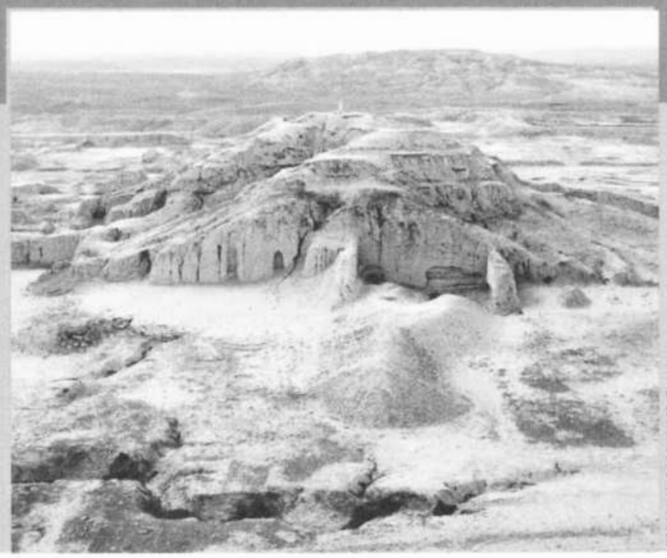
CHAPTER 1

The Ancient Near East: The First Civilizations



ESSAM AL-SUDANI/AFP/Getty Images

IMAGE 1.1 Excavation of Warka Showing the Ruins of Uruk

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND FOCUS QUESTIONS

CONNECTIONS TO TODAY

What lessons can you learn from the decline and fall of early civilizations, and can you apply those lessons to today's civilizations? Why or why not?

In 1849, a daring young Englishman made a hazardous journey into the deserts and swamps of southern Iraq. Moving south down the banks of the Euphrates (yoo-FRAY-teez) River while braving high winds and temperatures that reached 120°F, William Loftus led a small expedition in search of the roots of civilization. As he said, "From our childhood we have been led to regard this place as the cradle of the human race."

Guided by native Arabs into the southernmost reaches of Iraq, Loftus and his small group of explorers were soon overwhelmed by what they saw. He wrote, "I know of nothing more exciting or impressive than the first sight of one of these great piles, looming in solitary grandeur from the surrounding plains and marshes." One of these piles, known to the natives as the mound of Warka, contained the ruins of Uruk, one of the first cities in the world and part of one of the world's first civilizations.

Southern Iraq in Southwest Asia was one area in the world where civilization began. In fact, people in both Southwest Asia and Egypt developed organized societies, invented writing, and created the ideas and institutions that we associate with civilization. The Greeks and Romans, who later played such a crucial role in the foundation of what became Western civilization, were themselves nourished and influenced by these older societies. It is appropriate, therefore, to begin our story of Western civilization with the early civilizations of Southwest Asia and Egypt. Before considering these civilizations, however, we must briefly examine humankind's prehistory and observe how human beings made the shift from hunting and gathering to agricultural communities and ultimately to cities and civilization.

1-1 The First Humans

FOCUS QUESTIONS: How did the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages differ? How did the Neolithic Revolution affect the lives of men and women?

Historians rely primarily on documents to create their pictures of the past, but no written records exist for the prehistory of humankind. In their absence, the story of early humanity depends on archaeological and, more recently, biological information, which anthropologists and archaeologists use to formulate theories about our early past. Although modern science has given us more precise methods for examining prehistory, much of our understanding of early humans still relies on conjecture.

The earliest humanlike creatures—known as **hominids**—existed in Africa as long as 3 to 4 million years ago. Known as Australopithecines (aw-stray-loh-PITH-uh-synz), they flourished in East and South Africa and were the first hominids to make simple stone tools. They were bipedal with a brain size similar to that of modern apes. New hominids continue to be found, although considerable controversy can surround them. For example, the contention that a 2003 discovery in Indonesia of a hominid species known as the hobbit because of its small body is a distinct hominid species has been challenged by other scientists.

Another stage in early human development occurred around 1.5 million years ago when *Homo erectus* ("upright human being") emerged. *Homo erectus* made use of larger and more varied tools and was the first hominid to leave Africa and move into both Europe and Asia.

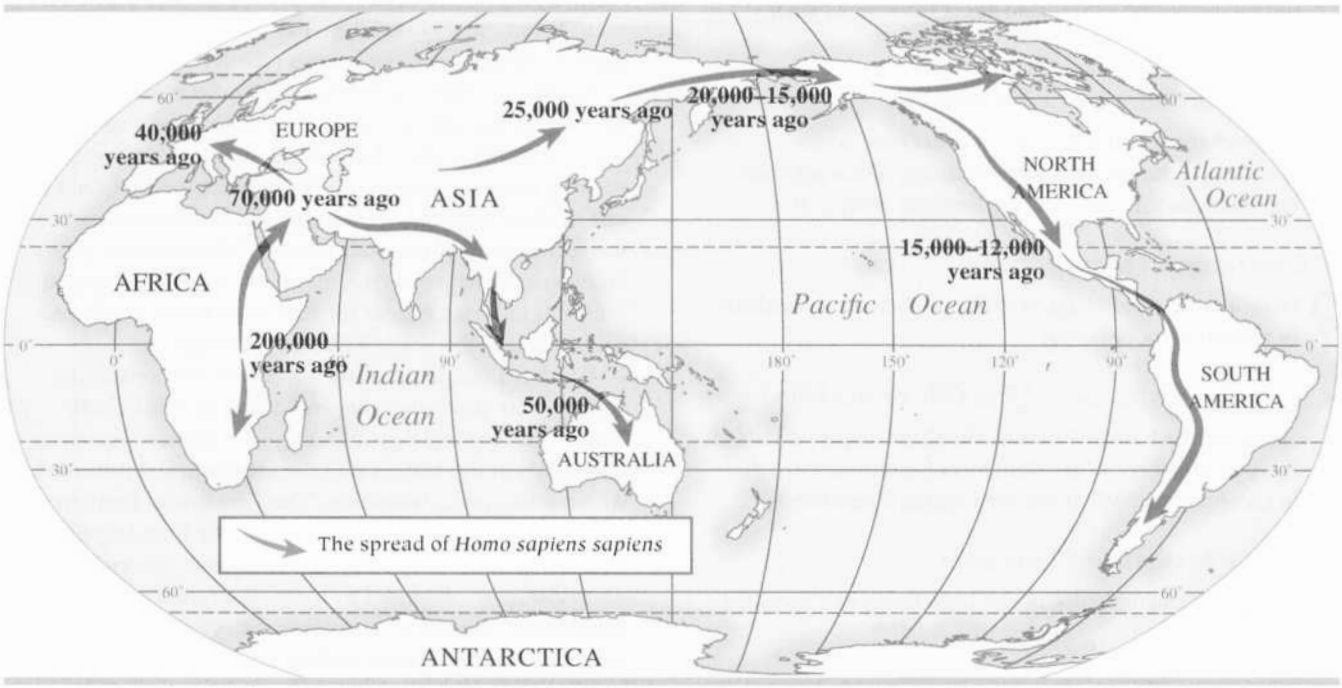
1-1a The Emergence of *Homo sapiens*

Around 250,000 years ago, a crucial stage in human development began with the emergence of *Homo sapiens* (HOH-moh SAY-pee-unz) ("wise human being"). The first anatomically modern humans, known as *Homo sapiens sapiens* ("wise, wise human being"), appeared in Africa between 200,000 and 150,000 years ago. Recent evidence indicates that they began to spread outside Africa around 70,000 years ago. Map 1.1 shows probable dates for different movements, although many of these dates are still controversial.

These modern humans, who were our direct ancestors, soon encountered other hominids, such as the Neanderthals, whose remains were first found in 1856 in the Neander valley in Germany. Neanderthal remains have since been found in both Europe and Asia and have been dated to between 200,000 and 30,000 B.C.E.

New genetic evidence since 2010 has indicated that European humans interbred with Neanderthals, and East Asian humans even more so. Neanderthals relied on a variety of stone tools and were the first early people to bury their dead. By 30,000 B.C.E., *Homo sapiens sapiens* had replaced the Neanderthals, who had largely become extinct.

HISTORIANS DEBATE **The Spread of Humans: Out of Africa or MultiRegional?** The movements of the first modern humans were rarely sudden or rapid. Groups of people advanced beyond their old hunting grounds at a rate



MAP 1.1 The Spread of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. *Homo sapiens sapiens* spread from Africa beginning about 70,000 years ago. Living and traveling in small groups, these anatomically modern humans were hunter-gatherers.

Given that some diffusion of humans occurred during ice ages, how would such climate change affect humans and their movements, especially from Asia to Australia and Asia to North America?

CHRONOLOGY	The First Humans
Australopithecines	Flourished ca. 2–4 million years ago
Homo erectus	Flourished ca. 100,000–1.5 million years ago
Neanderthals	Flourished ca. 200,000–30,000 B.C.E.
Homo sapiens sapiens	Emerged ca. 200,000 B.C.E.

of only two or three miles per generation, but this was enough to populate the world in some tens of thousands of years. Some scholars who advocate a multiregional theory have suggested that advanced human creatures may have emerged independently in different parts of the world rather than in Africa alone. But the latest genetic, archaeological, and climatic evidence strongly supports the out-of-Africa theory as the most likely explanation of human origin. In any case, by 10,000 B.C.E., *Homo sapiens sapiens* could be found throughout the world. By that time, it was the only human species left. All humans today, whether Europeans, Australian Aborigines, or Africans, belong to the same subspecies of human being.

1-1b The Hunter-Gatherers of the Old Stone Age

One of the basic distinguishing features of the human species is the ability to make tools. The earliest tools were made of stone, and so scholars refer to this early period of human history (ca. 2,500,000–10,000 B.C.E.) as the **Paleolithic Age** (*paleolithic* is Greek for "old stone").

For hundreds of thousands of years, humans relied on gathering and hunting for their daily food. Paleolithic peoples had a close relationship with the world around them and over time came to know which plants to eat and which animals to hunt. They did not know how to grow crops or raise animals, however. They gathered wild nuts, berries, fruits, and a variety of wild grains and green plants. Around the world, they hunted and consumed various animals, including buffalo, horses, bison, wild goats, and reindeer. In coastal areas, fish were a rich source of nourishment.

The gathering of wild plants and the hunting of animals no doubt led to certain patterns of living. Archaeologists and anthropologists have speculated that Paleolithic people lived in small bands of twenty or thirty people. They were nomadic, moving from place to place to follow animal migrations and vegetation cycles. Hunting depended on careful observation of animal behavior patterns and required a group effort for success. Over the years, tools became more refined and useful. The invention of the spear, and later the bow and arrow, made hunting considerably easier. Harpoons and fishhooks made of bone increased the catch of fish.

Both men and women were responsible for finding food—the chief work of Paleolithic people. Since women bore and raised the children, they generally stayed close to the camps, but they played an important role in acquiring food by gathering berries, nuts, and grains. Men hunted wild animals, an activity that often took them far from camp. Because both men and women played important roles in providing for the band's survival, many scientists believe that a rough equality existed between men and women. Indeed, some speculate that both men and women made the decisions that affected the activities of the Paleolithic band.

Some groups of Paleolithic peoples found shelter in caves, but over time, they also created new types of shelter. Perhaps the most common was a simple structure of wooden poles or sticks covered with animal hides. Where wood was scarce, Paleolithic hunter-gatherers might use the bones of mammoths to build frames that were then covered with animal hides. The systematic use of fire, which archaeologists believe began around 500,000 years ago, made it possible for the caves and human-made structures to have a source of light and heat. Fire also enabled early humans to cook their food, making it taste better, last longer, and, in the case of some plants, such as wild grain, easier to chew and digest.

The making of tools and the use of fire—two important technological innovations of Paleolithic peoples—remind us how crucial the ability to adapt was to human survival. But Paleolithic peoples did more than just survive. The cave paintings of large animals found in southwestern France and northern Spain bear witness to the cultural activity of Paleolithic peoples. A cave discovered in southern France in 1994—known as the Chauvet (shoh-VAY) cave after the leader of the expedition that found it—contains more than three hundred paintings of lions, oxen, owls, bears, and other animals (see Image 1.2). Most of these are animals that Paleolithic peoples did not hunt, which suggests to some scholars that the paintings were made for religious or even decorative purposes. The discoverers were overwhelmed by what they saw: "There was a moment of ecstasy. . . . They overflowed with joy and emotion in their turn. . . . These were moments of indescribable madness."[1]

1-1c The Neolithic Revolution (ca. 10,000–4000 B.C.E.)

The end of the last ice age around 10,000 B.C.E. was followed by what scholars call the **Neolithic Revolution**, a significant change in living patterns that occurred in the New Stone Age (*neolithic* is Greek for "new stone"). The name is misleading, however. Although Neolithic peoples made a new type of polished stone ax, this was not the major change that occurred after 10,000 B.C.E.

An Agricultural Revolution The biggest change in living patterns was the shift from gathering plants and hunting animals for sustenance (food gathering) to producing food by systematic agriculture (food production). The planting of grains and vegetables provided a regular supply of food. Dogs and sheep were among the first animals to be domesticated, and the domestication of animals such as goats, cattle, pigs, and sheep provided a steady source of meat, milk, and fibers such as wool for clothing. Larger animals could also be used for work as beasts of burden. The growing of crops and the taming of food-producing animals created a new relationship between humans and nature. Historians

Pictures from History/Bridgeman Images

IMAGE 1.2 Paleolithic Cave Painting: The Lascaux Cave. Cave paintings of large animals reveal the cultural creativity of Paleolithic peoples. This scene is part of a large underground chamber found accidentally in 1940 at Lascaux, France, by some boys looking for their dog. This work is dated around 15,000 B.C.E. To make their paintings, Paleolithic artists used stone lamps that burned animal fat to illuminate the cave walls and mixed powdered mineral ores with animal fat to create red, yellow, and black pigments. Some artists even made brushes out of animal hairs with which to apply the paints.

What does this painting reveal about Paleolithic peoples?

speak of this as the agricultural revolution. Revolutionary change is dramatic and requires great effort, but the ability to acquire food on a regular basis gave humans greater control over their environment. It also allowed them to give up their nomadic way of life and begin to live in settled communities.

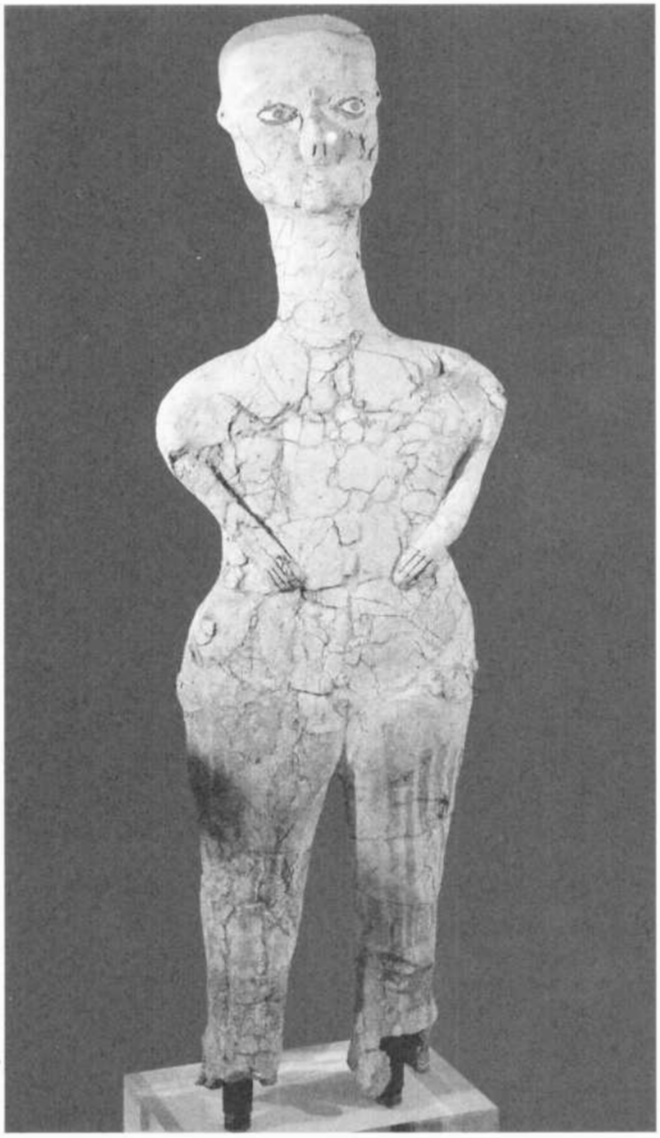
Systematic agriculture probably developed independently between 8000 and 7000 B.C.E. in four different areas of the world. Different plants were cultivated in each area: wheat, barley, and lentils in the Near East; rice and millet in South Asia; millet and yams in West Africa; and beans, potatoes, and corn (maize) in the Americas. The Neolithic Revolution needed a favorable environment. In the Near East, the upland areas above the Fertile Crescent (present-day northern Iraq and southern Turkey) were initially more conducive to systematic farming than the river valleys. This region received the necessary rainfall and was the home of two wild plant (barley and wheat) and four wild animal (pigs, cows, goats, and sheep) species that humans eventually domesticated.

Neolithic Farming Villages The growing of crops on a regular basis gave rise to more permanent settlements that historians refer to as Neolithic farming villages or towns. One of the oldest and most extensive agricultural villages was Çatal Hüyük (chaht-ul hoo-YOOK), which is located in modern-day Turkey. Its walls enclosed thirty-two acres, and its population probably reached six thousand during its high point from 6700 to 5700 B.C.E. People lived in simple mudbrick houses that were built so close to one another that there were few streets. To get to their homes, people had to walk along the rooftops and then enter the house through a hole in the roof.

Archaeologists have discovered twelve cultivated products at Çatal Hüyük, including fruits, nuts, and three kinds of wheat. Artisans made weapons and jewelry that were traded with neighboring peoples. Religious shrines housing figures of gods and goddesses have been found at Çatal Hüyük, as have a number of female statuettes. Molded with noticeably large breasts and buttocks, these "earth mothers" perhaps symbolically represented the fertility of both mother earth and human mothers. The shrines and statues point to the important role of religious practices in the lives of these Neolithic people (see Image 1.3).

Consequences of the Neolithic Revolution The Neolithic Revolution had far-reaching consequences. Once people settled in villages or towns, they built houses for protection and other structures for storing goods. As organized communities stored food and accumulated material goods, they began to engage in trade. People also began to specialize in certain crafts, and a division of labor consequently developed. Pottery was made from clay and baked in fire to make it hard. The pots were used for cooking and for storing grains. Woven baskets were also used for storage. Stone tools became refined as flint blades were developed to make sickles and hoes for use in the fields. Obsidian—a volcanic glass that was easily flaked—was also used to create very sharp tools. In the course of the Neolithic Age, many of the food plants still in use today began to be cultivated. Moreover, vegetable fibers from such plants as flax were used to make thread that was woven into cloth.

The change to systematic agriculture in the Neolithic Age also had consequences for the relationship between men and women. Men assumed the primary responsibility for working in the fields and herding animals—jobs that kept them away from home. Although women also worked in the fields, many remained close to home, caring for the children, weaving cloth, and performing other household tasks. In time, as work outside the home was increasingly perceived as more important than work done at home, men came to play the more dominant role in human society, which gave rise to the practice of **patriarchy** (PAY-tree-ark-ee), or a society dominated by men, a basic pattern that has persisted until our own times.



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 1.3 Statue from Ain Ghazal. This life-size statue made of plaster, sand, and crushed chalk was discovered in 1984 in Ain Ghazal, an archaeological site near Amman, Jordan. Dating from 6500 B.C.E., it is among the oldest known statues of the human figure. Although it appears lifelike, its features are considered generic rather than a portrait of an individual face. The purpose and meaning of this sculpture may never be known.

Other patterns set in the Neolithic Age also proved to be enduring elements of human history. Fixed dwellings, domesticated animals, regular farming, a division of labor, men holding power—all of these are a part of the human story. Despite all our modern scientific and technological progress, human survival still depends on the growing and storing of food, an accomplishment of peoples in the Neolithic Age. The Neolithic Revolution was truly a turning point in human history.

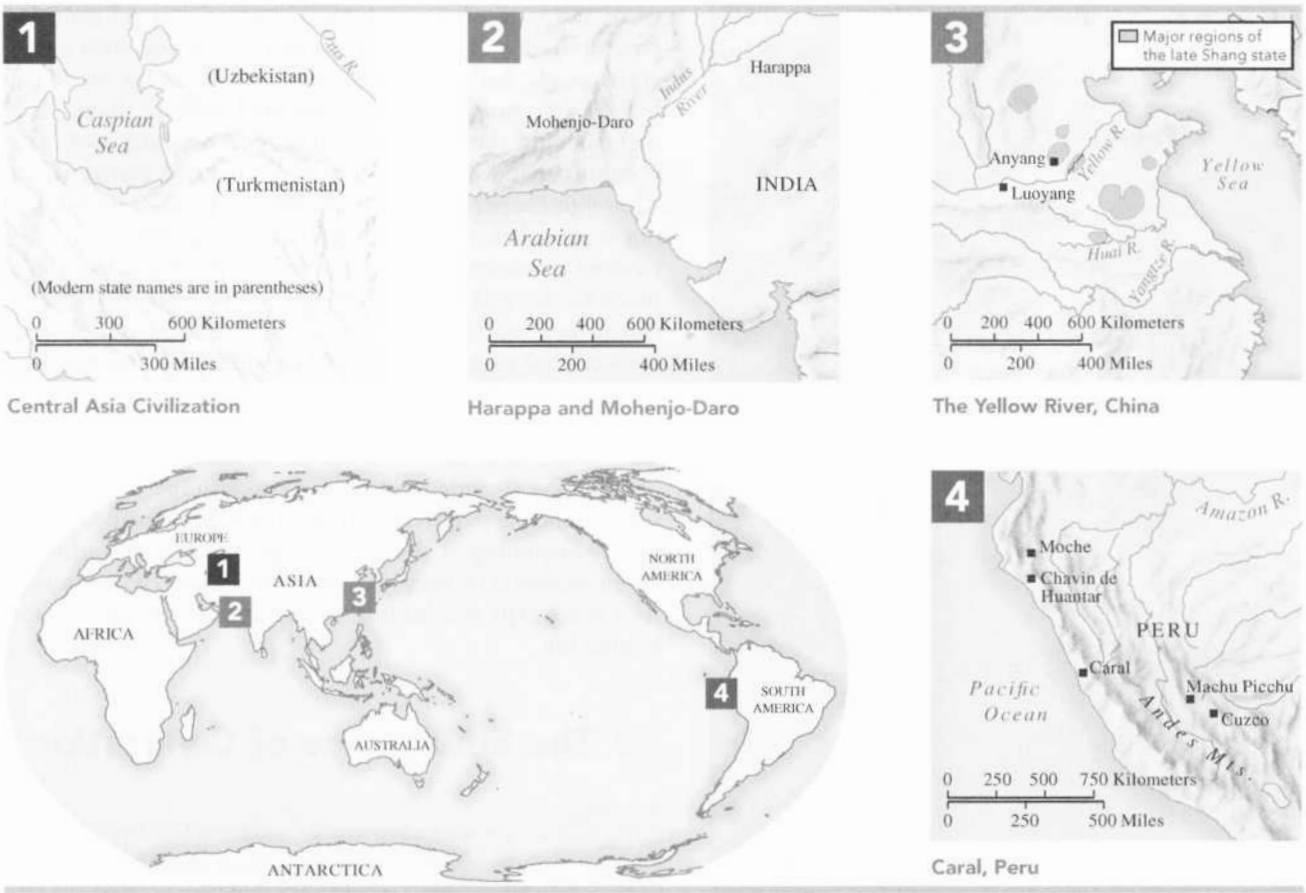
Between 4000 and 3000 B.C.E., significant technical developments began to transform Neolithic towns. The invention of writing enabled records to be kept, and the use of metals marked a new level of human control over the environment and its resources. Already before 4000 B.C.E., craftspeople had discovered that certain rocks could be heated to liquefy metals embedded within them. The metals could then be cast in molds to produce tools and weapons that were more refined than stone instruments. Although copper was the first metal to be used in producing tools, after 4000 B.C.E. craftspeople in West Asia discovered that combining copper and tin produced bronze, a much harder and more durable metal than copper. Its widespread use led historians to call the period from around 3000 to 1200 B.C.E. the Bronze Age; thereafter, bronze was increasingly replaced by iron.

At first, Neolithic settlements were mere villages. But as their inhabitants mastered the art of farming, more complex human societies emerged. As wealth increased, these societies began to develop armies and to build walled cities. By the beginning of the Bronze Age, the concentration of larger numbers of people in the river valleys of Southwest Asia and Egypt was leading to an entirely new pattern for human life.

1-2 The Emergence of Civilization

FOCUS QUESTIONS: What characteristics do some scholars use when speaking about the idea of civilization? What are some explanations for why early civilizations emerged?

As we have seen, early human beings formed small groups that developed a simple culture that enabled them to survive. As human societies grew and developed greater complexity, a new form of human existence—called civilization—came into being. A **civilization** is a complex culture in which large numbers of human beings share a variety of common elements. Historians have identified a number of basic characteristics of civilization. These include (1) an urban focus: cities became the centers of political, economic, social, cultural, and religious development; (2) a distinct religious structure: the gods were deemed crucial to the community's success, and professional priestly classes, as stewards of the gods' property, regulated relations with the gods; (3) new political and military structures: an organized government bureaucracy arose to meet the administrative demands of the growing population, and armies were organized to gain land and power and for defense; (4) a new social structure based on economic power: while kings and an upper class of priests, political leaders, and warriors dominated, there also existed a large group of free people (farmers, artisans, craftspeople) and at the very bottom, socially, a class of slaves; (5) the development of writing: kings, priests, merchants, and artisans used writing to keep records; and (6) new forms of significant artistic and intellectual activity: for example, monumental architectural structures, usually religious, occupied a prominent place in urban environments.



MAP 1.2 Emergence of Civilizations Around the World. Many historians maintain that civilizations developed independently in different parts of the world. As seen on this map, in addition to those in Southwest Asia and Egypt that will be examined in this chapter, civilizations emerged in India, China, Central Asia, and South America.

Q *What common features might explain the emergence of civilization in these areas?*

The civilizations that developed in Southwest Asia and Egypt will be examined in detail in this chapter. But civilization also developed independently in other parts of the world (see Map 1.2). Between 3000 and 1500 B.C.E., the valleys of the Indus River in India supported a flourishing civilization that extended hundreds of miles from the Himalayas to the coast of the Arabian Sea. Two major cities—Harappa (huh-RAP-uh) and Mohenjo-Daro (moh-HEN-joh-DAH-roh)—were at the heart of this South Asian civilization. Many written records of the Indus valley civilization exist, but their language has not yet been deciphered. This Indus valley civilization carried on extensive trade with city-states in Southwest Asia.

Another river valley civilization emerged along the Yellow River in northern China about 4,000 years ago. Under the Shang (SHAHNG) dynasty of kings, which ruled from 1570 to 1045 B.C.E., this civilization contained impressive cities with huge outer walls, royal palaces, and large royal tombs. A system of irrigation enabled early Chinese civilization to maintain a prosperous farming society ruled by an aristocratic class whose major concern was war.

Scholars long believed that civilization emerged in only four areas: the fertile river valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates, the Nile, the Indus, and the Yellow River—that is, in Southwest Asia, Egypt, India, and China. Recently, however, archaeologists have discovered two other early civilizations. One of these flourished in Central Asia (in what are now the republics of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) around 4,000 years ago. People in this civilization built mudbrick buildings, raised sheep and goats, had bronze tools, used a system of irrigation to grow wheat and barley, and had a writing system.

Another early civilization emerged in the Supe River valley of Peru. At the center of this civilization was the city of Caral, which flourished around 2600 B.C.E. It contained buildings for officials, apartment houses, and grand residences—all built of stone. The inhabitants of Caral also developed a system of irrigation by diverting a river more than a mile upstream into their fields.

CHRONOLOGY	The Birth of Early Civilizations
Egypt	ca. 3100 B.C.E.
Mesopotamia	ca. 3000 B.C.E.
India	ca. 3000 B.C.E.
Peru	ca. 2600 B.C.E.
China	ca. 2000 B.C.E.
Central Asia	ca. 2000 B.C.E.

HISTORIANS DEBATE

1-2a Why Did Early Civilizations Develop?

Since civilizations developed independently in different parts of the world, can general causes be identified that would explain why all of these civilizations emerged? A number of possible explanations of the beginning of civilization have been suggested. One theory maintains that challenges forced human beings to make efforts that resulted in the rise of civilization. Some scholars have adhered to a material explanation and have argued that material forces, such as the growth of food surpluses, made possible the specialization of labor and development of large communities with bureaucratic organization. But the area of the Fertile Crescent, in which civilization emerged in Southwest Asia (see Map 1.2), was not naturally conducive to agriculture. Abundant food could be produced only with massive human effort to manage the water, an undertaking that required organization and led to civilized cities. Other historians have argued that nonmaterial forces, primarily religious, provided the sense of unity and purpose that made such organized activities possible. Finally, some scholars doubt that we will ever discover the actual causes of early civilization.

1-3 Civilization in Mesopotamia

FOCUS QUESTION: How are the chief characteristics of civilization evident in ancient Mesopotamia?

The Greeks spoke of the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Southwest Asia as **Mesopotamia** (mess-uh-puh-TAY-mee-uh), the "land between the rivers." The region receives little rain, but the soil of the plain of southern Mesopotamia was enlarged and enriched over the years by layers of silt deposited by the two rivers. In late spring, the Tigris and Euphrates overflow and deposit their fertile silt, but since this flooding depends on the melting of snows in the upland mountains where the rivers begin, it is unpredictable and sometimes catastrophic. In such circumstances, people could raise crops only by building a complex system of irrigation and drainage ditches to control the flow of the rivers. Large-scale irrigation made possible the expansion of agriculture in this region, and the abundant food provided the material base for the emergence of civilization in Mesopotamia.

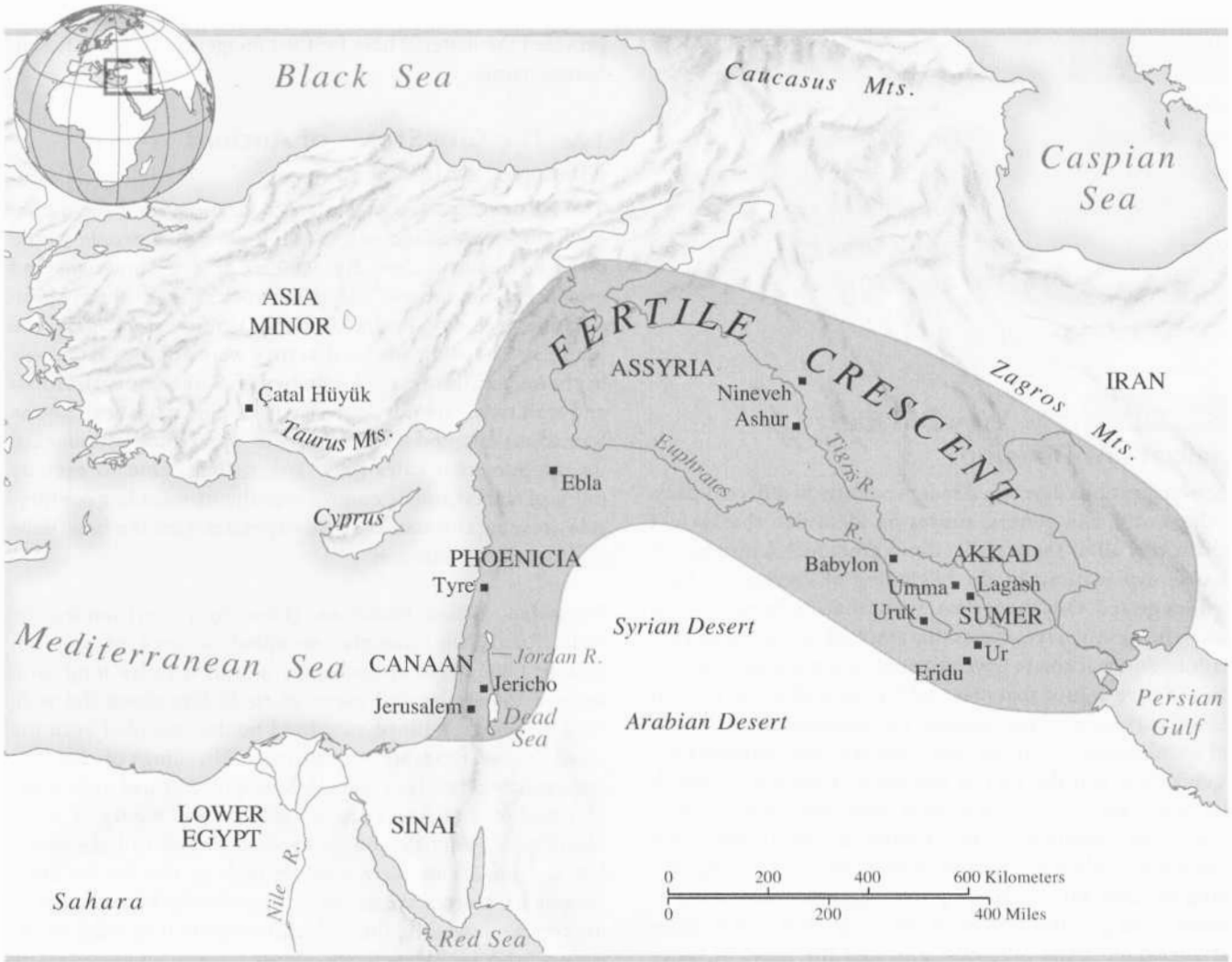
1-3a The City-States of Ancient Mesopotamia

The creators of Mesopotamian civilization were the Sumerians (soo-MER-ee-unz *or* soo-MEER-ee-unz), a people whose origins remain unclear. By 3000 B.C.E., the Sumerians had established a number of independent cities in southern Mesopotamia, including Eridu, Ur, Uruk, Umma, and Lagash (see Map 1.3). There is evidence that they were not the first people in the region, however. A number of Sumerian agricultural and craft terms are not Sumerian in origin, indicating that the Sumerians adopted some aspects of preexisting settlements. As the Sumerian cities grew larger, they came to exercise political and economic control over the surrounding countryside, forming city-states. These city-states were the basic units of Sumerian civilization.

Sumerian Cities Sumerian cities were surrounded by walls. Uruk, for example, occupied an area of approximately 1,000 acres encircled by a wall 6 miles long with defense towers located every 30 to 35 feet along the wall. City dwellings, built of sun-dried bricks, included both the small flats of peasants and the larger dwellings of the civic and priestly officials. Although Mesopotamia had little stone or wood for building purposes, it did have plenty of mud. Mudbricks, easily shaped by hand, were left to bake in the hot sun until they were hard enough to use for building. People in Mesopotamia were remarkably inventive with mudbricks, inventing the arch and constructing some of the largest brick buildings in the world.

The most prominent building in a Sumerian city was the temple, which was dedicated to the chief god or goddess of the city and often built atop a massive stepped tower called a **ziggurat** (ZIG-uh-rat). The Sumerians believed that gods and goddesses owned the cities, and much wealth was used to build temples as well as elaborate houses for the priests and priestesses who served the gods and supervised the temples and their property. The priests and priestesses had great power. In fact, historians believe that in the early stages of a few city-states, priests and priestesses may have played an important role in ruling. The Sumerians believed that the gods ruled the cities, making the state a **theocracy** (government by a divine authority). Actual ruling power, however, was primarily in the hands of worldly figures known as kings.

Kingship Sumerians viewed kingship as divine in origin—kings, they believed, derived their power from the gods and were the agents of the gods. As one person said in a petition to his king: "You in your judgment, you are the son of Anu [god of the sky]; your commands, like the word of a god, cannot be reversed; your words, like rain pouring down from heaven, are without number."[2] Regardless of their origins, kings had power—they led armies, issued laws, supervised the building



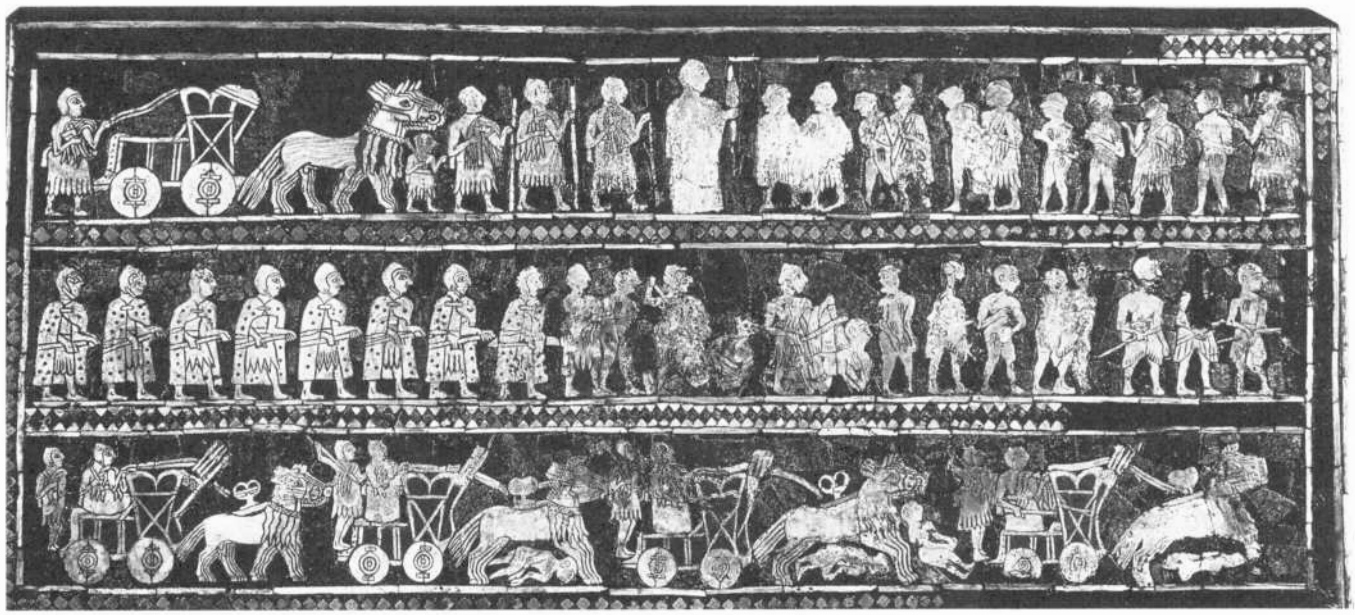
MAP 1.3 The Ancient Near East. The Fertile Crescent encompassed land with access to water. Employing flood management and irrigation systems, the peoples of the region established civilizations based on agriculture. These civilizations developed writing, law codes, and economic specialization.

What geographic aspects of the Mesopotamian city-states made conflict between them likely?

of public works, provided courts, and organized workers for the irrigation projects on which Mesopotamian agriculture depended. The army, government bureaucracy, and priests and priestesses all aided the kings in their rule (see Image 1.4). Befitting their power, Sumerian kings lived in large palaces with their wives and children.

Economy and Society The economy of the Sumerian city-states was primarily agricultural, but commerce and industry became important as well. The people of Mesopotamia produced woolen textiles, pottery, and metalwork. Foreign trade, which was primarily a royal monopoly, could be extensive. Royal officials imported luxury items, such as copper and tin, aromatic woods, and fruit trees, in exchange for dried fish, wool, barley, wheat, and the goods produced by Mesopotamian metalworkers. Traders traveled by land to the eastern Mediterranean in the west and by sea to India in the east. The invention of the wheel around 3000 B.C.E. led to the development of carts with wheels that made the transport of goods easier.

Sumerian city-states probably contained four major social groups: elites, dependent commoners, free commoners, and slaves. Elites included royal and priestly officials and their families. Dependent commoners included the elites' clients who worked for the palace and temple estates. Free commoners worked as farmers, merchants, fishers, scribes, and craftspeople. Probably 90 percent or more of the population were farmers. They could exchange their crops for the goods of the artisans in free town markets. Slaves belonged to palace officials, who used them mostly in building projects; temple officials, who used mostly female slaves to weave cloth and grind grain; and rich landowners, who used them for farming and domestic work.



Kmuratgeyik/Dreamstime.com

IMAGE 1.4 **The Royal Standard of Ur.** This detail is from the Royal Standard of Ur, a box dating from around 2700 B.C.E. that was discovered in a stone tomb from the royal cemetery of the Sumerian city-state of Ur. The scenes on one side of the box depict the activities of the king and his military forces. Shown in the bottom panel are four Sumerian battle chariots. Each chariot held two men, one who held the reins and the other armed with a spear for combat. A special compartment in the chariot held a number of spears. The charging chariots are seen defeating the enemy. In the middle band, the Sumerian soldiers round up the captured enemies. In the top band, the captives are presented to the king, who has alighted from his chariot and is shown standing above all the others in the center of the panel.

What do these scenes reveal about the importance of war in Sumerian society? Why was war so important?

1-3b Empires in Ancient Mesopotamia

As the number of Sumerian city-states grew and the states expanded, new conflicts arose as city-state fought city-state for control of land and water. During the Early Dynastic Age (3000–2340 B.C.E.), the fortunes of various cities rose and fell over the centuries. The constant wars, with their burning and sacking of cities, left many Sumerians in deep despair, as is evident in the following lines from the Sumerian poem "Lament from Ur": "Ur is destroyed, bitter is its lament. The country's blood now fills its holes like hot bronze in a mold. Bodies dissolve like fat in the sun. Our temple is destroyed, the gods have abandoned us, like migrating birds. Smoke lies on our city like a shroud."[3]

The Akkadian Empire Located on the flat, open land of Mesopotamia, the Sumerian city-states were also vulnerable to invasion. To the north of the Sumerian city-states were the Akkadians (uh-KAY-dee-unz). We call them a Semitic people because of the language they spoke (see Table 1.1). Around 2340 B.C.E., Sargon, leader of the Akkadians, overran the Sumerian city-states and established a dynastic empire. Sargon used the former rulers of the conquered city-states as his governors. His power was based on the military—namely, his army of 5,400 men. Sargon's empire, including all of Mesopotamia as well as lands westward to the Mediterranean, inspired generations of Near Eastern leaders to emulate his accomplishment. Even in the first millennium B.C.E., Sargon was still remembered in chronicles as a king of Akkad who "had no rival or equal, spread his splendor over all the lands, and crossed the sea in the east. In his eleventh year, he conquered the western land to its furthest point, and brought it under his sole authority."[4]

TABLE 1.1 Some Semitic Languages

Akkadian	*Assyrian*	Hebrew
Arabic	*Babylonian*	*Phoenician*
Aramaic	*Canaanitic*	*Syriac*

Note: Languages in *italic* type are no longer spoken.

Sargon also used religion as a unifying force in his empire. He made his daughter high priestess of the moon god Nanna at Ur in Sumer. She was given the Sumerian name of Enheduanna, "chief priestess, ornament of heaven." Sargon trusted her to unify the Sumerian and Akkadian gods in order to bring stability to his empire. This Akkadian princess also composed a number of religious hymns for the temples in Sumer, making her one of the first authors in history known by name.

One of Sargon's successors, his grandson Naram-Sin (ca. 2260–2223 B.C.E.), continued the greatness of the Akkadian empire. Like his grandfather, Naram-Sin waged numerous military campaigns that led him to an extreme level of self-glorification. He called himself the king of the four corners

of the universe and took the extraordinary step of declaring himself a god. An inscription found in northern Iraq reads: "Naram-Sin, the strong one, king of Akkad, when the four corners [of the universe] together were hostile to him, he remained victorious in nine battles in a single year. . . . Because he had been able to preserve his city in the time of crisis, [the inhabitants of] his city asked . . . that he be the god of their city Akkad, and built a temple for him in the midst of Akkad."[5] By the end of his reign, however, Naram-Sin was battling hill peoples, who finally caused the fall of the Akkadian empire by 2150 B.C.E.

The Third Dynasty of Ur The end of the Akkadian empire brought a return to independent city-states in Mesopotamia. Much confusion ensued, as is evident in the recorded Sumerian king list, which stated bluntly, "Who was king? Who was not king?" The confusion ended when Ur-Nammu established a new dynasty that reunified much of Mesopotamia with its capital at Ur. This Third Dynasty of Ur (ca. 2112–2000 B.C.E.) witnessed a final flowering of Sumerian culture. The economy flourished, and new temples and canals were built. Each province was required to contribute goods to the central government.

Around 2000 B.C.E., however, invaders from Iran destroyed Ur and brought an end to the Third Dynasty. Even earlier, the Amorites, a large group of Semitic-speaking semi-nomads, described by Sumerian scribes as dressed in sheepskins, living in tents, and eating raw meat, had entered the region and battled the kings of the Third Dynasty. The Amorites, or Old Babylonians, gradually settled down and over the next two hundred years established their influence throughout much of Mesopotamia. One of their kings, Hammurabi (ham-uh-RAH-bee), managed to establish power and create a new empire.

Hammurabi's Empire Hammurabi (1792–1750 B.C.E.) had a well-disciplined army of foot soldiers who carried axes, spears, and copper or bronze daggers. He learned to divide his opponents and subdue them one by one. Using such methods, he gained control of Sumer and Akkad and reunified Mesopotamia almost to the old borders established by Sargon (see Map 1.4). After his conquests, Hammurabi called himself "the sun of Babylon, the king who made the four quarters of the world obedient," and established his capital at Babylon.

Hammurabi, the man of war, was also a man of peace. He followed in the footsteps of previous conquerors by assimilating Mesopotamian culture; as a result, Sumerian ways continued to exist despite the end of the Sumerians as a political entity. A collection of his letters, found by archaeologists, reveals that the king took a strong interest in state affairs. He built temples, defensive walls, and irrigation canals; encouraged trade; and brought about an economic revival. Indeed, Hammurabi saw himself as a shepherd to his people: "I am indeed the shepherd who brings peace, whose scepter is just. My benevolent shade was spread over my city. I held the people of the lands of Sumer and Akkad safely on my lap."[6]

MAP 1.4 Hammurabi's Empire

CHRONOLOGY Chief Events in Mesopotamian History

Sumerian city-states: Early Dynastic Age	ca. 3000–2340 B.C.E.
Sargon	ca. 2340–2279 B.C.E.
Naram-Sin	ca. 2260–2223 B.C.E.
Third Dynasty of Ur	ca. 2112–2000 B.C.E.
Hammurabi's reign	1792–1750 B.C.E.
Invasion by Kassites	ca. 1550 B.C.E.

Hammurabi left his dynasty strong enough that it survived until the 1550s B.C.E., when the Kassites from the northeast took over.

1-3c The Code of Hammurabi

Hammurabi is best remembered for his law code, a collection of 282 laws (see Global Perspectives, "The Stele in the Ancient World," p. 11). For centuries, laws had regulated people's relationships with one another in the lands of Mesopotamia, but only fragments of these earlier codes survive. Although many scholars today view Hammurabi's collection less as a code of laws and more as an attempt by Hammurabi to portray himself as the source of justice to his people, the code still gives us a glimpse of the Babylonian society of his time (see Historical Voices, "The Code of Hammurabi," p. 12).

The Code of Hammurabi reveals a society with a system of strict justice. Penalties for criminal offenses were severe and varied according to the social class of the victim. A crime against a member of the upper class (a noble) was punished more severely than the same offense against a member of the lower class. Moreover, the principle of an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth was fundamental to this system of justice. This meant that punishments should fit the crime: "If a freeman has destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy, they shall destroy his eye." Hammurabi's code had an impact on legal ideas in Southwest Asia for hundreds of years, as the following verse from the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 24:19–20) demonstrates: "If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so is he to be injured."

Hammurabi's code took the responsibilities of public officials very seriously. The governor of an area and city officials were expected to catch burglars. If they failed to do so, the officials in the district where the crime was committed had to replace the lost property. If the officials did not apprehend a murderer, they had to pay a fine to the relatives of the murdered person.

The code also furthered the proper performance of work with what amounted to consumer protection laws. Builders were held responsible for the buildings they constructed. If a house collapsed, killing the

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

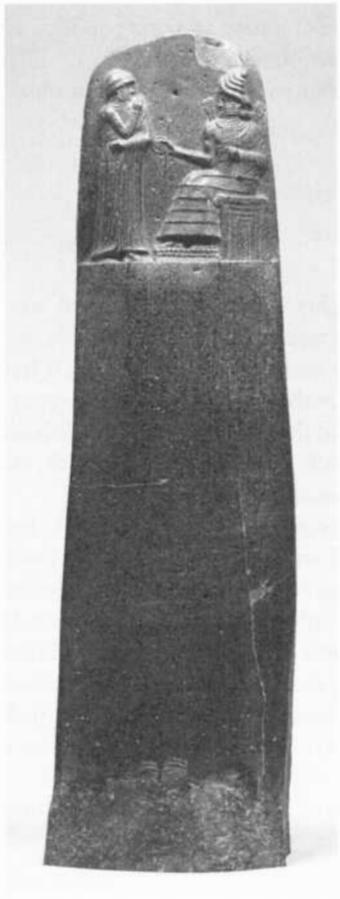
The Stele in the Ancient World

Why was the stele so widely used in ancient civilizations? Why was the stele of Hammurabi especially important in Mesopotamia?

A STELE IS AN UPRIGHT STONE SLAB OR PILLAR that usually contains an inscription and sculpture. Stelae were often used to commemorate the achievements of a ruler. One prominent stele from antiquity, shown in Image 1.5a, was the stele of Hammurabi. Although the Sumerians had compiled earlier law codes, Hammurabi's code was the most famous in early Mesopotamian history. The upper part of the stele depicts Hammurabi standing in front of the seated sun god Shamash. The king raises his hand in deference to the god, who gives Hammurabi the power to rule and orders the king to record the law. The lower portion of the stele contains the actual code.

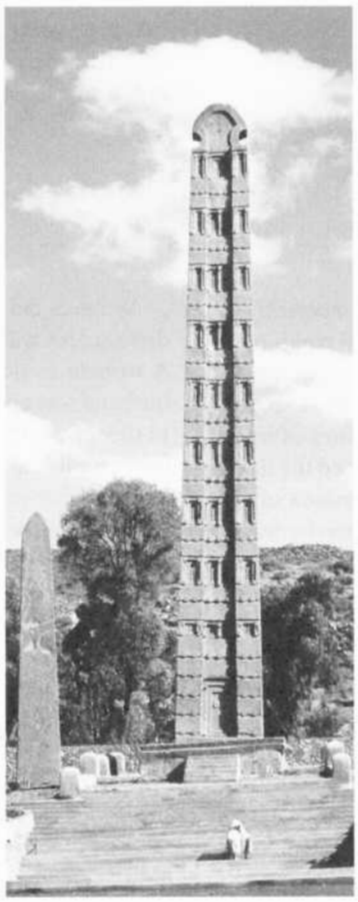
Shown in Image 1.5b is the tallest of the Axum stelae still standing in present-day Ethiopia. Axum was a prosperous trading state in Africa by the third century C.E., and in the fourth century rulers of Axum erected stelae to mark the site of royal tombs with inscriptions commemorating the achievements of the kings.

Image 1.5c shows a polished sandstone column, 32 feet high, erected in the third century B.C.E. during the reign of Ashoka (269–232 B.C.E.), who is considered one of India's greatest rulers. This and other pillars were used to commemorate events in the life of the Buddha and were inscribed with Buddhist sayings to guide people in the proper way. Stelae were also used in ancient China, Greece, and Mexico.



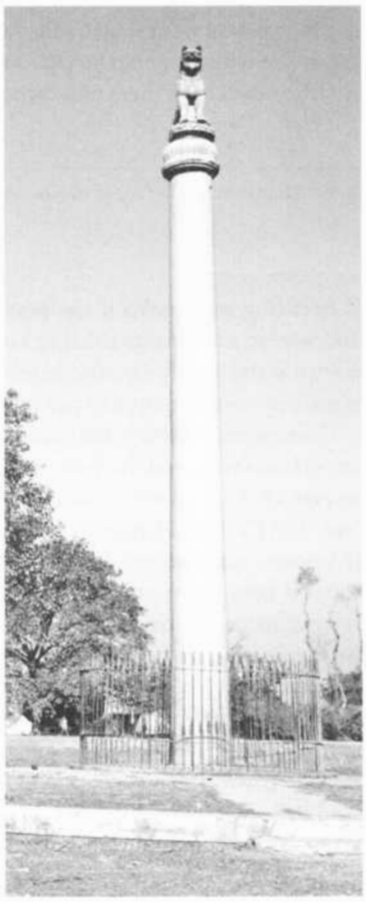
RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 1.5a



Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 1.5b



Borromeo/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 1.5c

owner, the builder was put to death. If the collapse caused the death of the son of the owner, the son of the builder was put to death. If the collapse destroyed goods, they had to be replaced and the house itself reconstructed at the builder's expense.

The number of laws in Hammurabi's code dedicated to land tenure and commerce reveals the importance of agriculture and trade in the Mesopotamian economy. Laws concerning land use and irrigation were especially strict, an indication of the danger

HISTORICAL VOICES

The Code of Hammurabi

What do the laws from the Code of Hammurabi reveal about Mesopotamian society?

HAMMURABI'S CODE is the most complete Mesopotamian law code, although not the earliest. It was inscribed on a stone stele (STEE-lee), or pillar, topped by a bas-relief picturing Hammurabi receiving the inspiration for the law code from the sun god Shamash, who was also the god of justice. As the following examples illustrate, the law code emphasized the principle of "an eye for an eye" and punishments that varied according to the victim's social status.

The Code of Hammurabi

25. If a fire break out in a man's house and a man who goes to extinguish it cast his eye on the furniture of the owner of the house, and take the furniture of the owner of the house, that man shall be thrown into that fire.
129. If the wife of a man be taken in lying with another man, they shall bind them and throw them into the water. If the husband of the woman would save his wife, or if the king would save his male servant (he may).
131. If a man accuse his wife and she has not been taken in lying with another man, she shall take an oath in the name of god and she shall return to her house.
196. If a man destroy the eye of another man, they shall destroy his eye.
198. If one destroy the eye of a freeman or break the bone of a freeman, he shall pay one mina of silver.
199. If one destroy the eye of a man's slave or break a bone of a man's slave he shall pay one-half his price.
209. If a man strike a man's daughter and bring about a miscarriage, he shall pay ten shekels of silver for her miscarriage.
210. If that woman die, they shall put his daughter to death.
211. If, through a stroke, he bring about a miscarriage to the daughter of a freeman, he shall pay five shekels of silver.
212. If that woman die, he shall pay one-half mana of silver.
213. If he strike the female slave of a man and bring about a miscarriage, he shall pay two shekels of silver.
214. If that female slave die, he shall pay one-third mana of silver.

Source: Hammurabi, *The Code of Hammurabi, King of Babylon*, ed. R. F. Harper, 2nd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1904).

of declining crop yields if the land was used incompetently. If landowners and tenants failed to keep dikes in good repair or to control water flow properly, thereby causing damage to others' crops, they were required to pay for the grain that was destroyed.

Commercial activity was carefully regulated. Rates of interest on loans were watched closely. If the lender raised the interest rate after a loan was made, he lost the entire amount of the loan. The Code of Hammurabi even specified the precise wages of laborers and artisans, such as brickmakers and jewelers.

Most laws in the code focused on marriage and the family. Parents arranged marriages for their children. After marriage, the parties involved signed a marriage contract; without it, no one was considered legally married. The husband provided a bridal payment, and the woman's parents were responsible for a dowry to the new husband.

As in many patriarchal societies, women had far fewer privileges and rights in the married relationship than men. A woman's place was in the home, and failure to fulfill her expected duties was grounds for divorce. If she was not able to bear children, her husband could divorce her, but he had to return the dowry to her family. If a wife tried to leave home to engage in business, thus neglecting her house, her husband could divorce her and did not have to repay the dowry. Furthermore, a wife who was a "gadabout . . . neglecting her house [and] humiliating her husband" could be drowned. We do know that in practice not all women remained at home. Some worked in the fields and others in business, where they were especially prominent in running taverns.

Women did have some rights, however. A husband who divorced his wife without good reason had to return her dowry. A woman could seek a divorce and get her dowry back if her husband was unable to show that she had done anything wrong. In theory, a wife was guaranteed the use of her husband's legal property in the event of his death. A mother could also decide which of her sons would receive an inheritance.

Sexual relations were strictly regulated as well. Husbands, but not wives, were permitted sexual activity outside marriage. A wife and her lover caught committing adultery were pitched into the river, although if the husband pardoned his wife, the king could pardon the guilty man. Incest was strictly forbidden. If a father had incestuous relations with his daughter, he would be banished. Incest between a son and his mother resulted in both being burned.

Fathers ruled their children as well as their wives. Obedience was duly expected: "If a son has struck his father, they shall cut off his hand." If a son committed a serious offense, his father could disinherit him.

1-3d The Culture of Mesopotamia

A spiritual worldview was of fundamental importance to Mesopotamian culture. To the peoples of Mesopotamia, the gods were living realities who affected all aspects of life. It was crucial, therefore, that the correct hierarchies be observed. Leaders could prepare armies for war, but success really depended on a favorable relationship with the gods. This helps explain the importance of

the priestly class and is the reason why even the kings took great care to dedicate offerings and monuments to the gods.

The Importance of Religion One of the most famous accounts of the creation of the universe from the ancient Near East is the Babylonian creation epic known as the *Enûma Elish*. The name comes from the first three words of the first two lines of the poem:

> *When on high the heavens were not yet named,*
> *And below, the earth was not called by a name*

The *Enûma Elish* tells how the god Marduk was endowed with absolute power by the other gods to do battle with Tiamat, a primordial goddess who personified the forces of watery chaos. Marduk defeats Tiamat in battle and proceeds to create the universe by dividing Tiamat in two, one part becoming the heavens and the other the earth (with her breasts as mountains). From her eyes came the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The *Enûma Elish* was recited during the New Year Festival celebrated in honor of Marduk in the city of Babylon, which the all-powerful god founded as an earthly residence for the gods after he created the universe.

The Mesopotamians viewed their city-states as earthly copies of a divine model and order. Each city-state was sacred because it was linked to a god or goddess. Hence, Nippur, the earliest center of Sumerian religion, was dedicated to Enlil (EN-lil), the god of wind. Moreover, located at the heart of each major city-state was a temple complex. Occupying several acres, this sacred area consisted of a ziggurat with a temple at the top dedicated to the god or goddess who owned the city. The temple complex was the true center of the community. The main god or goddess dwelt there symbolically in the form of a statue, and the ceremony of dedication included a ritual that linked the statue to the god or goddess and thus supposedly harnessed the power of the deity for the city's benefit. Considerable wealth was poured into the construction of temples and other buildings used for the residences of priests and priestesses who served the gods. Although the gods literally owned the city, the temple complex used only part of the land and rented out the remainder. The temples dominated individual and commercial life, an indication of the close relationship between Mesopotamian religion and culture.

The physical environment had an obvious impact on the Mesopotamian view of the universe. Ferocious floods, heavy downpours, scorching winds, and oppressive humidity were all part of the Mesopotamian climate. These conditions and the resulting famines easily convinced Mesopotamians that this world was controlled by supernatural forces and that the days of human beings "are numbered; whatever he may do, he is but wind," as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* laments (see "Mesopotamian Literature," later in this section). In the presence of nature, Mesopotamians could easily feel helpless, as this poem relates:

> *The rampant flood which no man can oppose,*
> *Which shakes the heavens and causes earth to tremble,*
> *In an appalling blanket folds mother and child,*
> *Beats down the canebrake's full luxuriant greenery,*
> *And drowns the harvest in its time of ripeness.*[7]

The Mesopotamians discerned cosmic rhythms in the universe and accepted its order but perceived that it was not completely safe because of the presence of willful and powerful cosmic forces that they identified with gods and goddesses.

With its numerous gods and goddesses animating all aspects of the universe, Mesopotamian religion was **polytheistic**. The four most important deities were An, Enlil, Enki (EN-kee), and Ninhursaga (nin-HUR-sah-guh). An was the god of the sky and hence the most important force in the universe. Since his basic essence was authority, he was also viewed as the source or active principle of all authority, including the earthly power of rulers and fathers alike. In one myth, the gods address him thus:

> *What you have ordered comes true!*
> *The utterance of prince and lord is but what you have ordered, do agree with.*
> *O An! your great command takes precedence, who could gainsay it?*
> *O father of the gods, your command, the very foundations of heaven and earth, what god could spurn it?*[8]

Enlil, god of wind, was considered the second greatest power of the visible universe. In charge of the wind and thus an expression of the legitimate use of force, Enlil became the symbol of the proper use of force on earth as well. Enki was the god of the earth. Since the earth was the source of life-giving waters, Enki was also the god of rivers, wells, and canals. More generally, he represented the waters of creativity and was responsible for inventions and crafts. Ninhursaga began as a goddess associated with soil, mountains, and vegetation. Eventually, however, she was worshiped as a mother goddess, a "mother of all children," who manifested her power by giving birth to kings and conferring the royal insignia on them.

Human beings' relationship with their gods was based on subservience because, according to Sumerian myth, human beings were created to do the manual labor the gods were unwilling to do for themselves. Moreover, humans were insecure because they could never be sure what the gods would do. But humans did make attempts to circumvent or relieve their anxiety by discovering the intentions of the gods and by trying to influence them as well; these efforts gave rise to the development of the arts of **divination**.

Divination took a variety of forms. A common form, at least for kings and priests who could afford it, involved killing animals such as sheep or goats and examining their livers or other organs. Supposedly, features seen in the organs of the sacrificed animals foretold events to come. Thus, one handbook states that if the animal organ has shape x, the outcome of the military campaign will be y. Private individuals relied on cheaper divinatory techniques. These included interpreting shapes in the smoke from burning incense or the pattern formed when oil was poured into water. The Mesopotamian arts of divination arose out of the desire to discover the purposes of the gods and goddesses. If people could decipher the signs that foretold events, the events would be predictable and humans could act wisely.

Rmn-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 1.6 **The Development of Cuneiform.** Pictured here is the cone of Uruinimgina, an example of cuneiform script from an early Sumerian dynasty. The inscription announces reductions in taxes.

Writing The realization of writing's great potential was another aspect of Mesopotamian culture. The oldest Mesopotamian texts date to around 3000 B.C.E. and were written by the Sumerians, who used a **cuneiform** (kyoo-NEE-uh-form) ("wedge-shaped") system of writing (see Image 1.6). Using a reed stylus, they made wedge-shaped impressions on clay tablets, which were then baked or dried in the sun. Once dried, these tablets were virtually indestructible, and the several hundred thousand that have been found so far have provided a valuable source of information for modern scholars. Sumerian writing evolved from pictures of concrete objects to simplified and stylized signs, leading eventually to a phonetic system that made possible the written expression of abstract ideas (see Table 1.2). Sumerian was the chief spoken and written language of Mesopotamia in the third millennium B.C.E., but it was replaced in the second millennium by Akkadian.

Mesopotamian peoples used writing primarily for record keeping. The most common cuneiform tablets record transactions of daily life: tallies of cattle kept by cowherds for their owners, production figures, lists of taxes and wage payments, accounts, contracts, and court decisions dealing with business matters. There are also monumental texts, documents that were intended to last forever, such as inscriptions etched in stone on statues and royal buildings.

Still another category of cuneiform inscriptions includes a large body of basic texts produced for teaching purposes. Schools for scribes were in operation by 2500 B.C.E. They were necessary because considerable time was needed to master the cuneiform system of writing. The primary goal of scribal education was to produce professionally trained scribes for careers in the temples and palaces, the military, and government service. Pupils were male and primarily from wealthy families.

Mesopotamian Literature Writing was important because it enabled a society to keep records and maintain knowledge of previous practices and events. Writing also made it possible for people to communicate ideas in new ways, which is especially evident in Mesopotamian literary works (see Historical Voices, "The Advice of Shuruppag," p. 15). The most famous piece of Mesopotamian literature was *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, an elaborate poem that records the exploits of a legendary king of

TABLE 1.2 Evolution of Writing from Pictographic Signs to Cuneiform Script

Pictographic sign, ca. 3100 B.C.E.									
Interpretation	star	?sun over horizon	?stream	ear of barley	bull's head	bowl	head + bowl	lower leg	?shrouded body
Cuneiform sign, ca. 2400 B.C.E.									
Cuneiform sign ca. 700 B.C.E. (turned through 90°)									
Phonetic value*	dingir, an	u_4, ud	a	še	gu_4	nig_2, ninda	ku_3	du, gin, gub	lu_2
Meaning	god, sky	day, sun	water, seed, son	barley	ox	food, bread	to eat	to walk, to stand	man

*Some signs have more than one phonetic value, and some sounds are represented by more than one sign; for example, u_4 means the fourth sign with the phonetic value *u*.

From the *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia & the Ancient Near East* by Michael Roaf/Courtesy of Andromeda Oxford Limited, Oxford, England.

HISTORICAL VOICES

The Advice of Shuruppag

What does this document tell you about the position of men and women in Sumerian society? How would you compare ancient Sumerian values with those of Hammurabi and those of today?

IN THE LATE THIRD MILLENNIUM B.C.E. a Sumerian king named Shuruppag gave instructions to his son Ziusudra. The instructions included bits of wisdom on a variety of practical subjects.

The Instructions of Shuruppag

My son, let me give you instructions: you should pay attention! Ziusudra, let me speak a word to you: you should pay attention! Do not neglect my instructions! Do not transgress the words I speak! The instructions of an old man are precious: you should comply with them.

You should not steal anything. . . . You should not break into a house. . . . My son, you should not commit robbery. . . .

You should not play around with a married young woman: the slander could be serious. My son, you should not sit alone in a chamber with a married woman. . . .

You should not speak improperly, later it will lay a trap for you. . . .

You should not curse strongly: it rebounds on you. . . .

My son, you should not use violence. . . . You should not commit rape on someone's daughter; the courtyard will learn of it. . . .

You should not boast in beer halls like a deceitful man: then your words will be trusted. . . .

You should not pass judgment when you drink beer. . . .

At harvest time, at the most priceless time, collect like a slave girl, eat like a queen; my son, to collect like a slave girl, to eat like a queen, this is how it should be. . . .

The elder brother is indeed like a father; the elder sister is indeed like a mother. Listen therefore to your elder brother, and you should be obedient to your elder sister as if she were your mother. . . .

The negligent one ruins his family. . . .

When you bring a slave girl from the hills, she brings both good and evil with her. The good is in the hands; the evil is in the heart. The heart does not let go of the good, but the heart cannot let go of the evil either. . . .

A loving heart maintains a family; a hateful heart destroys a family.

To have authority, to have possessions and to be steadfast are princely divine powers. You should submit to the respected; you should be humble before the powerful. My son, you will then survive against the wicked. . . .

You should not speak arrogantly to your mother; that causes hatred for you. You should not question the words of your mother and your personal god. The mother gives birth to the man; the father, like a god, makes him bright. The father is like a god: his words are reliable. The instructions of the father should be complied with.

Source: The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, Oxford 1998–2006.

Uruk. Gilgamesh (GILL-guh-mesh), wise, strong, and perfect in body, part man, part god, abused the citizens of Uruk:

> "Gilgamesh sounds the tocsin for his amusement," the people complained, "his arrogance has no bounds by day or night. No son is left with his father, for Gilgamesh takes them all, even the children. . . . His lust leaves no virgin to her lover, neither the warrior's daughter nor the wife of the noble."[9]

The citizens ask the gods to send a competitor to oppose Gilgamesh and keep him busy. The gods comply and send a hairy, barbaric beast named Enkidu who Gilgamesh tries to weaken by sending a prostitute to seduce him. When Enkidu finally comes to Uruk, he and Gilgamesh engage in a fierce struggle that neither can win. The two become fast friends and set off in pursuit of heroic deeds. Ishtar (Sumerian Inanna), the goddess of love, attempts to seduce Gilgamesh, but he refuses her advances. In anger, she convinces her father Anu (Sumerian An) to send the Bull of Heaven to kill Gilgamesh and Enkidu. They manage to kill the bull instead, but the gods decide that in return one of them must die. When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh experiences the pain of mortality and begins a search for the secret of immortality. He finds Utnapishtim, a man who had been granted everlasting life by the gods. Utnapishtim tells how he survived the Great Flood sent by the gods to destroy humankind (see Opposing Viewpoints, "The Great Flood: Two Versions," p. 16). Regretting what they had done, the gods bestowed immortality on Utnapishtim, who then instructed Gilgamesh to dive to the bottom of a river and find a certain plant that gives the power to grow younger. Although Gilgamesh finds the plant, a snake snatches it away before he can eat it. Gilgamesh remains mortal. The desire for immortality, one of humankind's great searches, ends in frustration. Everlasting life, as this Mesopotamian epic makes clear, is only for the gods.

Mathematics and Astronomy People in Mesopotamia made outstanding developments in mathematics and astronomy. In math, the Sumerians devised a number system based on 60, using combinations of 6 and 10 for practical solutions. They used the processes of multiplication and division and compiled tables for the computation of interest. Geometry was used for practical purposes, such as measuring fields and building projects. In

The Great Flood: Two Versions

What does this selection from the Epic of Gilgamesh *tell you about the relationship between the Mesopotamians and their gods? How might you explain the similarities and differences between the Mesopotamian account and the flood story in Genesis?*

BOTH THE MESOPOTAMIAN *EPIC OF GILGAMESH* and the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) include accounts of a great flood. In the first selection, taken from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh the story of how he survived the flood unleashed by the gods to destroy humankind. Utnapishtim recounts how the god Ea advised him to build a boat and how he came to land the boat at the end of the flood. The second selection is the account of the great flood that appears in the book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible. The biblical Noah appears to be a later version of the Mesopotamian Utnapishtim.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh*

"In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamor. Enlil heard the clamor and he said to the gods in council, 'The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel.' So the gods agreed to exterminate mankind. Enlil did this, but Ea [Sumerian Enki, god of the waters] because of his oath warned me in a dream . . . 'tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life, despise worldly goods and save your soul alive. Tear down your house, I say, and build a boat. . . . Then take up into the boat the seed of all living creatures.' [Utnapishtim did as he was told, and then the destruction came.]

"For six days and six nights the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world, tempest and flood raged together like warring hosts. When the seventh day dawned, the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stifled; I looked at the face of the world and there was silence, all mankind was turned to clay. The surface of the sea stretched as flat as a rooftop; I opened a hatch and the light fell on my face. Then I bowed low, I sat down and I wept, the tears streamed down my face, for on every side was the waste of water. I looked for land in vain, but fourteen leagues distant there appeared a mountain, and there the boat grounded; on the mountain of Nisir the boat held fast, she held fast and did not budge. . . .

"When the seventh day dawned, I loosed a dove and let her go. She flew away, but finding no resting-place she returned. Then I loosed a swallow, and she flew away but finding no resting-place she returned. I loosed a raven, she saw that the waters had retreated, she ate, she flew around, she cawed, and she did not come back. Then I threw everything open to the four winds, I made a sacrifice and poured out a libation on the mountain top."

Genesis 6:11–15, 17–19; 7:24; 8:3, 13–21

Now the earth was corrupted in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood: make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. . . . I am going to bring flood waters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. . . ."

The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days. . . . By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. . . . Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it." So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his son's wives . . . [and all the animals]. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart. "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done."

Sources: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. with an introduction by N. K. Sandars (London: Penguin Classics, 1960), and the Holy Bible, New International Version (Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, 1973).

HISTORICAL VOICES

Significance of the Nile River and the Pharaoh

How do the two hymns presented here underscore the importance of the Nile River and the institution of the pharaoh to Egyptian civilization?

TWO OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCES of life for the ancient Egyptians were the Nile River and the pharaoh. Egyptians perceived that the Nile River made possible the abundant food that was a major source of their well-being. The first selection, *Hymn to the Nile*, probably from the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties in the New Kingdom, expresses the gratitude Egyptians felt for the Nile. The Egyptian king, or pharaoh, was viewed as a god and the absolute ruler of Egypt. His significance and the gratitude of the Egyptian people for his existence are evident in the second selection, a hymn from the reign of Sesotris III (ca. 1880–1840 B.C.E.).

"Hymn to the Nile"

Hail to you, O Nile, that issues from the earth and comes to keep Egypt alive! . . .
He that waters the meadows which Re [Ra] created, in order to keep every kid alive.
He that makes to drink the desert and the place distant from water: that is his dew coming down from heaven. . . .
The lord of fishes, he who makes the marsh-birds to go upstream. . . .
He who makes barley and brings emmer [wheat] into being, that he may make the temples festive.
If he is sluggish, then nostrils are stopped up, and everybody is poor. . . .
When he rises, then the land is in jubilation, then every belly is in joy, every backbone takes on laughter, and every tooth is exposed.
The bringer of food, rich in provisions, creator of all good, lord of majesty, sweet of fragrance. . . .
He who makes every beloved tree to grow, without lack of them.

"Hymn to the Pharaoh"

He has come to us, he has taken the land of the well, the double crown [crown of Upper and Lower Egypt] is placed on his head.
He has come, he has united the two lands, he has joined the kingdom of the upper land with the lower.
He has come, he has ruled Egypt, he has placed the desert in his power.
He has come, he has protected the two lands, he has given peace in the two regions.
He has come, he has made Egypt to live, he has destroyed its afflictions.
He has come, he has made the aged to live, he has opened the breath of the people.
He has come, he has trampled on the nations, he has smitten the [enemies], who knew not his terror.
He has come, he has protected his frontier, he has rescued the robbed.

Source: "Hymn to the Nile" from J. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament*, 3rd revised edition with supplement (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969). Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press. "Hymn to the Pharaoh" from W. M. Flinders Petrie, *A History of Egypt* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1903), vol. 1, p. 183.

astronomy, the Sumerians made use of units of 60 and charted the chief heavenly constellations. Their calendar was based on twelve lunar months and was brought into harmony with the solar year by adding an extra month from time to time.

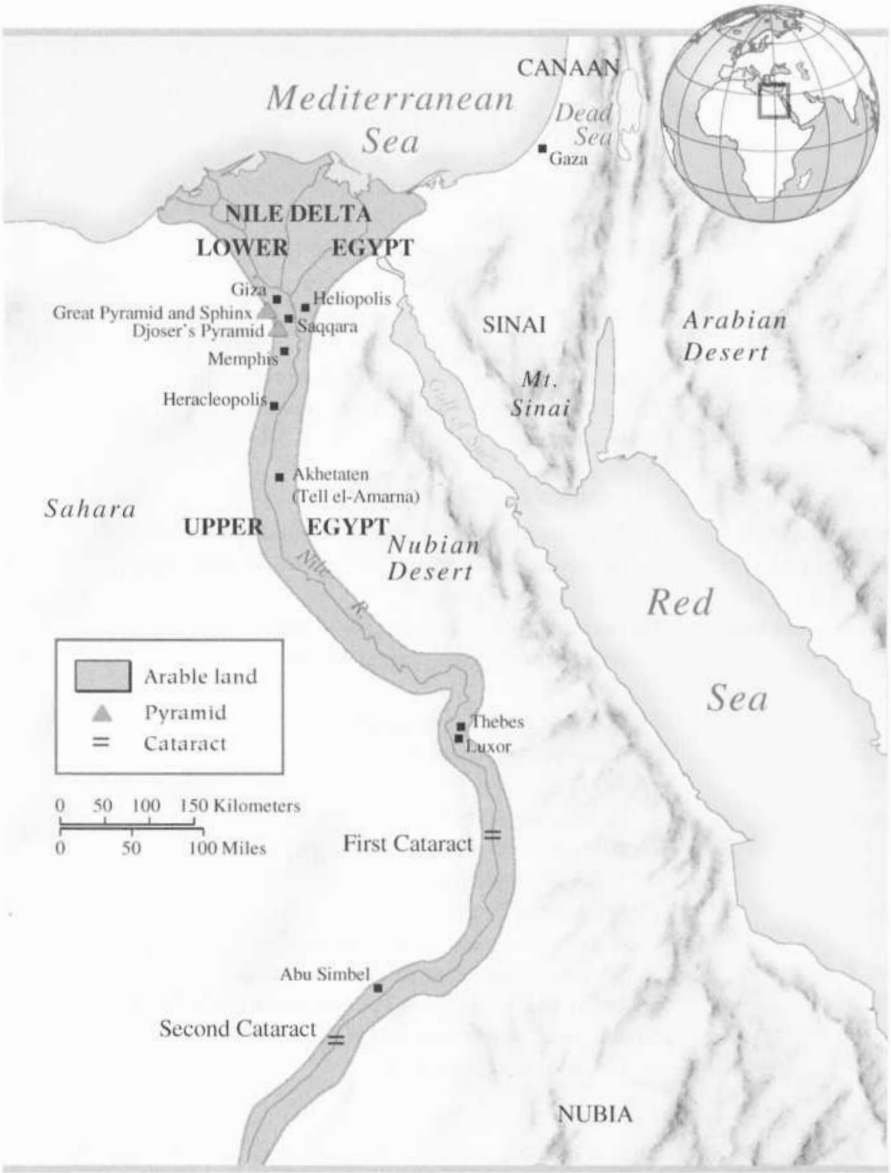
1-4 Egyptian Civilization: "The Gift of the Nile"

FOCUS QUESTION: What are the basic features, elements of continuity, and differences in the three major periods of Egyptian history?

Although contemporaneous with Mesopotamia, civilization in Egypt evolved along somewhat different lines. Of central importance to the development of Egyptian civilization was the Nile River. That the Egyptian people recognized its significance is apparent in the *Hymn to the Nile* (see Historical Voices, "Significance of the Nile River and the Pharaoh," above): "The bringer of food, rich in provisions, creator of all good, lord of majesty, sweet of fragrance. . . . He who . . . fills the magazines, makes the granaries wide, and gives things to the poor. He who makes every beloved tree to grow."[10] Egypt, like Mesopotamia, was a river valley civilization.

1-4a The Impact of Geography

The Nile is a unique river, beginning in the heart of Africa and coursing northward for thousands of miles. It is the longest river in the world. Thanks to the Nile, an area several miles wide on both banks of the river was capable of producing abundant harvests. The miracle of the Nile was its annual flooding. The river rose in the summer from rains in Central Africa and



MAP 1.5 **Ancient Egypt.** Egyptian civilization centered on the life-giving water and flood silts of the Nile River, with most of the population living in Lower Egypt, where the river splits to form the Nile delta. Most of the pyramids, built during the Old Kingdom, are clustered at the entrance to the delta.

How did the lands to the east and west of the river help to protect Egypt from invasion?

the Ethiopian highlands, crested in Egypt in September and October, and left a deposit of silt that enriched the soil. The Egyptians called this fertile land, dark from the silt and the lush crops that grew on it, the Black Land. Beyond these narrow strips of fertile fields lay the deserts (the Red Land).

Unlike the floods of Mesopotamia's rivers, the flooding of the Nile was gradual and usually predictable, and the river itself was seen as life-enhancing, not life-threatening. Although a system of organized irrigation was still necessary, the small villages along the Nile could make the effort without the massive state intervention that was required in Mesopotamia. Egyptian civilization consequently tended to remain more rural, with many small population centers congregated along a narrow band on both sides of the Nile. About 100 miles before it empties into the Mediterranean, the river splits into two major branches, forming the delta, a triangular-shaped territory called Lower Egypt to distinguish it from Upper Egypt, the land upstream to the south (see Map 1.5). Egypt's important cities developed at the tip of the delta. Even today, most of Egypt's people are crowded along the banks of the Nile River.

The surpluses of food that Egyptian farmers grew in the fertile Nile valley made Egypt prosperous. But the Nile also served as a unifying factor in Egyptian history. In ancient times, the Nile was the fastest way to travel, making both transportation and communication easier. Winds from the north pushed sailboats south, and the current of the Nile carried them north. Often when they headed downstream (north), people used long poles or paddles to propel their boats forward.

Unlike Mesopotamia, which was subject to constant invasion, Egypt was blessed by natural barriers that protected it from invasion and gave it a sense of security. These barriers included the deserts to the west and east; the cataracts (rapids) on the southern part of the Nile, which made defense relatively easy; and the Mediterranean Sea to the north. These barriers, however, were effective only when they were combined with Egyptian fortifications at strategic locations, and they did not prevent the development of trade. Indeed, there is evidence of very early trade between Egypt and Mesopotamia.

In essence, Egyptian geography and topography played important roles in the early history of the country. The regularity of the Nile floods and the relative isolation of the Egyptians created a sense of security that was accompanied by a feeling of changelessness. As the ancient Egyptians said, when the Nile floods each year "the fields laugh and people's faces light up." Unlike people in Mesopotamia, Egyptians faced life with a spirit of confidence in the stability of things. Egyptian civilization was characterized by a remarkable degree of continuity over thousands of years.

1-4b The Old and Middle Kingdoms

Manetho (MAN-uh-thoh), an Egyptian priest and historian who lived in the early third century B.C.E., provided the basic framework for the study of Egyptian history. He divided Egyptian

history into thirty-one dynasties of kings. Using Manetho's and other lists of kings, modern historians have divided Egyptian history into three major periods: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom. These were periods of long-term stability characterized by strong monarchical authority, competent bureaucracy, freedom from invasion, much construction of temples and pyramids, and considerable intellectual and cultural activity. But between the periods of stability were intervals known as the Intermediate Periods, which were characterized by weak political structures and rivalry for leadership, invasions, a decline in building activity, and a restructuring of society.

The Old Kingdom According to the Egyptians' own tradition, their land consisted initially of numerous populated areas ruled by tribal chieftains. Around 3100 B.C.E., during the Early Dynastic Period, the first Egyptian royal dynasty, under a king called Menes (MEE-neez), united both Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom. Henceforth, the king would be called King of Upper and Lower Egypt, and one of the royal crowns would be the Double Crown, combining the White Crown of Upper Egypt and the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. Just as the Nile united Upper and Lower Egypt physically, kingship united the two areas politically.

The Old Kingdom encompassed the fourth through eighth dynasties of Egyptian kings and lasted from around 2575 to 2125 B.C.E. It was an age of prosperity and splendor, made visible in the construction of the greatest and largest pyramids in Egyptian history. The capital of the Old Kingdom was located at Memphis, south of the delta.

Kingship was a divine institution in ancient Egypt and formed part of a universal cosmic scheme (see Historical Voices, "Significance of the Nile River and the Pharaoh," p. 17): "What is the king of Upper and Lower Egypt? He is a god by whose dealings one lives, the father and mother of all men, alone by himself, without an equal."[11] In obeying their king, subjects helped maintain the cosmic order. A breakdown in royal power could only mean that citizens were offending divinity and weakening the universal structure. Among the various titles of Egyptian kings, that of pharaoh (originally meaning "great house" or "palace") eventually came to be the most common.

Although they possessed absolute power, Egyptian kings were supposed to rule not arbitrarily but according to set principles. The chief principle was called *Ma'at* (muh-AHT), a spiritual precept that conveyed the idea of truth and justice, especially right order and harmony. To ancient Egyptians, this fundamental order and harmony had existed throughout the universe since the beginning of time. Pharaohs were the divine instruments who maintained it and were themselves subject to it.

Although theoretically absolute in their power, in practice Egyptian kings did not rule alone. Initially, members of the king's family performed administrative tasks, but by the fourth dynasty a bureaucracy with regular procedures had developed. Especially important was the office of vizier, "steward of the whole land." Directly responsible to the king, the vizier was in charge of the bureaucracy, with its numerous departments, including police, justice, river transport, and public works. Agriculture and the treasury were the most important departments. Agriculture was, of course, the backbone of Egyptian prosperity, and the treasury collected the taxes, which were paid in kind. A careful assessment of land and tenants was undertaken to establish the tax base.

For administrative purposes, Egypt was divided into twenty-two provinces (or nomes as they were later called by the Greeks) in Upper Egypt and twenty in Lower Egypt. A governor, called by the Greeks a nomarch, was head of each nome and was responsible to the king and vizier. Nomarchs, however, tended to build up large holdings of land and power within their nomes, creating a potential rivalry with the pharaohs.

The Middle Kingdom A decline in centralized authority, a drought caused by low levels of the Nile and a decline in rainfall, and economic troubles brought about the collapse of the Old Kingdom, ushering in the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2125–2010 B.C.E.). A so-called prophet named Nefer-Rohu (Neferti) described the scene:

> This land is so damaged that there is no one who is concerned with it, no one who speaks, no one who weeps. . . . The sun disk is covered over. It will not shine so that people may see. . . . The rivers of Egypt are empty, so that the water is crossed on foot. Men seek for water for the ships to sail on it. . . . This land is helter-skelter, and no one knows the result that will come about, which is hidden from speech, sight, or hearing.[12]

Eventually, a new royal dynasty managed to pacify all Egypt and inaugurated the Middle Kingdom, a new period of stability lasting from around 2010 to 1630 B.C.E.

Much of the Middle Kingdom's history centered around the twelfth dynasty founded by Amenemhet I, a vizier who established himself and his successors as pharaohs. Egyptians later portrayed the Middle Kingdom as a golden age, a clear indication of its stability. Several factors contributed to its vitality. The nome structure was reorganized. The boundaries of each nome were now settled precisely, and the obligations of the nomes to the state were clearly delineated. Nomarchs were confirmed as hereditary officeholders but with the understanding that their duties must be performed faithfully. These included the collection of taxes for the state and the recruitment of labor forces for royal projects, such as stone quarrying.

The Middle Kingdom was characterized by a new concern on the part of the pharaohs for the people. In the Old Kingdom, the pharaoh had been viewed as an inaccessible god-king. Now he was portrayed as the shepherd of his people with the responsibility to build public works and provide for the public welfare. As one pharaoh expressed it: "He [a particular god] created me as one who should do that which he had done, and to carry out that which he commanded should be done. He appointed me herdsman of this land, for he knew who would keep it in order for him."[13]

As confirmation of its newfound strength, Egypt embarked on a period of expansion. Lower Nubia was conquered, and fortresses were built to protect the new southern frontier. The government also sent military expeditions into Canaan and Syria. Although they did not remain there, this campaign marks the beginning of Egyptian imperialism in those areas.

1-4c Society and Economy in Ancient Egypt

Egyptian society had a simple structure in the Old and Middle Kingdoms; basically, it was organized along hierarchical lines with the god-king at the top. The king was surrounded by an upper class of nobles and priests who participated in the elaborate rituals of life that surrounded the pharaoh. The members of this ruling class ran the government and managed their own landed estates, which provided much of their wealth.

Below the upper classes were merchants and artisans. Merchants engaged in active trade up and down the Nile as well as in town and village markets. Some merchants also engaged in international trade; they were sent by the king to Crete and Syria, where they obtained wood and other products. Expeditions traveled into Nubia for ivory and down the Red Sea to Punt for incense and spices. Egyptian artisans displayed unusually high standards of craftsmanship and physical beauty (see Image 1.7) and produced an incredible variety of goods: stone dishes; beautifully painted boxes made of clay; wooden furniture, especially of Lebanon cedar; gold, silver, and copper tools and containers; jewelry; paper and rope made of papyrus; and linen clothes.

Most people in Egypt simply worked the land. In theory, the king owned all the land but granted portions of it to his subjects. Large sections were in the possession of nobles and the temple complexes. Most of the lower classes were serfs, common people who were bound to the land and cultivated the estates. They paid taxes in the form of crops to the king, nobles, and priests; lived in small villages or towns; and provided military service and labor for building projects.

IMAGE 1.7 **The Making of Jewelry.** In ancient Egypt, people used jewelry for self-adornment as well as a mark of social status. This photo of a wall fragment from a tomb in Thebes around 1400 B.C.E. shows jewelers and metal craftsmen at work. At the top jewelers are seen drilling holes in hard-stone beads with three or four bow-drills. The beads were then polished and strung in collars, as seen in the lower panel.

1-4d The Culture of Egypt

Egypt produced a culture that dazzled and awed its later conquerors. The Egyptians' technical achievements alone, especially visible in the construction of the pyramids, demonstrated a measure of skill unique to the world at that time. To the Egyptians, all of these achievements were part of a cosmic order suffused with the presence of the divine.

Spiritual Life in Egyptian Society The Egyptians had no word for religion because it was an inseparable element of the world order to which Egyptian society belonged. Egypt was part of the universal cosmic scheme, and the pharaoh was the divine being whose duty was to preserve Egypt's place within that divinely ordained cosmic order.

This perspective helps explain the importance of ritual in ancient Egypt. Through their rituals, Egyptians worked to maintain the cosmic order by appeasing the gods and goddesses who controlled the universe. An Egyptian ritual ceremony focused on an image of a deity and provided it with food and sustenance, thereby performing an act of ritual worship to appease the god.

The pharaoh was at the heart of Egypt's ritual life. He supervised the sacred ceremonies that were performed in the temples, although in practice the pharaoh's religious deputies—the priests—carried out the daily ceremonies.

The Egyptians had a remarkable number of gods associated with heavenly bodies and natural forces, hardly unusual in view of how important the sun, river, and fertile land were to Egypt's well-being. The sun was the source of life and hence worthy of worship. A sun cult developed, and the sun god took on different forms and names depending on his specific function. He was worshiped as Atum in human form and as Re (or Ra), who had a human body but the head of a falcon. The pharaoh took the title Son of Re because he was regarded as the earthly embodiment of Re.

River and land deities included Osiris (oh-SY-russ) and Isis (Y-sis) with their child Horus, who was related to both the Nile and the sun. Osiris became especially important as a symbol of resurrection. A famous Egyptian myth told of the struggle between Osiris, who brought civilization to Egypt, and his evil brother Seth, who killed him, cut his body into fourteen parts, and tossed them into the Nile. Isis, the faithful wife of Osiris, found the pieces and, with help from other gods, restored Osiris to life. As a symbol of resurrection and as judge of the dead, Osiris took on an important role for the Egyptians (see Image 1.8). By identifying with Osiris, one could hope to gain new life, just as Osiris had done. The dead, embalmed and mummified, were placed in tombs (in pyramidal tombs in the case of kings), given the name of Osiris, and by a process of magical identification became Osiris. Like Osiris, they would then be reborn. The flood of the Nile and the new life it brought to Egypt were symbolized by Isis gathering all of the parts of Osiris together and were celebrated each spring in the festival of the new land.

Later Egyptian spiritual practice began to emphasize morality by stressing the role of Osiris as judge of the dead. The dead were asked to give an account of their earthly deeds to show whether they deserved a reward. Other means were also employed to gain immortality. As seen in the *Book of the Dead* from the period of

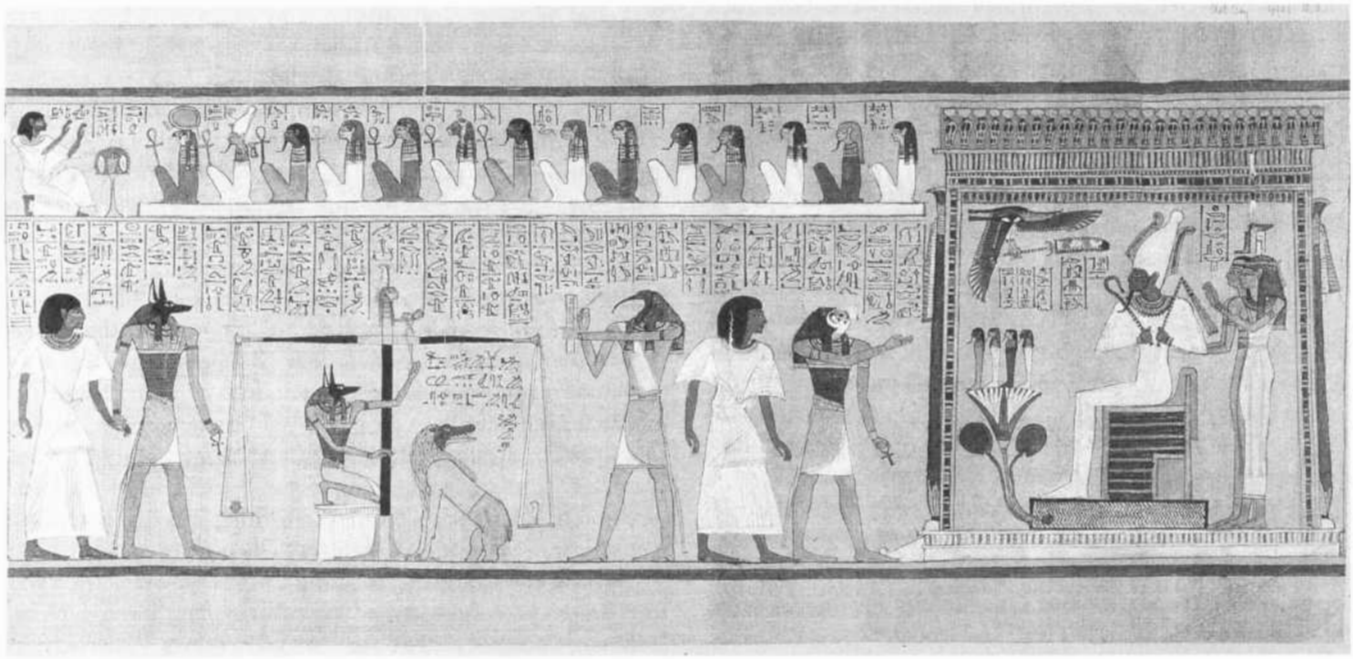


IMAGE 1.8 Osiris as Judge of the Dead. According to the *Book of the Dead*, after making a denial of offenses (the "negative confession"), the deceased experienced the "weighing of the heart." Shown here is a judgment scene from the *Book of the Dead* of Hunefer, a royal scribe who died around 1285 B.C.E. Hunefer's heart is placed on one side of a balance scale; on the other side is the feather of Ma'at, the goddess of truth. For Hunefer, heart and feather are of equal weight, so the god Anubis ushers him into the presence of Osiris, seated on his throne at the right. A "Swallowing Monster," a hybrid creature combining crocodile, lion, and hippopotamus, stood ready at the scale to devour the deceased if he failed the test.

What is the significance of the ritual that is described here?

the New Kingdom, magical incantations were used to ensure a favorable journey to a happy afterlife. Specific instructions explained what to do when confronted by the judge of the dead. These instructions had two aspects. In the negative confession, the deceased gave a detailed list of what he had not done:

> *I have not committed evil against men.*
> *I have not mistreated cattle. . . .*
> *I have not blasphemed a god. . . .*
> *I have not done violence to a poor man. . . .*
> *I have not made anyone sick. . . .*
> *I have not killed. . . .*
> *I have not caused anyone suffering. . . .*
> *I have not had sexual relations with a boy.*
> *I have not defiled myself. . . .*
> *I have not driven cattle away from their pasturage.*[14]

Later the supplicant made a speech listing his good actions: "I have done that which men said and that with which gods are content. . . . I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, and a ferry-boat to him who was marooned. I have provided divine offerings for the gods and mortuary offerings for the dead."[15]

At first the Osiris cult was reserved for the very wealthy, who could afford to take expensive measures to preserve the body after death. During the Middle Kingdom, however, the cult became "democratized" and was extended to all Egyptians who aspired to an afterlife.

The Pyramids One of the great achievements of Egyptian civilization, the building of pyramids, occurred during the Old Kingdom. Pyramids were not built in isolation but as part of a larger complex dedicated to the dead—in effect, a city of the dead. The area included a large pyramid for the king's burial, smaller pyramids for his family, and mastabas (MAS-tuh-buhs), rectangular structures with flat roofs, as tombs for the pharaoh's noble officials. The tombs were well prepared for their residents. The rooms were furnished and stocked with numerous supplies, including chairs, boats, chests, weapons, games, dishes, and a variety of foods. The Egyptians believed that human beings had two bodies, a physical one and a spiritual one, which they called the ka. If the physical body was properly preserved (i.e., mummified) and the tomb furnished with all the various objects of regular life, the *ka* could return and continue its life despite the death of the physical body.

To preserve the physical body after death, the Egyptians practiced mummification, a process of slowly drying a dead body to prevent it from rotting. Special workshops, run by priests, performed this procedure, primarily for the wealthy families who could afford it. According to Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian (see Chapter 3) who visited Egypt around 450 B.C.E., "The most refined method is as follows: first of all they draw out the brain through the nostrils with an iron hook. . . . Then they make an incision in the flank with a sharp Ethiopian stone through which they extract all the internal organs."[16] The liver, lungs, stomach, and intestines were then placed in four special jars that were put in the tomb with the mummy. The

priests then covered the corpse with a natural salt that absorbed the body's water. Later, they filled the body with spices and wrapped it with layers of linen soaked in resin. At the end of the process, which took about seventy days, a lifelike mask was placed over the head and shoulders of the mummy, which was then sealed in a case and placed in its tomb.

Pyramids were tombs for the mummified bodies of pharaohs. The first pyramid was a step pyramid built at Saqqara in the third dynasty during the reign of King Djoser (ZHOH-sur). The first real pyramid, with each side filled in to make an even surface, was constructed around 2600 B.C.E. by King Snefru, who built three pyramids. But the largest and most magnificent of all was built under Snefru's son Khufu. Constructed at Giza around 2540 B.C.E., the famous Great Pyramid covers 13 acres, measures 756 feet at each side of its base, and stands 481 feet high. Its four sides are almost precisely oriented to the four points of the compass (see Image 1.9).

The building of the Great Pyramid was an enormous construction project that used limestone blocks as well as granite from Upper Egypt. Herodotus reported that it took 100,000 Egyptians twenty years to build the Great Pyramid. But Herodotus wrote two thousand years after the event, and considerable controversy and speculation still surround the construction of the Great Pyramid, especially in view of the precision with which it was built. The stone slabs on the outside of the pyramid, for example, fit so closely side by side that a hair cannot be pushed into the joints between them. The Great Pyramid still stands as a symbol of the power of Egyptian kings of the Old Kingdom. No later pyramid ever matched its size or splendor. But an Egyptian pyramid was not just the king's tomb; it was also an important symbol of royal power. It could be seen for miles away as a visible reminder of the glory and might of the ruler, a living god on earth.

Pius Lee/Shutterstock.com

IMAGE 1.9 **The Pyramids at Giza.** The three pyramids at Giza, across the Nile River from Cairo, are the most famous in Egypt. At the rear is the largest of the three pyramids—the Great Pyramid of Khufu. Next to it is the pyramid of Khafre. In the foreground is the smaller pyramid of Menkaure standing behind the even smaller pyramids for the pharaohs' wives. Covering almost 13 acres, the Great Pyramid of Khufu is immense. It is estimated that the Great Pyramid contains 2.3 million stone blocks, each weighing about 2.5 tons.

What is the significance of the pyramids in the spiritual life of Egypt?

Art and Writing Commissioned by kings or nobles for use in temples and tombs, Egyptian art was largely functional. Wall paintings and statues of gods and kings in temples served a strictly spiritual purpose. They were an integral part of the performance of ritual, which was thought necessary to preserve the cosmic order and hence the well-being of Egypt. Likewise, the mural scenes and sculptured figures found in the tombs had a specific function. They were supposed to aid the journey of the deceased into the afterworld.

Egyptian art was also formulaic. Artists and sculptors were expected to observe a strict canon of proportions that determined both form and presentation. This canon gave Egyptian art a distinctive appearance for thousands of years. Especially characteristic was the convention of combining the profile, semi-profile, and frontal views of the human body in relief work and painting in order to represent each part of the body accurately. This fashion created an art that was highly stylized yet still allowed distinctive features to be portrayed.

Writing emerged in Egypt during the first two dynasties. It was the Greeks who later labeled Egyptian writing **hieroglyphics**, meaning "priest carvings" or "sacred writings." Hieroglyphs (HY-uh-roh-glifs) were signs that depicted objects and had a sacred value at the same time. Although hieroglyphs were later simplified for writing purposes into two scripts, they never developed into an alphabet. Egyptian hieroglyphs were initially carved in stone, but later the two simplified scripts were written on papyrus, a paper made from the papyrus reed that grew along the Nile. Most of the ancient Egyptian literature that has come down to us was written on papyrus rolls and wooden tablets.

1-4e Disorder and a New Order: The New Kingdom

The Middle Kingdom came to an end in the midst of another period of instability. An incursion into the delta region by a people known as the Hyksos (HIK-sos) initiated this second age of disorder. The Hyksos, a Semitic-speaking people, infiltrated Egypt in the seventeenth century B.C.E. and came to dominate much of Egypt. The presence of the Hyksos was not entirely negative for Egypt, however. They taught the Egyptians how to use bronze to make agricultural tools and weapons. The Hyksos also introduced new aspects of warfare, including the horse-drawn war chariot, a heavier sword, and the compound bow. Eventually, the Egyptians made use of their new weapons to throw off Hyksos domination.

The Egyptian Empire It was the pharaoh Ahmose I who managed to defeat and expel the Hyksos from Egypt. He reunited Egypt, founded the eighteenth dynasty, established the New Kingdom (ca. 1539–1069 B.C.E.), and launched the Egyptians along a new militaristic and imperialistic path characterized by the development of a more professional

MAP 1.6 The Egyptian and Hittite Empires. The Hittite empire was the dominant power north of Egypt for roughly two centuries. The Hittites assimilated important linguistic, political, and religious aspects of the peoples they conquered and thus helped transmit Mesopotamian culture to the eastern Mediterranean.

What made both the Hittite and Egyptian empires vulnerable to invasion?

army. No longer content to remain in isolation, Egypt now pursued an active political and diplomatic policy.

During the period of the New Kingdom, Egypt became the most powerful state in the ancient Near East (see Map 1.6). Thutmose (thoot-MOH-suh) I (ca. 1493–1481 B.C.E.) expanded Egypt's border to the south by conquering the African kingdom of Nubia. The warrior Thutmose III (ca. 1479–1425 B.C.E.) led seventeen military campaigns into Canaan and Phoenicia. The Egyptians occupied these lands but permitted local native princes to rule. Amenhotep (ah-mun-HOH-tep) II (ca. 1426–1400 B.C.E.), the successor of Thutmose III, also campaigned in the Near East and not only solidified the Egyptian empire but also increased Egypt's prosperity by bringing back enormous quantities of booty (see Image 1.10).

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 1.10 Nubians in Egypt. During the New Kingdom, Egypt expanded to the north, into Canaan and Syria, and to the south, into the African kingdom of Nubia. Nubia had first emerged as an African kingdom around 2300 B.C.E. Shown here in a fourteenth-century B.C.E. painting from an Egyptian official's tomb in Nubia are Nubians arriving in Egypt with bags and rings of gold. Nubia was a rich source of gold for the Egyptians.

The New Kingdom also witnessed one of Egypt's six female rulers: Hatshepsut (hat-SHEP-soot). She initially served as regent for her nephew Thutmose III when he was a child but assumed the throne for herself. Although Thutmose III was considered a co-ruler, she remained in power until her death. In order to remain in power, Hatshepsut had to create many new positions for the elites who supported her. Her reign (ca. 1473–1458 B.C.E.) was a prosperous one, as is especially evident in her building activity. She is most famous for the temple, known as the Temple of Millions of Years, she dedicated to herself at Deir el Bahri (dayr ahl BAH-ree) on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes. As pharaoh, Hatshepsut sent out military expeditions, securing and expanding boundaries, encouraged mining, fostered agriculture, and sent a trading expedition up the Nile. Hatshepsut's official statues sometimes show her clothed and bearded like a king. She was addressed as "His Majesty." That Hatshepsut was aware of her unusual position is evident from an inscription she had placed on one of her temples. It read: "Now my heart turns to and fro, in thinking what will the people say, they who shall see my monument in after years, and shall speak of what I have done." Late in his reign, Thutmose III, who succeeded her, attempted to erase her memory by smashing her statues and obliterating her image from monuments.

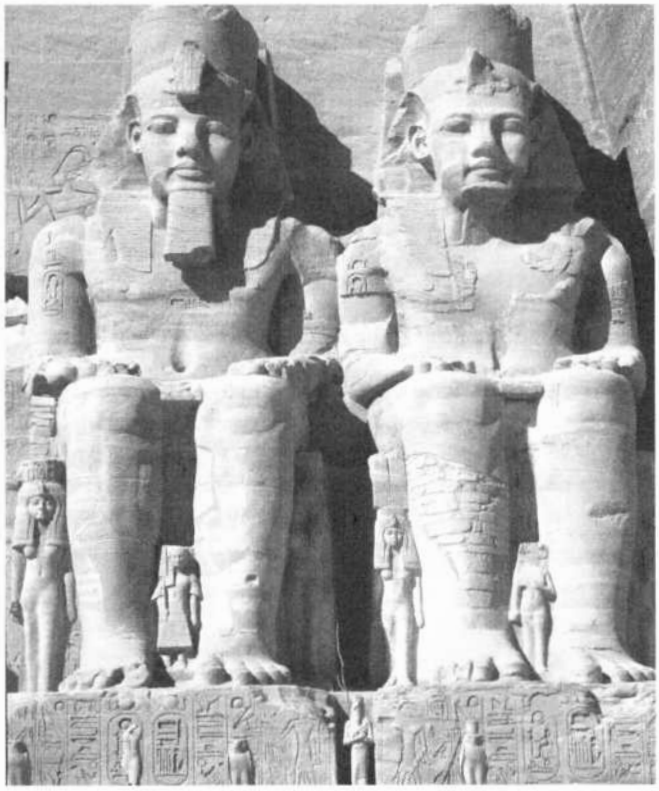
The new Egyptian imperial state reached its height during the reign of Amenhotep III (ca. 1390–1353 B.C.E.), the great-grandson of Thutmose III. Caring little about military affairs and content to maintain the empire he had inherited, Amenhotep III spent much of his reign constructing magnificent new buildings and temples. Especially famous were the temple centers at Karnak and Luxor and the immense statues of Amenhotep III in front of the mortuary temples along the Nile.

By the end of his reign, Amenhotep III faced a growing military challenge from a people known as the Hittites (see "1-5b The Hittite Empire," later in this chapter). His son, Amenhotep IV (ca. 1353–1336 B.C.E.), proved even less able to deal with this threat, a failure that was due in large part to a religious upheaval that he had initiated in Egypt.

Akhenaten and Religious Change Amenhotep IV introduced the worship of Aten, god of the sun disk, as the supreme god and later in his reign as the only god (see Historical Voices, "Akhenaten's *'Hymn to Aten'*," p. 25). In the pharaoh's eyes, he and Aten had become co-rulers of Egypt. Changing his own name to Akhenaten (ah-kuh-NAH-tun) ("Servant of Aten"), the pharaoh closed the temples of other gods and especially endeavored to lessen the power of the priesthood dedicated to the god Amon-Re at Thebes. Akhenaten strove to reduce the priests' influence by replacing Thebes as the capital of Egypt with Akhetaten ("Horizon of Aten"), a new city located at modern Tell el-Amarna, 200 miles north of Thebes. The pharaoh decreed that Akhetaten, not Thebes, would be his final resting place: "If I die in any town of the north, the south, the west, or the east in these millions of years, let me be brought back so that I may be buried in Akhetaten."[17]

Akhenaten's attempt at religious change failed. It was too much to ask Egyptians to ignore their traditional ways and beliefs, especially since they saw the destruction of the old gods as subversive of the very cosmic order on which Egypt's survival and continuing prosperity depended. Moreover, the priests at Thebes were unalterably opposed to the changes, which diminished their influence and power. At the same time, Akhenaten's preoccupation with religion caused him to ignore foreign affairs and led to the loss of both Syria and Canaan. Akhenaten's changes were soon undone after his death by those who influenced his successor, the boy-pharaoh Tutankhamun (toot-ahng-KAH-muhn) (ca. 1332–1322 B.C.E.). Tutankhamun returned the government to Thebes and restored the old gods. The Aten experiment had failed to take hold, and the eighteenth dynasty itself came to an end with the rise to power of a military officer and vizier, Horemhab, who assumed the kingship in 1319 B.C.E.

The End of the Empire The nineteenth dynasty managed to restore Egyptian power one more time. Under Ramesses (RAM-uh-seez) II (ca. 1279–1213 B.C.E.), the Egyptians went on the offensive, and after an inconclusive struggle with the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh, regained control of Canaan and restored Egypt as an imperial power. During his long sixty-seven-year reign, Ramesses II provided visible demonstrations of his power by constructing mammoth new temples, many of them adorned with colossal statues of himself (see Image 1.11).



Bildarchiv Steffens /Bridgeman Images

IMAGE 1.11 Statues of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel. After being driven out of Canaan and Syria by the Hittites, Egypt grew to power one final time under Ramesses II. He succeeded in reconquering Canaan but was unable to restore the boundaries of the previous empire. The massive Temple of Ramesses II, located at Abu Simbel, was carved out of a cliff of Nubian sandstone. The giant statues represent Ramesses II.

What message do these statues convey?

HISTORICAL VOICES

Akhenaten's *"Hymn to Aten"*

What does Akhenaten's Hymn to Aten *tell you about the religion of the Egyptians and Akhenaten's attempt to change it? Why did so many Egyptians oppose the basic premise of the hymn?*

AMENHOTEP IV, MORE COMMONLY KNOWN AS AKHENATEN, created a religious upheaval in Egypt by introducing the worship of Aten, god of the sun disk, as the chief god. Akhenaten's reverence for Aten is evident in this hymn. Some authorities have noted a similarity in spirit and wording to the 104th Psalm of the Old Testament.

"Hymn to Aten"

Your rays suckle every meadow.
When you rise, they live, they grow for you.
You make the seasons in order to rear all that you have made,
The winter to cool them,
And the heat that they may taste you.
You have made the distant sky in order to rise therein,
In order to see all that you do make.
While you were alone,
Rising in your form as the living Aten,
Appearing, shining, withdrawing or approaching,
You made millions of forms of yourself alone.
Cities, towns, fields, road, and river—
Every eye beholds you over against them,
For you are the Aten of the day over the earth. . . .
The world came into being by your hand,
According as you have made them.
When you have risen they live,
When you set they die.
You are lifetime your own self,
For one lives only through you.
Eyes are fixed on beauty until you set.
All work is laid aside when you set in the west. . . .
But when you rise again,
Everything is made to flourish for the king.
Since you did found the earth
And raise them up for your son,
Who came forth from your body: the King of Upper and Lower Egypt . . . Akh-en-Aten . . . and the Chief Wife of the King . . . Nefert-iti, living and youthful forever and ever.

Source: "Hymn to Aten" from J. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament*, 3rd revised edition with supplement (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969). Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

After the death of Ramesses II, struggles for the throne weakened the government, and new invasions in the twelfth century by the Sea Peoples, as the Egyptians called them, destroyed Egyptian power in Canaan and drove the Egyptians back within their old frontiers. The days of the Egyptian empire were ended, and the New Kingdom itself expired with the twentieth dynasty in 1069 B.C.E. For the next thousand years, despite periodic revivals of strength, Egypt was dominated by Libyans, Nubians, Assyrians, Persians, and finally Macedonians after the conquest of Alexander the Great (see Chapter 4). In the first century B.C.E., Egypt became a province in Rome's mighty empire.

1-4f Daily Life in Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptians had a very positive attitude toward daily life on earth and followed the advice of the wisdom literature, which suggested that people marry young and establish a home and family. Monogamy was the general rule, although a husband was allowed to keep additional wives if his first wife was childless. Pharaohs were entitled to harems, although the queen was acknowledged as the Great Wife, with a status higher than that of the other wives. As in all patriarchal societies, the husband was master in the house, but wives were very much respected and in charge of the household and education of the children (see Historical Voices, "Respect for Women," p. 26). From a book of wise sayings (which the Egyptians referred to as instructions) came this advice:

> If you are a man of standing, you should found your household and love your wife at home as is fitting. Fill her belly; clothe her

CHRONOLOGY The Egyptians

Early Dynastic Period (dynasties 1–3)	ca. 3100–2575 B.C.E.
Old Kingdom (dynasties 4–8)	ca. 2575–2125 B.C.E.
First Intermediate Period (dynasties 9–11)	ca. 2125–2010 B.C.E.
Middle Kingdom (dynasties 12–13)	ca. 2010–1630 B.C.E.
Second Intermediate Period (dynasties 14–17)	ca. 1630–1539 B.C.E.
New Kingdom (dynasties 18–20)	ca. 1539–1069 B.C.E.
Postempire Egypt (dynasties 21–31)	1069–30 B.C.E.

HISTORICAL VOICES

Respect for Women

What does this advice to a young man reveal about the circumstances of upper-class Egyptian women? How does this advice compare to that of the Sumerians as seen in the document, The Instructions of Shuruppag?

BECAUSE OF THE HIGH infant and child mortality rate, women were considered important for their role as childbearers and hence due respect. Any, a scribe at the court of Nefertari, one of the wives of Ramesses II, provided this advice concerning women to a young man around 1270 B.C.E.

Any, *Advice to a Young Man Concerning Women*

Beware of the woman who is a stranger, who is not known in her town. Do not stare at her as she passes by and do not have intercourse with her. A woman who is away from her husband is a deep water whose course is unknown.

Take a wife while you're young,
That she make a son for you;
She should bear for you while you're youthful.
It is proper to make people.
Happy the man whose people are many.
He is saluted on account of his progeny.

Do not control your wife in her house,
When you know she is efficient;
Don't say to her: "Where is it?" "Get it!"
When she has put it in the right place.
Let your eye observe her in silence,
Then you will recognize her skill;
It is a joy when your hand is with her,
There are many who don't know this.

Source: J. E. Lewis, ed., The *Mammoth Book of Eyewitness: Ancient Egypt* (New York: Caroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), p. 184.

> back. Ointment is the prescription for her body. Make her heart glad as long as you live. She is a profitable field for her lord. You should not contend with her at law, and keep her far from gaining control. . . . Let her heart be soothed through what may accrue to you; it means keeping her long in your house.[18]

Women's property and inheritances remained in their hands, even after marriage. Although most careers and public offices were closed to women, some did operate businesses. Peasant women worked long hours in the fields and at numerous domestic tasks, especially weaving cloth. Upper-class women could function as priestesses, and a few queens even became pharaohs in their own right. Most famous, as we have seen, was Hatshepsut in the New Kingdom.

Marriages were arranged by parents. The primary concerns were family and property, and the chief purpose of marriage was to produce children, especially sons (see Historical Voices, "A Father's Advice," p. 27). Daughters were not slighted, however. Numerous tomb paintings show the close and affectionate relationship parents had with both sons and daughters. Marriages could and did end in divorce, which was allowed, apparently with compensation for the wife. Adultery, however, was strictly prohibited, and punishments were severe, especially for women, who could have their noses cut off or be burned at the stake.

Under normal circumstances, Egypt was blessed by a material abundance that not only kept its entire population fed but also enabled its upper classes to lead a life of gracious leisure. These wealthy families had attractive homes located on walled estates. Much energy was devoted to the garden, which contained fruit trees and vegetables as well as tree-lined paths and pools for the family's leisure time.

Tomb paintings indicate that the upper classes participated in numerous banquets where guests were lavishly fed and entertained (see Images of Everyday Life, "The Egyptian Diet," p. 28). Although some people obviously got drunk, a collection of "instructions" advises more circumspect behavior:

> If you are one of those sitting at the table of one greater than yourself, take what he may give, when it is set before your nose. You should gaze at what is before you. . . . Let your face be cast down until he addresses you, and you should speak only when he addresses you. Laugh after he laughs, and it will be very pleasing to his heart and what you may do will be pleasing to the heart.[19]

The same collection of instructions warns that when one has been invited to a party, "beware of approaching the women. It does not go well with the place where that is done."[20]

Entertainment, especially music, was a regular feature of parties. The Egyptians used an astonishing variety of instruments: drums, tambourines, flutes, trumpets, and stringed instruments that were plucked rather than played with a bow. Singers, accompanying themselves on the lute or harp, presented songs in praise of the host's generosity and of enjoying life.

HISTORICAL VOICES

A Father's Advice

According to this document, what social and political skills were prized by members of the Egyptian governing elite? What does the passage reveal about Egyptian bureaucrats?

UPPER-CLASS EGYPTIANS enjoyed compiling collections of wise sayings to provide guidance for leading an upright and successful life. This excerpt is taken from "The Instruction of Ptah-hotep" and dates from around 2450 B.C.E. The vizier was the pharaoh's chief official. In this selection, Ptah-hotep advises his son on how to be a successful official.

"The Instruction of Ptah-hotep"

Then he said to his son:

Let not your heart be puffed-up because of your knowledge; be not confident because you are a wise man. Take counsel with the ignorant as well as the wise. The full limits of skill cannot be attained, and there is no skilled man equipped to his full advantage. Good speech is more hidden than the emerald, but it may be found with maidservants at the grindstones. . . .

If you are a leader commanding the affairs of the multitude, seek out for yourself every beneficial deed, until it may be that your own affairs are without wrong. Justice is great, and its appropriateness is lasting; it has been disturbed since the time of him who made it, whereas there is punishment for him who passes over its laws. It is the right path before him who knows nothing. Wrongdoing has never brought its undertaking into port. It may be that it is fraud that gains riches, but the strength of justice is that it lasts. . . .

If you are a man of intimacy, whom one great man sends to another, be thoroughly reliable when he sends you. Carry out the errand for him as he has spoken. Do not be reserved about what is said to you, and beware of any act of forgetfulness. Grasp hold of truth, and do not exceed it. Mere gratification is by no means to be repeated. Struggle against making words worse, thus making one great man hostile to another through vulgar speech. . . .

If you are a man of standing and found a household and produce a son who is pleasing to god, if he is correct and inclines toward your ways and listens to your instruction, while his manners in your house are fitting, and if he takes care of your property as it should be, seek out for him every useful action. He is your son . . . you should not cut your heart off from him.

But a man's seed often creates enmity. If he goes astray and transgresses your plans and does not carry out your instruction, so that his manners in your household are wretched, and he rebels against all that you say, while his mouth runs on in the most wretched talk, quite apart from his experience, while he possesses nothing, you should cast him off: he is not your son at all. He was not really born to you. Thus, you enslave him entirely according to his own speech. He is one whom god has condemned in the very womb.

Source: "The Instruction of Ptah-hotep" from J. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament*, 3rd revised edition with supplement (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969). Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

Judging from the paintings in their tombs, the upper classes found myriad ways to entertain themselves as well. Fowling in the stands of papyrus reeds that grew along the riverbanks was a favorite pastime. So was hunting animals, but only for the men. Armed with bows and arrows, the hunters rode in chariots and used dogs to pursue antelope, gazelles, and other creatures. Indoor activities included board games. The earliest known board games in the world have been found in Egyptian tombs. Many are made of wood decorated with ivory or ebony. The games played on them involved moving pieces on the boards according to the roll of the dice.

The gulf between the upper and lower classes of Egyptian society was especially evident in health care. While the elite had a healthy diet and could call on doctors and dentists for medical help, the peasants suffered from numerous debilitating diseases. The ailments of women, especially those related to fertility, pregnancy, and childbirth, attracted special attention from the medical world.

Regardless of class, most Egyptians believed that disease came from bad spirits or incorrect behavior. To protect themselves, people used magic spells and amulets that carried images of protective deities. Nevertheless, Egyptian records include lists of prescriptions for broken bones, wounds, stomach problems, rashes, and numerous other ailments.

1-5 On the Fringes of Civilization

FOCUS QUESTION: What is the significance of the Indo-European-speaking peoples?

Mesopotamia and Egypt have dominated our story of the beginnings of Western civilization, but significant developments were also taking place on the fringes of these civilizations. Farming had spread into the Balkan peninsula of Europe by 6500 B.C.E., and by 4000 B.C.E. it was well established in southern

The Egyptian Diet

What were the differences in the diets of the upper and lower classes? Why were they so different?

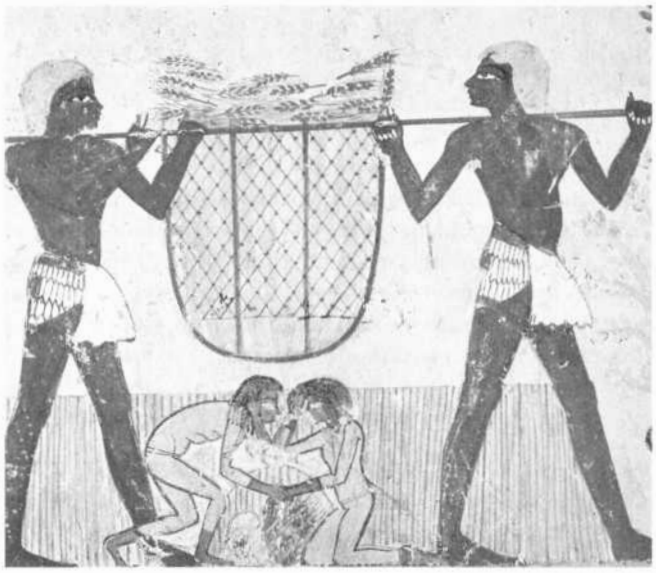
THE DIETS OF THE UPPER AND LOWER CLASSES in ancient Egypt differed considerably. Various types of meat and fowl, including beef, goat, pork, goose, and pigeon, were on the tables of the rich. Fish was also an important part of the upper-class Egyptian diet. Although done for sport as well as food, hunting waterfowl in the stands of papyrus reeds that grew along the river's banks was a favorite pastime of the Egyptian upper classes. Image 1.12a shows a hunting scene from the eighteenth-dynasty tomb of Nebamun in Thebes. Nebamun, a nobleman, is seen standing in his boat using his throwstick to hunt birds. He holds three birds in his right hand while a cat retrieves two in its claws and holds the wings of another in its teeth.

The basic diet of the poor consisted chiefly of bread, beer made from barley, and onions. The baking of bread was an important task in all households. The tomb painting in Image 1.12b from the eighteenth-dynasty tomb of Mennah shows two men carrying grain while slave girls fight over leftovers in the background.

Vegetables and fruits were also part of the Egyptian diet. Among the vegetables were lettuce, radishes, squash, and cucumbers. Fruits included figs, dates, and grapes, which were mainly used by the upper classes for making wine. Image 1.12c shows peasants harvesting grapes from grapevines that have been attached to a trellis. Both sweet and dry wines were produced from a variety of dark and pale grapes.

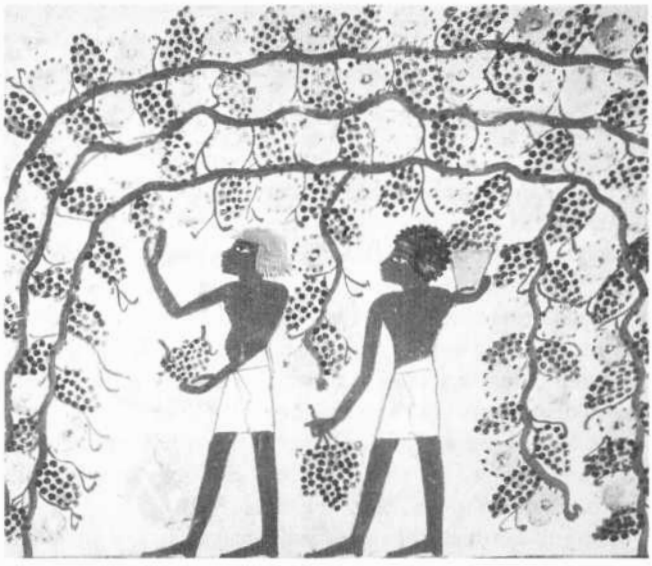
Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 1.12a



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 1.12b



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 1.12c

France, central Europe, and the coastal regions of the Mediterranean. Although migrating farmers from the Near East may have brought some farming techniques into Europe, historians now believe that the Neolithic peoples of Europe domesticated animals and began to farm largely on their own.

One outstanding feature of late Neolithic Europe was the building of megalithic structures. *Megalith* is Greek for "large stone." Radiocarbon dating, a technique that allows scientists to determine the age of objects, shows that the first megalithic structures were built around 4000 B.C.E., more than a thousand years before the great pyramids were built in Egypt. Between 3200 and 1500 B.C.E., standing stones placed in circles or lined up in rows were erected throughout the British Isles and northwestern France. Other megalithic constructions have been found as far north as Scandinavia and as far south as the islands of Corsica, Sardinia, and Malta (see Map 1.7). Some archaeologists have demonstrated that the stone circles were used as observatories to detect not only such simple astronomical phenomena as the midwinter and midsummer sunrises but also such sophisticated observations as the major and minor standstills of the moon.

MAP 1.7 Stonehenge and Other Megalithic Sites in Europe

By far the most famous of these megalithic constructions is Stonehenge in England (see Image 1.13). Stonehenge consists of a series of concentric rings of standing stones. Its construction sometime between 2100 and 1900 B.C.E. was no small accomplishment. The eighty bluestones used at Stonehenge weigh 4 tons each and were transported to the site from their original source 135 miles away. Like other megalithic structures, Stonehenge indicates a remarkable awareness of astronomy on the part of its builders, as well as an impressive coordination of workers.

1-5a The Impact of the Indo-Europeans

For many historians, both the details of construction and the purpose of the megalithic structures of Europe remain a mystery. Also puzzling is the role of the Indo-European people. The term *Indo-European* refers to people who used a language derived from a single parent tongue. Indo-European languages include Greek, Latin, Persian, Sanskrit, and the Germanic languages (see Table 1.3). It has been suggested that the original Indo-European-speaking peoples were based somewhere in the steppe region north of the Black Sea or in southwestern Asia, in modern Iran or Afghanistan. Although there had been earlier migrations, around 2000 B.C.E. they began major nomadic movements into Europe (including present-day Italy and Greece), India, and the Near East. The Indo-Europeans who moved into Asia Minor and Anatolia (modern Turkey) coalesced with the native peoples to form the first Hittite kingdom, known as the Old Kingdom (ca. 1700–1400 B.C.E.), with its capital at Hattusas (Boğazköy in modern-day Turkey).

burcinturucer/iStock/Getty Images

IMAGE 1.13 Stonehenge. The Bronze Age in northwestern Europe is known for its megaliths, large standing stones that were placed in circles or lined up in rows. By far the most famous of these megalithic constructions is Stonehenge in England.

TABLE 1.3 Some Indo-European Languages

SUBFAMILY	LANGUAGES
Indo-Iranian	*Sanskrit*, Persian
Balto-Slavic	Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Czech, Polish, Lithuanian
Hellenic	Greek
Italic	*Latin*, Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian)
Celtic	Irish, Gaelic
Germanic	Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, German, Dutch, English

Note: Languages in *italic* type are no longer spoken.

1-5b The Hittite Empire

The Hittites began to spread outward around 1600 B.C.E., but it was not until around two hundred years later that a new line of kings created the Hittite New Kingdom or Hittite Empire. Especially notable was Suppiluliumas (suh-PIL-oo-LEE-uh-muss) I (ca. 1370–1330 B.C.E.), one of the strongest rulers of the era, who established Hittite control from western Turkey to northern Syria. Suppiluliumas formed an alliance with the Egyptians and then conquered Syria. The Hittites were the first of the Indo-European peoples to make use of iron, enabling them to construct weapons that were stronger and cheaper to make because of the widespread availability of iron ore.

For the next hundred years, the Hittites were in conflict with Egypt until the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II crafted a remarkable nonaggression treaty that stabilized relations between Egypt and the Hittites. The end of Hittite power came in part from internal problems but also as a result of attacks by the Sea Peoples from the west around 1200 B.C.E. and by a group of aggressive tribespeople who raided Hittite cities. By 1190 B.C.E., Hittite power had come to an end.

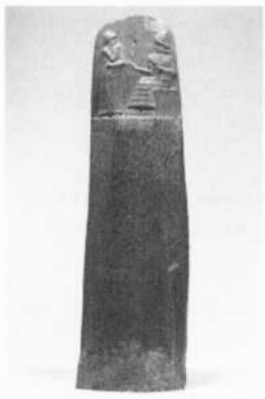
During its heyday, however, the Hittite Empire was one of the great powers in West Asia. The Hittite ruler, known as the Great King, controlled the core areas of the kingdom, but in western and southern Anatolia and Syria he allowed local rulers to swear allegiance to him as his vassals. Constant squabbling over succession to the throne, however, tended to weaken the royal authority at times.

During its height, the Hittite Empire also demonstrated an interesting ability to assimilate other cultures into its own. In language, literature, art, law, and religion, the Hittites borrowed much from Mesopotamia as well as from the native peoples they had subdued. Recent scholarship has stressed the important role of the Hittites in transmitting Mesopotamian culture, as they transformed it, to later civilizations in the Mediterranean area, especially to the Mycenaean Greeks (see Chapter 3).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Humanlike creatures first emerged in Africa more than 3 to 4 million years ago. Over a long period of time, Paleolithic people learned how to create more sophisticated tools, to use fire, and to adapt to and even change their physical environment. Paleolithic people were primarily nomads who hunted animals and gathered wild plants for survival. Nevertheless, they created a culture that included sophisticated cave paintings.

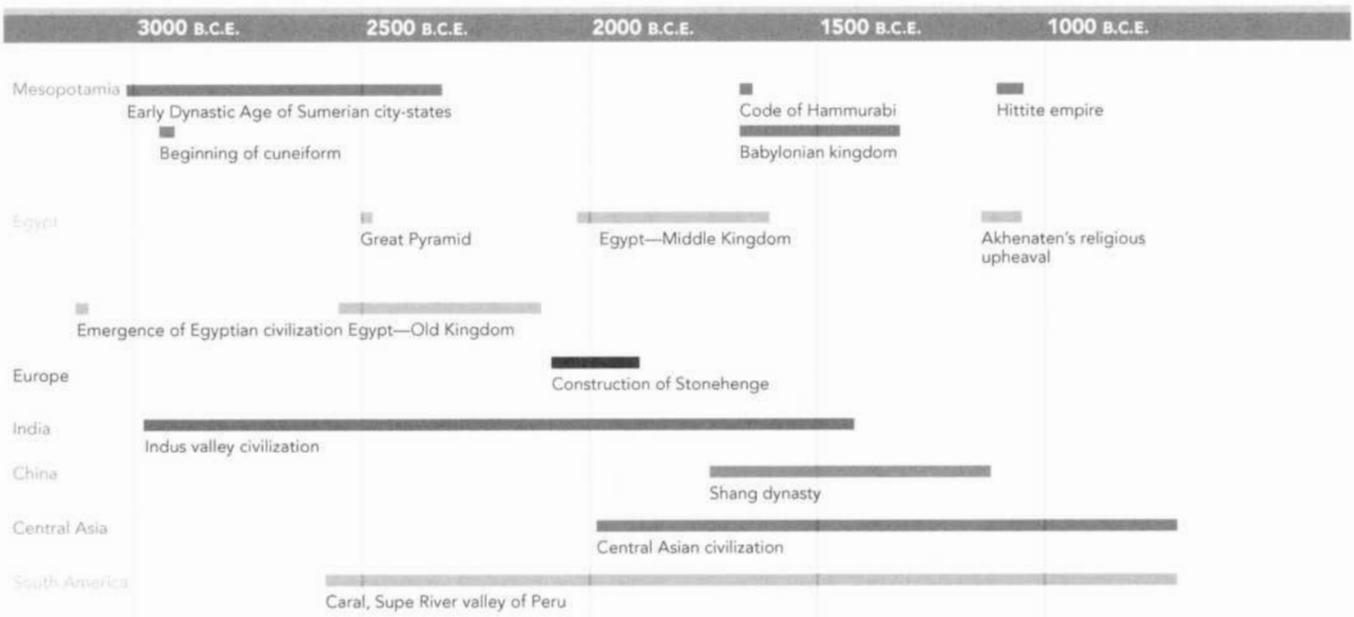
The agricultural revolution of the Neolithic Age, which began around 10,000 B.C.E., dramatically changed human patterns of living. The growing of food on a regular basis and the taming of animals made it possible for humans to stop their nomadic ways and settle in more permanent settlements. These organized communities gradually gave rise to more complex human societies.



These more complex human societies, which we call the first civilizations, emerged around 3000 B.C.E. in the river valleys of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China. An increase in food production in these regions led to a significant growth in human population and the rise of cities. Efforts to control the flow of water for farming also led to organized governments in these new urban civilizations. The peoples of Southwest Asia and Egypt laid the foundations of what would become Western civilization. They developed cities and struggled with the problems of organized states as they moved from individual communities to larger territorial units and eventually to empires. They invented writing to keep records and created literature. They constructed monumental buildings to please their gods, give witness to their power, and preserve their culture. They developed new political, military, social, and religious structures to deal with the basic problems of human existence and organization. These first civilizations left detailed records that allow us to view how they grappled with three of the fundamental problems that humans have pondered: the nature of human relationships, the nature of the universe, and the role of divine forces in the cosmos. Although later people would provide different answers from those of the Mesopotamians and Egyptians, it was they who first posed the questions, gave answers, and wrote them down.

By the middle of the second millennium B.C.E., much of the creative impulse of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations was beginning to wane. As we shall see in Chapter 2, by 1200 B.C.E. a whole new pattern of petty states and new kingdoms would lead to the largest empires the ancient Near East had seen.

CHAPTER TIMELINE



CHAPTER REVIEW

Upon Reflection

Q What achievements did early humans make during the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages, and how did those achievements eventually make possible the emergence of civilization?

Q Explain the ways in which the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt were alike and how they were different. How significant are the differences?

Q What roles did geography, environmental conditions, religion, politics, economics, and women and families play in the civilizations of Southwest Asia and Egypt?

Q What do you think Western civilization has derived from the civilizations of the ancient Near East?

Key Terms

hominids (p. 2)
Paleolithic Age (p. 3)
Neolithic Revolution (p. 3)
patriarchy (p. 4)
civilization (p. 5)
Mesopotamia (p. 7)
ziggurat (p. 7)
theocracy (p. 7)
polytheistic (p. 13)
divination (p. 13)
cuneiform (p. 14)
hieroglyphics (p. 22)

Full definitions also appear in the Glossary at the end of the book.

Suggestions for Further Reading

The Prehistoric World For two brief but sound surveys, see **C. Gosden**, ***Prehistory: A Very Short Introduction***, 2nd ed. (New York, 2018), and **I. Tattersall, *The World from Beginnings to 4000* B.C.E.** (Oxford, 2008). The following works are also of considerable value in examining the prehistory of humankind: **S. Mithen, *After the Ice: A Global Human History, 20,000–5000* B.C.** (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), and **N. Wade, *Before the Dawn: Recovering the Lost History of Our Ancestors*** (New York, 2006). On the role of women in prehistory, see **J. M. Adovasio, O. Soffer**, and **J. Page, *The Invisible Sex: Uncovering the True Roles of Women in Prehistory*** (New York, 2007).

The Ancient Near East For a brief introduction, see **A. H. Podany, *The Ancient Near East*** (New York, 2014). An excellent reference tool on the ancient Near East can be found in **P. Bienkowski** and **A. Milward, eds., *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East*** (Philadelphia, 2000). For a detailed survey, see **B. and K. Foster, *Civilizations of Ancient Iraq*** (Princeton, 2009); **M. Liverani, The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy** (London, 2014); and **A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330* B.C.**, 2 vols. (London, 1995). A good survey can also be found in **M. van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323* B.C.**, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2006). **G. Leick, *The Babylonians*** (London, 2003), provides an overview of the peoples of ancient Mesopotamia. On the economic and social history of the ancient Near East, see **D. C. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East*** (New Haven, Conn., 1997).

Ancient Mesopotamia A beautifully illustrated survey of ancient Mesopotamia can be found in **M. Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East*** (New York, 1996). The world of the Sumerians is examined in **H. Crawford, *Sumer and the Sumerians***, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2004). On the spiritual perspective of ancient Mesopotamia, see **J. Bottéro, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*** (Chicago, 2001). On daily life, see **S. Bertman, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*** (New York, 2003).

Ancient Egypt For an excellent introduction to ancient Egypt, see **T. Wilkinson, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*** (New York, 2010). A brief survey is **I. Shaw, *Ancient Egypt*** (New York, 2004). Other general surveys include **M. Van de Mieroop, *A History of Ancient Egypt*** (Oxford, 2011) and **J. Romer, *A History of Ancient Egypt: From the First Farmers to the Great Pyramid*** on early Egypt. On Hatshepsut, see **K. Cooney, *When Women Ruled the World: Six Queens of Egypt*** (Washington, D.C., 2018). Egyptian religion is covered in **J. Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt***, trans. **D. Lorton** (Ithaca, N.Y., 2001), and **R. David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*** (New York, 2002). On art, see **G. Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*** (Cambridge, Mass., 2008). On daily life, see **L. Meskell, *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt*** (Princeton, N.J., 2004).

Hittites On the Hittites, see **T. Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites***, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2006) and ***Life and Society in the Hittite World*** (Oxford, 2002).

Notes

1. J.-M. Chauvet et al., *Dawn of Art: The Chauvet Cave* (New York, 1996), pp. 49–50.
2. Quoted in A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330* B.C., vol. 1 (London, 1995), p. 68.
3. Quoted in M. Wood, *Legacy: The Search for Ancient Cultures* (New York, 1995), p. 34.
4. Quoted in M. van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323* B.C. (Oxford, 2004), p. 69.
5. Ibid., p. 64.
6. Ibid., p. 106.
7. Quoted in T. Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," in H. Frankfort et al., *Before Philosophy* (Baltimore, 1949), p. 139.
8. Quoted in T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, Conn., 1976), p. 97.
9. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. N. K. Sandars (London, 1972), p. 62.
10. J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 3rd edition (Princeton, N.J., 1969), p. 372.
11. Quoted in A. P. Thomas, *Egyptian Gods and Myths* (London, 1986), p. 25.
12. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 445.
13. Quoted in B. G. Trigger, B. J. Kemp, D. O'Connor, and A. B. Lloyd, *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 74.
14. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 34.
15. Ibid., p. 36.
16. Quoted in R.-M. Hagen and R. Hagen, *Egypt: People, Gods, Pharaohs* (Cologne, 2002), p. 148.
17. Quoted in T. Wilkerson, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* (New York, 2010), p. 262.
18. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 413.
19. Ibid., p. 412.
20. Ibid., p. 413.