

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**ROBERT  
STRAYER:**

Chapter five is about the inequalities of the ancient world. Chapter five examines these inequalities of class and gender as they existed in Eurasian civilizations at a time when they were largely accepted as natural and as permanent. But the expression of these inequalities differed considerably from place to place, and changed over time.

So this chapter investigates the social history of second-wave Eurasian civilizations by posing a number of questions. What's the difference between class in China and caste in India? How can we understand the extraordinarily prominent role of slavery in the Roman world, compared to that of Asian civilizations? In what ways, precisely, were women subordinated to men in these civilizations, and how did that subordination change over the centuries?

Now, in these early civilizations, such inequalities were seldom confronted directly, or as a matter of principle. Nonetheless, oppressed or subordinated people, on occasion, clearly resented those inequalities and pushed back against them. Peasants sometimes rebelled. Slaves sometimes revolted. And women sometimes spoke, wrote, and acted, to express their own grievances.

So despite the entrenched power of male elites, these second-wave civilizations were seldom places of social harmony. Chapter five examines the ways in which these inequalities were experienced, how they were justified, and the kinds of discontents and upheaval they generated.

As you read this chapter, you may want to consider how our own societies are organized in the 21st century. For history is always a mirror, in which we can, by comparison, see ourselves more clearly.