

CHAPTER 1

EARLY HUMANS AND THE FIRST CIVILIZATIONS

Chapter Outline and Focus Questions

1-1 *The First Humans*

Q How did the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages differ, and how did the Neolithic Revolution affect the lives of men and women?

1-2 *The Emergence of Civilization*

Q What are the characteristics of civilization, and what are some explanations for why early civilizations emerged?

1-3 *Civilization in Mesopotamia*

Q How are the chief characteristics of civilization evident in ancient Mesopotamia?

1-4 *Egyptian Civilization: “The Gift of the Nile”*

Q What are the basic features of the three major periods of Egyptian history? What elements of continuity are evident in the three periods? What are their major differences?

1-5 *New Centers of Civilization*

Q What was the significance of the Indo-Europeans? How did Judaism differ from the religions of Mesopotamia and Egypt?

1-6 *The Rise of New Empires*

Q What methods and institutions did the Assyrians and Persians use to amass and maintain their respective empires?



Excavation of Warka showing the ruins of Uruk. Nik Wheeler/CORBIS

Critical Thinking

Q In what ways were the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt alike? In what ways were they different? What accounts for the similarities and differences?

Connections to Today

Q What lessons can you learn from the decline and fall of early civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Assyria, and Persia, and how do those lessons apply to today's civilizations?

IN 1849, A DARING YOUNG ENGLISHMAN made a hazardous journey into the deserts and swamps of southern Iraq. Braving high winds and temperatures that reached 120 degrees Fahrenheit, William Loftus led a small expedition southward along the banks of the Euphrates River in search of the roots of

civilization. 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 band 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 the world's first civilization.

Southern Iraq, known to the ancient Greeks as Mesopotamia, was one of the areas in the world where civilization began. In the fertile valleys of large rivers—the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia, the Nile in Egypt, the Indus in India, and the Yellow River in China—intensive agriculture became capable of supporting large groups of people. In these regions, civilization was born. The first civilizations emerged in western Asia (now known as the Middle East) and Egypt, where people developed organized societies and created the ideas and institutions that we associate with civilization.

Before considering the early civilizations of western Asia and Egypt, however, we must briefly examine our 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 Question: How did the Paleolithic and Neolithic Ages differ, and how did the Neolithic Revolution affect the lives of men and women?

Historians rely mostly 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 considerable conjecture.

The earliest humanlike creatures—known as **hominids**—lived in Africa some 3 to 4 million years ago. Called *Australopithecines* (aw-stray-loh-PITH-uh-synz), or "southern apemen," by their discoverers, they flourished in eastern and southern Africa and were the first hominids to make simple stone tools. *Australopithecines* may also have been bipedal—that is, they may have walked upright on two legs, a trait that would have

enabled them to move over long distances and make use of their arms and legs for different purposes.

In 1959, Louis and Mary Leakey discovered a new form of hominid in Africa that they labeled *Homo habilis* ("skillful human"). The Leakeys believed that *Homo habilis*, which had a brain almost 50 percent larger than that of the *Australopithecines*, was the earliest toolmaking hominid. Their larger brains and ability to walk upright allowed these hominids to become more sophisticated in searching for meat, seeds, and nuts for nourishment.

New hominids continue to be found, although considerable controversy can surround them. The belief that a 2003 discovery in Indonesia of a distinct hominid species, known as the "hobbit" because of its small body, is a distinct hominid species has been challenged by other scientists.

A new phase in early human development occurred around 1.5 million years ago with the emergence of *Homo erectus* ("upright human"). A more advanced human form, *Homo erectus* made use of larger and more varied tools and was the first hominid to leave Africa and move into Europe and Asia.

1-1a The Emergence of *Homo sapiens*

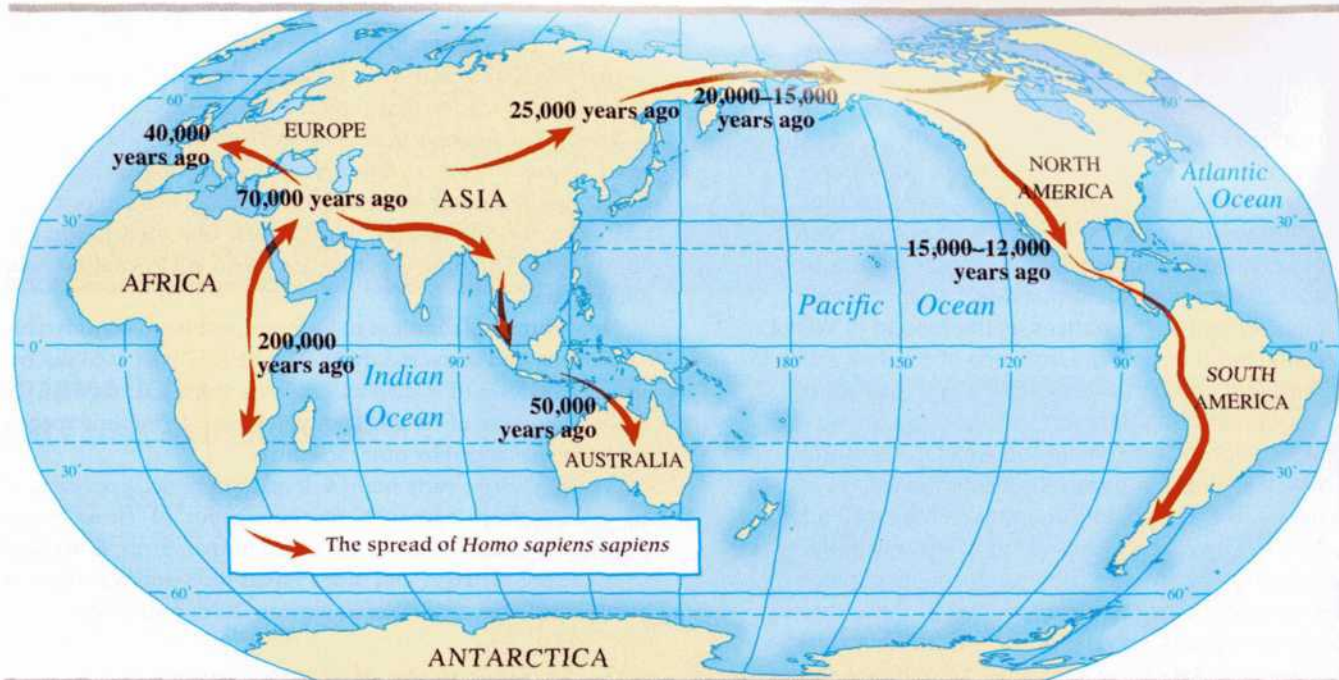
Around 250,000 years ago, a crucial stage in human development began with the emergence of *Homo sapiens* (HOH-moh SAY-pee-unz) ("wise human being"). The first anatomically modern humans, known as *Homo sapiens sapiens* ("wise, wise human being"), appeared in Africa between 200,000 and 150,000 years 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 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 the Neander Valley in Germany. Neanderthal remains have since been found in both Europe and western Asia and have been dated to between 200,000 and 30,000 BCE. New genetic evidence has indicated that European, and even more so, East Asian humans interbred with Neanderthals. Neanderthals relied on a variety of stone tools and were the first early people to bury their dead. By 30,000 BCE, *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 of only 2 to 3 miles per generation. This was enough, however, 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 BCE, members of the *Homo sapiens sapiens* species could be found throughout the



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.

Q 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?

world. By that time, it was the only human species left. All humans today, be they Europeans, Australian Aborigines, or Africans, belong to the same subspecies of human being.

1-1b The Hunter-Gatherers of the Paleolithic 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 this early period of human history (c. 2,500,000–10,000 BCE) has been designated the **Paleolithic Age** (*paleo-*lithic 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 a period of time, they 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 captured and consumed various animals, including buffalo, horses, bison, wild goats, reindeer, and fish.

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 to thirty individuals. 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 more 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 for 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 wood poles or sticks covered with animal hides. Where wood was scarce, Paleolithic hunter-gatherers might use the bones of mammoths for the framework and cover it 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 grains, 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. Changing physical conditions during periodic ice ages posed

a considerable threat to human existence. Paleolithic peoples used their technological innovations to change their physical environment. By working together, they found a way to survive.

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. Most of these are animals that Paleolithic people 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, c. 10,000–4000 BCE

The end of the last ice age around 10,000 BCE was followed by what is called the **Neolithic Revolution**, a significant change in living patterns that occurred in the New Stone Age (*neolithic* is Greek for “new stone”). The name “New Stone Age” is misleading, however. Although Neolithic peoples made a new type of polished stone axes, this was not the most significant change they introduced.

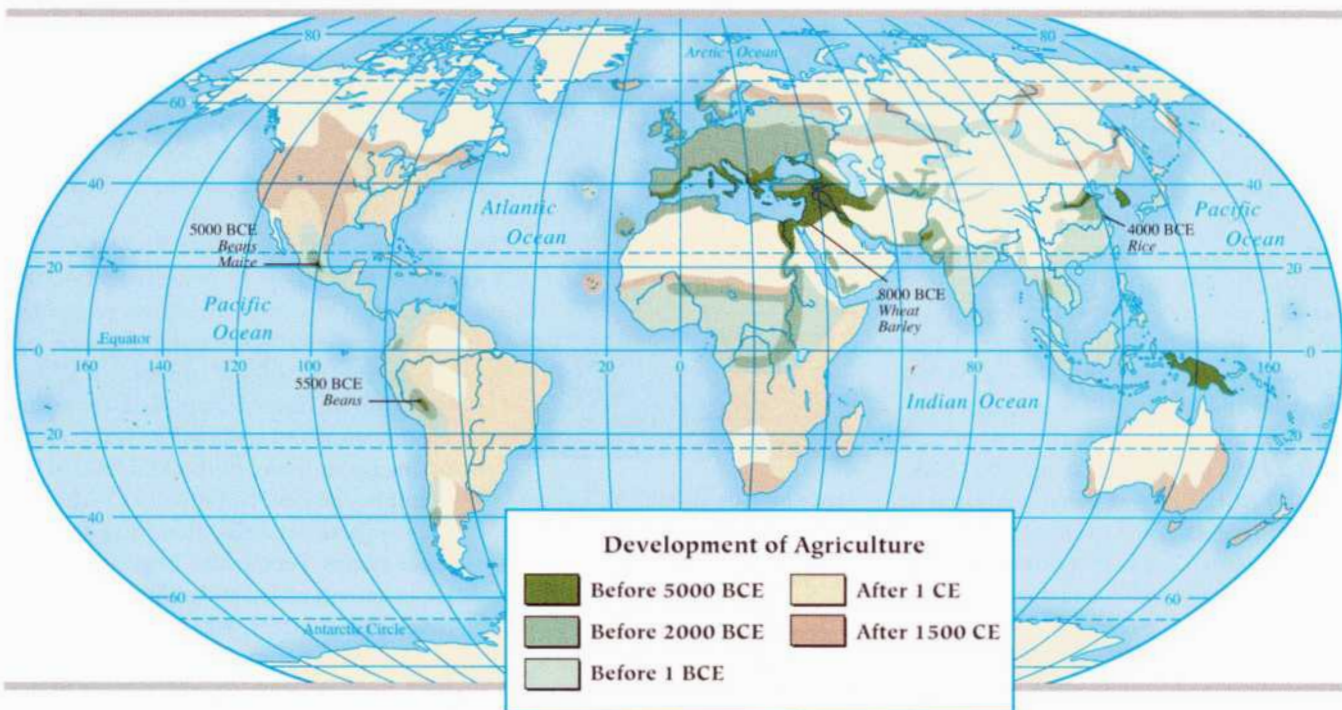
An Agricultural Revolution The biggest change was the shift from gathering plants and hunting animals for sustenance



Pictures from History/Bridgeman Images

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 BCE. 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.

(food gathering) to producing food by systematic agriculture (food production; see Map 1.2). The planting of grains and vegetables provided a regular supply of food, while the



Map 1.2 The Development of Agriculture. Agriculture first began between 8000 and 5000 BCE in four different parts of the world. It allowed the establishment of permanent settlements where crops could be grown and domesticated animals that produced meat and milk could be easily tended.

Q What geographic and human factors might explain relationships between latitude and the beginning of agriculture?

domestication of animals, such as sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs, added a steady source of meat, milk, and fibers such as wool for clothing. Larger animals could also be used as beasts of burden. The growing of crops and the taming of food-producing animals created a new relationship between humans and nature. Historians like to speak of this as an 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 enabled them to give up their nomadic ways of life and begin to live in settled communities. The increase in food supplies also led to a noticeable expansion of the population.

The shift from hunting and gathering to food producing was not as sudden as was once believed, however. The **Mesolithic Age** ("Middle Stone Age," c. 10,000–7000 BCE) saw a gradual transition from a food-gathering and hunting economy to a food-producing one and witnessed a gradual domestication of animals as well. Likewise, the movement toward the use of plants and their seeds as an important source of nourishment was not sudden. Moreover, throughout the Neolithic period, hunting and gathering as well as nomadic herding remained ways of life for many people around the world.

Systematic agriculture developed independently in different areas of the world between 8000 and 5000 BCE. Inhabitants of the Middle East began cultivating wheat and barley and domesticating pigs, cattle, goats, and sheep by 8000 BCE. From the Middle East, farming spread into southeastern Europe and, by 4000 BCE, was well established in central Europe and the coastal regions of the Mediterranean. The cultivation of wheat and barley also spread from western Asia into the Nile Valley of Egypt by 6000 BCE and soon moved up the Nile to other areas of Africa, especially Ethiopia. In the woodlands and tropical forests of West Africa, a separate agricultural system emerged, based on the cultivation of tubers or root crops such as yams. The cultivation of wheat and barley also moved eastward into the highlands of northwestern and central India between 7000 and 5000 BCE. By 5000 BCE, rice was being cultivated in southeastern Asia, and from there it spread into southern China. In northern China, the cultivation of millet and the domestication of pigs and dogs seem well established by 6000 BCE. In the Western Hemisphere, Mesoamericans (inhabitants of present-day Mexico and Central America) domesticated beans, squash, and maize (corn) as well as dogs and fowl between 7000 and 5000 BCE (see Comparative Essay "From Hunter-Gatherers and Herders to Farmers").

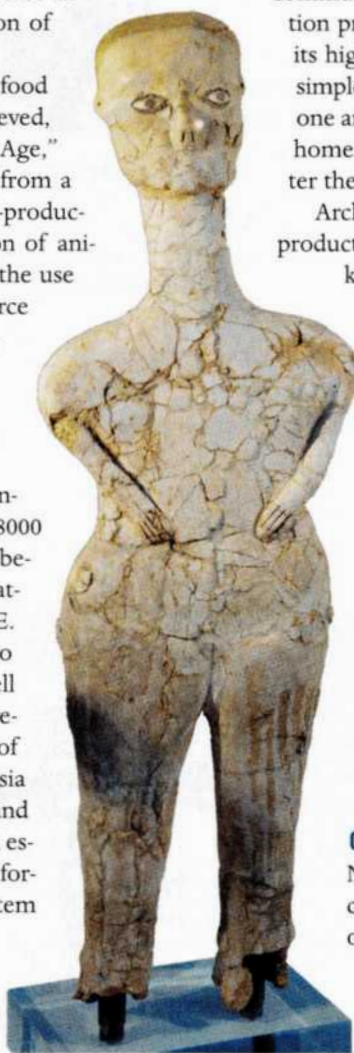
Neolithic Farming Villages The growing of crops on a regular basis gave rise to more permanent settlements, which historians refer to as Neolithic farming villages or towns. Although Neolithic villages appeared in Europe, India, Egypt, China, and Mesoamerica, the oldest and most extensive ones were located in the Middle East. Jericho, in Canaan near the Dead Sea, was in existence by 8000 BCE and covered several acres by 7000 BCE. It had a wall several feet thick that enclosed houses made of sun-dried mudbricks. Çatal Hüyük (chaht-ul hoo-YOOK), located in modern Turkey, was an even larger community. Its walls enclosed 32 acres, and its population probably reached six thousand inhabitants during its high point from 6700 to 5700 BCE. 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 would walk along the rooftops and enter the house through a hole in the roof.

Archaeologists have discovered twelve cultivated products in Çatal Hüyük, including fruits, nuts, and three kinds of wheat. People grew their own food and stored it in storerooms in their homes. Domesticated animals, especially cattle, yielded meat, milk, and hides. Food surpluses also made it possible for people to engage in activities other than farming. Some people became artisans and 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 "our mother" earth and human mothers. The shrines and the statues point to the important role of religious practices in the lives of these Neolithic peoples.

Consequences of the Neolithic Revolution The Neolithic agricultural revolution had far-reaching consequences. Once people settled in villages or towns, they built houses for protection and other structures for the storage of goods.

As organized communities stored food and accumulated material goods, they began to engage in trade. In the Middle East, for example, the new communities exchanged such objects as shells, flint, and semiprecious stones. People also began to specialize in certain crafts, and a division of labor developed. Pottery was made from clay and baked in fire to make it hard. The pots were used for cooking and to store grains. Woven baskets were also used for storage. Stone tools became refined as flint blades were used to make sickles and hoes for use in the fields. Obsidian—a volcanic glass that was easily flaked—was also used to create



Statue from Ain Ghazal. This life-size statue made of plaster, sand, and crushed chalk was discovered in 1984 at Ain Ghazal, an archaeological site near Amman, Jordan. Dating from around 6500 BCE, it is among the oldest known statues of the human figure. Although it appears lifelike, its features are too generic to be a portrait of a particular individual. The purpose of this sculpture and the reason for its creation may never be known. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

From Hunter-Gatherers and Herders to Farmers

Earth & Environment

ABOUT TEN THOUSAND YEARS AGO, human beings began to practice the cultivation of crops and the domestication of animals. The exact time and place that crops were first cultivated successfully is uncertain. The first farmers undoubtedly used simple techniques and still relied primarily on other forms of food production, such as hunting, foraging, and pastoralism (herding). The real breakthrough came when farmers began to cultivate crops along the floodplains of river systems. The advantage was that crops grown in such areas were not as dependent on rainfall and therefore produced a more reliable harvest. An additional benefit was that the sediment carried by the river waters deposited nutrients in the soil, enabling the farmer to cultivate a single plot of land for many years without moving to a new location. Thus, the first truly sedentary societies were born.

The spread of river valley agriculture in various parts of Asia and Africa was the decisive factor in the rise of the first civilizations. The increase in food production in these regions led to a significant growth in population, while efforts to control the flow of water to maximize the irrigation of cultivated areas and to protect the local inhabitants from

hostile forces outside the community provoked the first steps toward cooperative activities on a large scale. The need to oversee the entire process brought about the emergence of an elite that was eventually transformed into a government.

We shall investigate this process in the next several chapters as we explore the rise of civilizations in the Middle East, the Mediterranean, South Asia, China, and the Americas. We shall also raise a number of important questions: Why did human communities in some areas that had the capacity to support agriculture not take the leap to farming? Why did other groups that had managed to master the cultivation of crops not take the next step and create large and advanced societies? Finally, what happened to the existing communities of hunter-gatherers who were overrun or driven out as the agricultural revolution spread throughout the world?

Over the years, a number of possible explanations, some of them biological, others cultural or environmental, have been advanced to answer such questions. According to Jared Diamond, in *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, the ultimate causes of such differences lie not within the character or cultural values of the resident population

but in the nature of the local climate and topography. These influence the degree to which local crops and animals can be put to human use and then be transmitted to adjoining regions. In Mesopotamia, for example, the widespread availability of edible crops, such as wheat and barley, helped promote the transition to agriculture in the region. At the same time, the absence of land barriers between Mesopotamia and its neighbors to the east and west facilitated the rapid spread of agricultural techniques and crops to climatically similar regions in the Indus River Valley and Egypt.



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Women's Work. This rock painting from a cave in modern-day Algeria, dating from around the fourth millennium BCE, shows women harvesting grain.

Q What role did the development of agriculture play in the emergence of civilization?

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 and cotton 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 the home. Women remained behind, grinding grain into flour, caring for the children, weaving cloth, making cheese from milk, and performing other household tasks that required considerable labor. In time, as work outside the home was increasingly perceived as more important than work done in the 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 to our own times.

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 part of the human story. For all of our scientific and technological progress, human survival still depends on the growing and storing of food, an accomplishment of people in the Neolithic Age. The Neolithic Revolution was truly a turning point in human history.

Between 4000 and 3000 BCE, significant technical developments began to transform the 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 BCE, artisans had discovered that metal-bearing rocks could be heated to liquefy the metal, which could then be cast in molds to produce tools and weapons that were more useful than stone instruments. Although copper was the first metal to be used for producing tools, after 4000 BCE, metalworkers in western Asia discovered that a combination of copper and tin produced bronze, a much harder and more durable metal than copper. Its widespread use has led historians to call the period from around 3000 to 1200 BCE the Bronze Age; thereafter, bronze was increasingly replaced by iron.

At first, Neolithic settlements were hardly more than villages. But as their inhabitants mastered the art of farming, more complex human societies gradually emerged. As wealth increased, these societies sought to protect it from being plundered by outsiders and so began to develop armies and to build walled cities. By the beginning of the Bronze Age, the concentration of larger numbers of people in river valleys was leading to a whole new pattern for human life.

1-2 THE EMERGENCE OF CIVILIZATION



Focus Question: What are the characteristics of civilization, and 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, civilization came into being. A **civilization** is a complex culture in which large numbers of people share a variety of common elements. Historians have identified a number of basic characteristics of civilization, including the following:

1. *An urban focus.* Cities became the centers for political, economic, social, cultural, and religious development. The cities that emerged were much larger than the Neolithic towns that preceded them.
2. *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.

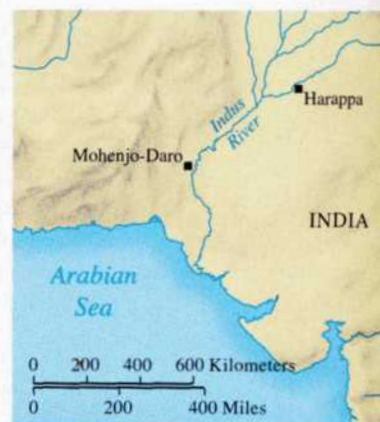
3. *A new social structure based on economic power.* While kings and an upper class of priests, political leaders, and warriors dominated, there also existed large groups of free common people (farmers, artisans, craftspeople) and, at the very bottom of the social hierarchy, a class of slaves.
4. *The development of more complexity in a material sense.* Surpluses of agricultural crops freed some people to work in occupations other than farming. Demand among ruling elites for luxury items encouraged the creation of new products. And as urban populations exported finished goods in exchange for raw materials from neighboring populations, organized trade grew substantially.
5. *A distinct religious structure.* The gods were deemed crucial to the community's success, and a professional priestly class, serving as stewards of the gods' property, regulated relations with the gods.
6. *The development of writing.* Kings, priests, merchants, and artisans used writing to keep records.
7. *New forms of significant artistic and intellectual activity.* For example, monumental architectural structures, usually religious, occupied a prominent place in urban environments.

1-2a Early Civilizations Around the World

The first civilizations that developed in Mesopotamia and Egypt will be examined in detail in this chapter. But civilizations also developed independently in other parts of the world. Between 3000 and 1500 BCE, 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 (see Chapter 2). Two major cities—Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro—were at the heart of this advanced civilization, which flourished for hundreds of years.

As in the city-states that arose in Mesopotamia and along the Nile, the Harappan economy was based primarily on farming, but Harappan civilization also carried on extensive trade with Mesopotamia. Textiles and food were imported from the Mesopotamian city-states in exchange for copper, lumber, precious stones, cotton, and various types of luxury goods.

Another river valley civilization emerged along the Yellow River in northern China about four thousand years ago (see Chapter 3). Under the Shang dynasty of kings, which ruled from 1570 to 1045 BCE, this civilization contained impressive cities with huge city walls, royal palaces, and large royal tombs. A system of irrigation enabled early Chinese civilization to



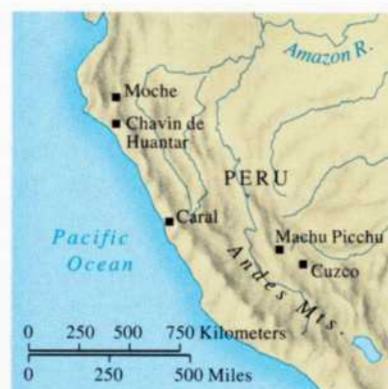
Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro



The Yellow River, China



Central Asia Civilization



Caral, Peru

CHRONOLOGY

The Birth of Early Civilizations

Egypt	c. 3100 BCE
Mesopotamia	c. 3000 BCE
India	c. 3000 BCE
Peru	c. 2600 BCE
China	c. 2000 BCE
Central Asia	c. 2000 BCE

maintain a prosperous farming society ruled by an aristocratic class whose major concern was war.

Scholars long believed that civilization emerged only in 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 other early civilizations. One of these flourished in Central Asia (in what are now the republics of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) around four thousand 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 developed 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 BCE. It contained buildings for officials, apartment buildings, 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. This Peruvian culture reached its height during the first millennium BCE (see Chapter 6).

HISTORIANS DEBATE

1-2b 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 accumulation of food surpluses, made possible the specialization of labor and development of large communities with bureaucratic organization. But some areas, such as that of the Fertile Crescent, in which civilization emerged in Southwest Asia, were not naturally conducive to agriculture. Abundant food could be produced only through a massive human effort to manage the water, an undertaking that required organization and bureaucratic control 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 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 their banks 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 irregular and sometimes catastrophic. In such circumstances, farming could be accomplished only with human intervention in the form of irrigation and drainage ditches. A complex system was required to control the flow of the rivers and produce the crops. 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 the first Mesopotamian civilization were the Sumerians (soo-MER-ee-unz or soo-MEER-ee-unz), a people

whose origins remain unclear. By 3000 BCE, they had established a number of independent cities in southern Mesopotamia, including Eridu, Ur, Uruk, Umma, and Lagash (see Map 1.3). As the cities expanded, they came to exercise political and economic control over the surrounding countryside, forming city-states, which were the basic units of Sumerian civilization.

Sumerian Cities Walls surrounded Sumerian cities. Uruk, for example, was encircled by a wall 6 miles long with defense towers located every 30 to 35 feet along it. 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

innovative with mudbricks, inventing the arch and the dome 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 deities. Priests and priestesses, who supervised the temples and their property, had great power. In fact, historians believe that in the early stages of certain city-states, priests and priestesses may have had an important role in governance. The Sumerians believed that the gods ruled the cities, making the state a **theocracy** (government by a divine authority). Ruling power, however, was primarily in the hands of worldly figures known as kings.



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.

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



The "Royal Standard" of Ur. This detail is from the "Royal Standard" of Ur, a box dating from around 2700 BCE 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.

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 and organized workers for the irrigation projects on which Mesopotamian farming depended. The army, the government bureaucracy, and the priests and priestesses all aided the kings in their rule. 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. The Sumerians imported copper, tin, and timber in exchange for dried fish, wool, barley, wheat, and metal goods. Traders traveled by land to the eastern Mediterranean in the west and by sea to India in the east. The introduction of the wheel, which had been invented around 3000 BCE by nomadic people living in the region north of the Black Sea, led to 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. Slaves belonged to palace officials, who used them in building projects; to temple officials, who used mostly female slaves to weave cloth and grind grain; and to rich landowners, who used them for agricultural and domestic work.

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. The fortunes of various city-states 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 words of this Sumerian poem from the city of 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 in the flat land of Mesopotamia, the Sumerian city-states were also open 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 type of language they spoke (see Table 1.1). Around 2340 BCE, Sargon, leader of the Akkadians, overran the Sumerian city-states and established a dynastic empire. Sargon

TABLE 1.1

Some Semitic Languages

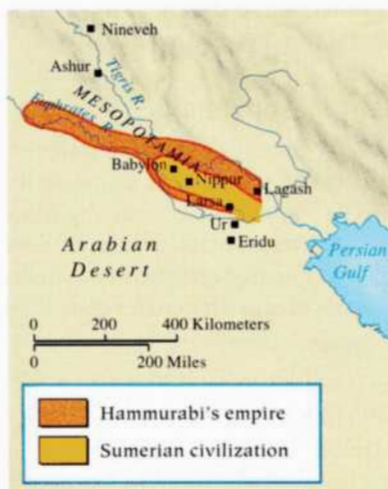
<i>Akkadian</i>	<i>Assyrian</i>	Hebrew
Arabic	<i>Babylonian</i>	<i>Phoenician</i>
Aramaic	<i>Canaanitic</i>	<i>Syriac</i>

Note: Languages in italic type are no longer spoken.

used the former rulers of the conquered city-states as his governors. His power was based on the military, namely, his standing 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 BCE, 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 Attacks from neighboring hill peoples eventually caused the Akkadian empire to fall, and its end by 2100 BCE brought a return to independent city-states and the conflicts between them. It was not until 1792 BCE that a new empire came to control much of Mesopotamia under Hammurabi (ham-uh-RAH-bee), who ruled over the Amorites or Old Babylonians, a large group of Semitic-speaking seminomads.

Hammurabi's Empire Hammurabi (1792–1750 BCE) employed 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, creating a new Mesopotamian kingdom. After his conquests, he called himself "the sun of Babylon, the king who has made the four quarters of the world subservient," and established a new capital at Babylon.



Hammurabi's Empire

Hammurabi, the man of war, was also a man of peace. A collection of his letters, found by archaeologists, reveals that he 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."⁵ After his death, however, a series of weak kings were unable to keep Hammurabi's empire united, and it finally fell to new invaders.

The Code of Hammurabi: Society in Mesopotamia Hammurabi is best remembered for his law code, a collection of 282 laws. 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 Mesopotamian society of his time (see "The Code of Hammurabi").

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) by a member of the lower class (a commoner) was punished more severely than the same offense against a member of the lower class. Moreover, the principle of "an eye for an eye, a 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" (Code of Hammurabi, No. 196). Hammurabi's code also 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 he is to be injured."

The largest category of laws in the Code of Hammurabi 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. While the husband provided a bridal payment to the bride's parents, the woman's parents were responsible for a dowry to the new husband.

As in many patriarchal societies, women possessed 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. Furthermore, a wife who was a "gadabout, . . . neglecting her house [and] humiliating her husband, shall be prosecuted" (No. 143). 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 had some rights, however. If a woman was divorced without good reason, she received the dowry back. 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.

THE CODE OF HAMMURABI

Family & Society

ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT THE EARLIEST MESOPOTAMIAN LAW CODE, Hammurabi's is the most complete.

The code emphasizes the principle of retribution ("an eye for an eye") and punishments that vary according to social status. Punishments could be severe. The following selections illustrate these concerns.

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 free 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 mina 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 mina of silver.



What do these points of law from the Code of Hammurabi reveal to you about Mesopotamian society?

Source: Pritchard, James B., ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd Edition with Supplement. Copyright 1950, 1955, 1969, renewed 1978 by Princeton University Press.

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" (No. 195). If a son committed a serious enough offense, his father could disinherit him, although fathers were not permitted to disinherit their sons arbitrarily.

1-3c 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 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*

put it. 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.⁶*

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, powerful cosmic powers that they identified with gods and goddesses.

With its numerous gods and goddesses animating all aspects of the universe, Mesopotamian religion was a form of **polytheism**. The four most important deities were An, god of the sky and hence the most important force in the universe; Enlil (EN-lil), god of wind; Enki (EN-kee), god of the earth, rivers, wells, and canals as well as inventions and crafts; and Ninhursaga (nin-HUR-sah-guh), a goddess associated with soil, mountains, and vegetation, who came to be 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 relationships with the gods were based on subservience since, 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 predict the gods' actions. But humans did attempt

to relieve their anxiety by discovering the intentions of the gods through **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*. The Mesopotamian arts of divination arose out of the desire to discover the purposes of the gods. If people could decipher the signs that foretold events, the events would be predictable and humans could act wisely.

The Cultivation of Writing and Sciences The realization of writing's great potential was another aspect of Mesopotamian culture. The oldest Mesopotamian texts date to around 3000 BCE and were written by the Sumerians, who used a **cuneiform** ("wedge-shaped") system of writing. 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 been 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.

Mesopotamian peoples used writing primarily for record keeping, but cuneiform texts were also used in schools set up to teach 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.

Writing was important because it enabled a society to keep records and maintain knowledge of previous practices and events (see Comparative Illustration "Early Writing" on p. 17). Writing also made it possible for people to communicate ideas in new ways, which is especially evident in the most famous piece of Mesopotamian literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, an epic poem that records the exploits of a legendary king of Uruk. Gilgamesh (GILL-guh-mesh), wise, strong, and perfect in body, part man and part god, befriends a hairy beast named Enkidu. Together they set off in pursuit of heroic deeds. When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh experiences the pain of mortality and begins a search for the secret of immortality. He finds Utnapishtim, who was granted immortality by the gods after he survived the Great Flood sent by the gods to destroy humankind (see Opposing Viewpoints "The Great Flood: Two Versions" p. 18). Utnapishtim tries to help Gilgamesh gain immortality, but his efforts fail, and Gilgamesh remains mortal. The desire for immortality, one of humankind's great searches, ends in complete frustration. "Everlasting life," as this Mesopotamian epic makes clear, is only for the gods.

Mesopotamians also made outstanding achievements in mathematics and astronomy. In math, the Sumerians devised a number system based on 60, using combinations of 6 and 10 for practical solutions. Geometry was used to measure fields and erect buildings. In astronomy, the Sumerians made use of units of 60 and charted the 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.

Pictographic sign, c. 3100 BCE									
Interpretation	star	?sun over horizon	?stream	ear of barley	bull's head	bowl	head + bowl	lower leg	?shrouded body
Cuneiform sign, c. 2400 BCE									
Cuneiform sign c. 700 BCE (turned through 90°)									
Phonetic value*	dingir, an	u ₄ , ud	a	še	gu ₄	nig ₂ , ninda	ku ₂	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, u₄ means the fourth sign with the phonetic value *u*.

The Development of Cuneiform Writing. This chart shows the evolution of writing from pictographic signs around 3100 BCE to cuneiform signs by about 700 BCE. Note that the sign for *star* came to mean "god" or "sky." Pictographic signs for *head* and *bowl* came eventually to mean "to eat" in their simplified cuneiform version.

From Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia & the Ancient Near East by Michael Roaf/Courtesy Andre Meda Oxford Limited, Oxford, England

COMPARATIVE ILLUSTRATION

Art & Ideas

Early Writing. Pictured in A is the upper part of the cone of Uruinimkina, covered in cuneiform script from an early Sumerian dynasty. The first Egyptian writing was also pictographic, as shown in the hieroglyphs in the detail from the mural in the tomb of Ramesses I in B. In Central America, the Mayan civilization had a well-developed writing system, also based on hieroglyphs, as seen in C in the text carved on a stone platform in front of the Palace of the Large Masks in Kabah, Mexico.

Q What common feature is evident in these early writing systems? How might you explain that?

A



BMN Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

B



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C



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

1-4 EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION: "THE GIFT OF THE NILE"



Focus Questions: What are the basic features of the three major periods of Egyptian history? What elements of continuity are evident in the three periods? What are their major differences?

"The Egyptian Nile," wrote one Arab traveler, "surpasses all the rivers of the world in sweetness of taste, in length of course and usefulness. No other river in the world can show such a continuous series of towns and villages along its banks." The Nile River was crucial to the development of Egyptian civilization (see "The Significance of the Nile River and the Pharaoh" on p. 19). 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. The Nile was responsible for creating an area several miles wide on both banks of the river that was fertile and 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, crested in Egypt in September and October, and left a deposit of silt that enriched the soil. The Egyptians called this fertile land the "Black Land" because it was dark in color from the silt and the crops that grew on it so densely. Beyond these narrow strips of fertile fields lay the deserts (the "Red Land"). 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.

The Great Flood: Two Versions

BOTH THE MESOPOTAMIAN POEM, *THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH*, AND THE HEBREW BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT)

include accounts of a great flood. In the first selection, taken from the *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 stilled; 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 sons' 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."



What does the 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 this account and the biblical flood story in Genesis?

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

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NILE RIVER AND THE PHARAOH

Religion & Philosophy

TWO OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCES OF LIFE

for the ancient Egyptians were the Nile River and the pharaoh. Egyptians perceived that the Nile made possible the abundant food that was a major source of their well-being. This *Hymn to the Nile*, probably from the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties in the New Kingdom, expresses the gratitude Egyptians felt for the great river.

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 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 good, 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.

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 this hymn from the reign of Sesotris III (c. 1880–1840 BCE).

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.



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

Sources: Pritchard, James B., ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd Edition with Supplement. Copyright © 1950, 1955, 1969, renewed 1978 by Princeton University Press. W. M. Flinders-Petrie, *A History of Egypt*, Fifth Edition (Methuen & Co.: London, 1903), Vol. 1, p. 183.

to the south (see Map 1.4). 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.

Unlike 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 create such systems 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.

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 through the land, making both transportation and communication easier. Winds from the north pushed sailboats south, and the current of the Nile carried them north.

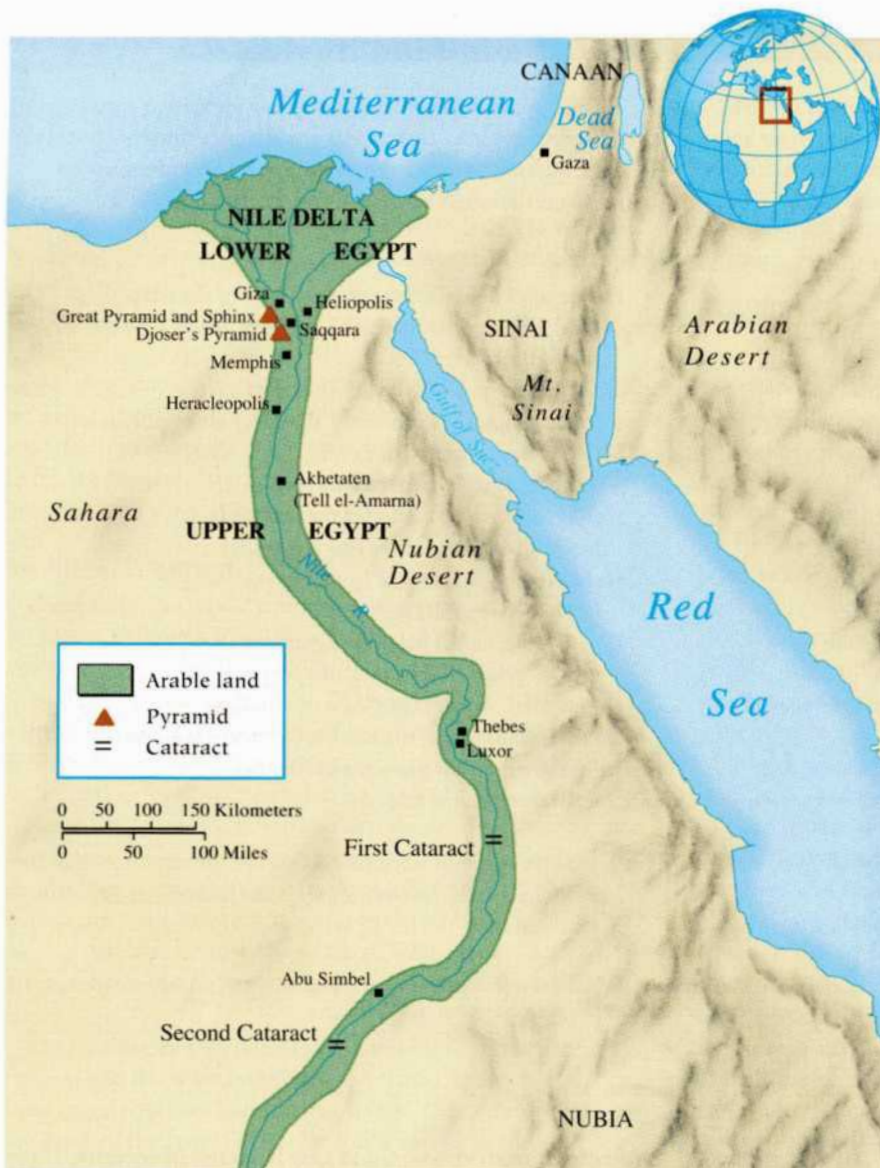
Unlike Mesopotamia, which was subject to constant invasion, Egypt had natural barriers that fostered isolation,

protected it from invasion, and gave it a sense of security. These barriers included deserts to the west and east; cataracts (rapids) on the southern part of the river, which made defense relatively easy; and the Mediterranean Sea to the north. These barriers, however, were effective only when combined with Egyptian fortifications at strategic locations. Nor did these barriers prevent the development of trade. Indeed, there is evidence of very early trade between Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The regularity of the Nile floods and the relative isolation of the Egyptians created a sense of security and a feeling of changelessness. To the ancient Egyptians, when the Nile flooded 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. Ancient Egyptian civilization was characterized by a remarkable degree of continuity for thousands of years.

1-4b The Old and Middle Kingdoms

Modern historians have divided Egyptian history into three major periods, known as the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom. These were periods of long-term



Map 1.4 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 south and west of Cairo.

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

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, 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 BCE, the first Egyptian royal dynasty, under a king called Menes, united Upper

and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom. Henceforth, the king would be called "king of Upper and Lower Egypt," and a royal crown, the Double Crown, was created, combining the White Crown of Upper Egypt and the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. Just as the Nile served to unite Upper and Lower Egypt physically, the king served to unite the two areas politically.

The Old Kingdom encompassed the fourth through eighth dynasties of Egyptian kings, lasting from around 2575 to 2125 BCE. It was an age of prosperity and splendor, made visible in the construction of the greatest and largest pyramids in Egypt's 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 "The Significance of the Nile River and the Pharaoh" on p. 19): "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."⁷ 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* (MAH-ut), a spiritual precept that conveyed the ideas of truth and justice and 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. For administrative purposes, Egypt was divided into provinces, or *nomes* as they were later called by the Greeks—twenty-two 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 Despite the theory of divine order, the Old Kingdom eventually collapsed, ushering in a period of disarray. Finally, a new royal dynasty managed to pacify all Egypt and inaugurated the Middle Kingdom, a period of stability lasting from around 2040 to 1630 BCE. 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 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."⁸

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. An upper class of nobles and priests aided the king and participated in the elaborate rituals of life that surrounded the pharaoh. This ruling class ran the government and managed its own landed estates, which provided much of its wealth.

Below the upper classes were merchants and artisans. Merchants engaged in an active trade up and down the Nile as well as in town and village markets. Some merchants also engaged in international trade; the king sent them 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. Eventually, trade links were established between ports in the Red Sea and countries as far away as the Indonesian archipelago. Egyptian artisans made an incredible variety of well-built and beautiful goods: stone dishes; painted boxes made of clay; wooden furniture; gold, silver, and copper tools and containers; paper and rope made of papyrus; and linen clothes.

By far the largest number of people in Egypt simply worked the land. In theory, the king owned all the land but granted



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 BCE shows jewelers and metal craftspeople 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. The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY

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, or common people bound to the land, who 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 forced labor for building projects.

1-4d The Culture of Egypt

Egypt produced a culture that dazzled and awed its later conquerors. The Egyptians' technical achievements, especially visible in the construction of the pyramids, demonstrated a measure of skill unequaled in 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 entire world order to which Egyptian society belonged. Egypt was part of the universal cosmic scheme, and the pharaoh was the divine being whose function was to maintain Egypt's stability within the 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. Egyptian ritual ceremonies focused on an image of a deity, providing it with food and sustenance and 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 it was the pharaoh's religious deputies—the priests—who executed the daily ceremonies.

The Egyptians had a remarkable number of gods associated with heavenly bodies and natural forces, hardly unusual in view of the importance to Egypt's well-being of the sun, the river, and the fertile land along its banks. 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 role. He was worshiped as Atum in human form and also as Re, who had a human body but the head of a falcon. The pharaoh took the title of "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 the Nile and to the sun as well. Osiris became especially important as a symbol of resurrection or rebirth. 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 River. 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. 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 the case of kings, in pyramidal tombs), given the name of Osiris, and by a process of magical identification became Osiris. Like Osiris, they could 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 so that Osiris could determine whether they deserved a reward. 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 in the time of the Old Kingdom. Pyramids were built as part of a larger complex of buildings 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*, rectangular structures with flat roofs, as tombs for the pharaoh's noble officials.

The tombs were well prepared for their residents, their rooms 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 they called the *ka*. If the physical body was properly preserved (by mummification) and the tomb was furnished with all the objects of regular life, the *ka* could return, surrounded by earthly comforts, 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 decomposing. Special workshops, run by priests, performed this procedure, primarily for the wealthy families who could afford it. According to an ancient Greek historian who visited Egypt around 450 BCE, "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."⁹ The liver, lungs, stomach, and intestines were 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 the pharaohs. The largest and most magnificent of all the pyramids was built under King Khufu. Constructed at Giza around 2540 BCE, this famous Great Pyramid covers 13 acres, measures 756 feet at each side of its base, and stands 481 feet high (see Comparative Illustration "The Pyramid," in Section 6-2c, p. 165). Its four sides are almost precisely oriented to the four points of the compass. The interior included a grand gallery to the burial chamber, which was built of granite with a lidless sarcophagus for the pharaoh's body. The Great Pyramid still stands as a visible symbol of the power of Egyptian kings and the spiritual conviction that underlay Egyptian society. No pyramid built later ever matched its size or splendor. The pyramid was not only the king's tomb; it was also an important symbol of royal power. It could be seen from miles away, a visible reminder of the glory and might of the ruler who was a living god on earth.

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 assist the journey of the deceased into the afterworld.

Egyptian art was also formulaic. Artists and sculptors observed 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, semiprofile, and frontal views of the human body in relief work and painting in order to represent each part of the body accurately. The result was an art that was highly stylized yet still allowed distinctive features to be displayed.

Writing emerged in Egypt during the first two dynasties. The Greeks later called Egyptian writing **hieroglyphics** (HY-uh-roh-glif-iks), meaning "priest-carvings" or "sacred writings." Hieroglyphs were signs that depicted objects and had a sacred

value at the same time. Although hieroglyphs were later simplified into two scripts for writing purposes, 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 reeds 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 around 1650 BCE with the invasion of Egypt by a people from western Asia known to the Egyptians as the Hyksos. The Hyksos used horse-drawn war chariots and overwhelmed the Egyptian soldiers, who fought from donkey carts. For almost a hundred years, the Hyksos ruled much of Egypt, but the conquered took much from their conquerors. From the Hyksos, the Egyptians learned to use bronze in making new farming tools and weapons. They also mastered the military skills of the Hyksos, especially the use of horse-drawn war chariots.

The Egyptian Empire Eventually, a new line of pharaohs—the eighteenth dynasty—made use of the new weapons to throw off Hyksos domination, reunite Egypt, establish the New Kingdom (c. 1539–1069 BCE), and launch the Egyptians along a new militaristic and imperialistic path, characterized by the development of a more professional army. During the period of the New Kingdom, Egypt assembled an empire and became the most powerful state in the Middle East.

Massive wealth aided the power of the New Kingdom pharaohs. The Egyptian rulers showed their wealth by building new temples. Queen Hatshepsut (hat-SHEP-soot) (c. 1503–1480 BCE), in particular, one of the first women to become pharaoh in her own right, built a great temple at Deir el Bahri (dayr ahl BAH-ree) near Thebes. As pharaoh, Hatshepsut sent out military expeditions, 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 referred to as "His Majesty." Hatshepsut was succeeded by her nephew, Thutmosis (thoot-MOH-suss) III (c. 1480–1450 BCE), who led seventeen military campaigns into Syria and Canaan and even reached the Euphrates River. Egyptian forces occupied Canaan and Syria and also moved westward into Libya.

Akhenaten and Religious Change The eighteenth dynasty was not without its troubles, however. Amenhotep (ah-mun-HOH-tep) IV (c. 1353–1336 BCE) introduced the worship of Aten, god of the sun disk, as the supreme god and, later in his reign, as the only god. 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 (ah-kuh-TAH-tun) ("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.

Akhenaten's attempt at religious change failed. It was too much to ask Egyptians to give up 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 had 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 (too-tang-KAH-mun) (c. 1332–1322 BCE). Tutankhamun returned the government to Thebes and restored the old gods. The Aten experiment had failed to take hold, and the eighteenth dynasty itself soon came to an end.

Decline of the Egyptian Empire The nineteenth dynasty managed to restore Egyptian power one more time. Under Ramesses (RAM-uh-seez) II (c. 1279–1213 BCE), the Egyptians went on the offensive, 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 temple buildings, many of which were characterized by colossal statues of himself.



Statues of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel. After being driven out of Canaan and Syria by the Hittites, the Egyptian empire 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.

Early Dynastic Period (Dynasties 1–3)	c. 3100–2575 BCE
Old Kingdom (Dynasties 4–8)	c. 2575–2125 BCE
First Intermediate Period (Dynasties 9–11)	c. 2125–2010 BCE
Middle Kingdom (Dynasties 12–13)	c. 2010–1630 BCE
Second Intermediate Period (Dynasties 14–17)	c. 1630–1539 BCE
New Kingdom (Dynasties 18–20)	c. 1539–1069 BCE
Post-Empire (Dynasties 21–31)	c. 1069–30 BCE

After the death of Ramesses II, struggles for the throne weakened the government, and new invasions in the thirteenth 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 Egyptian empire were ended, and the New Kingdom itself expired with the end of the twentieth dynasty in 1069 BCE. For the next thousand years, despite periodical 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 BCE, Egypt became a province in Rome’s mighty empire.

1-4f Daily Life in Ancient Egypt: Family and Marriage

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; the queen, however, was acknowledged as the “great wife,” with a status higher than that of the other wives. The husband was master in the house, but wives were very much respected and in charge of the household and the education of the children. From a book of wise sayings (which the Egyptians called “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 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.¹⁰

Women’s property and inheritance remained in their hands, even in marriage. Although most careers and public offices were closed to women, some women did operate businesses. Peasant women worked long hours in the fields and at numerous domestic tasks. Upper-class women could function as priestesses,

and a few queens, such as Hatshepsut, even became pharaohs in their own right.

Parents arranged marriages. The primary concerns were family and property, and the chief purpose of marriage was to produce children, especially sons. From the New Kingdom came this piece of wisdom: “Take to yourself a wife while you are [still] a youth, that she may produce a son for you.”¹¹ 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, with stiff punishments—especially for women, who could have their noses cut off or be burned at the stake.

1-4g The Spread of Egyptian Influence: Nubia

The civilization of Egypt had an impact on other peoples in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean. Egyptian products have been found in Crete and Cretan products in Egypt (see Chapter 4). Egyptian influence is also evident in early Greek statues. The Egyptians also had an impact to the south in Nubia (the northern part of modern Sudan). In fact, some archaeologists have recently suggested that the African kingdom of Nubia may have arisen even before the kingdoms of Egypt.

It is clear that contacts between the upper and lower Nile had been established by the late third millennium BCE, when Egyptian merchants traveled to Nubia to obtain ivory, ebony, frankincense, and leopard skins. A few centuries later, Nubia had become an Egyptian tributary. At the end of the second millennium BCE, Nubia profited from the disintegration of the Egyptian New Kingdom to become the independent state of Kush. Egyptian influence continued, however, as Kushite culture borrowed extensively from Egypt, including religious beliefs, the practice of interring kings in pyramids, and hieroglyphs.

But in the first millennium BCE, Kush also had a direct impact on Egypt. During the second half of the eighth century BCE, Kushite monarchs took control of Egypt and formed the twenty-fifth dynasty of Egyptian rulers. It was not until 663 BCE that the last Kushite ruler was expelled from Egypt. During this period, the Kushite rulers of Egypt even aided the Israelites in their struggle with the Assyrians (see “The Hebrews: The ‘Children of Israel’” on p. 27).

Although its economy was probably founded primarily on agriculture and animal husbandry, Kush developed into a major trading state in Africa that endured for hundreds of years. Its commercial activities were stimulated by the discovery of iron ore in a floodplain near the river at Meroë. Strategically located at the point where a land route across the desert to the south intersected the Nile River, Meroë eventually became the capital of a new state. In addition to iron products, Kush and Meroë supplied goods from Central and East Africa, notably ivory, gold, ebony, and slaves, to the Romans, Arabia, and India. At first, goods were transported by donkey caravans to the point where the river north was navigable. By the last centuries of the first millennium BCE, however, the donkeys were being replaced by camels, newly introduced from the Arabian peninsula.



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

1-5 NEW CENTERS OF CIVILIZATION



Focus Questions: What was the significance of the Indo-Europeans? How did Judaism differ from the religions of Mesopotamia and Egypt?

Mesopotamia and Egypt have dominated our story of civilization so far, but significant developments were also taking place on the fringes of these civilizations. Farming had spread into the Balkan peninsula of Europe by 6500 BCE, and by 4000 BCE,

it was well established in southern France, central Europe, and the coastal regions of the Mediterranean. Although migrating farmers from the Anatolian peninsula may have brought some farming techniques into Europe, some historians 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 erection of **megaliths** (*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 constructed around 4000 BCE, more than a thousand years before the great pyramids were built in Egypt. Between

3200 and 1500 BCE, 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. 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 phenomena as the major and minor standstills of the moon.



Stonehenge. The Bronze Age in northwestern Europe is known for its megaliths, large standing stones. Between 3200 and 1500 BCE, standing stones, placed in circles or lined up in rows, were erected throughout the British Isles and northwestern France. The most famous of these megalithic constructions is Stonehenge in England.

1-5a Nomadic Peoples: Impact of the Indo-Europeans

On the fringes of civilization lived nomadic peoples who depended on hunting and gathering, herding, and sometimes a bit of farming for their survival. Most important were the pastoral nomads who on occasion overran civilized communities and forged their own empires. Pastoral nomads domesticated animals for both food and clothing and moved along regular migratory routes to provide steady sources of nourishment for their animals.

The Indo-Europeans were among the most important nomadic peoples. These groups spoke languages derived from a single parent tongue. Indo-European languages include Greek, Latin, Persian, Sanskrit, and the Germanic and Slavic tongues (see Table 1.2). The original Indo-European-speaking peoples were probably based in the steppe region north of the Black Sea or in southwestern Asia, in modern Iran or Afghanistan, but around 2000 BCE, they began to move into Europe, India, and western Asia. The domestication of horses and the importation of the wheel and wagon from Mesopotamia facilitated the Indo-European migrations to other lands (see Map 1.5).

The Hittites One group of Indo-Europeans who moved into Asia Minor and Anatolia (modern Turkey) around 1750 BCE

TABLE 1.2

Some Indo-European Languages

Subfamily	Languages
Indo-Iranian	<i>Sanskrit</i> , Persian
Balto-Slavic	Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Czech, Polish, Lithuanian
Hellenic	Greek
Italic	<i>Latin</i> , 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.

coalesced with the native peoples to form the Hittite kingdom, with its capital at Hattusha (Bogazköy in modern Turkey). Between 1600 and 1200 BCE, the Hittites formed their own empire in western Asia and even threatened the power of the Egyptians.

The Hittites were the first of the Indo-European peoples to make use of iron, enabling them to construct weapons that



Map 1.5 The Spread of the Indo-Europeans. From their probable homeland in the steppe region north of the Black Sea, Indo-European-speaking peoples moved eventually into Europe, India, and western Asia. The languages shown on the map are all Indo-European languages (see Table 1.2).

Q How do you explain the movements of the Indo-European-speaking peoples?

were stronger and cheaper to make because of the widespread availability of iron ore. 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 4).

1-5b Territorial States in Western Asia:
The Phoenicians

During its heyday, the Hittite Empire was one of the great powers in western Asia. Constant squabbling over succession to the throne, however, tended to weaken royal authority at times. Especially devastating, were attacks by the Sea Peoples from the west and aggressive neighboring tribes. By 1190 BCE, Hittite power had come to an end. The destruction of the Hittite kingdom and the weakening of Egypt around 1200 BCE left no dominant powers in western Asia, allowing a patchwork of petty kingdoms and city-states to emerge, especially in the area of Syria and Canaan. The Phoenicians (fuh-NEE-shunz) were one of these peoples.

A Semitic-speaking people (see Table 1.1 on p. 14), the Phoenicians lived in the area of Canaan along the Mediterranean coast on a narrow band of land 120 miles long. Their newfound political independence after the demise of Hittite and Egyptian power helped the Phoenicians expand the trade that was already the foundation of their prosperity. The chief cities of Phoenicia—Byblos, Tyre, and Sidon—were ports on the eastern Mediterranean, but they also served as distribution centers for the lands to the east in Mesopotamia. The Phoenicians themselves produced a number of goods for foreign markets, including purple dye, glass, wine, and lumber from the famous cedars of Lebanon. In addition, the Phoenicians improved

their ships and became great international sea traders. They charted new routes, not only in the Mediterranean but also in the Atlantic Ocean, where they reached Britain and sailed south along the west coast of Africa. The Phoenicians established a number of colonies in the western Mediterranean, including settlements in southern Spain, Sicily, and Sardinia. Carthage, the Phoenicians' most famous colony, was located on the north coast of Africa.

Culturally, the Phoenicians are best known as transmitters. Instead of using pictographs or signs to represent whole words and syllables as the Mesopotamians and Egyptians did, the Phoenicians simplified their writing by using twenty-two different signs to represent the sounds of their speech. These twenty-two characters or letters could be used to spell out all the words in the Phoenician language. Although the Phoenicians were not the only people to invent an alphabet, theirs would have special significance because it was eventually passed on to the Greeks. From the Greek alphabet was derived the Roman alphabet that we still use today (Table 1.3 shows the derivation of the letters A to F). The Phoenicians achieved much while independent, but they ultimately fell subject to the Assyrians and Persians.

1-5c The Hebrews: The "Children of Israel"

To the south of the Phoenicians lived another group of Semitic-speaking people known as the Hebrews. Although they were a minor factor in the politics of the region, their **monotheism**—belief in but one God—later influenced both Christianity and Islam and flourished as a world religion in its own right. The Hebrews had a tradition concerning their origins and history that was eventually written down as part of the Hebrew Bible, known to Christians as the Old Testament. Describing themselves as a nomadic people, the Hebrews' own tradition states that they were descendants of the patriarch Abraham, who had migrated from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan, where the Hebrews became identified as the "Children of Israel." Moreover, according to tradition, a drought in Canaan caused many

TABLE 1.3 The Phoenician, Greek, and Roman Alphabets							
Phoenician			Greek			Roman	
Phoenician	Phoenician Name	Modern Symbol	Early Greek	Classical Greek	Greek Name	Early Latin	Classical Latin
𐤀	'aleph	'	Α	A	alpha	A	A
𐤁	beth	B	Β	B	beta		B
𐤂	gimel	G	Γ	Γ	gamma		C
𐤃	daleth	D	Δ	Δ	delta	D	D
𐤄	he	H	Η	E	epsilon	E	E
𐤅	waw	W	Ϝ		digamma	F	F

Source: Andrew Robinson, *The Story of Writing* (London, 1995), 170.

Hebrews to migrate to Egypt, where they lived peacefully until they were enslaved by pharaohs who used them as laborers on building projects. The Hebrews remained in bondage until Moses supposedly led his people out of Egypt in the Exodus in the first half of the thirteenth century BCE. According to the biblical account, the Hebrews then wandered for many years in the desert until they entered Canaan. Organized into twelve tribes, the Hebrews became embroiled in conflict with the Philistines, who had settled along the coast of Canaan but were beginning to move inland.

Many scholars today doubt that the biblical account reflects the true history of the early Israelites. The Hebrew Bible is a collection of twenty-four books written over hundreds of years. Dating of the biblical books is problematic, although scholars have advanced a Documentary Hypothesis, which maintains that a series of authors wrote different books of the Bible over a period of hundreds of years until the books were finally consolidated around 250 BCE. They argue that the early books of the Bible, written centuries after the events described, preserve only the cultural memory of what the Israelites came to believe about themselves and that recent archaeological evidence often contradicts the details of the biblical account. There is, for example, no archaeological or other evidence for the Exodus from Egypt. These scholars also argue that the Israelites were not nomadic invaders but indigenous peoples in the Canaanite hill country. What is generally agreed, however, is that between 1200 and 1000 BCE, the Israelites emerged as a distinct group of people, possibly organized into tribes or a league of tribes.

HISTORIANS DEBATE

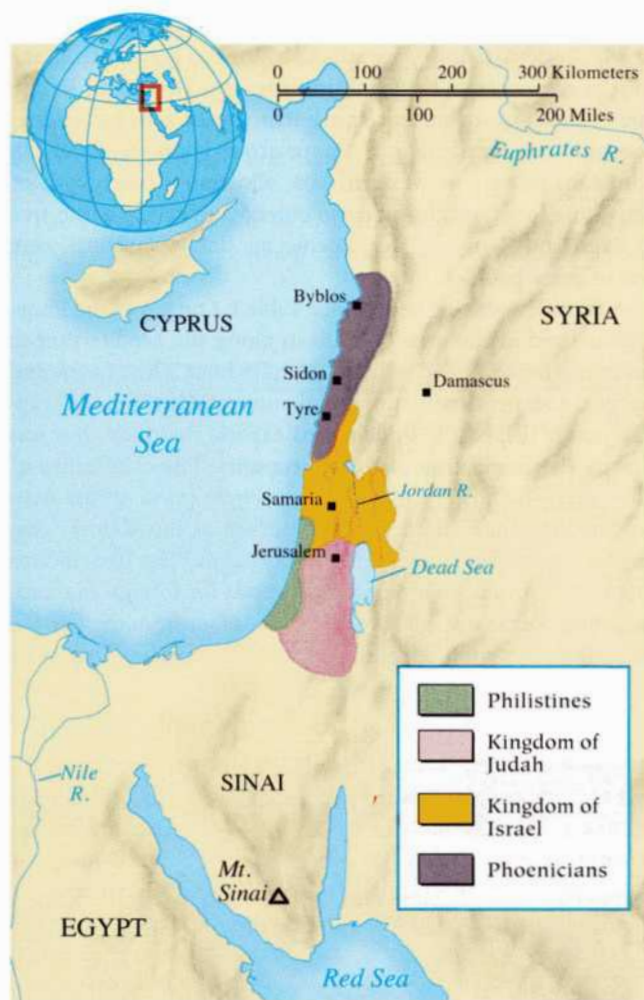
Was There a United Kingdom of Israel?

According to the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites established a united kingdom of Israel beginning with Saul (c. 1020–1000 BCE), who supposedly achieved some success in the ongoing struggle with the Philistines. But after his death, a brief period of anarchy ensued until one of Saul's lieutenants, David (c. 1000–970 BCE), reunited the Israelites, defeated the Philistines, and established control over all of Canaan. Among David's conquests was the city of Jerusalem, which he supposedly made into the capital of a united kingdom.

According to the biblical account, David's son Solomon (c. 970–930 BCE) did even more to strengthen royal power. He expanded the political and military establishments and extended the trading activities of the Israelites. Solomon is portrayed as a great builder who was responsible for the Temple in the city of Jerusalem. The Israelites viewed the Temple as the symbolic center of their religion and hence of the kingdom of Israel itself. Under Solomon, ancient Israel supposedly reached the height of its power.

The accuracy of this biblical account of the united kingdom of Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon has recently been challenged by a new generation of archaeologists and historians. Although they mostly accept Saul, David, and Solomon as historical figures, they view them more as chief warlords than as kings. If a kingdom of Israel did exist during these years, it was not as powerful or as well organized as the Hebrew Bible says. Furthermore, they argue, there is no definitive archaeological evidence that Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah There may or may not have been a united kingdom of Israel, but after the death of Solomon, tensions between northern and southern tribes in Israel led to the establishment of two separate kingdoms—the kingdom of Israel, composed of the ten northern tribes, with its capital eventually at Samaria, and the southern kingdom of Judah, consisting of two tribes, with its capital at Jerusalem (see Map 1.6). In 722 or 721 BCE, the Assyrians (uh-SEER-ee-unz) destroyed Samaria, overran the kingdom of Israel, and deported many Hebrews to other parts of the Assyrian Empire. These dispersed Hebrews (the “ten lost tribes”) merged with neighboring peoples and gradually lost their identity.



Map 1.6 The Israelites and Their Neighbors in the First Millennium BCE.

After the death of Solomon, tensions between the tribes in Israel led to the creation of two kingdoms—a northern kingdom of Israel and a southern kingdom of Judah. With power divided, the Israelites could not resist invasions that dispersed many of them from Canaan. Some, such as the “ten lost tribes,” never returned. Others were sent to Babylon but were later allowed to return under the rule of the Persians.



Why was Israel more vulnerable to the Assyrian Empire than Judah was?

The southern kingdom of Judah was also forced to pay tribute to Assyria but managed to retain its independence as Assyrian power declined. A new enemy, however, appeared on the horizon. The Chaldeans (kal-DEE-unz) defeated Assyria, conquered the kingdom of Judah, and completely destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BCE. Many upper-class people from Judah were deported to Babylonia; the memory of their exile is still evoked in the stirring words of Psalm 137:

*By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered
Zion. . . .*

How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.

*May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not
remember you,*

If I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.¹²

But the Babylonian captivity of the people of Judah did not last. A new set of conquerors, the Persians, destroyed the Chaldean kingdom and allowed the people of Judah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their city and Temple. The revived kingdom of Judah remained under Persian control until the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE. The people of Judah survived, eventually becoming known as the Jews and giving their name to Judaism, the religion of Yahweh (YAH-way), the Israelite God.

The Spiritual Dimensions of Israel The spiritual perspective of the Israelites evolved over time. Early Israelites probably worshiped many gods, including nature spirits dwelling in trees and rocks. For some Israelites, Yahweh was the chief god of Israel, but many, including kings of Israel and Judah, worshiped other gods as well. It was among the Babylonian exiles in the sixth century BCE that Yahweh—the God of Israel—came to be seen as the only God. After these exiles returned to Judah, their point of view eventually became dominant, and pure monotheism came to be the major tenet of Judaism.

According to the Hebrew conception, there is but one God, called Yahweh, who created the world and everything in it. Yahweh ruled the world and was subject to nothing. This omnipotent creator was not removed from the life he had created, however, but was a just and good God who expected goodness from his people. If they did not obey his will, they would be punished. But he was primarily a God of mercy and love: “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.”¹³ Each individual could have a personal relationship with this being.

Three aspects of the Hebrew religious tradition had special significance: the covenant, the law, and the prophets. The Israelites believed that during the exodus from Egypt, when Moses, according to biblical tradition, led his people out of bondage and into the Promised Land, God made a covenant or contract with the tribes of Israel, who believed that Yahweh had spoken to them through Moses (see “The Covenant and the Law: The Book of Exodus” on p. 30). The Israelites promised to obey Yahweh and follow his law. In return, Yahweh promised to take

special care of his chosen people, “a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.”

This covenant between Yahweh and his chosen people could be fulfilled, however, only by obedience to the law of God. Most important were the ethical concerns that stood at the center of the law. Sometimes these took the form of specific standards of moral behavior: “You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal.”¹⁴ True freedom consisted of following God’s moral standards voluntarily. If people chose to ignore the good, suffering and evil would follow.

The Israelites believed that certain religious teachers, called prophets, were sent by God to serve as his voice to his people. The golden age of prophecy began in the mid-eighth century BCE and continued during the time when the people of Israel and Judah were threatened by Assyrian and Chaldean conquerors. The “men of God” went through the land warning the



Moses and the Ten Commandments. As we have seen, according to the Hebrew Bible, God gave to Moses a set of commandments for the Israelites to obey. Although these commandments are interpreted and numbered differently by religious groups, the early Christian church came to consider the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God as a summary of God’s law and a standard for ethical behavior. This is evident in this sixth-century detail of Moses and the Ten Commandments in the Eastern Roman (later known as Byzantine) church of San Vitale in Italy. The Israelites shown in the photo are, of course, garbed in the clothing styles of the sixth century.

THE COVENANT AND THE LAW: THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Religion & Philosophy

ACCORDING TO THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT, it

was during the exodus from Egypt that the Israelites supposedly made their covenant with Yahweh. They agreed to obey their God and follow his law. In return, Yahweh promised to take special care of his chosen people. This selection from the biblical book of Exodus describes the making of the covenant and God's commandments to the Israelites.

Exodus 19:1–8

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, and said, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

Source: The Holy Bible, New International Version (Colorado Springs, CO, Biblica, 1973).

Israelites that they had failed to keep God's commandments and would be punished for breaking the covenant: “I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

Out of the words of the prophets came new concepts that enriched the Jewish tradition. The prophets embraced a concern for all humanity. All nations would someday come to the God of Israel: “All the earth shall worship thee.” This vision encompassed the elimination of war and the establishment of peace for all nations. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, “He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many people. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”¹⁵

Although the prophets developed a sense of universalism, the demands of the Jewish religion (the need to obey God) eventually encouraged a separation between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. Unlike most other peoples of the Middle East, Jews could not simply be amalgamated into a community by accepting the gods of their conquerors and their neighbors. To remain faithful to the demands of their God, they might even have to refuse loyalty to political leaders.

Exodus 20:1–3, 7–17

And God spoke all these words, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. . . . You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Q What was the nature of the covenant between Yahweh and the Israelites? What was its moral significance for the Israelites? How does it differ from Hammurabi's code, and how might you explain those differences?

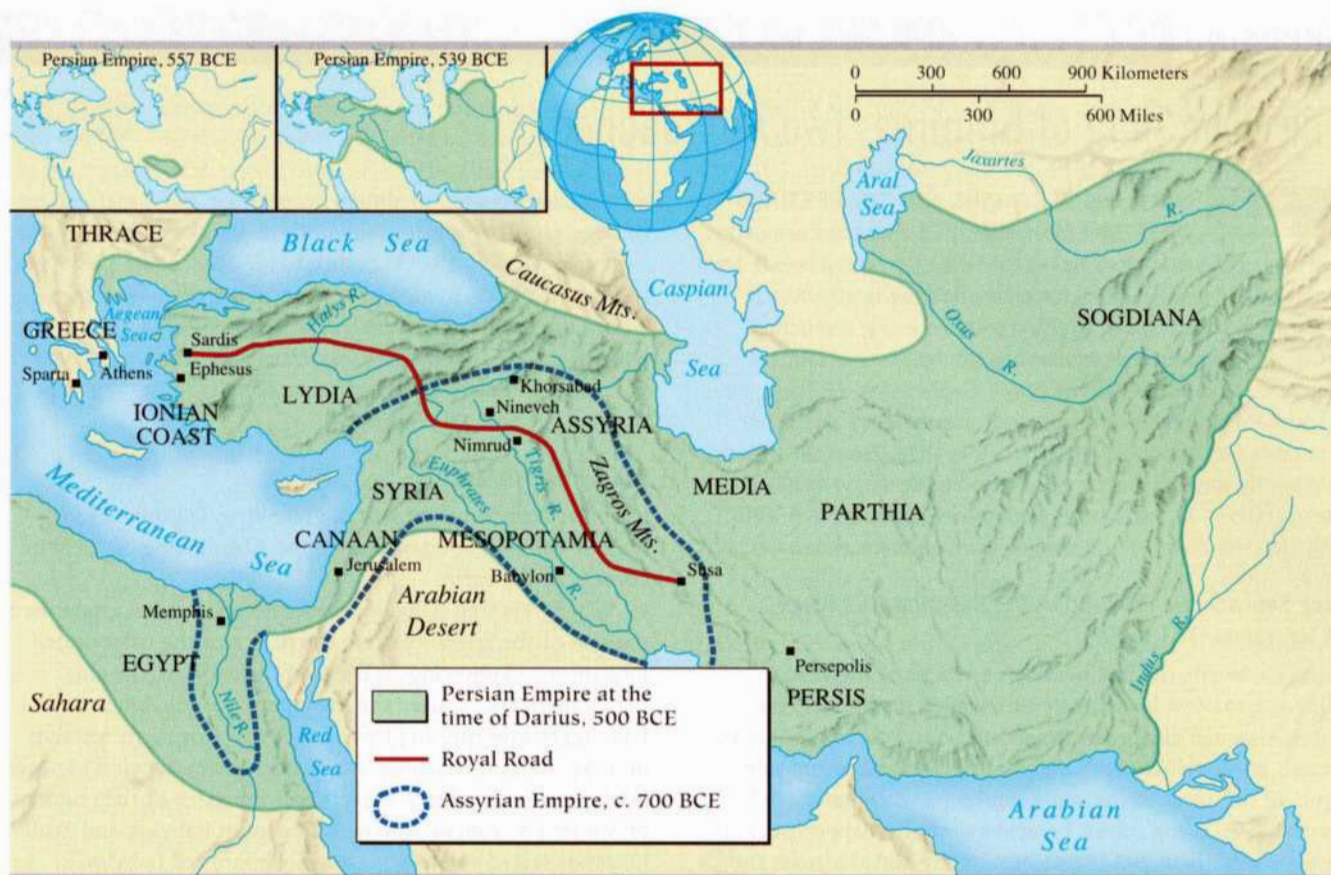
1–6 THE RISE OF NEW EMPIRES

Q **Focus Question:** What methods and institutions did the Assyrians and Persians use to amass and maintain their respective empires?

Small and independent states could exist only as long as no larger state dominated western Asia. New empires soon arose, however, and conquered vast stretches of the ancient world.

1–6a The Assyrian Empire

The first of these empires emerged in Assyria, located on the upper Tigris River, an area that brought it into both cultural and political contact with southern Mesopotamia. The Assyrians were a Semitic-speaking people who exploited the use of iron weapons, first developed by the Hittites, to establish an empire that by 700 BCE included Mesopotamia, parts of the Iranian Plateau, sections of Asia Minor, Syria, Canaan, and Egypt down to Thebes (see Map 1.7). Ashurbanipal (ah-shur-BAH-nuh-pahl) (669–627 BCE) was one of the strongest Assyrian rulers, but during his



Map 1.7 The Assyrian and Persian Empires. Cyrus the Great united the Persians and led them in a successful conquest of much of the Near East, including most of the lands of the Assyrian Empire. By the time of Darius, the Persian Empire was the largest the world had yet seen.

Q Based on your examination of this map of the Assyrian and Persian Empires, what do you think would be the challenges of governing a large empire?

reign it was already becoming apparent that the Assyrian Empire was greatly overextended. Moreover, subject peoples, such as the Babylonians, greatly resented Assyrian rule and rebelled against it. Soon after Ashurbanipal's reign, the Assyrian Empire began to disintegrate. The capital city of Nineveh fell to a coalition of Chaldeans and Medes in 612 BCE, and in 605 BCE, the rest of the empire was finally divided between the two powers.

At its height, kings whose power was considered absolute ruled the Assyrian Empire. Under their leadership, the empire came to be well organized. Local officials were directly responsible to the king. The Assyrians also developed an efficient system of communication to administer their empire more effectively. A network of staging posts was established throughout the empire that used relays of horses (mules or donkeys in mountainous terrain) to carry messages. The system was so effective that a provincial governor anywhere in the empire (except Egypt) could send a question and receive an answer from the king in his palace within a week.

The Assyrians' ability to conquer and maintain an empire was due to a combination of factors. Over many years of practice, the Assyrians developed effective military leaders and fighters. They were able to enlist and deploy troops numbering

in the hundreds of thousands, although most campaigns were not on such a large scale. Size alone was not decisive, however. The Assyrian army was well organized and disciplined. It included a standing army of infantry as its core, accompanied by cavalry and horse-drawn war chariots that were used as mobile platforms for shooting arrows. In addition to fighting set battles on open ground, the Assyrian army was also capable of waging guerrilla warfare in the mountains and laying siege to cities.

Another factor in the effectiveness of the Assyrian military machine was its use of terror as an instrument of warfare. As a matter of regular policy, the Assyrians laid waste to the land in which they were fighting, smashing dams, looting and destroying towns, setting crops on fire, and cutting down trees, particularly fruit trees. They were especially known for committing atrocities on their captives. King Ashurnasirpal (ah-shur-NAH-zur-pahl) recorded this account of his treatment of prisoners:

3000 of their combat troops I felled with weapons. . . . Many of the captives taken from them I burned in a fire. Many I took alive; from some of these I cut off their hands to the wrist, from others I cut off their noses, ears and fingers; I put out the eyes of many of the soldiers. . . . I burned their young men and women to death.¹⁶

The Governing of Empires: Two Approaches

Politics & Government

BOTH THE ASSYRIANS AND THE PERSIANS CREATED LARGE EMPIRES

that encompassed large areas of the ancient Near East. Although both Assyrian and Persian rulers used military force and violence to attain their empires, their approaches to conquest and ruling sometimes differed. Assyrian rulers were known for their terror tactics and atrocities, as described in the first two selections. Although the kings of Persia also used terror when needed, they also had a reputation for less cruelty and more tolerance. Especially noteworthy was Cyrus, as is evident in this selection from a decree (known as the Cyrus Cylinder) that he issued in 538 BCE. The propaganda value of his words is also apparent, however.

King Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) Describes His Siege of Jerusalem (701 BCE)

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them by means of well-stamped earth-ramps, and battering-rams brought thus near to the walls combined with the attack by foot soldiers, using mines, breaches as well as sapper work. I drove out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered them booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate.

King Ashurbanipal (669–627 BCE) Describes His Treatment of Conquered Babylon

I tore out the tongues of those whose slanderous mouths had uttered blasphemies against my god Ashur and had plotted against me, his god-fearing prince; I defeated them completely. The others, I smashed alive with the very same statues of protective deities with which they had smashed my own grandfather Sennacherib—now finally as a belated burial

sacrifice for his soul. I fed their corpses, cut into small pieces, to dogs, pigs, . . . vultures, the birds of the sky and also to the fish of the ocean. After I . . . thus made quiet again the hearts of the great gods, my lords, I removed the corpses of those whom the pestilence had felled, whose leftovers after the dogs and pigs had fed on them were obstructing the streets, filling the places of Babylon, and of those who had lost their lives through the terrible famine.

The Cyrus Cylinder

I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four corners of the earth. . . .

When I entered Babylon as a friend and when I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord [the chief Babylonian god], caused the magnanimous inhabitants of Babylon to love me, and I was daily endeavoring to worship him. My numerous troops walked around in Babylon in peace. I did not allow anybody to terrorize any place of the country of Sumer and Akkad. I strove for peace in Babylon and in all his other sacred cities. As to the inhabitants of Babylon . . . I brought relief to their dilapidated housing, putting thus an end to their main complaints. . . .

As to the region from as far as Ashur and Susa . . . I returned to these sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which used to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I also gathered all their former inhabitants and returned to them their dwellings.

Q Both Ashurbanipal and Cyrus entered Babylon as conquerors. How did their treatment of the conquered city differ? How do you explain the differences? Which method do you think was more effective? Why?

Sources: Pritchard, James B., ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition with Supplement. © 1950, 1955, 1969, renewed 1978 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

After conquering another city, the same king wrote, "I fixed up a pile of corpses in front of the city's gate. I flayed the nobles, as many as had rebelled, and spread their skins out on the piles. . . . I flayed many within my land and spread their skins out on the walls."¹⁷ It should be noted that this policy of extreme cruelty to prisoners was not used against all enemies but was primarily reserved for those who were already part of the empire and then rebelled against Assyrian rule (see *Opposing Viewpoints* "The Governing of Empires: Two Approaches").

Assyrian Society Unlike the Hebrews, the Assyrians were not fearful of mixing with other people. In fact, the Assyrian policy of deporting many prisoners of newly conquered territories to Assyria created a polyglot society in which ethnic differences were not very important. What gave identity to the Assyrians themselves was their language, although even that was akin to the language of their southern neighbors in Babylonia, who also spoke a Semitic tongue. Religion was also a cohesive force. Assyria was literally "the land of Ashur," a reference to

THE CODE OF THE ASSURA

Family & Society

Assyrian law was similar to Sumerian and Babylonian law, but it could be considerably harsher, especially in regard to women. The excerpts below are taken from one compilation of Assyrian laws known as the Code of the Assura, which is dated around 1075 BCE.

The Code of the Assura

- I.7. If a woman bring her hand against a man, they shall prosecute her; 30 manas of lead shall she pay, 20 blows shall they inflict on her.
- I.8. If a woman in a quarrel injure the testicle of a man, one of her fingers they shall cut off. And if a physician bind it up and the other testicle which is beside it be infected thereby, or take harm; or in a quarrel she injure the other testicle, they shall destroy both of her eyes.
- I.9. If a man bring his hand against the wife of a man, treating her like a little child, and they prove it against him, and convict him, one of his fingers they shall cut off. If he kiss her, his lower lip with the blade of an axe they shall draw down and they shall cut off.
- I.13. If the wife of a man go out from her house and visit a man where he lives, and he have intercourse with her, knowing that she is a man's wife, the man and also the woman they shall put to death.
- I.15. If a man catch a man with his wife, both of them shall they put to death. If the husband of the woman put his wife to death, he shall also put the man to death. If he

cut off the nose of his wife, he shall turn the man into a eunuch, and they shall disfigure the whole of his face.

- I.16. If a man have relations with the wife of a man at her wish, there is no penalty for that man. The man shall lay upon the woman, his wife, the penalty he wishes.
- I.40. If the wives of a man, or the daughters of a man go out into the street, their heads are to be veiled. The prostitute is not to be veiled. Maidservants are not to veil themselves. Veiled harlots and maidservants shall have their garments seized and 50 blows inflicted on them and bitumen poured on their heads.
- I.50. If a man strike the wife of a man, in her first stage of pregnancy, and cause her to drop that which is in her, it is a crime; two talents of lead he shall pay.
- I.52. If a woman of her own accord drop that which is in her, they shall prosecute her, they shall convict her, they shall crucify her, they shall not bury her. . . .
- I.57. In the case of every crime for which there is the penalty of the cutting-off of ear or nose or ruining or reputation or condition, as it is written it shall be carried out.
- I.58. Unless it is forbidden in the tablets, a man may strike his wife, pull her hair, her ear he may bruise or pierce. He commits no misdeed thereby.



Compare these excerpts from the Code of the Assura with the Code of Hammurabi in Chapter 1. How are they similar? How are they different? What do the differences reveal about Assyrian society?

Source: Internet Ancient History Sourcebook.

its chief god. The king, as Ashur's representative on earth, provided a final unifying focus.

Assyrian society was hierarchical. There was a noticeable gap between kings, royal officials, and warriors at the top and the merchants, peasants, and slaves below them. As in other ancient Near East societies, the Assyrian family was patriarchal.

The father held authority over his wife and children; women were expected to take care of the household and bear children. Although women were not equal to men, legal documents indicate that some Assyrian women could purchase and sell property, take part in business for themselves, and assist their husbands in legal matters. There were also enormous differences between high and low class women. The former included the wives and daughters of rulers and royal officials; the latter included lower-class wives and slaves who worked in households and temples. Their lives were regulated by harsh laws (see "The Code of the Assura").

Agriculture formed the principal basis of Assyrian life. Assyria was a land of farming villages with relatively few significant cities, especially in comparison to southern Mesopotamia.

Unlike the river valleys, where farming required the minute organization of large numbers of people to control irrigation, Assyrian farms received sufficient moisture from regular rainfall.

Trade was second to agriculture in economic importance. For internal trade, metals—including gold, silver, copper, and bronze—were used as a medium of exchange. Various agricultural products also served as a form of payment or exchange. Because of their geographic location, the Assyrians served as intermediaries and participated in an international trade, importing timber, wine, and precious metals and stones while exporting textiles produced in palaces, temples, and private workshops.

Assyrian Culture The Assyrians assimilated much of Mesopotamian civilization and saw themselves as guardians of Sumerian and Babylonian culture. Assyrian kings also tried to maintain old traditions when they rebuilt damaged temples by constructing the new buildings on the original foundations rather than in new locations.



Wiener Forman/Art Resource, NY

King Ashurbanipal's Lion Hunt. This relief, sculpted on alabaster as a decoration for the Assyrian northern palace in Nineveh, depicts King Ashurbanipal engaged in a lion hunt. Lion hunts were not conducted in the wild but were held under controlled circumstances: the king and his retainers faced lions released from cages in an arena. The scene was intended to glorify the king as the conqueror of the king of beasts. Relief sculpture, one of the best-known forms of Assyrian art, reached its zenith under Ashurbanipal just before the Assyrian Empire began its rapid disintegration.

Among the best-known objects of Assyrian art are the relief sculptures found in the royal palaces in three of the Assyrian capital cities, Nimrud, Nineveh, and Khorsabad. These reliefs, which were begun in the ninth century BCE and reached their high point in the reign of Ashurbanipal in the seventh, depicted two different kinds of subject matter: ritual or ceremonial scenes revolving around the king and scenes of hunting and war. The latter show realistic action scenes of the king and his warriors engaged in battle or hunting animals, especially lions. These images depict a strongly masculine world where discipline, brute force, and toughness are the enduring values—indeed, the very values of the Assyrian military monarchy.

1-6b The Persian Empire

After the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, the Chaldeans, under their king Nebuchadnezzar (neb-uh-kud-NEZZ-ur) II (605–562 BCE), made Babylonia the leading state in western Asia. Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt Babylon as the center of his empire, giving it a reputation as one of the great cities of the ancient world. But the splendor of Chaldean Babylonia proved to be short-lived when Babylon fell to the Persians in 539 BCE.

The Persians were an Indo-European-speaking people who lived in southwestern Iran. Primarily nomadic, the Persians were organized into tribes until the Achaemenid (ah-KEE-muh-nud) dynasty managed to unify them. One of the dynasty's members, Cyrus (559–530 BCE), created a powerful Persian state that rearranged the political map of western Asia.

Cyrus the Great In 550 BCE, Cyrus extended Persian control over the Medes, making Media the first Persian **satrapy** (SAY-truh-pee), or province. Three years later, Cyrus defeated the prosperous Lydian kingdom in western Asia Minor, and Lydia

became another Persian satrapy. Cyrus's forces then went on to conquer the Greek city-states that had been established on the Ionian coast. Cyrus then turned eastward, subduing the eastern part of the Iranian Plateau, Sogdia, and even western India. His eastern frontiers secured, Cyrus entered Mesopotamia in 539 and captured Babylon (see Map 1.7 on p. 31). His treatment of Babylonia showed remarkable restraint and wisdom. Babylonia was made into a Persian province under a Persian **satrap** (SAY-trap), or governor, but many government officials were kept in their positions. Cyrus took the title "King of All, Great King, Mighty King, King of Babylon, King of the Land of Sumer and Akkad, King of the Four Rims [of the earth], the Son of Cambyzes the Great King, King of Anshan"¹⁸ and insisted that he stood in the ancient, unbroken line of Babylonian kings. By appealing to the vanity of the Babylonians, he won their loyalty. Cyrus also issued an edict permitting the Jews, who had been brought to Babylon in the sixth century BCE, to return to Jerusalem with their sacred objects and to rebuild their Temple as well.

To his contemporaries, Cyrus deserved to be called Cyrus the Great. The Greek historian Herodotus recounted that the Persians viewed him as a "father," a ruler who was "gentle, and procured them all manner of goods."¹⁹ Cyrus must have been an unusual ruler for his time, a man who demonstrated considerable wisdom and compassion in the conquest and organization of his empire (see Opposing Viewpoints "The Governing of Empires: Two Approaches" on p. 32). He won approval by using not only Persians but also native peoples as government officials in their own states. Unlike the Assyrian rulers of an earlier empire, he had a reputation for mercy. Medes, Babylonians, and Jews all accepted him as their legitimate ruler. Indeed, the Jews regarded him as the anointed one of God: "I am the Lord who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all

that I please'; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt'; and of the Temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.' This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him."²⁰

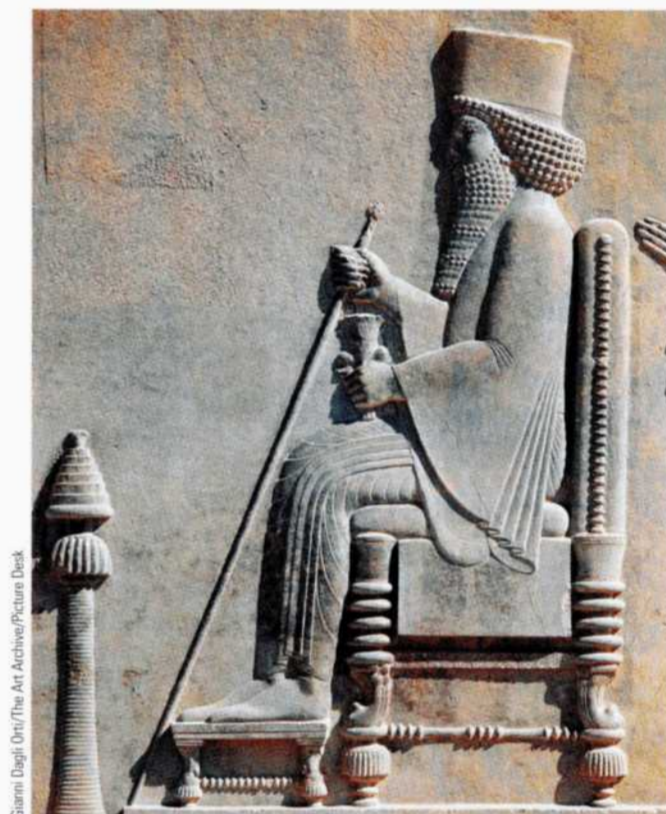
Expanding the Empire Cyrus's successors extended the territory of the Persian Empire. His son Cambyses (kam-BY-seez) (530–522 BCE) undertook a successful invasion of Egypt. Darius (duh-RY-uss) (521–486 BCE) added a new Persian province in western India that extended to the Indus River and moved into Europe proper, conquering Thrace and making the Macedonian king a vassal. A revolt of the Ionian Greek cities in 499 BCE resulted in temporary freedom for these communities in western Asia Minor. Aid from the Greek mainland, most notably from Athens, encouraged the Ionians to invade Lydia and burn Sardis, center of the Lydian satrapy. This event led to Darius's involvement with the mainland Greeks. After reestablishing control of the Ionian Greek cities, Darius undertook an invasion of the Greek mainland, which culminated in the Athenian victory in the Battle of Marathon, in 490 BCE (see Chapter 4).

Governing the Empire By the reign of Darius, the Persians had assembled the largest empire the world had yet seen. It not only included all the old centers of power in Egypt and western Asia but also extended into Thrace and Asia Minor in the west and into India in the east. For administrative purposes, the empire had been divided into approximately twenty satrapies. Each province was ruled by a satrap, literally a "protector of the kingdom." Satraps collected tributes, were responsible for justice and security, raised military levies for the royal army, and normally commanded the military forces within their satrapies. In terms of real power, the satraps were miniature kings who created courts imitative of the Great King's.

An efficient system of communication was crucial to sustaining the Persian Empire. Well-maintained roads facilitated the rapid transit of military and government personnel. One in particular, the so-called Royal Road, stretched from Sardis, the center of Lydia in Asia Minor, to Susa, the chief capital of the Persian Empire. Like the Assyrians, the Persians established staging posts equipped with fresh horses for the king's messengers.

The Great King In this vast administrative system, the Persian king occupied an exalted position. Although not considered a god in the manner of an Egyptian pharaoh, he was nevertheless the elect one or regent of the Persian god Ahuramazda (uh-HOOR-uh-MAHZ-duh) (see next section, "Persian Religion"). All subjects were the king's servants, and he was the source of all justice, possessing the power of life and death over everyone. Persian kings were largely secluded and not easily accessible. They resided in a series of splendid palaces. Darius in particular was a palace builder on a grand scale.

The policies of Darius also tended to widen the gap between the king and his subjects. As the Great King himself said of all his subjects, "What was said to them by me, night and



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Darius, the Great King. Darius ruled the Persian Empire from 521 to 486 BCE. He is shown on his throne in Persepolis, the new capital city he built. In his right hand, Darius holds the royal staff; with his left, he grasps a lotus blossom with two buds, a symbol of royalty.

day it was done."²¹ Over a period of time, the Great Kings in their greed came to hoard immense quantities of gold and silver in treasuries located in the capital cities. Both their hoarding of wealth and their later over-taxation of their subjects were crucial factors in the ultimate weakening of the Persian Empire.

In its heyday, however, the empire stood supreme, and much of its power depended on the military. By the time of Darius, the Persian monarchs had created a standing army of professional soldiers. This army was truly international, composed of contingents from the various peoples who made up the empire. At its core was a cavalry force of ten thousand and an elite infantry force of ten thousand Medes and Persians known as the Immortals because they were never allowed to fall below ten thousand in number. When one was killed, he was immediately replaced.

Persian Religion Of all the Persians' cultural contributions, the most original was their religion, **Zoroastrianism**. According to Persian tradition, Zoroaster (ZOR-oh-ass-tur) was born in 660 BCE. After a period of wandering and solitude, he experienced revelations that caused him to be revered as a prophet of the "true religion." His teachings were eventually written down in the third century BCE in the *Zend Avesta*, the sacred book of Zoroastrianism.

CHRONOLOGY**Early Empires****The Assyrians**

Height of power	700 BCE
Ashurbanipal	669–627 BCE
Fall of Nineveh	612 BCE
Assyrian Empire destroyed	605 BCE

The Persians

Unification under Achaemenid dynasty	600s BCE
Persian control over Medes	550 BCE
Conquests of Cyrus the Great	559–530 BCE
Cambyses and conquest of Egypt	530–522 BCE
Reign of Darius	521–486 BCE

Zoroaster's spiritual message was basically monotheistic. To Zoroaster, the religion he preached was the only perfect one, and Ahuramazda was the only god. Ahuramazda ("Wise Lord") was the supreme deity, "creator of all things."

According to Zoroaster, Ahuramazda also possessed qualities that all humans should aspire to, such as good thought, right action, and piety. Although Ahuramazda was supreme, he was not unopposed; this gave a dualistic element to Zoroastrianism. At the beginning of the world, the good spirit of Ahuramazda was opposed by the evil spirit, later identified as Ahriman.

Humans also played a role in this cosmic struggle between good and evil. Ahuramazda, the creator, gave all humans free will and the power to choose between right and wrong. The good person chooses the right way of Ahuramazda. Zoroaster taught that there would be an end to the struggle between good and evil. Ahuramazda would eventually triumph, and at the last judgment at the end of the world, the final separation of good and evil would occur. Individuals, too, would be judged. Each soul faced a final evaluation of its actions. The soul of a person who had performed good deeds would achieve paradise; but if deeds had been evil, the person would be thrown into an abyss of torment. Some historians believe that Zoroastrianism, with its emphasis on good and evil, heaven and hell, and a last judgment, had an impact on Christianity, a religion that eventually surpassed it in significance.

CHAPTER SUMMARY



Humanlike creatures first emerged in Africa around 3 to 4 million years ago. Over a period of time, Paleolithic people learned to create sophisticated tools, to use fire, and to adapt to and even change their physical world. They were primarily nomads, who hunted animals and gathered wild plants for survival. The agricultural revolution of the Neolithic Age, which began around 10,000 BCE, dramatically changed human patterns of living. The growing of food on a regular basis and the taming of animals enabled humans to stop their nomadic ways and settle in permanent settlements, which gave rise to more complex human societies.

These more complex human societies, which we call the first civilizations, emerged around 3000 BCE 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. The peoples of Southwest Asia and Egypt 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

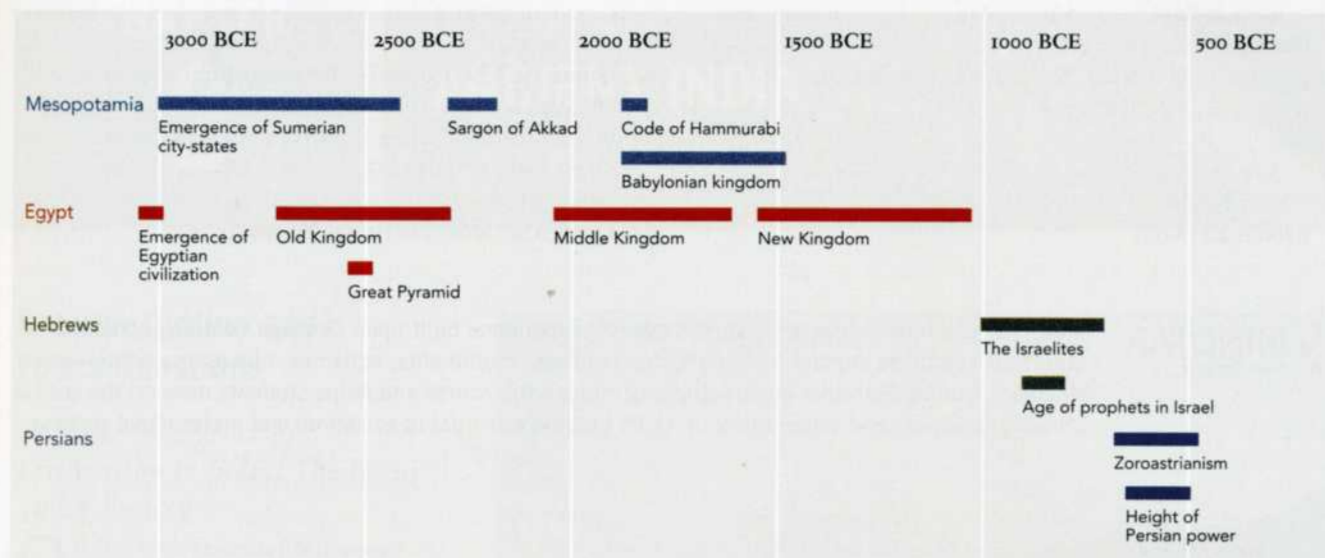


gods, give witness to their power, and preserve their culture. They developed new political, military, social, and religious structures to deal with the basic problems of human existence and organization. These first civilizations left detailed records that allow us to view how they grappled with three 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 that cosmos.

By the middle of the second millennium BCE, much of the creative impulse of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations was beginning to wane. Around 1200 BCE, a number of small states emerged, but all of them were eventually overshadowed by the rise of the great empires of the Assyrians and Persians. The Assyrian Empire was the first to unite almost all of the ancient Middle East. Even larger, however, was the empire of the Great Kings of Persia. The many years of peace that the Persian Empire brought to the Middle East facilitated trade and the general well-being of its peoples. It is no wonder that many peoples expressed their gratitude for being subjects of the Great Kings of Persia. Among these peoples were the Hebrews, who created no empire but nevertheless left an important spiritual legacy. The embrace of monotheism created in Judaism one of the world's greatest religions, one that went on to influence the development of both Christianity and Islam.



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

Q Compare and contrast the administrative and military structures and the attitudes toward subject peoples of the Assyrian and Persian Empires.

Key Terms

hominids (p. 5)

Paleolithic Age (p. 6)

Neolithic Revolution (p. 7)

Mesolithic Age (p. 8)

patriarchy (p. 10)

civilization (p. 10)

ziggurat (p. 12)

theocracy (p. 12)

polytheism (p. 15)

divination (p. 16)

cuneiform (p. 16)

pharaoh (p. 20)

hieroglyphics (p. 22)

megaliths (p. 25)

monotheism (p. 27)

satrapy (p. 34)

satrap (p. 34)

Zoroastrianism (p. 35)

Chapter 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 BC* (London, 1995), vol. 1, 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 BC* (Oxford, 2004), p. 69.
5. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 106.
6. Quoted in T. Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," in H. Frankfort et al., *Before Philosophy* (Baltimore, 1949), p. 139.
7. Quoted in M. Covensky, *The Ancient Near Eastern Tradition* (New York, 1966), p. 51.