

PART 3 – *Empires and Imperialism*

5 DAWN OF THE EMPIRES

2300 B.C.E. – 300 B.C.E.

EMPIRE-BUILDING IN WEST AFRICA, WEST ASIA, AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

COMMENTARY

Part Three – *Empires and Imperialism* – seeks to answer two major questions: “What are empires?” and “Why are they important?” The answers are neither simple nor self-evident and tend to raise a number of related issues – How do empires arise (and, even more problematically, why)? What forms and methods does imperial rule assume? How and why do they “fall”? What is the nature of their legacy? And what accounts for the ambivalent attitudes – a mixture of admiration and repulsion -- about empires and imperialism that have been evident among historians and commentators, at least since the time of the Greek historians **Herodotus** and **Thucydides**, and continue even today? The text attacks these questions in four chapters, spanning 3400 years. Chapter 5 – “The Dawn of Empires” – examines the “meaning of empire,” both in terms of its defining characteristics and its impact and legacy, using the earliest empires of southwest Asia and the Mediterranean as examples. The succeeding chapters survey the rise and expansion of empire in Rome, China, and India, respectively; three classical civilizations whose influence endures to this day.

Spodek’s model for empire is clearly delineated in his survey of the rise and fall of great powers in Mesopotamia, Iran and the eastern Mediterranean between 2300 and 300 B.C.E.: **Akkad**, Egypt, **Assyria**, Achaemenid **Persia**, **Athens**, and **Macedonia**. The definition of “empire” is simple enough: the “extension of political rule by one people over other, different peoples” (p. 120). (Indeed, the Latin root word *imperium* simply means “right to rule” and *imperator* (emperor) originally referred to a military commander.) But the chapter spells out in detail what empire involved in actual practice. In order to achieve permanence, the creation of empire went far beyond mere conquest or subordination of far-flung territories. A system of administration had to be established, with its capital situated in a city whose size, architecture and cultural life testified to its power and wealth. The various regions and provinces had to be governed by reliable and competent officials. This required a uniform code of laws, or at least a common sense of purpose, and an efficient system of communication and transportation (roads, sea lanes, canals, messengers) to transmit imperial commands, tax revenues, trade goods and provincial tribute back and forth. Trade was facilitated by a common coinage and imperial rule was usually reinforced by the employment of a common language and a common **ideology**, or set of accepted beliefs, sometimes in the form of a religion, sometimes not. Above all, empire rested on a strong army (and, usually, navy), in order to guarantee the advantages of order, security and prosperity which imperial rulers promised subjects in exchange for their independence; protect the extended borders from foreign invaders and rival empires; and, if push came to shove, to suppress any attempt at rebellion by subject peoples or over-ambitious royal relatives or officials (a fairly common occurrence). The examples in this chapter, from **Sargon of Akkad** to **Alexander the Great**, clearly demonstrate all these attributes of imperial rule.

Three other related issues are also examined throughout the chapter. The first is the comparison between the two general kinds of imperial rule, **hegemony** (relatively benevolent rule, based more on inclusiveness and cooperation) and **dominance** (rule by brute force, with little respect for subjects’ rights and traditions). The nature of imperial rule could change, of course, under a different ruler or in response to different conditions; but the text shows that hegemony tended to work better in practice. This relates to the second comparison: the reasons why empires decline and fall. A third topic introduced in the chapter is the nature of an empire’s **legacy**: the lasting cultural, intellectual, and material effects of the extension of the rule of one people of others. Depending upon the duration and circumstances of imperial rule, this varied from the temporary and superficial overlay of one culture upon another to the creation of a new, imperial civilization or **ecumene**, sharing common, yet diverse, cultures, traditions and values.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- A. The Meaning of Empire
 - 1. Characteristics of empires
 - 2. Hegemony and dominance
 - 3. Benefits, burdens and resistance
 - 4. Causes of the decline and fall of empires
- B. The Earliest Empires
 - 1. Mesopotamia and the “Fertile Crescent”
 - a. Sargon of Akkad
 - b. Babylonian empires: Hammurabi and after
 - 2. Egypt and international conquest
 - a. The Middle Kingdom and the conquest of Nubia
 - b. The New Kingdom and expansion into Syria
 - 3. The Assyrians
 - 4. Egypt under occupation
- C. Persia
 - 1. Indo-Europeans and the rise of Persia
 - a. Unification under the Achaeminid Dynasty
 - b. The Persian Wars with the Greeks
 - 2. Imperial policies
 - a. Cyrus II (the Great)
 - b. Cambyses II
 - c. Darius I
 - 3. Persian capitals: Pasagardae, Susa, Ecbatana and Persepolis
- D. Greek City-States: Reality and Image
 - 1. SOURCE: Homer and the value system of Ancient Greece – the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*
 - 2. The *polis*: origin and nature of the Greek city state
 - a. SPOTLIGHT: Everyday life in ancient Greece
 - b. FOCUS: Minoans and Mycenaeans, the earliest city-states of the Aegean
 - 3. The Persian Wars
 - a. The rise of Athens and the origins of the Persian Wars
 - b. SOURCE: Herodotus describes Darius’ preparations for war against Greece
 - 4. Athens: from city-state to mini-empire
 - a. Athenian democracy: historical background and historians
 - b. Architecture, design, the arts, philosophy and drama
- E. The Limits of City-State Democracy
 - 1. How do we know? What do we know?
 - a. Citizenship and political participation in ancient Athens
 - b. Gender and democracy: was classical Athens a “phallocracy”?
 - c. SOURCE: Pericles and Socrates – two views of Athenian democracy
 - 2. Was classical Athens a “phallocracy”?
 - 3. Athens becomes an imperial power: Sparta and the Peloponnesian War
- F. The Empire of Alexander the Great
 - 1. The rise of Macedonia
 - 2. PROFILE: Alexander the Great – historical interpretations
 - 3. The campaigns of Alexander
 - 4. The legacy of Alexander: the Hellenistic ecumene
- G. Empire Building: What Difference Does It Make?

IDENTIFICATION TERMS

For each term, students should be able to provide an identification or definition, an approximate date, a geographical location (if relevant) and – most important – a concise explanation of its significance in the context of the chapter. Terms that appear in the *Study Guide* are listed in **bold** font in the first column.

hoplites	hegemony	<i>Iliad and Odyssey</i>
Cyrus the Great	dominance	<i>polis</i>
Melos	imperial ideology	Herodotus
Socrates	Babylonian Empires	Athenian democracy
Nubia	Meroe	Pericles
Mycenae	Assyria	Peloponnesian War
Hellenistic ecumene	Indo-Europeans	Plato
agora and acropolis	Achaemenid Dynasty	Aristotle
Sargon of Akkad	Persian Empire	Macedonia
Sparta	Persepolis	Alexander the Great

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and studying Chapter 5, students should be able to:

1. Define empire and list the general characteristics of empires; and be able to differentiate between “hegemony” and “dominance” forms of imperial rule (with examples).
2. Be able to discuss the general causes of the decline of empires, with examples from the reading.
3. Understand and be able to explain the significance of the Persian Empire; the differing ruling styles of Cyrus II, Cambyses II and Darius I; and the significance of the Persian Empire in the history of Greece and world civilization.
4. Understand the origins of the Greek *polis*; its contributions to the development of western civilization; and its inherent injustices, weaknesses and shortcomings.
5. Be able to explain the nature and background of Athenian democracy and how Athens differed from both contemporary Sparta and from modern American democracy.
6. Define a cultural “ecumene” and be able to explain how Alexander’s Empire laid the foundations of a “Hellenistic Ecumene.”

SUGGESTIONS FOR LECTURE TOPICS

1. Introduce the concept and terms “empire” and “imperialism” in a talk that explains the linguistic origins of the words (from the Latin *imperium/imperator*) and discusses more modern usages of the terms (such as “British Empire” or “Evil Empire”). Explain Spodek’s defining characteristics and compare and contrast them with the modern meaning of empire.
2. Explain Spodek’s definition of empire and then discuss the pros and cons of imperial rule. Compare and contrast “hegemony” and “dominance” as different forms of imperial rule and cite specific examples of both from the reading and from among later empires.
3. Compare the Assyrian, Persian, Athenian and Hellenistic Empires, demonstrating how they all conformed to the general model, but differed in important respects; differences that in the long run made the Persian and Hellenistic Empires much more successful than the Assyrian or Athenian.
4. Explain the development of the Greek *polis*, comparing Athens and Sparta as prototypical examples and explaining the reasons for their divergence. Discuss the contributions of geography, migrations, trade and other Mediterranean cultures on Greek development.
5. Discuss the impact of Greek culture on the Mediterranean and beyond, explaining how and why Greek influence was disseminated throughout much of the known (to the Greeks) world and pointing out the enduring nature of that influence into modern times. Discuss the reasons for Greek culture’s lasting impact on modern societies.

TOPICS FOR ESSAYS OR CLASS DISCUSSIONS

1. Define and explain the terms “hegemony” and “dominance” as they relate to methods of imperial rule. Based on the available evidence, how would the Assyrian, Persian, Athenian and Macedonian/Hellenistic empires be classified? Support your assertions with specific examples and evidence.
2. In the chapter introduction, the author cites five common reasons for imperial decline and dissolution. Which of these can be assigned to the various empires discussed in the chapter? Furnish specific examples to support your argument. Can those reasons be applied to the decline of other, later empires?
3. Debate: Some historians have argued that Athenian democracy was much less democratic than our modern, American democracy; while others have asserted that, in some important respects, it was actually more democratic. Which is the more valid argument, based on specific evidence from the chapter?
4. Group work: It has been argued by historians that both the physical layout of the city of Athens and the city’s hoplite military formations were reflections of its democratic traditions. Discuss this assertion, using illustrations from the text as evidence. Contrast this evidence with available evidence for Persian cities, such as Persepolis.
5. Discuss the attitudes towards and status of women in classical Athens, as revealed by contemporary Greek sources and modern historians. What characteristics of the Greek value system and the society of the Athenian *polis* might account for the prevailing view of women’s roles at the time? Cite evidence from as many different sources as you can. Is “phallocracy” an accurate or appropriate term for Athenian society?
6. Who were the Nubians? Citing examples from the archaeological evidence presented in the chapter, discuss the relationship between Egypt and its southern neighbor, Nubia. In what respects does this relationship illustrate important aspects of “empire” and “imperialism”?
7. Group work: Compare the values of pre-classical Greece, as reflected in the archaeological evidence from Minoan and Mycenaean civilization and from Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, with the values of classical Athens, as reflected in the works of Thucydides and Plato and classical Athenian art and drama. How are they similar? In what respects do they differ? How can we account for those differences?
8. Current events & issues: Spodek argues that Athens strove to build an empire, just as many people have argued that the United States has been an imperial power in the 20th century. Based on the text’s definition and description of empire and the various forms of imperial rule, how valid are these arguments?
9. Map exercise: Comparing the maps of the Persian Empire, the Greek world, and Alexander’s empire, explain the reasons why the conquests of Alexander the Great are considered to have laid the foundations for a Hellenistic cultural ecumene. What is an “ecumene”? What various elements would have been included in the “Hellenistic cultural ecumene”?

TEXT RESOURCES (Spodek, 2nd ed.)

Timetables, charts and graphs:	Ancient Greece and Its Neighbors	(p. 121)
	The Great Peloponnesian War	(p. 142)
Large photographs or illustrations:	Five-string harp (Egyptian, Thebes)	(p. 125)
	Relief from the Temple of Beit el-Wali (Nubia)	(p. 127)
	Royal pyramids (Meroe)	(p. 127)
	Lion killing a bull (Persepolis)	(p. 135)
	Formation of Greek hoplites	(p. 140)
	Parthenon, Athens	(p. 144)
	Statue of Athena	(p. 145)
	Plan of the Acropolis	(p. 145)
	Psykter with cavorting Satyrs	(p. 147)

	The “Alexander Mosaic” (Pompeii)	(p. 150-151)
	Statue of the “Dying Gaul”	(p. 155)
Maps:	The Empire of Sargon	(p. 123)
	Middle and New Kingdom Egypt	(p. 126)
	The empires of southwest Asia	(p. 128)
	Assyria and its rivals	(p. 129)
	Achaemenid Persia	(p. 130)
	Classical Greece	(p. 142)
	The Empire of Alexander	(p. 150)
SPOTLIGHT:	Everyday Life in Ancient Greece	(p. 136-137)
PROFILE:	Alexander the Great: Historical Reinterpretations	(p. 152-153)
FOCUS:	Minoans and Myceneans	(p. 138-139)
SOURCES:	Homer and the Value System of Ancient Greece [from the <i>Iliad</i>]	(p. 132-133)
	Herodotus Describes Darius’ Preparations for War Against Greece [from <i>The Persian Wars</i>]	(p. 141)
	Two Views of Athenian Democracy [from Thucydides, <i>Peloponnesian Wars</i> and Plato’s <i>Crito</i>]	(p. 148-149)

ADDITIONAL PRIMARY SOURCES (*Documents Set & www.prenhall.com/Spodek*)

5-1	Sargon of Akkad record his deeds for posterity
5-2	The other side of imperialism: how outsiders viewed Assyria [from the <i>Book of Nahum</i>]
5-3	Ramses II at the Battle of Kadesh: the Egyptian version of events
5-4	The Ramses-Hattusilis Treaty from both perspectives
5-5	Cyrus of Persia: a study in imperial success [from Xenophon, <i>The Persian Expedition</i>]
5-6	Empires and military glory: Herodotus relates the story of Thermopylae [from <i>The Persian Wars</i>]
5-7	Thucydides writes concerning the negative by-products of imperialism [from <i>The Peloponnesian War</i>]
5-8	Demosthenes’ first Philippic: a great orator warns of Macedonian imperialism
www	Imperialist paradigm: Alexander the Great [from Arrian, <i>The Campaigns of Alexander</i>]

AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES (videos, DVD’s, CD-ROM and web-sites)

Acropolis: <http://www.mechan.ntua.gr/webacropol/> [web-site]

Includes examination of the building of the Acropolis during the Peloponnesian War and a virtual tour.

Ancient City of Athens: <http://www.indiana.edu/~kglowack/Athens/Athens.html> [web-site]

A photographic tour of sites in ancient Athens: the Agora, the Acropolis, the Pnyx. Photos with excellent and informative descriptions.

Athens and Ancient Greece: Great Cities of the Ancient World: 1994. [video; 78 minutes, color]

Reconstruction of 25 structures, including the Acropolis, the Parthenon, the Temple of Athena, the Agora, the Theatre of Zeus and the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

Diogenes’ Links to the Ancient World: <http://h16snider.net/lyceum/> [web-site]

A comprehensive search engine for sites relating to ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome. Includes history, art, anthropology and archaeology, mythology and literature.

The Greeks: Crucible of Civilization: PBS Home Video, 2000. [2 videos; 165 minutes, color]

Introduces the Greeks, the history of classical Athens and Greek contributions to Western Civilization. Includes interviews with researchers, computer recreations and excellent photography of surviving structures and sites.

Hellenic Civilization Database: <http://www.greekcivil.araidne-t.gr/default.html> [web-site]

Links to over 200 museum collections of Greek art, literature and history.

In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great: PBS Home Video, 1994. [2 videos; 240 minutes, color]

Michael Wood leads viewers on a journey from Macedonia to northern India, following Alexander's route through Asia Minor, the Near East, Egypt and the Persian Empire.

In Search of History: the Greek Gods: History Channel. [video; 50 minutes, color]

The History Channel treatment of Greek mythology, "from Aphrodite to Zeus."