AD 200
THE ROMAN AND KUSHAN EMPIRES
REACH THEIR GREATEST EXTENTS;
DECLINE OF THE HAN EMPIRE

Between ad 100 and 200, the Kushano-Sasanians, an Iranian nomadic people, created a vast empire in Central Asia and northern India. This empire was notable for its cosmopolitan culture, blending Indian, Persian, and Graeco-Roman influences, a reflection of its role as a key middleman in east-west trade routes. The Kushan empire was, however, highly decentralized and by ad 200 its power was already in decline.

Superficially the other empires established before this point had scarcely changed, but in fact all had serious problems. The prestige of the Parthians, always regarded as outsiders by their Persian subjects, was collapsing after a series of defeats by Rome and the Kushans. Believing that the Roman empire was becoming over-extended, the Parthians, who v. High People had made a habit of Roman expansion and fortified the northern frontiers, which the increasingly well-organized German tribes were putting under ever greater pressure.

In China, the Han dynasty was losing power to the local warlords on which it had relied to suppress peasant rebellions in ad 184. The warlords were now fighting each other, and a significant development at this time was the rise of Funan and Champa, the first kingdoms in Southeast Asia, seeing mainly to the stimulus of international trade.

In the 3rd century the Graeco-Roman mariners discovered how to exploit the monsoon winds to sail directly from Egypt to India and return in a single season. Trade between the Roman empire and India increased greatly as a result. To supply the Roman market, Indian merchants in turn increased trade with Southeast Asia, taking them not only goods but also Hindu and Buddhist cultures.