Quick Notes: Early India

Sources: Holt World History

World Civilizations Fourth Edition Philip J. Adler / Randall L. Pouwels (all quotes are from this source)

NOTES

Magadha

540 BCE King Bimbisara

c. 520-510 Persian invasion (Darius the Great)

End of Magadha – 320BCE

Chandragupta Maurya (start of 150 year rule)

Gained power upon the retreat of the Greeks

The invasion of India by Alexander the Great (330s BCE) “not only brought the first direct contact with Western ideas and art forms but also enabled a brief period of political unity under the Mauryan Dynasty, which moved into the vacuum left by Alexander’s retreat.”

Took advice from his associate Kautilya “who insisted on the primacy of the end over the means in all things political”….he supposedly wrote a guide for his master known as the Arthasastra (“a compilation of hard-bitten governmental policies” )…this book is “one of the few literary sources of early India’s history and culture”.

Chandragupta Maurya’s accomplishments included:

Grand palace at Pataliputra (Ganges River)

Army of 600,000 soldiers – war elephants / chariots

Conquered all of NW India

Rigid bureaucracy

Mines, spinning weaving, weights and measures, standards for physicians

Paranoid (slept in a different location every night in fear of assassination)

Grandson Asoka 270 BCE.

Gained all of India except the southern tip

Sickened by his own bloody battles…especially the Battle of Kalinga at the midpoint of his reign.

Ordered end of killing…converted to Buddhism

Indian Buddhist became missionaries and spread faith to other countries

Laws carved into stone pillars…set up in public places…the few surviving stones are the source for our understanding of early Indian government and are the first examples of Indian written language.

Asoka had 20 years of pacifism and “viewed himself as the responsible father of the people and exerted himself continually for their welfare. In doing so, he set a model of noble authority toward which later Indian rulers aspired but seldom reached.”

After Asoka’s death, weak successors lost what he had gained. “Wave after wave of barbarian horsemen entered India through the gateway to Central Asia called the Khyber Pass”

Replaced by Gupta –

Notes on the Position of Women

Initial period of near equality and (possibly) matriarchy

Arrival of Aryan nomads, descent of female prestige began and continued through the Vedic Hindu era.

Manu – the legendary lawgiver – “established the proper relation between the sexes once and for all”

Sati- ritualistic suicide of the widows and Purdah – isolation from all nonfamily males became an established part of Indian society. Females fundamentally were to follow their dharma and obey and serve their husbands and sons. The level of this “rule” varied a bit according to the caste the person was in.

“The Laws of Manu are an ancient compilation of teachings from Hindu India. Manu was a being simultaneously human and divine, from whom devout Hindus could learn what was needed for perfection and the attainment of moksha. Manu’s laws were the cornerstone of Hindu traditional opinion on the rights and duties of the sexes and of family members, as well as castes. These opinions and prejudices did not change substantially until recent times. The attitude of the Laws of Manu toward women and the lower castes are especially revealing (Note: the *shudra* are the lowest of the original four castes of India established during the Aryan epoch.)

*That place where the shudra are very numerous … soon entirely perishes, afflicted by disease and famine.*

*A Brahmin may confidently take the goods of his shudra, because the slave cannot have any possessions and the master may take his property.*

*A Brahmin who takes a shudra to wife and to his bed will after death sink into Hell; if he begets a child with her, he will lose the rank of Brahmin. The son whom a Brahmin begets through lust upon a shudra female is, although alive, a corpse and hence called a living corpse…*

*…*

*Reprehensible is the father who gives not his daughter in marriage at the proper time [namely puberty]; reprehensible is the husband who approaches not his wife in due season, and reprehensible is the son who does not protect his mother after the husband has died…*

*Drinking spirituous liquors, associating with wicked ones, separation from the husband, rambling abroad, sleeping at unseasonable hours, and dwelling in houses of other men are the six causes of ruin in women.*