**Chapter Five:**   
Peoples and World Empires of Eurasia 500 B.C.E. – 500 C.E.

**Chapter Five Focus Questions:**

1. How did the new religious ideas of the last centuries B.C.E. suit the social and political structures of India?
2. How did the early Chinese philosophers come to have a long-lasting influence on the intellectual development of the region?
3. What were the cultural innovations of classical Greece, and how did they affect the peoples of Greece, North Africa, and Southwest Asia?
4. How did the lives and livelihoods of the peoples of Atlantic Europe differ from those of the Mediterranean peoples?

**Chapter Five Summary:**

The Axial Age—a time of pivotal intellectual shifts developed in Eurasia—led to the creation of what is now known as the classical ages in India, China, and Greece from around 500 B.C.E. – 500 C.E. Starting in India, religious developments of Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism caused fundamental changes to Indian culture and society, allowing for the creation of unified empires. In China, intellectual developments of Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism paved the way for China’s first empires, the Qin and Han. In Greece, the Golden Age of Athens created intellectual and political changes that are still felt today. All of these benefitted from trade and interaction with one another, especially in the Hellenistic period, when Greek ideas and culture were transmitted throughout Eurasia. With all of these development and connections, the Counterpoint of this chapter focuses on the Celts, who did have connections with these classical regions, but had different lifestyles and ideologies, and many of those aspects (especially languages) still survive today.

**Chapter Five Annotated Outline:**

1. Backstory
   * 1. This period of history in Eurasia is known as the classical ages because the ideas were preserved and treasured into modern times.
     2. The entire era has been called the Axial Age; a time of pivotal intellectual shifts.
2. India: Thinkers, Traders, and Courtly Cultures 500 B.C.E. – 500 C.E.
   * 1. Around 500 B.C.E. Indian culture and society started to undergo fundamental changes that continued for almost a millennium.
3. Religious Ferment: The Rise of Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism
4. The Vedic cast system was ill suited to Indian society of this time, and many were unhappy with their secondary status.
5. They often turned to religious teachers, who prescribed asceticism.
6. One new religion was Jainism, which taught that all things had a soul, nonviolence was key, dharma was the moral virtue to inspire their behavior, and they tried to end the cycle or reincarnation through ascetic behavior such as fasting.
7. While few could fully adhere to such rigor and pacifism, it did inspire some, including Mahatma Gandhi.
8. Another religion that originated in India was Buddhism, which had a powerful impact on the entire Asian continent.
9. The Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) formulated the idea of “the middle way”: a balanced way of life between luxury and asceticism to end human suffering.
10. He created the Four Nobel Truths; and Buddhism’s appeal relied on the “three jewels”: The charismatic teacher (the Buddha); his teachings (his interpretation of dharma); and the community (sangha).
11. Those who devoted their lives to Buddhism rounded monasteries and strove to reach a state without desire, hatred, and ignorance, known as nirvana.
12. As followers interpreted the Buddha’s teachings, different schools of thought emerged, and the support of royals and merchants greatly facilitated the spread of Buddhism.
13. Buddhism and Jainism Challenged the Vedic tradition, and as a result, the Vedic tradition evolved; mostly by abandoning its special treatment of the Brahmins.
14. The new religion, Hinduism, emphasized the value of the individual: all people had an obligation to carry out the duties of their caste.
15. The poem known as the *Bhagavad Gita* explains how a person could attain the ideal balance in an active life, according to Hinduism.
16. Unity and Fragmentation: The Mauryan and Gupta Empires
17. Because of its vast size and diverse population it was not easy to bring the Indian subcontinent under central political control, but between 300 B.C.E. and 500 C.E., the Mauryan and Gupta Empires controlled large parts of India.
18. An Indian prince, Chandragupta, established himself as ruler of the kingdom of Magadha, and through conquest and clever diplomacy, he created the largest empire in Indian history (Mauryan Empire).
19. Chandragupta relied on his chief adviser Kautilya to create the administration, and he left behind a handbook on government known as the *Arthasastra.*
20. The religious climate also deeply influenced Chandragupta’s grandson and successor, Ashoka, who used Buddhist ideals in his government.
21. Ashoka was a tolerant leader, who led by example, but the empire did not long outlast his death. By 185 B.C.E. the Mauryan Empire was no more, and various regions of India had regained independence.
22. India was temporarily reunited when the Gupta dynasty from the Ganges Valley created a smaller state, led by Chandra Gupta.
23. The Gupta Empire was based more on cooperation and was much more decentralized. Leaders, such as Samudra Gupta (Chandra’s son), used violence and threats to hold the empire together.
24. However, under increasing pressure from Central Asian nomads, the Gupta Empire disappeared by 540 C.E.
25. A Crossroads of Trade
26. India’s location at the crossroads of land and sea trade routes across Asia placed it at the center of an enormous and dynamic international trading system.
27. India’s merchants took advantage of the age-old trade routes which later became known as the Silk Roads.
28. Literary and Scientific Flowering
29. Despite the region’s shifting political circumstances, this time was a period of great literary production for India.
30. The language of the Vedas inspired the primary literary language of ancient India, Sanskrit.
31. While Sanskrit texts fall into a wide range of genres, the most prominent are the epics, including the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.
32. Scholarship also flourished, as grammar was developed for Sanskrit, and investigations in astronomy, medicine, physics, and chemistry brought technological wonders. This includes Indian mathematicians inventing the concept of zero.
33. China’s First Empires: The Qin and Han Dynasties 221 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.
    * 1. In East Asia, the unified Zhou kingdom started to disintegrate around 800 B.C.E., leading to the period of Warring States (480 – 221 B.C.E.).
      2. Perhaps inspired by the volatility of the time, revolutionary thinkers such as Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, and Lord Shang Yang founded intellectual movements that questioned human nature, the state, and political behavior.
      3. Implementation of their ideas led to a reconfiguration of political life that paved the way for the Qin and Han dynasties.
34. Intellectual Churning: Confucians, Daoists, and Legalists
    * 1. Confucius dominates the intellectual history of this period, and his teaching have crucially influenced Chinese society and political life to this day.
      2. His students compiled his teachings into the *Analects*, which documents his ideas about human nature, behavior, and the state.
      3. He taught proper behavior, and established moral guidelines for individuals to help produce a more peaceful and prosperous society
      4. After his death, numerous philosophers interpreted and developed his teachings; the most influential being Mencius, who emphasized the importance of human compassion.
      5. While Confucius taught proper behavior involved active participation in society, the Daoists urged people to withdraw from society and meditate.
      6. These teaching are ascribed to Laozi, and claimed that if many people behaved well, the world would be in harmony and follow its natural course.
      7. Later Daoism became an official religion, closely associated with Buddhism.
      8. Legalism, which focused on the ruler and practical aspects of government was put into practice by Lord Shang Yang, paving the way for the later unification of China.
      9. Legalism believes that every man should have an occupation beneficial to the state, so Shang Yang introduced compulsory military service, and forced others to become farmers.
      10. Legalism also stresses strict laws and harsh punishments, while focusing on the principle of collective responsibility.
35. Unification and Centralization: The Worlds of Qin and Han
    * 1. During the Warring States period, it was only when rulers inspired by the teachings of Confucius and Lord Shang were able to restore China’s political unity.
      2. The infantry rose in military importance, leading to a more meritocratic army, and iron became the preferred metal for weapons.
      3. As the military aristocracy declined, bureaucracies arose to administer states inspired by Legalism, which led to centralized systems of taxation and a military draft.
      4. The state to most successfully institute Legalism was the Qin state in western China, where Lord Shang has been minister.
      5. In 237 B.C.E., the Qin ruler, Shi Huangdi, used his economic base and large army to conquer and establish the Qin dynasty.
      6. Shi Huangdi did not tolerate dissent and had critical scholars assassinated, and all non-practical works of literature burned.
      7. Greatest building project of the Qin was the First Emperor’s tomb; an underground palace guarded by terra cotta soldiers.
      8. The death of Shi Huangdi effectively meant the end of the dynasty, but a determined and popular rebel leader, Liu Bang, established dominance and created a new dynasty, the Han.
      9. The success of the Former Han was due to its combination of Legalism and Confucianism.
      10. A combination of causes led to the collapse of the Han, including a short interruption starting in 9 C.E., when an usurper seized the throne. When the Han regained control, large numbers of peasants rose in rebellion, and although crushed, they weakened the central government.
36. Preserving and Spreading the Written Word
    * 1. The Chinese political elite placed special value on the written word, and many members of the bureaucracy buried themselves with their libraries.
      2. The Former Han was crucial to the preservation of earlier Chinese literature, and the writing of history in prose flourished under the Han, with China’s first historian, Sima Qian, defining our modern understanding of early Chinese history.
      3. This tradition was continued by a family of scholars, including Ban Zhao, a remarkable woman in the period.
      4. She was well educated, and given the task of finishing the official history of the Han dynasty, while she also wrote numerous literary and scholarly works.
37. Greece: Intellectuals and Innovators 500 – 30 B.C.E.
    * 1. The prestige and wealth in Athens allowed thinkers to develop new ideas concerning all aspects of life.
      2. Greece’s later integration into Alexander the Great’s empire promoted the spread of these ideas.
38. Athens’s Golden Age 500 – 400 B.C.E.
    1. Athenian democracy reached its zenith under Pericles, who sought to ensure that all Athenian citizens were able to take an active role in government.
    2. The art of rhetoric gained unprecedented importance, which created a niche for a new type of teacher called a sophist.
    3. Athens became an intellectual crossroads and the center of the new field of philosophy. The three most famous and influential were Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.
    4. Also important in Athens were the early historians Herodotus and Thucydides, who explored the events that shaped Greek life.
    5. In addition, Athens was the hub of extraordinary literary production, leading to tragic works from Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides that examined all aspects of human nature and society.
39. Hellenism: The Expansion of Greek Ideals and Institutions 323 – 30 B.C.E.
    * 1. After establishing dominance over Greece, Macedonia conquered the vast Persian Empire, and Greeks moved into all parts of the new Macedonian territory, leading to a cultural fusion known as Hellenism.
      2. Alexander succeeded his father Philip as king of Macedonia in 336 B.C.E., and defeated the Persians, giving him a new large empire, and the title “the Great” in later tradition.
      3. After taking his troops to all corners of the new empire, they refused to go further, and Alexander returned to Babylon, where he died in 323 B.C.E., and his death triggered long battles over succession among his generals, which led to the splitting of his empire.
      4. For the common locals in most of these areas, little changed, but the Greeks faced fundamental changes both at home and in the new empires.
      5. While kingdoms, in which absolute power passed from father to son, replaced city-states ruled by citizens, the idea of the polis did survive, and many new cities founded by Alexander were based on traditional Greek layouts; the most prominent was Alexandria, in Egypt.
      6. Alexandria became a center of learning, draying scholars and artist from all over the Greek-speaking world and beyond. This also stimulated intellectual innovation.
      7. Philosophy also flourished in the Hellenistic world, focusing more on the individual and how to live a good and proper life. Epicureans, Cynics, and Stoics defined this period of Hellenistic philosophy.
      8. Religion was also impacted, where although many people maintained their indigenous cults, they also adopted foreign gods and merged the identities of deities.
      9. However, within this world of multiple polytheistic religions, the inhabitants of Judah continued to honor their single god, Yahweh. The exact beginnings of monotheism are debated, but in the Hellenistic times monotheism of Judaism was alive, and it survived and flourished in the region.
40. Counterpoint: The Celtic Peoples of the Atlantic Zone
    1. Who were the Celts?
       1. A group of people to the north and west of Greece, who were called “Celts” by the Romans.
       2. Like the Greeks, the Romans paid little attention to the cultural distinctions among foreign peoples, thus *Celts* covers a variety of groups and cultures.
    2. Celtic Ways of Life
       1. The Celtic people were farmers living in small settlements and villages who valued warrior skills and were ruled by a military aristocracy.
       2. Warlike culture is prominent in Celtic oral literature, but unlike most ancient societies, women actively participated in military life, and could become war leaders.
       3. One example was Queen Boudicca, who led an army against Rome in 60 C.E., because of the mistreatment of her people by the Romans. Although her troops lost and she committed suicide, her memory was revived as a symbol of resistance and woman’s valor.
       4. The Celts were polytheistic, and Roman authors provide some information on their early religious practices, including human sacrifices that they Romans tried to ban, without success.
    3. Contacts with the Mediterranean
       1. Starting in the early first millennium B.C.E., Celtic contacts with the Mediterranean world were extensive, and they grew over time.
       2. Phoenician and Greek colonies in the western Mediterranean were places of exchange, and did give some Celtic elites access to Mediterranean luxury goods.
       3. The wealth of the Mediterranean may have inspired Celtic military forays into the region.
       4. At the edge of the Eurasian world lived a people with fundamentally different traditions, whose cultures have been overshadowed by their powerful neighbors.
41. Conclusion
    * 1. The classical traditions of India, China, and Greece were formulated during this period of time from 500 B.C.E. – 500 C.E.
      2. New ideas and understanding of themselves and their place in the universe were being developed across Eurasia.
      3. These intellectual developments took place in a period when large territorial empires rose and disappeared across Eurasia.
42. Chapter Five Special Features
    1. Reading the Past: Women in Han China
       1. Ban Zhao’s work Lessons for Women, which was written as advice to women, but men later used to prescribe how women ought to behave.
    2. Lives and Livelihoods: Philosophers of Athens’s Golden Age
       1. For some one hundred years, the teachings and writings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle inspired intellectual life in the city and beyond.
    3. Seeing the Past: The Vix Crater: A Greek Vessel in Northern France
       1. The largest metal vessel of Greek manufacture ever recovered from a tomb in Northern France.

**Chapter Five Overview (Discussion) Questions:**

**Major Global Development:** The revolutionary religious and cultural developments in India, China, and Greece that took place between 500 B.C.E. and 500 C.E. and that remained fundamental to the history of Eurasia.

1. How did new social circumstances stimulate changes in religious beliefs and cultures?
2. What processes encouraged close connections among the various regions of Eurasia?
3. In what ways did the revolutionary thinkers discussed here have a lasting impact on the histories of the regions they inhabited and beyond?

**Chapter Five Making Connections Questions:**

1. What ideas that emerged in classical India, China, and Greece remained fundamental to the later histories of these countries?
2. How would you describe cultural and intellectual interactions among the various Eurasian cultures?
3. How did the cultural innovations in India and China compare with those in Greece of the first millennium b.c.e.?

**Counterpoint: The Celtic Peoples of the Atlantic Zone.**  
 **Counterpoint Focus Question:** How did the lives and livelihoods of the peoples of Atlantic Europe differ from those of the Mediterranean peoples?

**Chapter Five Special Features:**

**Reading the Past: Women in Han China**

1. What are the basic tenets of Ban Zhao’s advice to women?
2. Why can this passage from the independent and politically influential Zhao be interpreted as an argument for women’s secondary role in society?

**Lives and Livelihoods: Philosophers of Athens’s Golden Age**

1. How and why did approaches to philosophical inquiry differ among Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle?
2. Why did these three philosophers have such influence on later intellectual history?

**Seeing the Past: The Vix Crater: A Greek Vessel in Northern France**

1. How does the decoration of the vessel indicate contacts between the people of northern France and Greeks of the Mediterranean?
2. What does the burial tell us about the woman’s social status?
3. Why would the scene on this crater have appealed to the Celts? Keep in mind the text discussion in considering this question.

**Key Terms**

asceticism

Axial Age

bodhisattva

classical

dharma

Hellenism

monastery

monotheism

nirvana

philosophy

sangha

sophist

stupa