

CHAPTER  
**4**

CHAPTERS IN BRIEF *First Age of Empires,  
1570 B.C.–200 B.C.*

Summary

**CHAPTER OVERVIEW** *Egypt becomes an empire by conquering other lands. It later falls to the Assyrians, who are highly skilled at war. When they fall, Persians become the power in Southwest Asia. Their empire treats conquered peoples less harshly. In China, thinkers develop different ideas to restore values after the warring Zhou Dynasty falls. However, the new Qin Dynasty is just as cruel.*

## 1 The Egyptian and Nubian Empires

**KEY IDEA** *After Egypt conquered Nubia, these two empires along the Nile began trading and cultural ties.*

At the end of its second period of glory, Egypt was weakened by internal power struggles. New invaders, the Hyksos, soon swept into Egypt. They had the chariot, a new machine of war that the Egyptians had never seen before. The Hyksos ruled Egypt for many years until the pharaohs took back their land. Then they began some conquests of their own. The time from 1570 to 1075 B.C. is called the New Kingdom. In this third period, Egypt was richer, more powerful than ever.

The pharaohs of this New Kingdom brought Egyptian rule to Syria and Palestine in the east. They also moved south into Nubia, a part of Africa that lay near where the Nile began. Egypt had traded with and influenced Nubia for centuries. During the New Kingdom, the rulers of the Nubian kingdom of Kush accepted many traditions and ideas from Egypt. They began to build pyramids, to worship Egyptian gods, to wear Egyptian clothing, and to use a form of writing that was similar to the writing used in Egypt.

The pharaohs of the New Kingdom also wanted to create great tombs for themselves. They did not build pyramids, like those who had come before, however, because these tombs were often looted for their precious goods. Instead, they built their tombs in a secret place called the Valley of the Kings. Some pharaohs also built huge palaces for themselves or temples to the Egyptian gods.

Eventually, though, the pharaohs became weaker. Starting around 1200 B.C., a new group of people reached the eastern Mediterranean, and they brought trouble with them. As the power of Egypt fell, the land broke into many small kingdoms. Soon people from Libya took control of the land. The rulers in Kush felt that they were the pro-

ductors of Egyptian civilization. They moved into Egypt to force the Libyans out.

The Kushites ruled Egypt for a few decades until another people—the Assyrians—invaded and forced them back to their home. There the Kushite kings settled in the city of Meroë, south of Egypt. Their kingdom entered a golden age. The city was far enough from Egypt to protect it from attack. Yet, it was close enough to trade routes to play an important role in trade. Meroë also became an important center for making iron—and weapons of iron.

Traders in the city brought their iron to the ports of the Red Sea. They were taken on ships to Arabia and India. The traders from Meroë, in the meantime, brought back jewelry, cloth, silver lamps, and glass bottles. The city thrived from about 250 B.C. to about A.D. 150. By A.D. 350 Meroë had fallen to rival Aksum, a seaport farther south.

## 2 The Assyrian Empire

**KEY IDEA** *Assyria created a powerful army and conquered its neighbors. Rulers built an empire and formed a government to run it.*

The Assyrians who took Egypt had started their career of conquest hundreds of years earlier and farther to the east. They came from the northern part of Mesopotamia. Their homes were open to attack, however. The Assyrians decided to form a strong fighting force to defend their homes. Soon, though, they turned to conquest.

The Assyrians used many different methods to win their battles. Their soldiers wore leather or metal armor and carried strong iron-tipped spears and iron swords. They used troops for rapid attacks and large numbers of men with bows to shower an enemy with arrows. Some opponents hoped city walls would stop the Assyrian army, but they could not. The Assyrians simply dug tunnels under the walls to weaken them. They used heavy battering rams to knock down the

wooden gates of the city. The Assyrians conquered almost everything in their path. They usually killed or enslaved those they defeated.

Between 850 and 650 B.C., the Assyrians conquered all of Mesopotamia along with Syria and Palestine. Then they took modern Turkey and Egypt. They ruled by putting kings in power who would support them. They also collected taxes and tribute—yearly payments a people make to a stronger power. If a city did not hand over the year’s tribute, the Assyrian army moved in and destroyed it.

The Assyrian kings were builders, too. One built the city of Nineveh on the north branch of the Tigris River. It was the largest city of its day. Another gathered thousands and thousands of writing tablets from the lands that had been taken. When these were found in modern times, they gave historians much information about the ancient world.

The Assyrians’ cruelty had made many enemies over the years, however. Eventually those enemies banded together and struck back. In 612 B.C., an army captured Nineveh. To pay the Assyrians back for their past actions, it destroyed the city.

The Chaldeans, who had ruled the area earlier, took control of Mesopotamia again. They rebuilt the city of Babylon, and once more they made it one of the greatest cities of the world. The city included famous gardens that brought many different plants from the cool mountain regions to the dry desert where the city was. To keep the plants alive, slaves worked hidden pumps that brought water to the garden.

They also built a huge building called a ziggurat. This was a step-shaped pyramid that soared 300 feet into the air. At night, scientists would study the stars and the planets. What they saw and recorded became the beginnings of the science of astronomy.

### 3 The Persian Empire

**KEY IDEA** *The Persian Empire accepted the differences of many different peoples as rulers tried to govern wisely.*

**E**ast of Mesopotamia, in modern Iran, arose a new power in the ancient world, Persia. The area had good farmland and was rich in such minerals as copper, lead, gold, and silver. About 550 B.C., the Persians began conquering neighboring kingdoms and founded a huge empire.

Their leader was King Cyrus, an excellent general. Cyrus led his army to conquer a huge empire

that stretched from the Indus Valley in India all the way through Mesopotamia to Turkey. It covered about 2,000 miles, and he took all this land in just over 10 years.

Helping Cyrus win this vast land was the wise way he treated the people who lived in these lands. Unlike the Assyrians, who destroyed towns and cities, Cyrus made sure that his army did nothing to harm the people he conquered. He allowed the people to practice their old religions, too. It was Cyrus who let the Hebrews return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple there.

Cyrus died in 530 B.C., and the kings who followed him had to decide how to run the vast new empire. His son was a failure, but the next king—Darius—proved as able as Cyrus had been. He put down several revolts, won more land for the empire, and created a government for the empire. Only Greece escaped Persian control.

Darius divided the land into 20 provinces, each holding a certain group of people. He allowed each group to practice its own religion, speak its own language, and obey many of its own laws. He also put royal governors in place to make sure that the people obeyed his laws. To bring his large empire together, Darius built a road that ran 1,677 miles and made it easy to move goods—and troops—from place to place. Also, Darius made metal coins that could be used for business anywhere in the empire. This was the first time that an empire so large shared a system of money.

During the Persian Empire, a new religion arose in Southwest Asia. A prophet named Zoroaster tried to explain why the world worked as it did. The earth is a battleground, he said, where the spirit of good and the spirit of evil fight. Each person is supposed to take part in the struggle. How a person would be judged depended on how well he or she fought for good. These ideas had influence on later religions.

### 4 The Unification of China

**KEY IDEA** *War and turmoil in China helped produce new philosophies and a drive to bring together the Chinese people.*

**I**n Chapter 2, you learned that China’s Zhou Dynasty collapsed into the “warring states period.” China became a land of troubles. Long-held Chinese values—social order, harmony among people, and respect for leaders—were forgotten.

Some thinkers, however, tried to find ways to restore these values.

One of the most important of these thinkers was Confucius. Born in 551 B.C., he became a well-educated man who thought deeply about the troubles of China. He believed that a time of peace could return if the people would work at five basic relationships: ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brothers, and friend and friend. The family relationships, he thought, were the most important.

He also tried to change government for the better. Using his ideas, the Chinese built a system in which people could work in the government only if they had a good education. Over time, the ideas of Confucius spread to other countries of East Asia.

Another thinker of this period was Laozi, who was more interested in putting people in touch with the powerful forces of nature. Nature follows a universal force called the Dao, or “the Way,” said Laozi. People do not follow this force, but they can learn to do so.

A third set of ideas came from a group of people called the Legalists. They said that the way to restore order in China was to have a strong government. A ruler should reward those who do what they are supposed to do, the Legalists said, and punish harshly those who do wrong.

These three ways to restore values were just philosophical debates. So, for practical advice in solving problems, people in China could consult a book called *I Ching*. Other people turned to the idea of Yin and Yang, two powers that balanced together to make harmony in the universe. Yang represented all that is warm, bright, hard, and clear. Yin stood for all that is cold, dark, soft, and mysterious. By having these two forces in balance, a person could reach harmony.

While these ideas moved through China, a new ruler arose to put an end to the troubles of the warring states period. At 13, he became king of a part of China called Qin (chihn), and he used the ideas of the Legalists to bring the different parts of China together. In 221 B.C., he took a new name—Shi Huangdi, which means “First Emperor.”

Shi Huangdi defeated many leaders of different states and doubled the size of China. He also acted to extend his power within this land. He forced wealthy nobles to give up their land in the country and move to his capital city. There he kept a watchful eye on them, while he gave their land to members

of his government. The emperor wanted to control ideas, too. He ordered his government to burn many books—those that held ideas that he disagreed with.

Shi Huangdi also took steps to bring all parts of his empire together. He ordered the peasants to build a network of roads that linked one corner to another. The roads made trade grow, but the peasants hated the emperor for the forced work. He set standards for writing, law, money, and weights and measures that were to be followed throughout the empire.

Finally, he moved to protect his empire from foreign invaders. In the past, some Chinese rulers had built sections of wall to try to block attacks from northern nomads. Emperor Shi Huangdi had hundreds of thousands of poor people work to connect these sections of wall and make a huge barrier. When finished, the Great Wall of China stretched from the Yellow Sea to the Gobi Desert.

These steps won the emperor little support. When he died, his son took the throne. Just three years into his reign, peasants revolted and managed to overthrow the emperor. By 202 B.C., the Qin Dynasty had given way to the Han Dynasty.

## Review

1. **Clarifying** Why did the Kushites move into Egypt, and where did they go after they were defeated?
2. **Drawing Conclusions** What made the Assyrians such a powerful army?
3. **Comparing and Contrasting** What was different about how Cyrus ruled his empire?
4. **Summarizing** Describe the three ways to restore values that were lost in China during the time of the warring states.
5. **Clarifying** What did Shi Huangdi do to unite his empire?