



Unit 5 Overview: Regional Webs 200 to 1500 CE

When the Roman Empire and Han Dynasty collapsed, much of the world was cast into a period of chaos and disarray. But often, periods of collapse look more like restructuring as people sought new sources of authority.



<p>0:03</p> <p><i>Montage of videos of parents giving their children advice. Illustrations from the Middle Ages of scribes writing, noblewoman and court, battle scene with swords and shields, painting of King Charles the Bald.</i></p>	<p>Do your parents give you advice? Do they tell you how to behave? Is their advice sometimes just a bit annoying? Take a moment to pity William of Septimania, the son of a nobleman in post Roman Europe. At the age of 15, his mother wrote him some advice in the form of a 50,000-word letter. William's mother was a noblewoman named Dhuoda. She hadn't seen her son in a while. Her husband, William's dad, chose the wrong side in one of the chaotic Wars engulfing Western Europe. In the 9th century CE and he was killed. William at the age of 15 became a hostage of King Charles the Bald. His mother wrote him a letter about how to behave. Here's part of it.</p>
<p>0:43</p> <p><i>Pages of hand-written letter with text visible as it is read aloud.</i></p>	<p>"Now, I remind you oh my son William, beautiful and adorable, that among your mundane concerns of this world, do not be slothful about collecting many books. I urge you to read and pray zealously. In sacred reading you will find how to pray and what you should guard against, what you should avoid, and what you ought to seek.</p>
<p>1:16</p> <p><i>Montage of pages from illustrated religious texts.</i></p>	<p>Of this I entreat you in reading and in worthy prayer that you let your mind be a helper to you. Watchful and alert, chaste and innocent, in reading and meritorious prayer."</p> <p>In keeping with the times, Dhuoda's advice was largely religious in nature but a lot of it was timeless stuff that parents tend to say. Honor and be faithful to your father, listen to good advice, don't be too proud or angry, read lots of books, and keep away from the girls until you're older. That sort of stuff.</p>
<p>1:57</p> <p><i>Continuing ontage of pages from illustrated religious texts transitioning to painted scenes of battle the collapse of the Roman Empire, then to scenes from the Dark Ages. Photographs of Roman ruins and Chinese funerary figurines. Map of Han Dynasty China.</i></p>	<p>You might roll your eyes at parental advice, but we can spare some sympathy for Dhuoda. She was writing in a time of chaos, she was worried for her son's safety, and who he might grow up to be without her. When she sent her letter in 843 CE, Dhuoda was living in Western Europe where Roman rule had collapsed centuries earlier.</p> <p>That collapse led to a period that historians once called a Dark Age. Centuries of warfare and destruction that made even the lives of nobles uncertain. The collapse of the Roman Empire was pretty epic but it's not the only great collapse in history. Around the same time, Han Dynasty China split into three pieces.</p>
<p>2:42</p> <p><i>Two photographs of the ruins of monumental architecture from the Gupta temples and Mayan pyramids. Sequence of images of Roman ruins, Han Dynasty era paintings of cities, Mayan ruins.</i></p>	<p>Other societies also experienced big declines during this unit, including the Gupta Empire of South Asia in the 5th Century and the Mayan city states in the 8th century.</p> <p>But the word collapse can be misleading. For example, while China split into three pieces for a while, much of the culture and infrastructure of the Han Dynasty was preserved as later dynasties rebuilt. And while many Mayan city states in the Central American lowlands were abandoned, others survived, especially in the mountainous highlands.</p>
<p>3:18</p> <p><i>Map of the world, zooming in on the vast expanse of the Roman Empire, with areas of present-</i></p>	<p>Even the collapse of the Roman Empire wasn't total. The eastern half of the Empire remained united under the rule of Byzantine emperors who called themselves Romans, not Byzantines.</p>



<p><i>day Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and more highlighted. Transition to highlight of the Middle East.</i></p>	<p>When the Muslim caliphates launched their conquests in the 7th Century, they adopted a lot of Roman techniques as they moved across North Africa.</p>
<p>3:38</p> <p><i>Area of central Europe highlighted on the map. More painted scenes of battle.</i></p>	<p>And in Western Europe, the so-called Dark Ages included periods of unification and growth like under Emperor Charlamagne, who ruled a vast empire. Dhuoda herself had grown up during the rule of Charlamagne but after he died, the brief period of unity ended as fighting broke out over who should succeed him, and the empire crumbled to pieces. It was this new uncertainty that inspired Dhuoda to send advice to her son.</p>
<p>4:19</p> <p><i>Map from the Middle Ages, illustration of a city as it pans to the right, settling on a church at the highest point.</i></p>	<p>Periods of collapse and chaos often intermingle with years of rebuilding and expansion. The systems that rose after the fall of the Roman and Han Empires might have built on the Roman and Han examples. But things still changed dramatically. In some places, the vacuum left by the fall of Rome was replaced by religion as people looked for new sources of authority.</p>
<p>4:39</p> <p><i>Painted scenes from the Catholic Church, a page from an illustrated manuscript of a religious scribe.</i></p>	<p>In Western Europe, this was the Catholic Church. Led by the popes in Rome, the church held powerful influence over the monarchs and nobles of Europe for centuries. Catholic monasteries often became centers of scholarship. We can see evidence of this influence in Dhuoda's letter which emphasized a life of piety and faith but also of reading and learning.</p>
<p>5:05</p> <p><i>Painting of a parade of riders on horseback, holding flags and blowing horns. Scene of an Islamic scholar teaching pupils.</i></p>	<p>Emerging from the Arabian Peninsula, Islam became the center of religious and political authority in the region, stretching from India to Spain. The Islamic World forged a network of shared religious values, trade, and scientific knowledge that connected societies across Asia, Africa, and Europe.</p>
<p>5:26</p> <p><i>Battle scene followed closely by a painting of scholars exchanging books and ideas. Image from an illustrated manuscript of a knight in armor.</i></p>	<p>Relations weren't always peaceful, of course, but the overall result was a flourishing network of trade and an exchange of ideas from east to west, and south to north, that stimulated growth and recovery even in poorer more remote regions like Dhuoda's Western Europe.</p> <p>Of course, the growth and rebuilding that followed collapse took a long time. Dhuoda's 15-year-old son, William, would live his life in a chaotic swirl world of warfare and revolt. He wasn't allowed to inherit his father's property.</p>
<p>6:02</p> <p><i>Scenes of battle. Final image of a man in robes, writing in a book with a feather pen.</i></p>	<p>He may have joined a rebellion against Charles the Bald, fought Vikings, and even appealed to the Muslim rulers of Cordoba for help overthrowing his King. William died in exile in 850, aged only 24. We don't know if he ever took his mom's advice. But when he was killed historians believe he still held the 50,000-word letter from his mother.</p>



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