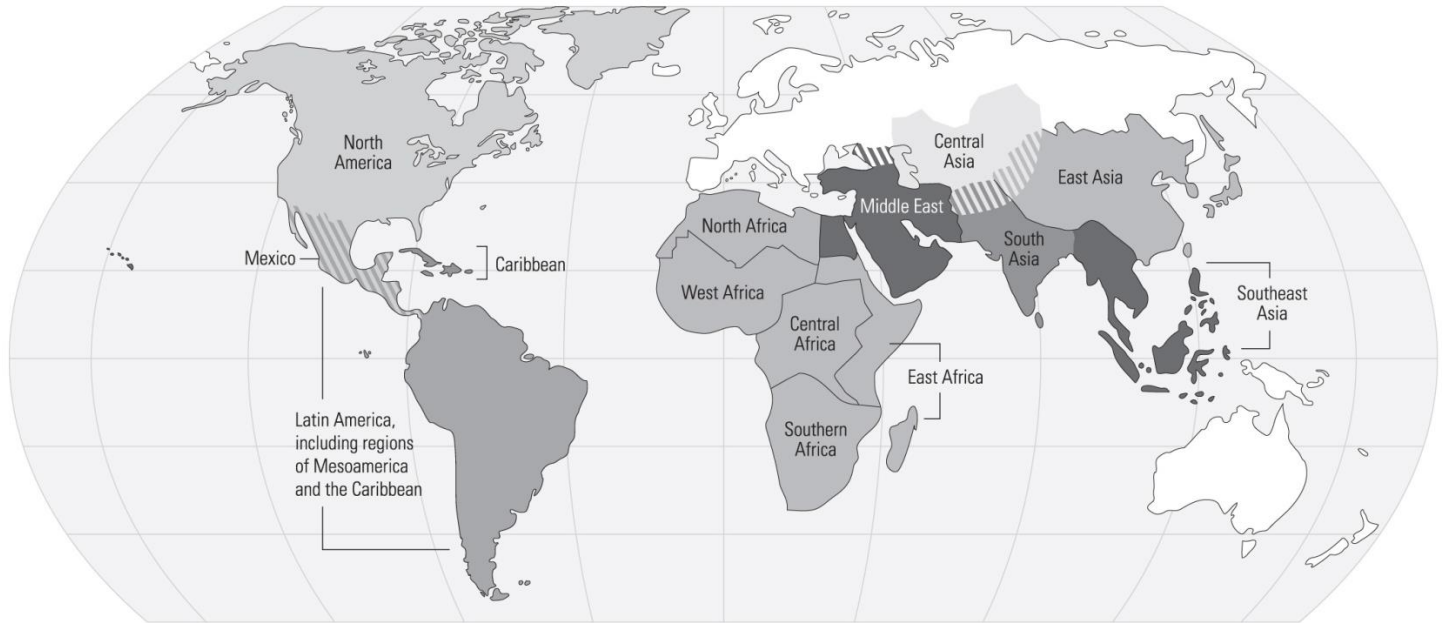


FALL OF CLASSICAL CIVILIZATIONS 600 BCE – 600 CE

Directions: read through the documents below and answer the processing questions on a separate sheet of paper. As you progress through each civilization, take notes of similarities and differences in factors that contributed to the downfall of these civilizations.



EUROPE

DOCUMENT 1

Source: Concerning Military Matters, by Vegetius (c. 450 CE)

This was written by Latin writer Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus about Roman warfare and military principles as a presentation of methods and practices in use during the height of Rome's power.

... Negligence and sloth... introduced a total relaxation of discipline [and] the soldiers began to think their armor too heavy, as they seldom put it on. ...In consequence of this, our troops in their engagements with the Goths were often overwhelmed with their showers of arrows. ...Troops, defenseless and exposed to all the weapons of the enemy, are more disposed to fly than fight. What can be expected from a foot-archer without [armor], who cannot hold at once his bow and shield; or from the ensigns whose bodies are naked, and who cannot at the same time carry a shield and the colors? But it seems these very men, who cannot support the weight of the ancient armor, think nothing of exposing themselves without defense to wounds and death, or, which is worse, to the shame of being made prisoners, or of betraying their country by flight; and thus to avoid an inconsiderable share of exercise and fatigue, suffer themselves ignominiously to be cut in pieces.

DOCUMENT 2

... By the middle of the second century Italy [within the Roman Empire] was in a state of decline. By the time of Diocletian, at the opening of the fourth century, decay was apparent throughout the empire. Commerce had largely disappeared owing to the lack of customers, to piracy on the seas, and to insecurity of the roads on land. Generally speaking, purchasing power at that time was confined to the public officials, to the army officers, and to the great landowners. Trade in the everyday objects of daily use had all but disappeared, but trade in luxuries prospered. The cities in the west, omitting the places where government centered, were usually in decline; their commercial and industrial classes had disappeared, the old traders having been replaced by the traveling eastern merchant, of whom the Syrian was the most notorious. Foreign trade was sharply curtailed. At various times the government attempted to prohibit the export of various commodities, among them wine, oil, grain, salt, arms, iron, and gold. With this curbing of exports there was also an effort made to control certain imports such as is evidenced by the state monopoly in silk. These two movements hampered commercial contracts outside the empire and all but killed what was left of foreign trade....

Source: Louis C. West, "The Economic Collapse of the Roman Empire," *The Classical Journal*, November 1932

DOCUMENT 3

Source: Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. B. Bury, ed.) London. Methuen, 1898, IV, 161-63; VII, 308.

As the happiness of a *future* life is the great object of religion, we may hear without surprise or scandal that the introduction, or at least the abuse, of Christianity, had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The clergy successfully preached the doctrines of patience and pusillanimity [cowardliness] buried in the cloister; a large portion of public and private wealth was consecrated to the demands of charity and devotion;... the Church, and even the State, were distracted by religious factions, whose conflicts were sometimes bloody and always implacable [unforgiving]; . . . the Roman world was oppressed by a new species of tyranny; and the persecuted sects became the secret enemies of their country . . . The indolence [laziness] of the monks was devoutly embraced by a servile and effeminate age . . . the decline of the Roman empire was hastened by the conversion of Constantine to Christianity.

DOCUMENT 4

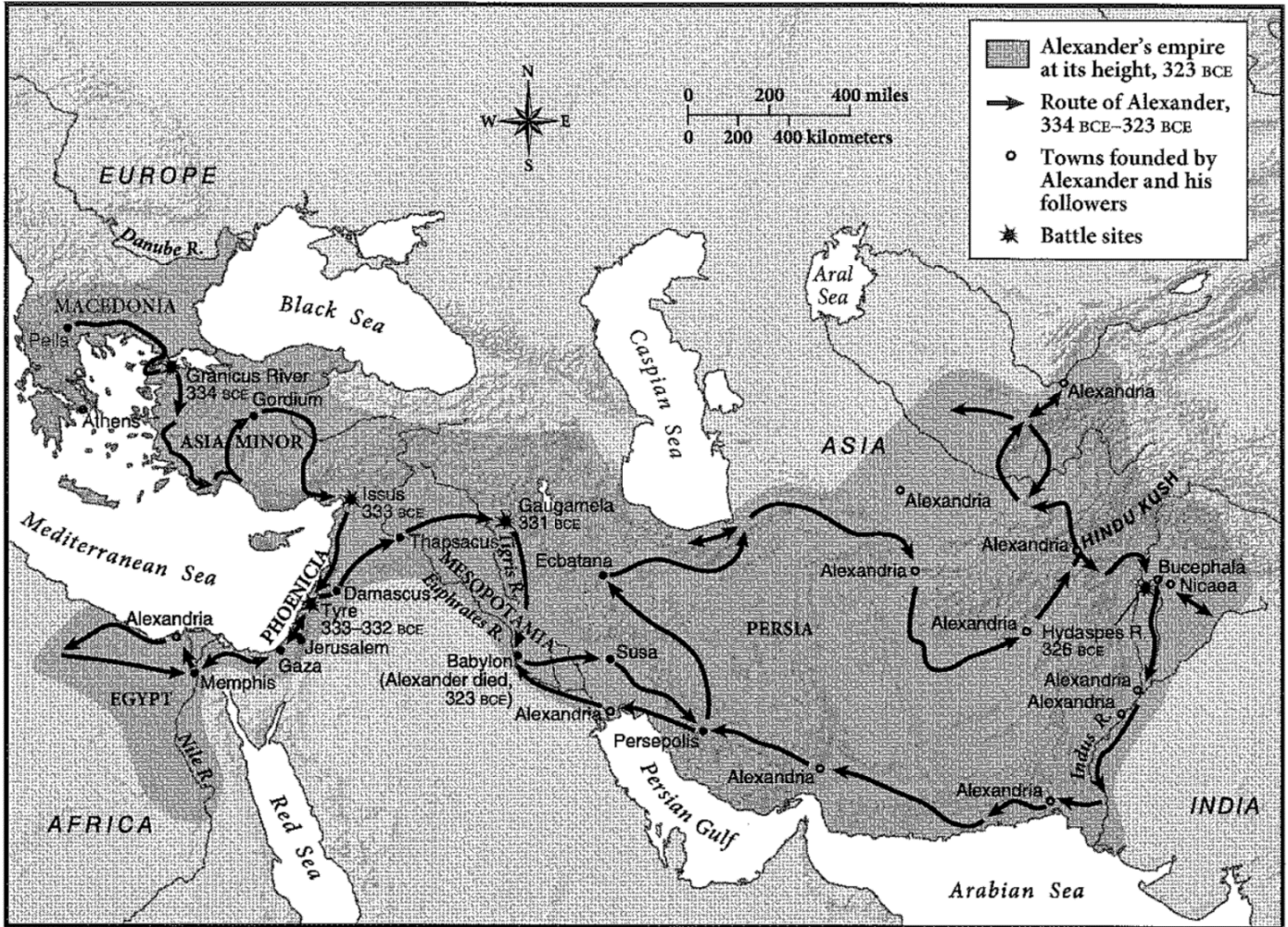
Source: World History: Patterns of Interaction. McDougal-Littell: 1999
This map shows the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire prior to 476 C.E.



SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AND SOUTHWEST ASIA

DOCUMENT 1

Alexander's Empire



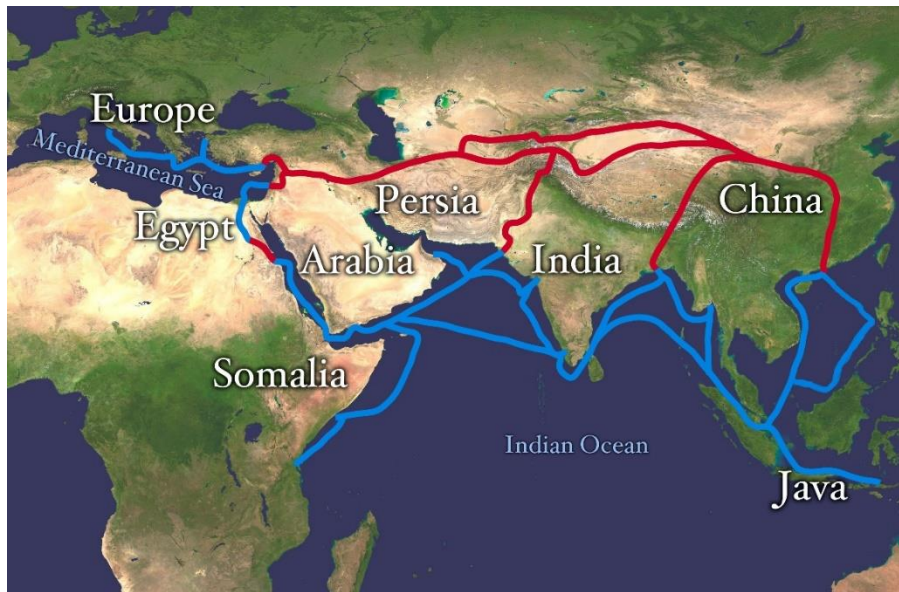
Note: In 334 BCE, Alexander crossed from Macedonia to Asia with an army of about 40,000. Most were Macedonians; others were Greeks and mercenaries (hired fighters).

TRANSREGIONAL INTERACTIONS

DOCUMENT 1

Source: Rosie Friedland and David Rheinstrom,

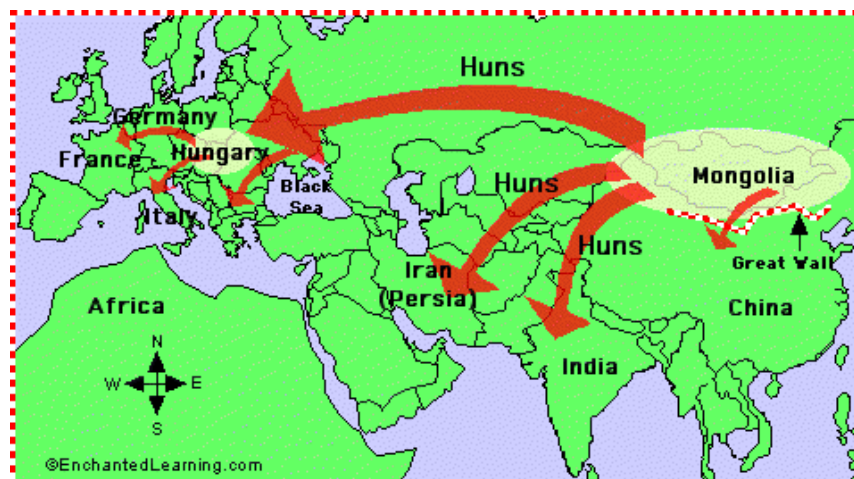
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/ancient-medieval/silk-road/a/the-silk-road>



Ideas and diseases were also exchanged along the sea lanes and camel-routes—and both would have profound effects on the locations they traveled to. Toward the end of the second century, a plague tore through the Roman Empire, killing 10% of the population. Historians think that this plague first appeared in China before making its way through trade routes to the Near East, where Roman soldiers were campaigning.

As for the exchange of ideas, Buddhism came to China through trade with India. The Sogdians of central Asia often acted as traders between India and China. Sogdians also translated Sanskrit sutras into Chinese and spread the Buddhist faith as they traded. Other faiths, like Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Christianity also traveled along the sea and land routes. These religions developed and changed to fit the new regions they travelled to.

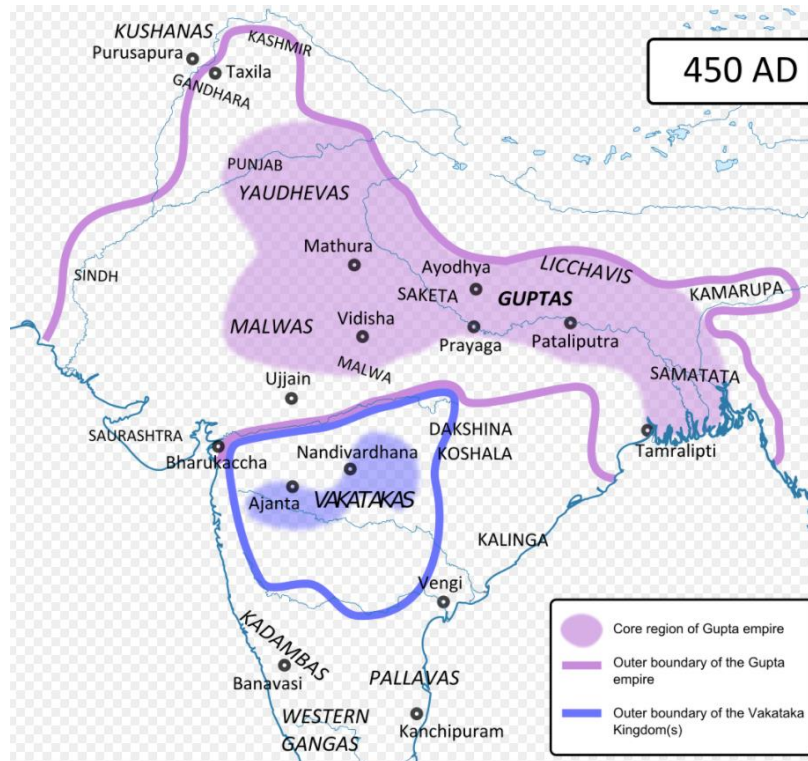
DOCUMENT 2



SOUTH ASIA

DOCUMENT 1

Source: Stearns, Peter, Michael Adas, Stuart B. Schwartz, and Marc Jason Gilbert. World Civilizations. 4th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.



The Gupta dynasty ruled a large empire in northern India from roughly 320 CE to 550 CE. This dynasty reached the height of its power in about 450 CE, as shown on the map below. From about 450 CE on, the Gupta Empire faced invasions in the northwest region of the empire from the Hephthalites—sometimes called the White Huns. These ongoing attacks drained Gupta military and financial resources and led to century-long process of decline.

The decline of classical civilization in India was less drastic than the collapse of Han China. The ability of the Gupta emperors to control local princes was declining by the 5th century. Invasions by nomadic peoples, probably Hun tribes similar to those who were pressing into Europe, affected some northern portions of India as early as 500 C.E. During the next century, the invaders penetrated much deeper, destroying the Gupta Empire in central India. Many of the invaders were integrated into the warrior caste of India, forming a new ruling group of regional princes. For several centuries, no native ruler attempted to build a large Indian state. The regional princes, collectively called Rajput, controlled the small states and emphasized military prowess. Few political events of more than local significance occurred.

DOCUMENT 2

Source: Smitha, Frank. "The Gupta Empire and Hinduism, 320 to 500 CE." [MacroHistory](http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch28gup.htm). 01 Aug 2006. MacroHistory. 11 Aug 2006 <<http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch28gup.htm>>.

Chandra Gupta II died in 415 and was succeeded by his son, Kumara Gupta, who maintained India's peace and prosperity. During his forty-year reign the Gupta Empire remained undiminished. Then - as was the Roman Empire around this time - India suffered more invasions. Kumara Gupta's son, the crown prince, Skanda Gupta, was able to drive the invaders - the White Huns - back, into the Sassanian Empire, where they were to defeat the Sassanid army and kill the Sassanid king, Firuz.

In India, women and children sang praises to Skanda Gupta. Skanda Gupta succeeded his father in 455. Then the White Huns returned, and he spent much of his reign of twenty-five years combating them, which drained his treasury and weakened his empire. Skanda Gupta died in 467, and after a century and a half the cycle of rise and disintegration of empire turned again to disintegration. Contributing to this was dissention within the royal family. Benefiting from this dissention, governors of provinces and feudal chieftains revolted against Gupta rule. For a while, the Gupta Empire had two centers: at Valabhi on the western coast and at Pataliputra toward the east. Seeing weakness, the White Huns invaded India again - in greater number. Just before the year 500, the Hephthalites took control of the Punjab. After 515, they absorbed the Kashmir, and they advanced into the Ganges Valley, the heart of India, raping, burning, massacring, blotting out entire cities and reducing fine buildings to rubble. Provinces and feudal territories declared their independence, and the whole of north India became divided among numerous independent kingdoms. And with this fragmentation India was again torn by numerous small wars between local rulers.

THE AMERICAS

DOCUMENT 1

Source: Charles C. Mann, 1491: New Revelations Of The Americas Before Columbus, 2005

Why did the Maya abandon all their cities?...

In the 1930s, Sylvanus G. Morley of Harvard, probably the most celebrated Mayanist of his day, espoused what is still the best-known theory: The Maya collapsed because they overshot the carrying capacity of their environment. They exhausted their resource base, began to die of starvation and thirst, and fled their cities en masse, leaving them as silent warning of the perils of ecological hubris.

When Morley proposed his theory, it was little more than a hunch. Since then, through scientific measurements, mainly of pollen in lake sediments, have shown that the Maya did cut down much of the region's forests, using the wood for fuel and the land for agriculture. The loss of tree cover would have caused large-scale erosion and floods. With their fields disappearing beneath their feet and a growing population to feed, Maya farmers were forced to exploit ever more marginal terrain with ever more intensity. The tottering system was vulnerable to the first good push, which came in the form of a century-long dry spell that hit the Yucatán between about 800 and 900 [C.E.] Social disintegration followed soon thereafter.

DOCUMENT 2

Source: Dr. Gerald Haug

"There were three exceptionally severe drought events, lasting three, six, and nine years, during which there was very little to no rainfall at all," says Hughen. "And during an already dry climate, even these fairly short periods of nearly zero rainfall, of absent rainy seasons, could have pushed the Maya civilization to the breaking point."

The droughts occurred around 810, 860, and 910 CE, dates which correspond to the three phases of Maya collapse shown by archaeological evidence. The Maya civilization depended on a consistent rainfall cycle to support its agricultural production. Their primary food was maize (corn), which they started growing around 2000 BCE, and maize production was their main economic activity. So scientists believe these droughts, during which there was almost no rainfall, probably forced the Maya civilization to the brink of collapse by putting a strain on their resources. Some scientists also believe that the droughts may have led people to question the power of the ruling class in Maya society because the established ceremonies failed to "bring back" the water during these dry periods.

DOCUMENT 3

Source: Professor Emily Keen, University of California: San Diego

From 205–600 CE, it is believed that Mayan warfare was more or less restricted to the kings and other royals: they were kidnapped by rivals as a means of absorbing their power as rulers. However, in the late Classic period, the Toltec people infiltrated the Mayan territory and influenced their culture, including how the Mayan elite waged war. Maya rulers began to involve large segments of the population in war. With entire communities engaged in warfare, fields were left fallow and water control systems deteriorated.

Classic Maya kings were also believed to be gods on Earth. As such, they were responsible for bringing rain to their land and ensuring that enough food was produced. This belief system worked well when resources were bountiful, but when they were not, some people may have turned against their kings in anger. Others may have fled city centers to escape their dissatisfaction. Maya leaders fought among themselves as well, and many began wars to expand their territories. When resources were scarce, regional centers most likely waged wars against one another to compete for food and water. The shortage of food and water, combined with the wars between regional centers, helped to trigger a collapse in their civilization.

EAST ASIA

DOCUMENT 1

Source: <http://www.koreanhistoryproject.org/Ket/C02/E0203.htm>

. . . The near constant need to mount an effective military defense against nomadic raids demanded manpower, food, horses, and weapons. To maintain itself, the central government imposed increasingly heavy taxes on the peasants in the north. The growing power of China's private land owners however, brought a dramatic drop in the number of tax-paying peasants, particularly in North China and the northern frontier regions. Eventually, the tax burden became unbearable. Many peasants fled south where taxes were lower, or moved onto the estates of the great land owners, where rent was a far less crushing burden than the taxes paid by free peasants. The inevitable result of this population shift was a dwindling number of tax-paying peasants in the north. The government persisted in its demands for money, imposing an ever-increasing tax burden on a diminishing tax base. Hard-pressed peasants faced the choice of turning to banditry or open revolt, either of which further weakened the dynasty's finances. Once this downward spiral began, nothing would stop it.

The decline of the Later Han Dynasty accelerated toward the end of 2nd century, yet the Chinese government took no effective measures to control the disintegration of its empire. While Chinese bureaucrats spent much of their time redistributing the empire's wealth among themselves, the collapse of the tax-paying peasantry ruined both the forced manual labor system and the peasant draft army. China's professional armies generally became the private forces of the rich land-owning generals who commanded them. These private armies grew in both size and power until the generals became virtually independent warlords, men too powerful to be curbed by the central government. Soon, these warlords completely overshadowed the central Chinese government; in fact, they controlled it.

DOCUMENT 2

Source: http://kongming.net/novel/writings/jiangzhi/long_united_must_divide.php

Because of the weakened Han military, the Yellow Turban Rebellion also caused the Han government to desperately recruit men to fight for their cause. However, charismatic leaders managed to form their own paramilitary groups and join the Han army to deal with the uprising. An example of this can be seen in the first chapter of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* where the emperor issues a call for volunteer fighters against the rebels. The protagonist, Liu Bei, decides to recruit his own army instead of joining up with the government forces. Another example deals with a volunteer army recruited from Southern China to deal with the rebels. According to Sun Jian's biography in the *Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms*, the young military officer, Sun Jian, gathered recruits from his home district and joined up with the Han army to fight against the Yellow Turban rebels. While the central government decayed, these paramilitary groups grew in strength.

DOCUMENT 3

Source: <http://www.flowofhistory.com/units/asia/8/FC54>

As powerful and prosperous as Han China was, it had an inherent weakness, namely that it was based on a huge army and bureaucracy that put a tremendous strain on the economy. This had two main results. First of all, the peasants, who bore the brunt of the taxes, increasingly lost their lands to nobles whose power grew in opposition to the central government. This caused revolts both by oppressed peasants and power hungry nobles. Secondly, as the economy faltered under the strain of heavy taxes, nomadic raids stepped up, which hurt the economy even more, triggering more raids, and so on. Together, these raids and revolts weakened the Han Dynasty, forcing it to increase the army and taxes, and so on. Finally, in 220 C.E., the Han Dynasty fell, ushering in another period of turmoil.

DOCUMENT 4

Source: Stearns, Peter, Michael Adas, Stuart B. Schwartz, and Marc Jason Gilbert. World Civilizations. 4th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.

By about 100 C.E., the Han dynasty in China began to enter a serious decline. Confucian intellectual activity gradually became less creative. Politically, the central government's control diminished, bureaucrats became more corrupt, and local landlords took up much of the slack, ruling their neighborhoods according to their own wishes. The free peasants, long heavily taxed, were burdened with new taxes and demands of service by these same landlords. Many lost their farms and became day laborers on the large estates. Some had to sell their children into service.

Social unrest increased, producing a great revolutionary effort led by Daoists in 184 C.E. Daoism now gained new appeal, shifting toward a popular religion and adding healing practices and magic to earlier philosophical beliefs. The Daoist leaders, called the Yellow Turbans, promised a golden age that was to be brought about by divine magic. The Yellow Turbans attacked the weakness of the emperor but also the self-indulgence of the current bureaucracy. As many as 30,000 students demonstrated against the decline of government morality. However, their protests failed, and Chinese population growth and prosperity both spiraled further downward. The imperial court was mired in intrigue and civil war.

Why Don't Empires Last?

Johnson and Johnson. *The Human Drama World History: From the Beginning to 500 C.E.*

Many factors contributed to the strength and endurance of both the Roman and Han empires. But after several centuries of glory, both began a period of decline and political decentralization. Why did these great empires disintegrate? What caused the central governments to lose control, trade to diminish, and creativity in the arts and literature to fade! Historians often write about the fall of Rome. Starting in the Third century, authority and legitimacy of the Roman government began to weaken, and it could no longer control the provinces. By that time the Han Empire had lost much of its hold over its territory as well.

We can only speculate to what extent people living through these periods of decline realized what was happening. Most subjects within an empire, we have noted, are unaware of what is going on in the capital. Local bureaucrats demand taxes and corvee and carry out the will of the central government as best as they can. Although the central government's vast network of control and communication is impressive, the daily lives of most people, especially those in distant provinces, are hardly affected. However, when people no longer feel secure and are not "left in peace" they begin to care a great deal about "who rules the land."

Taxes

The financial base in both empires eroded as peasants had difficulty paying taxes. Rates were high in part because many large estates in both areas were no longer taxed. Rich Roman land owners resisted paying taxes to a government that was no longer providing services, and often a landlord's armed guards drove tax collectors away. In addition, much church land was not taxed. In China many of the large estates owned by scholar officials were tax free. When local officials in both areas tried to force peasants to pay their taxes, some fled to local landlords for protection from tax collectors and marauding bandits, asking to live on their estates in exchange for working the land. Land owners welcomed these additional laborers, who worked for almost nothing. In Rome large estates attracted craftsmen who were having trouble finding markets for their goods. These artisans made tools and other implements, and the estates became increasingly self-sufficient.

Population

Changes in population added to the problem of collecting enough revenue. Beginning in 165 C.E., a series of plagues killed hundreds of thousands of people in the Roman Empire, drastically reduced the farming population. The lands often lay fallow, producing no taxes. In China population increases led to smaller family plots. Some peasants who were unable to pay the tax fled south to the Yangzi Valley.

Trade

Decline in trade was more of a problem in Rome than in Han China. Many Chinese communities were self-sufficient and most trade was carried out as part of the tributary system. Many within Roman territories, on the other hand, relied on trade, so when the legions spent less time repairing roads and bridges and guarding travelers, bandits and pirates attacked travelers and ships, leading to a sharp decline in trade. Less trade meant fewer taxes. In addition, the Roman government minted money not backed by silver, causing inflation.

The Bureaucracy

Administrative problems plagued both empires. The Roman government had trouble recruiting bureaucrats who could enforce laws and collect taxes. The later Han was unable to check the power of the large private estate owners. Many were able to bypass the exam system by buying position in the bureaucracy, which elevated their status.

Succession

Establishing an orderly system for selecting the new ruler had always been problematic for Roman citizens who wanted to hold on to the fiction that the Senate chose the new emperor. In reality would-be rulers usually fought for the throne, and soldiers, hoping for shared rewards, supported their generals. Once in power, the new emperor concentrated on winning the loyalty and protection of the Praetorian Guards and then the entire army. Even with this loyalty, however, being emperor became a dangerous job – between 235 and 284 C.E. 25 out of 26 emperors died violent deaths.

Emperor Diocletian, who ruled as an absolute monarch, tried to stem the political and economic decline by introducing reforms that improved tax collection, froze prices, and required sons to perform the same jobs as their fathers. To govern more effectively, he divided the empire in half, making two separate administrative units. He ruled the western half from Rome and a trusted colleague ruled the eastern half. After Constantinople became the capital of the eastern half of the empire, the stronger emperors ruled from that city, and trade, manufacturing, and cultural creativity were concentrated in the east, further weakening the western half.

Court Intrigues

Unlike Rome, in Han China the constant intrigues of corrupt officials, especially those close to the emperor created instability. Battles over succession took place in halls and bedrooms inside the palace not on streets or battle fields. Isolated from the outside world, the ruler relied on competing court officials to find out what was going on. He also had to balance the desires of his consorts, who often sought power for their own sons and families. In addition eunuchs who guarded the women's quarters, were often involved in palace intrigues.

Emperor Han Huandi increased the power of the court eunuchs, even allowing them to kill members of his consort's families. Soon the eunuchs were telling the emperor whom to reward with titles or honors, whom to be sent to torture or be killed and who should become scholar officials. They made sure that their relatives and friends got positions of power. Others had to bribe the eunuchs. To counter the eunuchs' power, the scholars formed their own association. Unfortunately, the next emperor did not trust the scholars and ordered them executed.

In the countryside, feeling desperate, many people rallied around a leader of a Taoist sect who seemed to have magical powers. In 184 C.E. his group and another secret society rebelled against the Han. The emperor was killed, the palace was destroyed, and chaos followed as nomads sacked the city. By 220 the Han had lost the Mandate.

INVASIONS:

As the Xiongnu went west they put pressure on other pastoral groups, causing some, including the Kushans, to move into northern India. These domino-like pressures also helped trigger the movement of nomadic and semi-nomadic German peoples into territories under Roman Hegemony.

Sometime before the start of the first millennium B.C.E. Germanic groups began to move out of the steppes of central Asia and into the sparsely settled lands of the west. The "Germani," as the Romans called these nomadic bands, split into two major bands: the Teutons and the Goths.

Although these groups were not skilled farmers, they had superior military technology and an impressive fighting spirit; by the second century B.C.E. they were threatening Roman forces. During Julius Caesar's rule some tried to conquer eastern Gaul, but Roman legions stopped them. Many settled down along the Rhine and Danube Rivers. For decades there were many relatively peaceful interchanges with the Romans. Some even joined the legions, and many who were captured in battle worked as slaves in the Empire.

But the Xiongnu helped upset this balance. As increasing numbers moved further west in the 4th century C.E., both Germanic groups and Romans tried to stop the advance of these people they call the Huns. Both considered the Huns violent savage men who covered vast distances with amazing speed, riding on their ponies.

With stirrups, Hun warriors could stand erect astride their galloping horses, making it possible to shoot arrows with deadly accuracy. Hun attacks made Germanic groups step up their pressure along the border of the Roman Empire. When the Huns crossed the Volga River in 372, the Ostrogoths begged permission from Rome to cross into its territory for protection. Rome allowed them to cross the Danube, but when the Ostrogoths did not get the land and food they believed the Romans had promised, they began to pillage. In 378 the Ostrogoths defeated several Roman legions. Some Roman peasants welcomed the Germanic peoples as deliverers from Roman taxation and oppression, and a buffer against the Huns.

By the 5th century the center of the Hun confederacy was in present-day Hungary. Under its leader, Attila, they made repeated assaults against Roman territory, even attacking Gaul. After Attila's death, the Huns continued their aggression, but by the 6th century they disappear from historical record.

In 410 a Visigoth general sacked Rome, and Roman officials bought peace by granting him control of southern Gaul and Spain. By 425 German chieftains had set up many small kingdoms within the territory that had been part of the Empire. In 476 Odoacer, a German chief, captured Rome and made himself king of Italy, the date many historians use as the official end of the Western Roman Empire.