



Gold sculpture of a nomadic horseman discharging an arrow. This figurine dates from the fifth or fourth century B.C.E. and might well represent a Parthian.

**Parthian Government** The Parthians portrayed themselves as enemies of the foreign Seleucids, as restorers of rule in the Persian tradition. To some extent, that characterization was accurate. The Parthians largely followed the example of the Achaemenids in structuring their empire: they governed through satraps, employed Achaemenid techniques of administration and taxation, and built a capital city at **Ctesiphon** on the Euphrates River near modern Baghdad. But the Parthians also retained elements of their steppe traditions. They did not develop nearly so centralized a regime as the Achaemenids or the Seleucids but, rather, vested a great deal of authority and responsibility in their clan leaders. These men often served as satraps, and they regularly worked to build independent bases of power in their regions. They frequently mounted rebellions against the imperial government, though without much success.

For about three centuries the Parthians presided over a powerful empire between India and the Mediterranean. Beginning in the first century C.E., they faced pressure in the west from the expanding Roman empire. The Parthian empire as a whole never stood in danger of falling to the Romans, but on three occasions in the second century C.E. Roman armies captured the Parthian capital at Ctesiphon. Combined with

**Ctesiphon** (TES-uh-phon)  
**Sasanids** (suh-SAH-nids)

internal difficulties caused by the rebellious satraps, Roman pressure contributed to the weakening of the Parthian state. During the early third century C.E., internal rebellion brought it down.

**The Sasanids** Once again, though, the tradition of imperial rule continued, this time under the **Sasanids**, who came from Persia and claimed direct descent from the Achaemenids. The Sasanids toppled the Parthians in 224 C.E. and ruled until 651 C.E., recreating much of the splendor of the Achaemenid empire. From their cosmopolitan capital at Ctesiphon, the Sasanid “king of kings” provided strong rule from Parthia to Mesopotamia while also rebuilding an elaborate system of administration and founding or refurbishing numerous cities. Sasanid merchants traded actively with peoples to both east and west, and they introduced into Iran the cultivation of crops such as rice, sugarcane, citrus fruits, eggplant, and cotton that came west over the trade routes from India and China.

During the reign of Shapur I (239–272 C.E.), the Sasanids stabilized their western frontier and created a series of buffer states between themselves and the Roman empire. Shapur even defeated several Roman armies and settled the prisoners in Iran, where they devoted their famous engineering skills to the construction of roads and dams. After Shapur, the Sasanids did not expand militarily, but entered into a standoff relationship with remnants of the Kushan empire in the east and the Roman and Byzantine empires in the west. None of those large empires was strong enough to overcome the others, but they contested border areas and buffer states, sometimes engaging in lengthy and bitter disputes that sapped the energies of all involved.

These continual conflicts seriously weakened the Sasanid empire in particular. The empire came to an end in 651 C.E. when Arab warriors killed the last Sasanid ruler, overran his realm, and incorporated it into their rapidly expanding Islamic empire. Yet even conquest by external invaders did not end the legacy of classical Persia, since Persian administrative techniques and cultural traditions were so powerful that the Arab conquerors adopted them to use in building a new Islamic society.

### IMPERIAL SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

Throughout the eastern hemisphere during the classical era, public life and social structure became much more complicated than they had been during the days of the early complex societies. Centralized imperial governments needed large numbers of administrative officials, which led to the emergence of educated classes of bureaucrats. Stable empires enabled many individuals to engage in trade or other specialized labor as artisans, craftsmen, or professionals of various kinds. Some of them accumulated vast wealth, which led to increased distance and tensions between rich and poor. Meanwhile, slavery became more common than in earlier times. The prominence of slavery had to do partly with the expansion of

imperial states, which often enslaved conquered foes, but it also reflected the increasing gulf between rich and poor, which placed such great economic pressure on some individuals that they had to give up their freedom in order to survive. All those developments had implications for the social structures of classical societies in Persia as well as China, India, and the Mediterranean basin.

### Social Development in Classical Persia

During the early days of the Achaemenid empire, Persian society reflected its origins on the steppes of central Asia. When the Medes and the Persians migrated to Iran, their social structure was similar to that of the Aryans in India, consisting primarily of warriors, priests, and peasants. For centuries, when they lived on the periphery and in the shadow of the Mesopotamian empires, the Medes and the Persians maintained steppe traditions. Even after the establishment of the Achaemenid empire, some of them followed a seminomadic lifestyle and maintained ties with their cousins on the steppes. Family and clan relationships were extremely important in the organization of Persian political and social affairs. Male warriors headed the clans, which retained much of their influence long after the establishment of the Achaemenid empire.

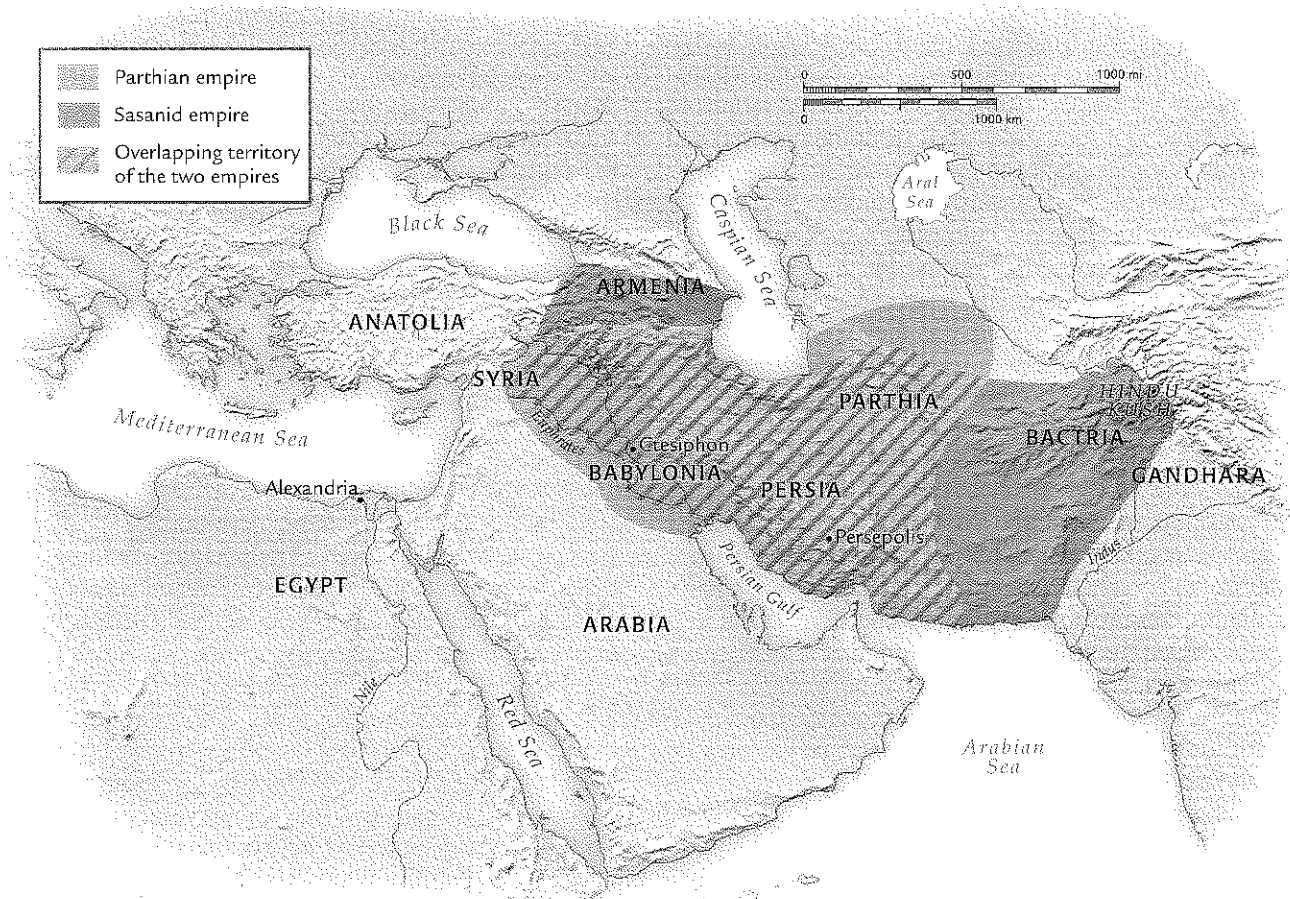
**Imperial Bureaucrats** The development of a cosmopolitan empire, however, brought considerable complexity to Persian society. The requirements of imperial administration, for example, called for a new class of educated bureaucrats who to a large extent undermined the position of the old warrior elite. The bureaucrats did not directly challenge the patriarchal warriors and certainly did not seek to displace them from their privileged position in society. Nevertheless, the bureaucrats’ crucial role in running the day-to-day affairs of the empire guaranteed them a prominent and comfortable place in Persian society. By the time of the later Achaemenids and the Seleucids, Persian cities were home to masses of administrators, tax collectors, and record keepers. The bureaucracy even included a substantial corps of translators, who facilitated communications among the empire’s many linguistic groups.

#### MAP 7.2

#### The Parthian and Sasanid empires, 247 B.C.E.–651 C.E.

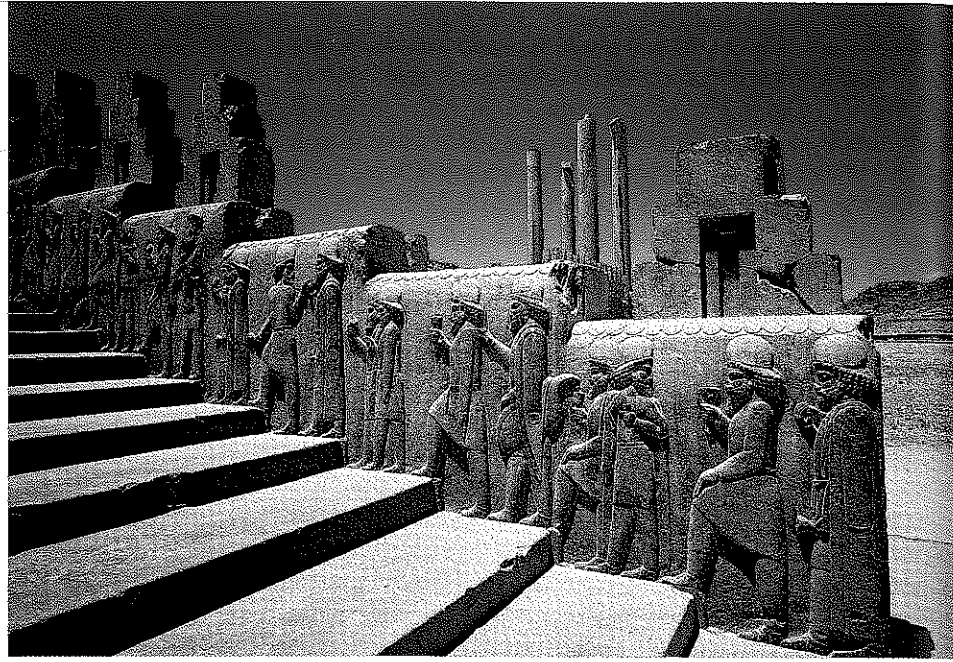
Note the location of the Parthian and Sasanid empires between the Mediterranean Sea and northern India.

*What roles did these two empires play in facilitating or hindering communications between lands to their east and west?*





In this sculpture from Persepolis, Persian nobles dressed in fine cloaks and hats ascend the staircase leading to the imperial reception hall.



Imperial survival depended on these literate professionals, and high-ranking bureaucrats came to share power and influence with warriors and clan leaders.

**Free Classes** The bulk of Persian society consisted of individuals who were free but did not enjoy the privileges of clan leaders and important bureaucrats. In the cities the free classes included artisans, craftsmen, merchants, and low-ranking civil servants. Priests and priestesses were also prominent urban residents, along with servants who maintained the temple communities in which they lived. In Persian society, as in earlier Mesopotamian societies, members of the free classes participated in religious observances conducted at local temples, and they had the right to share in the income that temples generated from their agricultural operations and from craft industries, such as textile production, that the temples organized. The weaving of textiles was mostly the work of women, who received rations of grain, wine, beer, and sometimes meat from the imperial and temple workshops that employed them.

In the countryside the free classes included peasants who owned land as well as landless cultivators who worked as laborers or tenants on properties owned by the state, temple communities, or other individuals. Free residents of rural areas had the right to marry and move as they wished, and they could seek better opportunities in the cities or in military service. Because the Persian empires embraced a great deal of parched land that received little rainfall, work in the countryside involved not only cultivation but also the building and maintenance of irrigation systems.

The most remarkable of those systems were underground canals known as *qanat*, which allowed cultivators to distribute water to fields without losing large quantities to evaporation through exposure to the sun and open air. Numerous *qanat* crisscrossed the Iranian plateau in the heartland of the Persian empire, where extreme scarcity of water justified the enormous investment of human labor required to build the canals. Although they had help from slaves, free residents of the countryside contributed much of the labor that went into the excavation and maintenance of the *qanat*.

**Slaves** A large class of slaves also worked in both the cities and the countryside. Individuals passed into slavery by two

main routes. Most were prisoners of war who became slaves as the price of survival. These prisoners usually came from military units, but the Persians also enslaved civilians who resisted their advance or who rebelled against imperial authorities. Other slaves came from the ranks of free subjects who accumulated debts that they could not satisfy. In the cities, for example, merchants, artisans, and craftsmen borrowed funds to purchase goods or open shops, and in the countryside small farmers facing competition from large-scale cultivators borrowed against their property and liberty to purchase tools, seed, or food. Failure to repay those debts in a timely fashion often forced the borrowers not only to forfeit their property but also to sell their children, their spouses, or themselves into slavery.

Slave status deprived individuals of their personal freedom. Slaves became the property of an individual, the state, or an institution such as a temple community: they worked at tasks set by their owners, and they could not move or marry at will, although existing family units usually stayed together. Most slaves probably worked as domestic servants or skilled laborers in the households of the wealthy, but at least some slaves cultivated their owners' fields in the countryside. State-owned slaves provided much of the manual labor for large-scale construction projects such as roads, irrigation systems, city walls, and palaces.

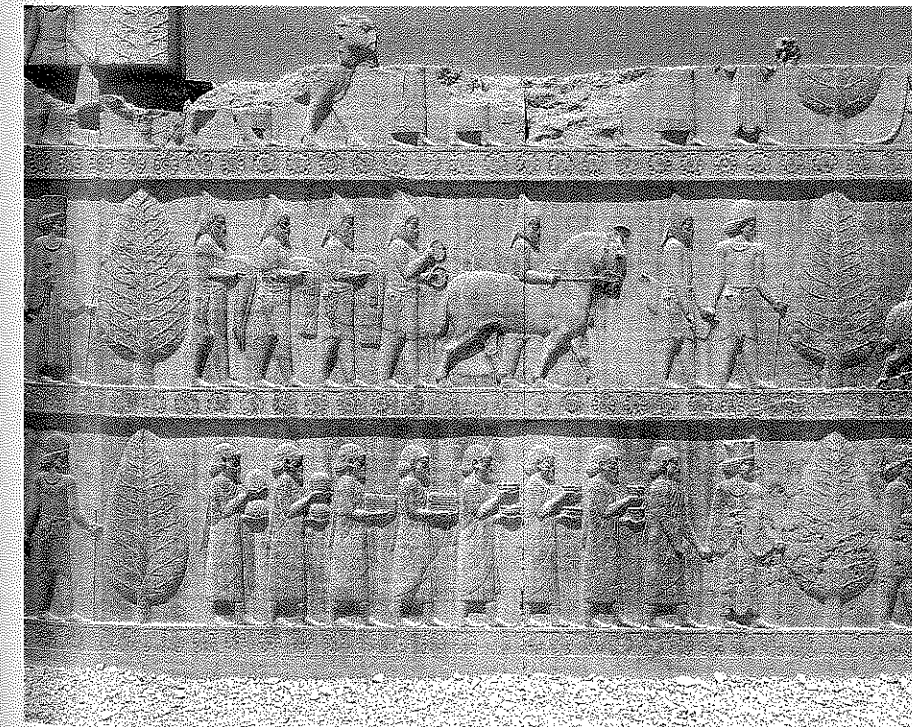
In Mesopotamia, temple communities owned many slaves who worked at agricultural tasks and performed administrative chores for their priestly masters. During the mid- to late sixth century B.C.E., a slave named Gimillu served the temple community of Eanna in Uruk, and his career is relatively well-known because records of his various misadventures survive in archives. Gimillu appeared in numerous legal cases because he habitually defrauded his masters, pocketed bribes,

and embezzled temple funds. Yet he held a high position in the temple community and always managed to escape serious punishment. His career reveals that slaves sometimes had administrative talents and took on tasks involving considerable responsibility. Gimillu's case clearly shows that slaves sometimes enjoyed close relationships with powerful individuals who could protect them from potential enemies.

### Economic Foundations of Classical Persia

Agriculture was the economic foundation of classical Persian society. Like other classical societies, Persia needed large agricultural surpluses to support military forces and administrative specialists as well as residents of cities who were artisans, craft workers, and merchants rather than cultivators. The Persian empires embraced several regions of exceptional fertility—notably Mesopotamia, Egypt, Anatolia, and northern India—and they prospered by mobilizing the agricultural surpluses of those lands.

**Agricultural Production** Barley and wheat were the grains cultivated most commonly in the Persian empires. Peas, lentils, mustard, garlic, onions, cucumbers, dates, apples, pomegranates, pears, and apricots supplemented the cereals in diets throughout Persian society, and beer and wine were the most common beverages. In most years agricultural production far exceeded the needs of cultivators, making sizable surpluses available for sale in the cities or for distribution to state servants through the imperial bureaucracy. Vast quantities of produce flowed into the imperial court from state-owned lands



Tribute bearers from lands subject to Achaemenid rule bring rams, horses, and fabrics to the imperial court at Persepolis. Representatives of twenty-three lands offered tribute at the imperial new year festival.

cultivated by slaves or leased out to tenants in exchange for a portion of the annual harvest. Even though they are incomplete, surviving records show that, for example, in 500 B.C.E., during the middle period of Darius's reign, the imperial court received almost eight hundred thousand liters of grain, quite apart from vegetables, fruits, meat, poultry, fish, oil, beer, wine, and textiles. Officials distributed some of that produce to the imperial staff as wages in kind, but much of it also found its way into the enormous banquets that Darius organized for as many as ten thousand guests. Satraps and other high officials lived on a less lavish scale than the Persian emperors but also benefited from agricultural surpluses delivered to their courts from their own lands.

**Standardized Coins** Agriculture was the economic foundation of the Persian empires, but the empires had the effect of encouraging rapid economic development and trade. By ensuring political stability and maintaining an elaborate network of roads, Achaemenid rulers laid solid foundations for economic prosperity and secure transportation of trade goods. Trade benefited also from the invention of standardized coins, which first appeared in the Anatolian kingdom of Lydia. Beginning about 640 B.C.E. the kings of Lydia issued coins of precisely measured metal and guaranteed their value. It was much simpler for merchants to exchange standardized coins than to weigh ingots or bullion when transacting their business. As a result, standardized coins quickly became popular and drew merchants from distant lands to Lydian markets. When Cyrus defeated the forces of King Croesus and absorbed Lydia into his expanding realm, he

brought the advantages of standardized coins to the larger Achaemenid empire. Markets opened in all the larger cities of the empire, and the largest cities, such as Babylon, also were home to banks and companies that invested in commercial ventures.

**Trade** Long-distance trade grew rapidly during the course of the Persian empires and linked lands from India to Egypt in a vast commercial zone. Trade traveled both

# Reverberations ●●●●●●●●●●

## Long-Distance Trade Networks

### Trans-Eurasian Exchange Networks

Between about 500 B.C.E. and 500 C.E., peoples across Eurasia and North Africa established long-distance trade networks on an unprecedented scale. Although we saw in Part I that peoples in the early complex societies had established trade networks in earlier times, the scale of long-distance trade networks in the classical societies was far greater and of even more lasting consequence. The vast empires of Persia, China, and Rome that arose in this period helped to create the relative political stability that allowed trade to flourish. These large empires also facilitated long-distance trade by issuing standardized coins, by building and maintaining new roads and ports, and by supporting large markets and urban areas. As a result, trade networks in this period extended by land and by sea from Europe to China, from Persia to north Africa and central Asia, and from India to China, southeast Asia, and the Mediterranean basin. Their existence, in turn, had profound long-term consequences because they allowed the diffusion of foodstuffs and the exchange of commodities, and because they laid the foundation for the spread of religions and epidemic disease far from their points of origin.

over land routes, including newly constructed highways such as the Persian Royal Road, and over sea lanes through the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Sea. The various regions of the Persian empires all contributed particular products to the larger imperial economy. India supplied gold, ivory, and aromatics. Iran and central Asia provided lapis lazuli, turquoise, and other semiprecious stones. Mesopotamia and Iran were sources of finished products such as textiles, mirrors, and jewelry. Anatolia supplied gold, silver, iron, copper, and tin. Phoenicia contributed glass, cedar, timber, and richly dyed woolen fabrics. Spices and aromatics came from Arabia. Egypt provided grain, linen textiles, and papyrus writing materials as well as gold, ebony, and ivory obtained from Nubia. Greek oil, wine, and ceramics also made their way throughout the empire and even beyond its borders.

Long-distance trade became especially prominent during the reigns of Alexander of Macedon and his Seleucid successors. The cities they established and the colonists they attracted stimulated trade throughout the whole region from the Mediterranean to northern India. Indeed, Greek migrants facilitated cultural as well as commercial exchanges by encouraging the mixing and mingling of religious faiths, art styles, and philosophical speculation throughout the Persian realm.

### The Diffusion of Foodstuffs and the Exchange of Commodities

In this chapter, we have already seen that the trade routes of the Persian empires facilitated the diffusion of Egyptian grains and textiles, Indian gold and ivory, and metals from Anatolia to diverse parts of the empire. At roughly the same time, fine Chinese silks were being carried across trade routes from the east and became coveted items in Persia, India, Mesopotamia, and the Roman empire (chapter 8). Pepper, meanwhile, was carried across both land and sea routes from India to China, central Asia, and the Mediterranean (chapter 9), while spices from southeast Asia were carried west from China and India (chapter 12). The spread of such commodities and foodstuffs had long-term social and economic consequences in the lands to which they diffused. For example, long-distance trade in coveted luxury items like silk, jewels, gold, and spices became markers of social distinction in the societies where they were traded, meaning that the possession of such items came to symbolize high status and helped to delineate social boundaries. In addition, the numerous markets and ports necessary to maintain such extensive trade networks encouraged urban growth around the

## RELIGIONS OF SALVATION IN CLASSICAL PERSIAN SOCIETY

Cross-cultural influences were especially noticeable in the development of Persian religion. Persians came from the family of peoples who spoke Indo-European languages, and their earliest religion closely resembled that of the Aryans of India. During the classical era, however, the new faith of Zoroastrianism emerged and became widely popular in Iran and to a lesser extent also in the larger Persian empires. Zoroastrianism later influenced the beliefs and values of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well. During the late centuries of the classical era, from about 100 to 500 C.E., three missionary religions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Manichaeism—also found numerous converts in the Persian empire.

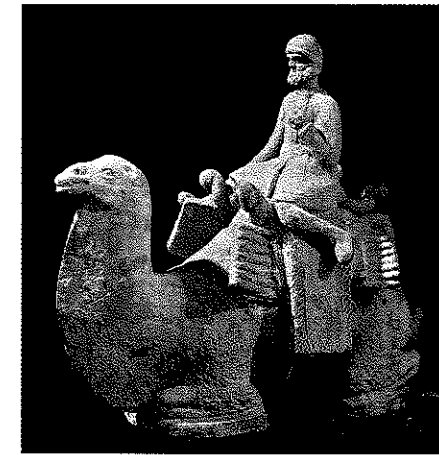
### Zarathustra and His Faith

The earliest Persian religion centered on cults that celebrated outstanding natural elements and geographic features such as the sun, the moon, water, and especially fire. Persians recognized many of the same gods as the ancient Aryans, and their priests performed sacrifices similar to those conducted by the brahmins in India. The priests even made ceremonial use of a

hubs of trade networks, allowing for population growth and a new range of urban creature comforts.

### The Spread of Religions

Of course, commodities and foodstuffs did not move by themselves: individual people traveled along portions of the trade routes, carrying goods and items back and forth over sizable distances. In the process, individuals from a variety of religious backgrounds and cultural traditions encountered one another and exchanged ideas. Some of the most important ideas people exchanged along these trade networks were about salvation. Along the Silk Roads, which linked vast portions of Eurasia, merchants who had converted to the Indian religion of Buddhism (chapter 9) invited Buddhist monks to establish monasteries across the oasis towns of central Asia (chapter 12). Similarly, adherents of both Christianity and Manichaeism took advantage of stable long-distance trade networks to establish communities of believers in the Mediterranean and southwest Asia (chapter 12). Over the long term, the spread of these religions of salvation had profound effects on the



Camels laden with goods

cultures of the regions to which they spread.

### The Spread of Epidemic Disease

While the establishment of long-distance trade networks in this period allowed unprecedented exchanges of goods and ideas, they also created the conditions that allowed epidemic disease to travel much farther—and much faster—than ever before. During the second and third centuries C.E., epidemics of smallpox, measles, and perhaps bubonic plague tore through both the Roman empire and China, resulting

in dramatic population losses and reductions in trade. Over the long term, the epidemic diseases—ironically made possible by long-distance trade routes—contributed to the political instability that destroyed both the western Roman and Han empires (chapter 12).

When reading chapters in subsequent Parts, try to keep in mind the often dramatic and long-term social, political, and economic consequences of long-distance trade for all participating societies.

hallucinogenic agent called *haoma* in the same way that the Aryans used soma, and indeed the two concoctions were probably the same substance. Like the Aryans, the ancient Persians glorified strength and martial virtues, and the cults of both peoples sought principally to bring about a comfortable material existence for their practitioners.

**Zarathustra** During the classical era Persian religion underwent considerable change, as moral and religious thinkers sought to adapt their messages to the circumstances of a complex, cosmopolitan society. One result was the appearance of **Zoroastrianism**, which emerged from the teachings of **Zarathustra**. Though Zarathustra was undoubtedly a historical person and the subject of many early stories, little certain information survives about his life and career. It is not even clear exactly when he lived: many scholars date his life to the late seventh and early sixth centuries B.C.E., but many others believe he flourished sometime between 1200 and 1000 B.C.E. He came from an aristocratic family, and he probably was a priest who became disenchanted with the traditional religion and its concentration on bloody sacrifices and mechanical rituals. In any case, when he was about twenty years old, Zarathustra left his family and home in search of wisdom. After about ten years of travel, he experienced a series of

visions and became convinced that the supreme god, whom he called **Ahura Mazda** (the “wise lord”), had chosen him to serve as his prophet and spread his message.

**The Gathas** Like his life, Zarathustra’s doctrine has proven to be somewhat elusive for modern analysts. Many of the earliest Zoroastrian teachings have perished, because the priests, known as **magi**, at first transmitted them orally. Only during the Seleucid dynasty did magi begin to preserve religious texts in writing, and only under the Sasanids did they compile their scriptures in a holy book known as the **Avesta**. Nevertheless, many of Zarathustra’s compositions survive, since magi preserved them with special diligence through oral transmission. Known as the **Gathas**, Zarathustra’s works were hymns that he composed in honor of the various deities that he recognized. Apart from the **Gathas**, ancient Zoroastrian literature included a wide variety of hymns, liturgical works, and treatises on moral and theological themes. Though some of these works survive, the arrival of Islam in the seventh century C.E. and the subsequent decline of Zoroastrianism resulted in the

**Zoroastrianism** (zohr-oh-ASS-tree-ahn-iz’m)

**Zarathustra** (zar-uh-THOO-struh)

**Gathas** (GATH-uhs)





loss of most of the Avesta and later Zoroastrian works.

**Zoroastrian Teachings** Zarathustra and his followers recognized Ahura Mazda as a supreme deity, an eternal and beneficent spirit, and the creator of all good things. But Zarathustra also spoke of six lesser deities, whom he praised in the *Gathas*. Furthermore, he believed that Ahura Mazda engaged in a cosmic conflict with an independent adversary, an evil and malign spirit known as Angra Mainyu (often also referred to as Ahriman, the “destructive spirit” or the “hostile spirit”). Following a struggle of some twelve thousand years, Zarathustra believed, Ahura Mazda and the forces of good would ultimately prevail, and Angra Mainyu and the principle of evil would disappear forever. At that time individual human souls would undergo judgment and would experience rewards or punishments according to the holiness of their thoughts, words, and deeds. Honest and moral individuals would enter into a heavenly paradise, whereas demons would fling their evil brethren into a hellish realm of pain and suffering.

**Popularity of Zoroastrianism** Zarathustra did not call for ascetic renunciation of the world in favor of a future heavenly existence. To the contrary, he considered the material world a blessing that reflected the benevolent nature of Ahura Mazda. His moral teachings allowed human beings to enjoy the world and its fruits—including wealth, sexual pleasure, and social prestige—as long as they did so in moderation and behaved honestly toward others. Zoroastrians have often summarized their moral teachings in the simple formula “good words, good thoughts, good deeds.”

Zarathustra’s teachings began to attract large numbers of followers during the sixth century B.C.E., particularly among Persian aristocrats and ruling elites. Wealthy patrons donated land and established endowments for the support of Zoroastrian temples. The Achaemenid era saw the emergence of a sizable priesthood, whose members conducted religious rituals, maintained a calendar, taught Zoroastrian values, and preserved Zoroastrian doctrine through oral transmission.

Cyrus and Cambyses probably observed Zoroastrian rites, although little evidence survives to illustrate their religious preferences. Beginning with Darius, however, the Achaemenid emperors closely associated themselves with Ahura Mazda and claimed divine sanction for their rule. Darius ordered stone inscriptions celebrating his achievements, and in those monuments he clearly revealed his devotion to Ahura Mazda and his opposition to the principle of evil. He did not attempt to suppress other gods or religions, but tolerated the established faiths of the various peoples in his



A gold clasp or button of the fifth century B.C.E. with the symbol of Ahura Mazda, the supreme Zoroastrian deity, as a winged god.

empire. Yet he personally regarded Ahura Mazda as a deity superior to all others.

In one of his inscriptions, Darius praised Ahura Mazda as the great god who created the earth, the sky, and humanity and who moreover elevated Darius himself to the imperial honor. With the aid of imperial sponsorship, Zoroastrian temples cropped up throughout the Achaemenid realm. The faith was most popular in Iran, but it attracted sizable followings also in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Egypt, and other parts of the Achaemenid empire even though there was no organized effort to spread it beyond its original homeland.

### Religions of Salvation in a Cosmopolitan Society

The arrival of Alexander of Macedon inaugurated a difficult era for the Zoroastrian community. During his Persian campaign, Alexander’s forces burned many temples and killed numerous magi. Because at that time the magi still transmitted Zoroastrian doctrines orally, an untold number of hymns and holy verses disappeared. The Zoroastrian faith survived, however, and the Parthians cultivated it to rally support against the Seleucids. Once established in power, the Parthians observed Zoroastrian rituals, though they did not support the faith as enthusiastically as their predecessors had done.

**Officially Sponsored Zoroastrianism** During the Sasanid dynasty, however, Zoroastrianism experienced a revival. As self-proclaimed heirs to the Achaemenids, the Sasanids identified closely with Zoroastrianism and supported it zealously. Indeed, the Sasanids often persecuted other faiths if they seemed likely to become popular enough to challenge the supremacy of Zoroastrianism. With generous imperial backing, the Zoroastrian faith and the magi flourished as never before. Theologians prepared written versions of the holy texts and collected them in the Avesta. They also explored points of doctrine and addressed difficult questions of morality and theology. Most people probably did not understand the theologians’ reflections, but they flocked to Zoroastrian temples where they prayed to Ahura Mazda and participated in rituals.

The Zoroastrian faith faced severe difficulties in the seventh century C.E. when Islamic conquerors toppled the Sasanid empire. The conquerors did not outlaw the religion altogether, but they placed political and financial pressure on the magi and Zoroastrian temples. Some Zoroastrians fled their homeland under persecution and found refuge in India, where their descendants, known as **Parsis** (“Persians”), continue even today to observe Zoroastrian traditions. But most Zoroastrians remained in Iran and eventually converted to Islam. As a

## Sources from the Past

### Zarathustra on Good and Evil

*Like many other religious faiths of classical times, Zoroastrianism encouraged the faithful to observe high moral and ethical standards. In this hymn from the Gathas, Zarathustra relates how Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu—representatives of good and evil, respectively—made choices about how to behave based on their fundamental natures. Human beings did likewise, according to Zarathustra, and ultimately all would experience the rewards and the punishments that their choices merited.*

In the beginning, there were two Primal Spirits, Twins spontaneously active;  
These are the Good and the Evil, in thought, and in word, and in deed:

Between these two, let the wise choose aright;  
Be good, not base.

And when these Twin Spirits came together at first,  
They established Life and Non-Life,  
And so shall it be as long as the world shall last;  
The worst existence shall be the lot of the followers of evil,  
And the Good Mind shall be the reward of the followers of good.

Of these Twin Spirits, the Evil One chose to do the worst;  
While the bountiful Holy Spirit of Goodness,  
Clothing itself with the mossy heavens for a garment,  
chose the Truth;

And so will those who [seek to] please Ahura Mazda with righteous deeds, performed with faith in Truth. . . .

And when there cometh Divine Retribution for the Evil One,  
Then at Thy command shall the Good Mind establish the Kingdom of Heaven, O Mazda,  
For those who will deliver Untruth into the hands of Righteousness and Truth.

Then truly cometh the blow of destruction on Untruth,  
And all those of good fame are garnered up in the Fair Abode.

The Fair Abode of the Good Mind, the Wise Lord, and of Truth!

O ye mortals, mark these commandments—  
The commandments which the Wise Lord has given, for Happiness and for Pain;  
Long punishment for the evil-doer, and bliss for the follower of Truth,  
The joy of salvation for the Righteous ever afterwards!

### For Further Reflection

- What assumptions does Zarathustra make about human nature and the capacity of human beings to make morally good choices through free will?

Source: D. J. Irani. *The Divine Songs of Zarathustra*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924.

result, Zoroastrian numbers progressively dwindled. Only a few thousand faithful maintain a Zoroastrian community in modern-day Iran.

**Other Faiths** Meanwhile, even though Zoroastrianism ultimately declined in its homeland, the cosmopolitan character of the Persian realm offered it opportunities to influence other

religious faiths. Numerous Jewish communities had become established in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Persia after the Hebrew kingdom of David and Solomon fell in 930 B.C.E. During the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanid eras, the Persian empire attracted merchants, emissaries, and missionaries from the whole region between the Mediterranean and India. Three religions of salvation—Buddhism, Christianity, and

**Manichaeism**, all discussed in later chapters—found a footing alongside Judaism and attracted converts. Indeed, Christianity and Manichaeism became extremely popular faiths in spite of intermittent rounds of persecution organized by Sasanid authorities.

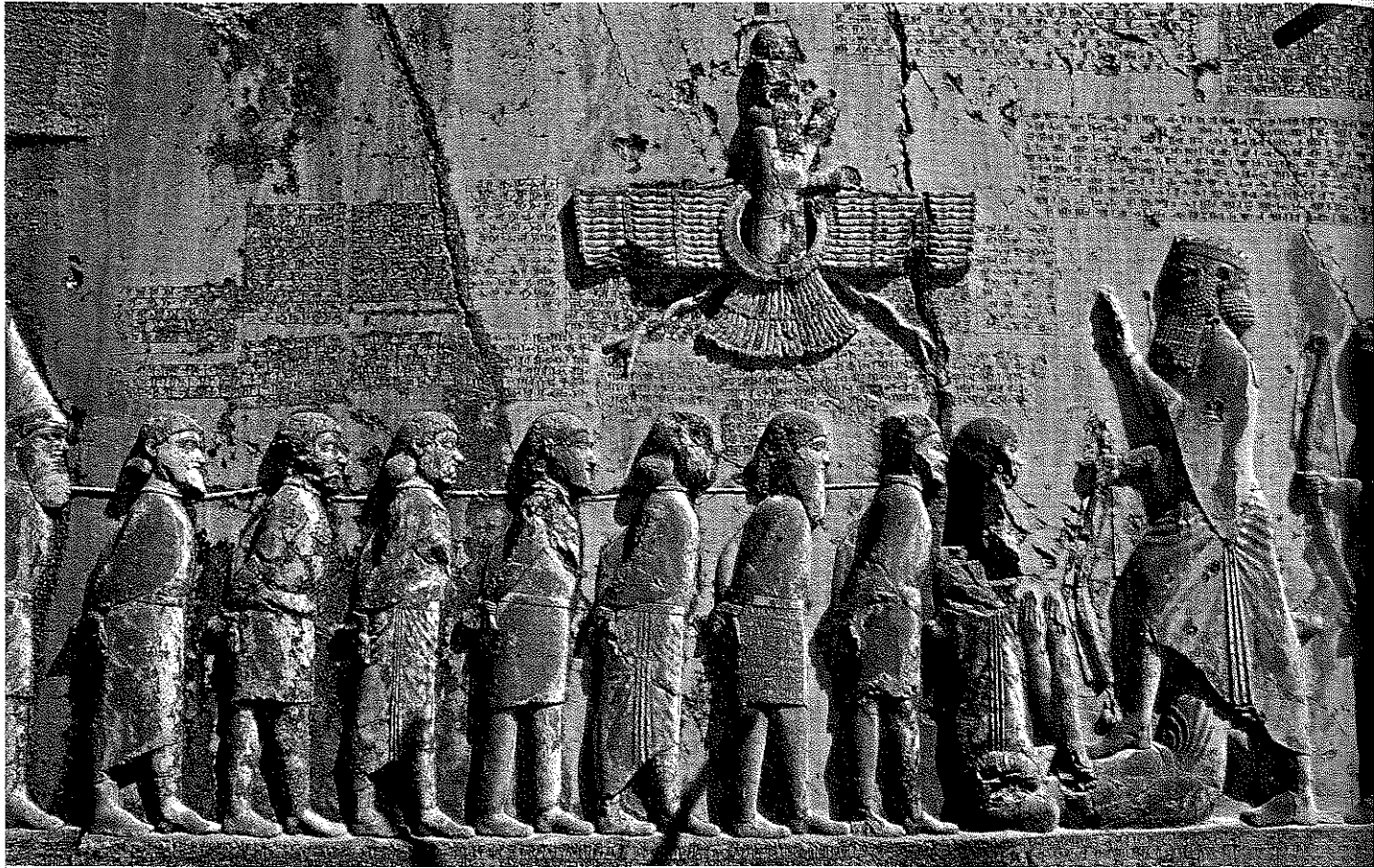
**Influence of Zoroastrianism** While foreign faiths influenced religious developments in classical Persian society, Zoroastrianism also left its

## Thinking about ENCOUNTERS

### Religions on the Move

During the classical era, proponents of popular religions of salvation found opportunities to attract new adherents both in their homelands and beyond. How can you account for the presence in classical Persia of different religious traditions from different lands? To what extent did Persian ideas influence the development of other religious traditions?

**Manichaeism** (man-ih-KEE-iz'm)



Darius faces Ahura Mazda, the Zoroastrian deity to whom he attributed his authority, as the various kings subject to him acknowledge him as their lord.

mark on the other religions of salvation. Jews living in Persia during Achaemenid times adopted several specific teachings of Zoroastrianism, which later found their way into the faiths of Christianity and Islam as well. Those teachings included the notion that an omnipotent and beneficent deity was responsible for all creation, the idea that a purely evil being worked against the creator god, the conviction that the forces of good will ultimately prevail over the power of evil after a

climactic struggle, the belief that human beings must strive to observe the highest moral standards, and the doctrine that individuals will undergo judgment, after which the morally upright will experience rewards in paradise while evildoers will suffer punishments in hell. Those teachings, which have profoundly influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all derived ultimately from the faith of Zarathustra and his followers.

### CHRONOLOGY

7th–6th centuries B.C.E.(?)	Life of Zarathustra
558–330 B.C.E.	Achaemenid dynasty
558–530 B.C.E.	Reign of Cyrus the Achaemenid
521–486 B.C.E.	Reign of Darius
334–330 B.C.E.	Invasion and conquest of the Achaemenid empire by Alexander of Macedon
323–83 B.C.E.	Seleucid dynasty
247 B.C.E.–224 C.E.	Parthian dynasty
224–651 C.E.	Sasanid dynasty