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## The Birth of Civilization

- Early Humans and Their Culture
- Early Civilizations in the Middle East to about 1000 B.C.E.
- Ancient Near Eastern Empires
- Early Indian Civilization
- Early Chinese Civilization
- The Rise of Civilization in the Americas

SCIENTISTS ESTIMATE THAT THE EARTH MAY BE AS many as 6 billion years old and that the first humanlike creatures appeared in Africa perhaps 3 to 5 million years ago. Some 1 to 2 million years ago, erect and tool-using early humans spread over much of Africa, Europe, and Asia (see Map 1-1 on page 4). Our own species, *Homo sapiens*, probably emerged some 200,000 years ago, and the earliest remains of fully modern humans date to about 100,000 years ago.

The earliest humans lived by hunting, fishing, and collecting wild plants. Only some 10,000 years ago did they learn to cultivate plants, herd animals, and make airtight pottery for storage. These discoveries transformed them from gatherers to producers and allowed them to grow in number and to lead a settled life. Beginning about 5,000 years ago a far more

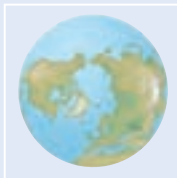


**A carved or etched limestone statue**, from about 2500 B.C.E., believed by scholars to be a king or a priest from Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus valley in present-day Pakistan.



## Global Perspective

# Civilizations



*The World*

The way of life of prehistoric cave dwellers differed immensely from that of today's civilized world. Yet the few millennia in which we have been civilized are but a tiny fraction of the long span of human existence. Especially during the recent millen-

nia, changes in our culture/way of life have far outpaced changes in our bodies. We retain the emotional makeup and motor reflexes of prehistoric men and women while living highly organized and often sedentary lives.

We might best view the early civilizations by asking how they fit into the sweep of history. One notable feature of human history is the acceleration in the pace of change. From the time that modern humans first appeared 100,000 years ago until 7000 B.C.E., few changes occurred. Humans migrated from Africa to other parts of the world and adapted to new climes. All lived by hunting, fishing, and gathering. The chief advance in technology during this longest span of human existence was from rough to smooth stone weapons and tools.

Then, from about 7000 B.C.E., innovations began. Humans learned to till the soil, domesticate animals, and make pots for the storage of food. A few millennia later, bronze was discovered, and the so-called river valley civilizations formed along the Nile, the Tigris-Euphrates, the Indus, and the Yellow rivers. Cities arose. Writing was invented. Societies divided into classes or castes: Most members engaged in farming, a few traded, and others assumed military, priestly, or governmental roles. As these civilizations expanded, they became richer, more populous, and more powerful.

The last millennium B.C.E. witnessed two major developments. One was the emergence, between roughly 600–300 B.C.E., of the religious and philosophical revolutions that would indelibly mark their respective civilizations: monotheistic Judaism from which would later develop the world religions of Christianity and Islam; Hinduism and Buddhism in southern Asia; the philosophies of Greece and China. The second development was the rise of the Iron Age empires—the Roman,

complex way of life began to appear in some parts of the world. In these places humans learned how to increase harvests through irrigation and other methods, making possible much larger populations. They came together in towns, cities, and other centers, where they erected impressive structures and where industry and commerce flourished. They developed writing, enabling them to keep inventories of food and other resources. Specialized occupations emerged, complex religions took form, and social divisions increased. These changes marked the birth of civilization. ■

### Early Humans and Their Culture

Humans, unlike other animals, are cultural beings. **Culture** is the sum total of the ways of living built up by a group and passed on from one generation to another. Culture includes behavior such as courtship or child-rearing practices; material things such as tools, clothing, and shelter; and ideas, institutions, and beliefs. Language, apparently a uniquely human trait, lies behind our ability to create ideas and institutions and to transmit culture

from one generation to another. Our flexible and dexterous hands enable us to hold and make tools and so to create the material artifacts of culture. Because culture is learned and not inherited, it permits rapid adaptation to changing conditions, making possible the spread of humanity to almost all the lands of the globe.

### The Paleolithic Age

Anthropologists designate early human cultures by their tools. The earliest period—the **Paleolithic Age** (from the Greek, “old stone”)—dates from the earliest use of stone tools some 1 million years ago to about 10,000 B.C.E. During this immensely long period, people were hunters, fishers, and gatherers, but not producers, of food. They learned to make and use increasingly sophisticated tools of stone and perishable materials like wood; they learned to make and control fire; and they acquired language and the ability to use it to pass on what they had learned.

These early humans, dependent on nature for food and vulnerable to wild beasts and natural disasters, may have developed responses to the world rooted in fear of the unknown—of the uncertainties of human life or the overpowering

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the Mauryan along the Ganges, the Han in China—during the centuries straddling the end of the millennium.

After the fall of these early empires, swift changes occurred. For a millennium, Europe and Byzantium fell behind, while China and the Middle East led in technology and the arts of government. But by 1500 Europe had caught up, and after 1700, it led. India had developed the numerals that later came to Europe as “Arabic numbers,” and Arab thinkers inspired the Renaissance, but it was Europe that produced Copernicus and Newton.

The nineteenth century saw the invention of the steam engine, the steamship, the locomotive, the telegraph and telephone, and the automobile. After that came electric lights, the radio, and, in the century that followed, the airplane.

In the twentieth century, invention and scientific discovery became institutionalized in university, corporate, and government laboratories. Ever larger amounts of resources were committed to research. By the beginning of the twenty-first century man had walked on the moon, deciphered the human genome, and unlocked the power of the atom. Today, as discoveries occur ever more rapidly, we cannot imagine the science of a hundred years into the future.

If this process of accelerating change had its origins in 7000 B.C.E., what was the original impetus? Does the logic of nature dictate that once agriculture develops, cities will rise

in alluvial valleys favorable to cultivation? Was it inevitable that the firing of clay to produce pots would produce metals from metallic oxides and lead to the discovery of smelting? Did the formation of aristocratic and priestly classes automatically lead to record keeping and writing? If so, it is not at all surprising that parallel and independent developments should have occurred in regions as widely separated as China and the Middle East.

Or was the almost simultaneous rise of the ancient Eurasian civilizations the result of **diffusion**? Did migrating peoples carry seeds, new tools, and metals over long distances? The available evidence provides no definitive answer. Understanding the origins of the early civilizations and the lives of the men and women who lived in them from what is left of their material culture is like reconstructing a dinosaur from a broken tooth and a fragment of jawbone.

### Focus Questions

- What were the processes behind the creation of early civilizations?
- What are the similarities and differences among the world’s earliest civilizations?
- Why has the pace of change accelerated with time?

forces of nature. Religious and magical beliefs and practices may have emerged in an effort to propitiate or coerce the superhuman forces thought to animate or direct the natural world. Evidence of religious faith and practice, as well as of magic, goes as far back as archaeology can take us. Fear or awe, exultation, gratitude, and empathy with the natural world must all have figured in the cave art and in the ritual practices, such as burial, that we find evidenced at Paleolithic sites around the globe. The sense that there is more to the world than meets the eye—in other words, the religious response to the world—seems to be as old as humankind.

During the Paleolithic Age, most likely relatively near its close, humans, probably pursuing game, crossed from Asia through the region of the Bering Sea, which was then dry land, into the American continent (see Map 1–1). This migration would ultimately separate their descendants from other human groups for many thousands of years. In their isolation, however, the inhabitants of the Americas experienced cultural changes parallel to those of Eurasia and Africa.

The style of life and the level of technology of the Paleolithic period could support only a sparsely settled society. If

hunters were too numerous, game would not suffice. In Paleolithic times people were subject to the same natural and ecological constraints that today maintain a balance between wolves and deer in Alaska.

Paleolithic society was probably characterized by a division of labor by sex. Men most likely hunted, fished, and fought other families, clans, and tribes. Women, less mobile because of childbearing, most likely gathered nuts, berries, and wild grains, wove baskets, and made clothing. Women gathering food probably discovered how to plant and care for seeds, knowledge that eventually led to agriculture and the Neolithic Revolution.

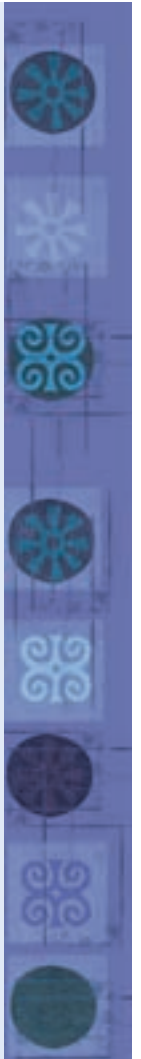
### The Neolithic Age

Only a few Paleolithic societies made the initial shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture. Anthropologists and archaeologists disagree as to why, but however it happened, some 10,000 years ago parts of what we now call the Middle East began to change from a nomadic hunter-gatherer culture to a more settled agricultural one. Because the shift to agriculture coincided with advances in stone tool technology—the development of greater precision, for example, in chipping and grinding—this period is called the Neolithic Age (from the

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**Wondjina.** An image depicting cloud and rain spirits from Chamberlain Gorge in western Australia, painted perhaps 12,000 years ago.

Greek, “new stone”). Productive animals, such as sheep and goats, and food crops, such as wheat and barley, were first domesticated in the mountain foothills where they already lived or grew in the wild.

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The Toolmaker (3300 B.C.E.)  
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Once they had domesticated these plants and animals, people could move to areas where these plants and animals did not occur naturally, such as the river valleys of the region. The invention of pottery during the Neolithic Age enabled people to store surplus

foods and liquids and to transport them, as well as to cook agricultural products that were difficult to eat or digest raw. They made cloth from flax and wool.

Because crops required constant care from planting to harvest, Neolithic farmers built permanent dwellings. The earliest of these dwellings tended to be circular huts, large enough to house only one or two people and clustered in groups around a central storage place. Later people built square and rectangular family-sized houses with individual storage places and enclosures to house livestock. Houses in a Neolithic village were normally all the same size and were built on the same plan, suggesting that most Neolithic villagers had about the same level of wealth and social status. A few items,

such as stones and shells, were traded long distance, but Neolithic villages tended to be self-sufficient.

Two larger Neolithic settlements do not fit this village pattern. One was found at Çatal Hüyük, in a fertile agricultural region about 150 miles south of Ankara, the capital of present-day Turkey. This was a large town covering over 15 acres, with a population probably well over 6,000 people. The houses were clustered so closely that they had no doors but were entered by ladders from the roofs.

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Redefining Self—From Tribe to Village to City 1500 B.C.E.  
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Many of these houses were decorated inside with sculptures of animal heads and horns, as well as paintings that were apparently redone regularly. Some appear to depict ritual or festive occasions involving men and women. One is the





**Çatal Hüyük.** The diagram reconstructs part of Çatal Hüyük on the basis of archaeological findings. Reprinted by permission of the Catalhoyuk Research Project.

world's oldest landscape picture, showing a nearby volcano exploding. The agriculture, arts, and crafts of this town were astonishingly diversified and at a much higher level of attainment than in other, smaller settlements of the period. The site of Jericho, an oasis around a spring near the Dead Sea, was occupied as early as 12,000 B.C.E. Around 8000 B.C.E. a town of 8 to 10 acres grew up, surrounded by a massive stone wall with at least one tower against the inner face. Although this wall may have been for defense, scholars dispute its use because no other Neolithic settlement has been found with fortifications. The inhabitants of Neolithic Jericho had a mixed agricultural, herding, and hunting economy and may have traded salt. They had no pottery but plastered the skulls of their dead to make realistic memorial portraits of them. These two sites show that the economy and the settlement patterns of the Neolithic period may be more complicated than many scholars have thought.

Throughout the Paleolithic Age, the human population had been small and relatively stable. The shift from food gathering to food production may not have been associated with an immediate change in population, but over time in the regions where agriculture and animal husbandry appeared, the number of human beings grew at an unprecedented rate. One reason for this is that farmers usually had larger families than hunters. Their children began to work and matured at a younger age than the children of hunters.

When animals and plants were domesticated and brought to the river valleys, the relationship between human beings and nature was changed forever. People had learned to control nature, a vital prerequisite for the emergence of civilization. But farmers had to work harder and longer than hunters did, and they had to stay in one place. Herders, on the other hand, often moved from place to place in search of pasture and water, returning to their villages in the spring. Some scholars refer to the dramatic changes in subsistence, settlement, technology, and population of this time as the **Neolithic Revolution**. The earliest Neolithic societies appeared in the Middle East about 8000 B.C.E., in China about 4000 B.C.E., and in India about 3600 B.C.E. Neolithic

agriculture was based on wheat and barley in the Middle East, on millet and rice in China, and on corn in Mesoamerica, several millennia later.

## The Bronze Age and the Birth of Civilization

Neolithic agricultural villages and herding cultures gradually replaced Paleolithic culture in much of the world. Then another major shift occurred, first in the plains along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the region the Greeks and Romans called **Mesopotamia** (modern Iraq), later in the valley of the Nile River in Egypt, and somewhat later in India and the Yellow River basin in China. This shift was initially associated with the growth of towns alongside villages, creating a hierarchy of larger and smaller settlements in the same region. Some towns then grew into much larger urban centers and often drew populations into them, so that nearby villages and towns declined. The urban centers, or cities, usually had monumental buildings, such as temples and fortifications. These were vastly larger than individual houses and could be built only by the sustained effort of hundreds and even thousands of people over many years. Elaborate representational artwork appeared, sometimes made of rare and imported materials. New technologies, such as smelting and the manufacture of metal tools and weapons, were characteristic of urban life. Commodities like pottery and textiles that had been made in individual houses in villages were mass produced in cities, which also were characterized by social stratification—that is, different classes of people

based on factors such as control of resources, family, religious or political authority, and personal wealth. The earliest writing is also associated with the growth of cities. Writing, like representational art, was a powerful means of communicating over space and time and was probably invented to deal with urban problems of management and record keeping. These attributes—urbanism; technological, industrial, and social change; long-distance trade; and new methods of symbolic communication—are defining characteristics of the form of human culture called **civilization**. At about the time the earliest civilizations were emerging, someone discovered how to combine tin and copper to make a stronger and more useful material—bronze. Archaeologists coined the term **Bronze Age** to refer to the period 3100–1200 B.C.E. in the Near East and eastern Mediterranean.

## Early Civilizations in the Middle East to About 1000 B.C.E.

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By 4000 B.C.E., people had settled in large numbers in the river-watered lowlands of Mesopotamia and Egypt. By about 3000 B.C.E., when the invention of writing gave birth to history, urban life and the organization of society into centralized states were well established in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia and the Nile River in Egypt.

Much of the urban population consists of people who do not grow their own food, so urban life is possible only where farmers and stockbreeders can be made to produce a substantial surplus beyond their own needs. Also, some process has to be in place so that this surplus can be collected and redeployed to sustain city dwellers. Moreover, efficient farming of plains alongside rivers requires intelligent management of water resources for irrigation. In Mesopotamia, irrigation was essential because in the south (Babylonia), rainfall was insufficient to sustain crops. Furthermore, the rivers, fed by melting snows in Armenia, rose to flood the fields in the spring, about the time for harvest, when water was not needed. When water was needed for the autumn planting, less was available. This meant that people had to build dikes to keep the rivers from flooding the fields in the spring and had to devise means to store water for use in the autumn. The Mesopotamians became skilled at that activity early on. In Egypt, on the other hand, the Nile River flooded at the right moment for cultivation, so irrigation was simply a

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Two Accounts of an Egyptian  
Famine 2600s B.C.E.  
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matter of directing the water to the fields. In Mesopotamia, villages, towns, and cities tended to be strung along natural watercourses and,

eventually, man-made canal systems. Thus, control of water could be important in warfare; an enemy could cut off water upstream of a city to force it to submit. Because the Mesopotamian plain was flat, branches of the rivers often changed their courses, and people would have to abandon their cities and move to new locations. Archaeologists once believed that urban life and centralized government arose in response to the need to regulate irrigation. This theory supposed that only a strong central authority could construct and maintain the necessary waterworks. More recently, archaeologists have shown that large-scale irrigation appeared only long after urban civilization had already developed, so major waterworks were a consequence of urbanism, not a cause of it.

## Mesopotamian Civilization

The first civilization appears to have arisen in Mesopotamia. The region is divided into two ecological zones, roughly north and south of modern Baghdad. In the south (Babylonia), as noted, irrigation is vital; in the north (Assyria), agriculture is possible with rainfall and wells. The south has high yields from irrigated lands, while the north has lower yields, but much more land under cultivation, so it can produce more than the south. The oldest Mesopotamian cities seem to have been founded by a people called the Sumerians during the fourth millennium B.C.E. in the land of Sumer, which is the southern half of Babylonia. By 3000 B.C.E., the Sumerian city of Uruk was the largest city in the world (see Map 1–2). From about 2800 to 2370 B.C.E., in what is called the Early Dynastic period, several Sumerian city-states existed in southern Mesopotamia, arranged in north–south lines along the major watercourses. Among these cities were Uruk, Ur, Nippur, Shuruppak, and Lagash. Some of the city-states formed leagues among themselves that apparently had both political and religious significance. Quarrels over water and agricultural land led to incessant warfare, and in time, stronger towns and leagues conquered weaker ones and expanded to form kingdoms ruling several city-states.

Unlike the Sumerians, the people who occupied northern Mesopotamia and Syria spoke mostly Semitic languages (that is, languages in the same family as Arabic and Hebrew). The Sumerian language is not related to any language known today. Many of these Semitic peoples absorbed aspects of Sumerian culture, especially writing. In northern Babylonia, the Mesopotamians believed that the large city of Kish had history's first kings. In the far east of this territory, not far from modern Baghdad, a people known as the Akkadians established their own kingdom at a capital city called Akkade, under their first king, Sargon, who had been a servant of the king of Kish.





**Map 1-2. The Ancient Near East.** Two river valley civilizations thrived in the Ancient Near East: Egypt, which was united into a single state, and Mesopotamia, which was long divided into a number of city-states.

The Akkadians conquered all the Sumerian city-states and invaded southwestern Iran and northern Syria. This was history's first empire, having a heartland, provinces, and an absolute ruler. It included numerous peoples, cities, languages, and cultures, as well as different ecological zones, under one rule. Sargon's name became legendary as the first great conqueror of history. His grandson, Naram-Sin, ruled from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea, with a standardized administration, vast wealth and power, and a grand style that to later Mesopotamians was a high point of their history. Naram-Sin even declared himself a god and had temples built to himself, something no Sumerian ruler had ever done. External attack and internal weakness destroyed the Akkadian Empire, but several smaller states flourished independently, notably Lagash in Sumer, under its ruler Gudea.

About 2125 B.C.E. the Sumerian city of Ur rose to dominance, and the rulers of the Third Dynasty of Ur established an empire built on the foundation of the Akkadian Empire, but far smaller. In this period,

Sumerian culture and literature flourished. Epic poems were composed, glorifying the deeds of the ancestors of the kings of Ur. A highly centralized administration kept detailed records of agriculture, animal husbandry, commerce, and other matters. Over 100,000 of these documents have been found in the ruins of Sumerian cities. After little more than a century of prominence, the kingdom of Ur disintegrated in the face of famine and invasion. From the east, the Elamites attacked the city of Ur and captured the king. From the north and west, a Semitic-speaking people, the Amorites, invaded Mesopotamia in large numbers, settling around the Sumerian cities and eventually founding their own dynasties in some of them, such as at Uruk, Babylon, Isin, and Larsa.

The fall of the Third Dynasty of Ur ended Sumerian rule, and the Sumerians gradually disappeared as an identifiable group. The Sumerian language survived only in writing as the learned language of Babylonia taught in schools and used by priests and scholars.

For some time after the fall of Ur, there was relative peace in Babylonia under the Amorite kings of Isin, who used Sumerian at their court and considered themselves the successors of the kings of Ur. Eventually, another Amorite dynasty at the city of Larsa contested control of Babylonia, and a period of warfare began, mostly centering around attacks on strategic points on waterways. A powerful new dynasty at Babylon defeated Isin, Larsa, and other rivals and dominated Mesopotamia for nearly 300 years. Its high point was the reign of its most famous king, Hammurabi (r. ca. 1792–1750 B.C.E.), best known today for the collection of laws that bears his name. (See Document, “The Code of Hammurabi.”) Hammurabi destroyed the great city

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Sumerian Law Code: *The Code of Lipit-Ishtar*  
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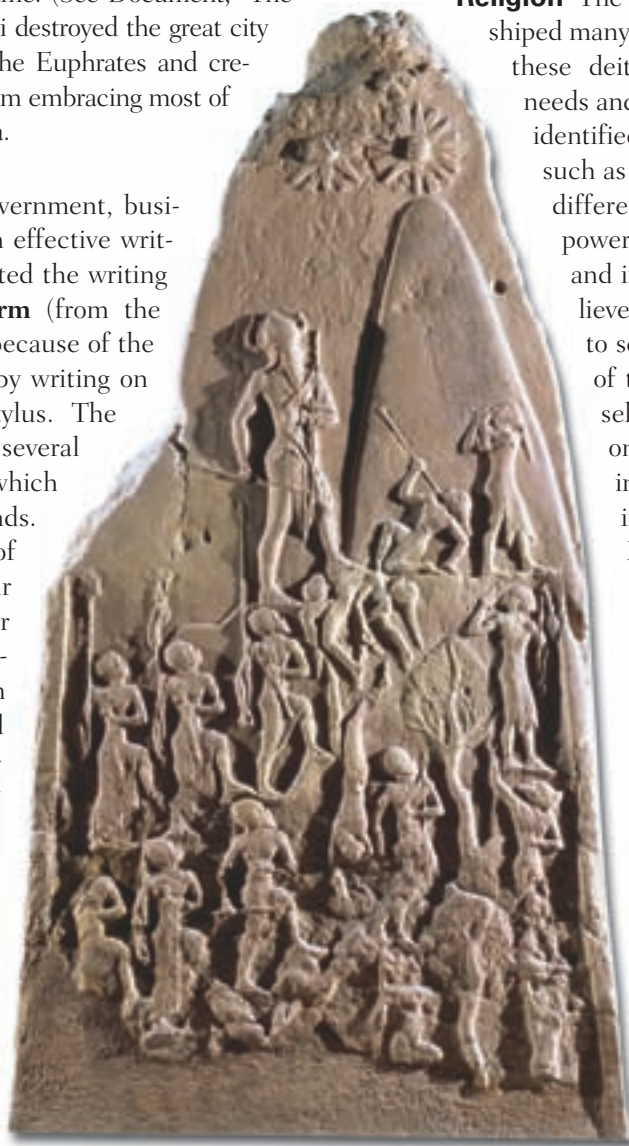
of Mari on the Euphrates and created a kingdom embracing most of Mesopotamia.

**Writing and Mathematics** Government, business, and scholarship required an effective writing system. The Sumerians invented the writing system now known as **cuneiform** (from the Latin *cuneus*, meaning “wedge”) because of the wedge-shaped marks they made by writing on clay tablets with a cut-reed stylus. The Sumerian writing system used several thousand characters, some of which stood for words and some for sounds. Sumerian students were fond of complaining about their unfair teachers, the difficulty of their schoolwork, and their too-short vacations. Sumerian and Babylonian schools emphasized language and literature, accounting, legal practice, and mathematics, especially geometry, along with memorization of much abstract knowledge that had no relevance to everyday life. The ability to read and write was restricted to an elite who could afford to go to school. Success in school and factors such as good family connections meant that a literate Sumerian could find employment as a clerk, surveyor, teacher, diplomat, or administrator.

The Sumerians also began the development of mathematics. Once an independent concept of number was estab-

lished, mathematics developed rapidly. The Sumerian system was based on the number 60 (sexagesimal) rather than the number 10 (decimal), the system in general use today. Sumerian counting survives in the modern 60-minute hour and the circle of 360 degrees. By the time of Hammurabi, the Mesopotamians were expert in many types of mathematics, including mathematical astronomy. The calendar the Mesopotamians used had twelve lunar months of thirty days each. To keep it in accordance with the solar year and the seasons, the Mesopotamians occasionally introduced a thirteenth month.

**Religion** The Sumerians and their successors worshiped many gods and goddesses. They visualized these deities in human form, with human needs and weaknesses. Most of the gods were identified with some natural phenomenon such as the sky, fresh water, or storms. They differed from humans in their greater power, sublime position in the universe, and immortality. The Mesopotamians believed that the human race was created to serve the gods and to relieve the gods of the necessity of providing for themselves. The gods were considered not only as universal, but also as residing in specific places, usually with one important god or goddess in each city. Mesopotamian temples were run like great households where the gods were fed lavish meals, entertained with music, and honored with devotion and ritual. There were gardens for their pleasure and bedrooms to retire to at night. The images of the gods were dressed and adorned with the finest materials. Theologians organized the gods into families and generations. Human social institutions, such as kingship, or crafts, such as carpentry, were associated with specific gods, so the boundaries between human and divine society were not always clearly drawn. Since the great gods were visualized like human rulers, remote from the common people and their concerns, the Mesopotamians imagined another, more personal intercessor god who was supposed to look after a person, rather like



**Akkadian Victory Stele.** The victory stele of Naram-Sin, king of Akkad, over the mountain-dwelling Lullubi, Mesopotamian, Akkadian period, ca. 2230 B.C.E. (pink sandstone). The king, wearing the horned helmet denoting divine power, strides forward at the head of his army. This is one of the finest sculptures to survive from the Akkadian period. Louvre, Paris, France. The Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd.

# Document

## The Code of Hammurabi

The Code of Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 B.C.E.) was only one of many law codes that Mesopotamian societies produced, probably because in this culture rulers were not considered divine. As a result, civil law codes, separate from religious regulations, were necessary to govern human behavior. From a modern perspective, Mesopotamian law codes such as that of Hammurabi seem unjust, in that they prescribed different rights, responsibilities, and punishments, depending on gender, class, and whether a person was enslaved or free. But they represent an enormous advance in legal thought because they codified and standardized laws and punishments, which made the legal process less dependent on the whims or favoritism of rulers or judges. They also offer invaluable evidence to historians about the social structures and culture of the society that produced them.

■ *What do the passages suggest about the way Mesopotamians viewed the role of marriage in society, and the role of women in marriage? If you formed your judgment about the roles women played in Babylonian society from passages 129, 137, and 138 alone, you might assume that women primarily reared children and were confined to the home. What do the other passages here reveal about other roles that women played in this culture? What does this difference suggest about the importance of evidence and the accidents of its survival in understanding the lives of women in history?*

**109.** If rebels meet in the house of a wineseller and she does not seize them and take them to the palace, that wineseller shall be slain.

**110.** If a priestess who has not remained in the temple, shall open a wine-shop, or enter a wine-shop for a drink, that woman shall be burned.

**117.** If a man has contracted a debt, and has given his wife, his son, his daughter for silver or for labor, three years shall they serve in the house of their purchaser or bondsman; in the fourth year they shall regain their original condition.

**129.** If the wife of a man is found lying with another male, they shall be bound and thrown into the water. If the husband lets his wife live, then the king shall let his servant live . . .

**137.** If a man had decided to divorce . . . a wife who has presented him with children, then he shall give back to that woman her dowry, and he shall give her the use of field, garden, and property, and she shall bring up her children. After she has brought up her children, she shall take a son's portion of all that is given to her children, and she marry the husband of her heart.

**138.** If a man divorces his spouse who has not borne him children, he shall give to her all the silver of the bride-price, and restore to her the dowry which she brought from the house of her father, and so he shall divorce her.

Source: *The Human Record*, vol. 1, Alfred J. Andrea and James H. Overfield, Houghton Mifflin College Division, 2008, pp. 14–15. Their source is Chilperic Edwards, *The Hammurabi Code* (1904), pp. 23–80.

a guardian spirit. The public festivals of the gods were important holidays, with parades, ceremonies, and special foods. People wore their best clothes and celebrated their city and its gods. The Mesopotamians were religiously tolerant and readily accepted the possibility that different people might have different gods.

The Mesopotamians had a vague and gloomy picture of the afterworld. The winged spirits of the dead were recog-

nizable as individuals. They were confined to a dusty, dark netherworld, doomed to perpetual hunger and thirst unless someone offered them food and drink. Some spirits escaped to haunt human beings. There was no preferential treatment in the afterlife for those who had led religious or virtuous lives—everyone was in equal misery. Mesopotamian families often had a ceremony to remember and honor their dead. People were usually buried together with goods such



as pottery and ornaments. In the Early Dynastic period, certain kings were buried with a large retinue of attendants, including soldiers and musicians, who apparently took poison during the funeral ceremony and were buried where they fell. But this practice soon disappeared. Children were sometimes buried under the floors of houses. Some families used burial vaults, others large cemeteries. No tombstones or inscriptions identified the deceased. Mesopotamian religion focused on problems of this world and how to lead a good life before dying.

The Mesopotamian peoples who came after the Sumerians believed that the gods revealed a person's destiny to those who could understand the omens, or indications of what was going to happen. The Babylonians therefore developed an elaborate science of divination based on chance observations, such as a cat walking in the street, and on ritual procedures, such as asking a question of the gods and then slaughtering a sheep to examine its liver and entrails for certain marks and features. Some omens, such as monstrous births or eclipses, were thought to apply to the government, while others, such as birds flying over a person's house, were thought to apply to the individual. Thousands of omens, including both the observation and the outcome thereof, were compiled into huge encyclopedias that scholars could consult. Divination was often done before making major decisions and to discover the causes of illness, unhappiness, and failure. The hope was to avert unfavorable future events by discovering them in time and carrying out rituals or avoiding certain actions. Diviners were paid professionals, not priests. Witchcraft was also widely feared and blamed for illnesses and harm to people. There were many rituals against witchcraft, such as making a figurine of a witch and burning it, thereby burning up the witchcraft.

Religion played a large part in the literature and art of Mesopotamia. Epic poems told of the deeds of the gods, such as how the world was created and organized, of a great flood the gods sent to wipe out the human race, and of the hero-king Gilgamesh, who tried to escape death by going on a fantastic journey to find the sole survivor of the great flood. The presence of many literary and artistic works that were not religious in character suggests that religion did not dominate all aspects of the Mesopotamians' lives. Religious architecture took the form of great temple complexes in the major cities. The most imposing religious structure was the *ziggurat*, a tower in stages, sometimes with a small chamber on top. The terraces may have been planted with trees to resemble a mountain. Poetry about ziggurats often compares them to mountains, with their peaks in the sky and their roots in the netherworld, linking heaven to earth, but their precise purpose is not known. Eroded remains of

many of these monumental structures still dot the Iraqi landscape. Through the Bible, they have entered Western tradition as the Tower of Babel.

**Society** Hundreds of thousands of cuneiform texts from the early third millennium B.C.E. until the third century B.C.E. reveal a full and detailed picture of how peoples in ancient Mesopotamia conducted their lives and of the social conditions in which they lived. From the time of Hammurabi, for example, there are many royal letters to and from the various rulers of the age, letters from the king to his subordinates, administrative records from many different cities, and numerous letters and documents belonging to private families.

Categorizing the laws of Hammurabi according to the aspects of life they deal with reveals much about Babylonian life in his time. The third largest category of laws deals with commerce, relating to such issues as contracts, debts, rates of interest, security, and default. Business documents of Hammurabi's time show how people invested their money in land, moneylending, government contracts, and international trade. Some of these laws regulate professionals, such as builders, judges, and surgeons. The second largest category of laws deals with land tenure, especially land given by the king to soldiers and marines in return for their service. The letters of Hammurabi that deal with land tenure show that he was concerned about upholding individual rights of landholders against powerful officials who tried to take their land from them. The largest category of laws relates to the family and its maintenance and protection, including marriage, inheritance, and adoption.

Parents usually arranged marriages, and betrothal was followed by the signing of a marriage contract. The bride usually left her own family to join her husband's. The husband-to-be could make a bridal payment, and the father of the bride-to-be provided a dowry for his daughter in money, land, or objects. A marriage started out monogamous, but a husband whose wife was childless or sickly could take a second wife. Sometimes husbands also sired children from domestic slave women. Women could own their own property and do business on their own. Women divorced by their husbands without good cause could get back their dowry. A woman seeking divorce could also recover her dowry if her husband could not convict her of wrongdoing. A married woman's place was thought to be in the home, but hundreds of letters between wives and husbands show them as equal partners in the ventures of life. Single women who were not part of families could establish a business on their own, often as tavern owners or moneylenders, or could be associated with temples, sometimes working as midwives and wet nurses, or taking care of orphaned children.

 **Read the Document**  
Excerpts from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*  
at **MyHistoryLab.com**

## A Closer Look

### Babylonian World Map

CARTOGRAPHY WAS AMONG THE many intellectual achievements of the Babylonians. The map illustrated here was inscribed on a clay tablet about 600 B.C.E., and appears to be the earliest surviving map of the world.

The Babylonians did not intend this map to be a precise or literal picture of the universe or even of the land on which human beings lived, for they omitted any representation of such important and numerous peoples as the Egyptians and Persians whom they knew very well.

There is a text written in cuneiform script above the picture and on the back of the tablet that help makes its identification as a map secure.

Surrounding Babylon are cities and lands, including Armenia and Assyria, and all the lands are encircled by a "Bitter River." Beyond that are seven islands arranged to form a seven-pointed star.



The tablet shows the world from a Babylonian point of view as flat and round, with Babylon sitting at its center on the Euphrates River.

*Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum. © The British Museum.*

### Questions

1. What can we learn from this map about how the Babylonians saw the world around them and their own place in it?
2. Why do you think this map locates some of the Babylonians' neighbors but ignores other important neighboring cultures?
3. Why has cartography remained so important throughout the ages?
4. Is the subjectivity reflected here confined to this map, or is it a general characteristic of cartography throughout history?



To examine this image in an interactive fashion, please go to [www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com)

**Slavery: Chattel Slaves and Debt Slaves** There were two main types of slavery in Mesopotamia: chattel and debt slavery. Chattel slaves were bought like any other piece of property and had no legal rights. They had to wear their hair in a certain way and were sometimes branded or tattooed on their hands. They were often non-Mesopotamians bought from slave merchants. Prisoners of war could also be enslaved. Chattel slaves were expensive luxuries during most of Mesopotamian history. They were used in domestic service rather than in production, such as field work. A wealthy household might have five or six slaves, male and female.

Debt slavery was more common than chattel slavery. Rates of interest were high, as much as 33⅓ percent, so people often defaulted on loans. One reason the interest rates were so high was that the government periodically canceled certain types of debts, debt slavery, and obligations, so lenders ran the risk of losing their money. If debtors had pledged themselves or members of their families as surety for a loan, they became the slave of the creditor; their labor went to pay the interest on the loan. Debt slaves could not be sold but could redeem their freedom by paying off the loan. True chattel slavery did not become common until the Neo-Babylonian period (612–539 B.C.E.).

Although laws against fugitive slaves or slaves who denied their masters were harsh—the Code of Hammurabi permits the death penalty for anyone who sheltered or helped a runaway slave to escape—Mesopotamian slavery appears to have been enlightened compared with other slave systems in history. Slaves generally belonged to the same people as their masters. They had been enslaved because of

misfortune from which their masters were not immune, and they generally labored alongside them. Slaves could engage in business and, with certain restrictions, hold property. They could marry free men or women, and the resulting children would normally be free. A slave who acquired the means could buy his or her freedom. Children of a slave by a master might be allowed to share his property after his death. Notwithstanding these policies, slaves were property, subject to an owner’s will and had little legal protection.

Egyptian Civilization

As Mesopotamian civilization arose in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates, another great civilization emerged in Egypt, centered on the Nile River. From its sources in Lake Victoria and the Ethiopian highlands, the Nile flows north some 4,000 miles to the Mediterranean. Ancient Egypt included the 750-mile stretch of smooth, navigable river from Aswan to the sea. South of Aswan the river’s course is interrupted by several cataracts—rocky areas of rapids and whirlpools.



**Making Bread.** A hallmark of the early river civilizations was the development of techniques to increase harvests. This statue from the Old Kingdom in Egypt (ca. 2700–2200 B.C.E.) shows a woman kneading dough for bread.

Chronology	
Key Events and People in Mesopotamian History	
ca. 3500 B.C.E.	Development of Sumerian cities, especially Uruk
ca. 2800–2370 B.C.E.	Early Dynastic period of Sumerian city-states
ca. 2370 B.C.E.	Sargon establishes Akkadian Dynasty and Empire
ca. 2125–2027 B.C.E.	Third Dynasty of Ur
ca. 2000–1800 B.C.E.	Establishment of Amorites in Mesopotamia
ca. 1792–1750 B.C.E.	Reign of Hammurabi
ca. 1550 B.C.E.	Establishment of Kassite Dynasty at Babylon





**Pyramids at Giza.** The three largest pyramids of Egypt, located at Giza, near Cairo, are the colossal tombs of pharaohs of the Fourth Dynasty (ca. 2640–2510 B.C.E.): Khufu (right), Khafre (center), and Menkaure (left). The small pyramids and tombs at their bases were those of the pharaohs' queens and officials. *Pictor/Uniphoto Picture Agency.*

The Egyptians recognized two sets of geographical divisions in their country. Upper (southern) Egypt consisted of the narrow valley of the Nile. Lower (northern) Egypt referred to the broad triangular area, named by the Greeks after their letter *delta*, formed by the Nile as it branches out to empty into the Mediterranean. The Egyptians also made a distinction between what they termed the “black land,” the dark fertile fields along the Nile, and the “red land,” the desert cliffs and plateaus bordering the valley.

The Nile alone made agriculture possible in Egypt's desert environment. Each year the rains of central Africa caused the river to rise over its floodplain, cresting in September and October. In places, the plain extends several miles on either side; elsewhere the cliffs slope down to the water's edge. When the floodwaters receded, they left a rich layer of organically fertile silt. The construction and maintenance of canals, dams, and irrigation ditches to control the river's water, together with careful planning and organization of planting and harvesting, produced agricultural prosperity unmatched in the ancient world.

The Nile served as the major highway connecting Upper and Lower Egypt (see Map 1–3 on page 16). There was also a network of desert roads running north and south, as well as routes across the eastern desert to the Sinai and

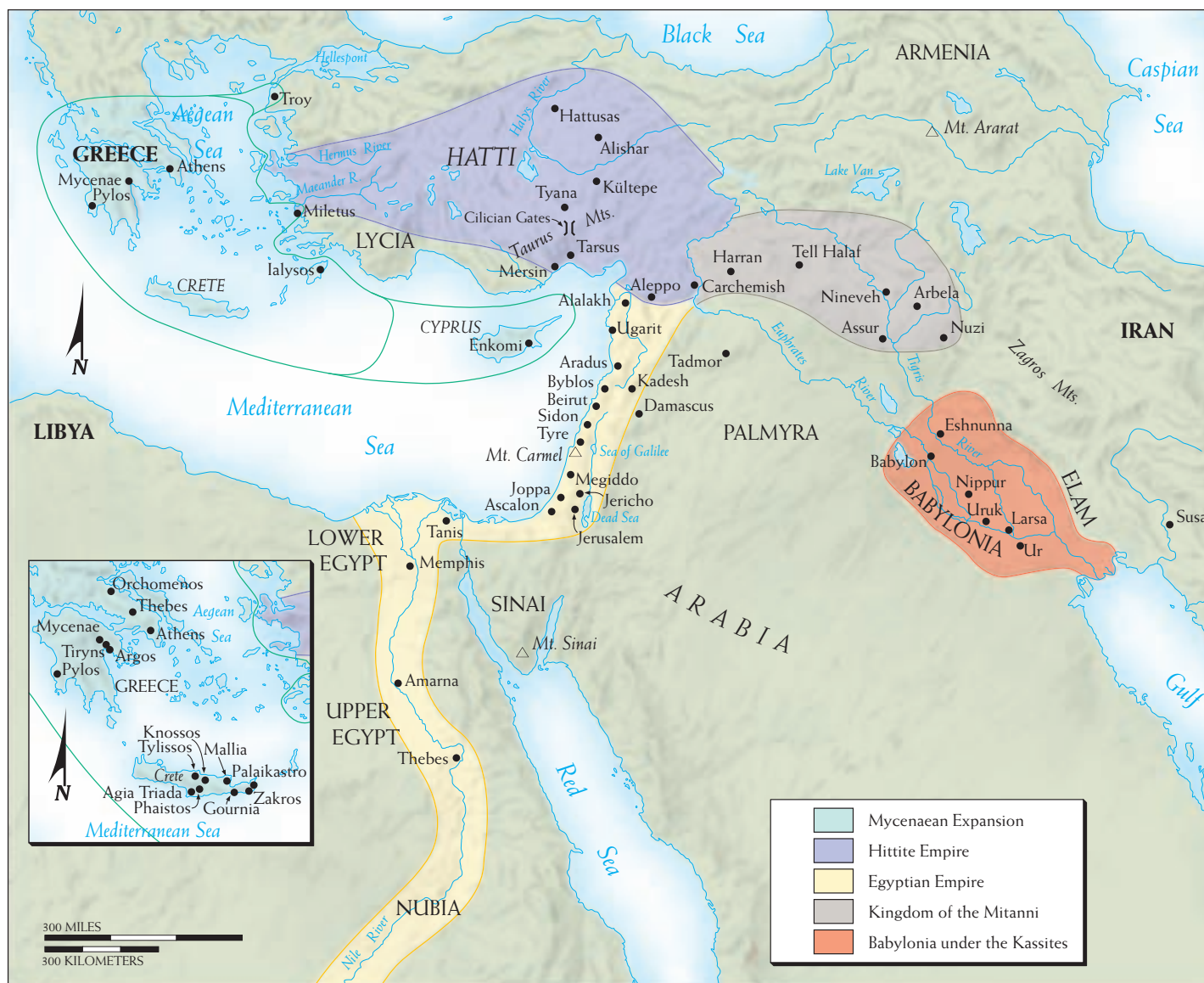
the Red Sea. Other tracks led to oases in the western desert. Thanks to geography and climate, Egypt was more isolated and enjoyed far more security than Mesopotamia. This security, along with the predictable flood calendar, gave Egyptian civilization a more optimistic outlook than the civilizations of the Tigris and Euphrates, which were more prone to storms, flash floods, and invasions.

The 3,000-year span of ancient Egyptian history is traditionally divided into thirty-one royal dynasties, from the first dynasty, said to have been founded by Menes, the king who originally united Upper and Lower Egypt, to the last, conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E. (as we shall see in Chapter 3). Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals, founded the Ptolemaic Dynasty, whose last ruler was Cleopatra. In 30 B.C.E. the Romans defeated Egypt, effectively ending the independent existence of a civilization that had lasted three millennia.

The unification of Upper and Lower Egypt was vital, for it meant that the entire river valley could benefit from an unimpeded distribution of resources. Three times in its history, Egypt experienced a century or more of political and social disintegration, known as Intermediate periods. During these eras, rival dynasties often set up separate power bases in Upper and Lower Egypt until a strong leader reunified the land.

## Map Exploration

To explore this map further, go to <http://www.myhistorylab.com>



**Map 1-3. The Near East and Greece, ca. 1400 B.C.E.** About 1400 b.c.e., the Near East was divided among four empires. Egypt extended south to Nubia and north through Palestine and Phoenicia. Kassites ruled in Mesopotamia, Hittites in Asia Minor, and the Mitanni in Assyrian lands. In the Aegean, the Mycenaean kingdoms were at their height.

**The Old Kingdom (2700–2200 B.C.E.)** The Old Kingdom represents the culmination of the cultural and historical developments of the Early Dynastic period. For over 400 years, Egypt enjoyed internal stability and great prosperity. During this period, the **pharaoh** was a king who was also a god (the term comes from the Egyptian for “great house,” much as we use “White House” to refer to the president). From his capital at Memphis, the god-king administered Egypt according to set principles; prime

 **Read the Document**  
Workings of Ma'at: “The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant”  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](http://www.MyHistoryLab.com)

among these principles was *maat*, an ideal of order, justice, and truth. In return for the king’s building and maintaining temples, the gods preserved the equilibrium of the state and ensured the king’s continuing power, which was absolute. Because the king was obligated to act infallibly in a benign and beneficent manner, the welfare of the people of Egypt was automatically guaranteed and safeguarded.

Nothing better illustrates the nature of Old Kingdom royal power than the pyramids built as pharaonic tombs. Beginning in the Early Dynastic period, kings constructed increasingly elaborate burial complexes in Upper Egypt. Djoser, a Third Dynasty king, was the first to erect a monumental six-step pyramid of hard stone. Subsequent pharaohs built other stepped pyramids until Snefru, the founder of the Fourth Dynasty, converted a stepped pyramid to a true pyramid over the course of putting up three monuments.

Djoser's son Khufu (Cheops in the Greek version of his name) chose the desert plateau of Giza, south of Memphis, as the site for the largest pyramid ever constructed. Its dimensions are prodigious: 481 feet high, 756 feet long on each side, with its base covering 13.1 acres. The pyramid is made of 2.3 million stone blocks averaging 2.5 tons each. It is also a geometrical wonder, deviating from absolutely level and square

 **View the Image**  
The Pyramids at Giza  
at **MyHistoryLab.com**

only by the most minute measurements using the latest modern devices. Khufu's successors, Khafre (Chephren) and Menkaure (Mycerinus), built equally

perfect pyramids at Giza, and together the three constitute one of the most extraordinary achievements in human history. Khafre also built the huge composite creature, part lion and part human, which the Greeks named the Sphinx. Recent

 **View the Image**  
The Sphinx  
at **MyHistoryLab.com**

research has shown that the Sphinx played a crucial role in the solar cult aspects of the pyramid complex.

The pyramids are remarkable not only for the great technical skill they demonstrate, but also for the concentration of resources they represent. They are evidence that the pharaohs controlled vast wealth and had the power to focus and organize enormous human effort over the years it took to build each pyramid. They also provide a visible indication of the nature of the Egyptian state: The pyramids, like the pharaohs, tower above the land, while the low tombs at their base, like the officials buried there, seem to huddle in relative unimportance.

**The First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom (2200–1630 B.C.E.)** Toward the end of the Old Kingdom absolute pharaonic power waned as royal officials called nomarchs became more independent and influential. About 2200 B.C.E. the Old Kingdom collapsed and gave way to the decentralization and disorder of the First Intermediate period, which lasted until about 2025 B.C.E.

Amunemhet I, the founder of Dynasty 12 and the Middle Kingdom, probably began his career as a successful vizier under an Eleventh Dynasty king. After reuniting Upper and Lower Egypt, he turned his attention to making three important and long-lasting administrative changes. First, he moved his royal residence from Thebes to a brand-new town, just south of the old capital at Memphis, signaling a fresh start rooted in past glories. Second, he reorganized the nome

 **See the Map**  
Egypt in the Middle  
Kingdom  
at **MyHistoryLab.com**

structure by more clearly defining the nomarchs' duties to the state, granting them some local autonomy within the royal structure. Third, he established a co-regency system to smooth transitions from one reign to another.

Amunemhet I and the other Middle Kingdom pharaohs sought to evoke the past by building pyramid complexes like those of the later Old Kingdom rulers. Yet the events of the First Intermediate period had irrevocably changed the nature of Egyptian kingship. Gone was the absolute, distant god-king; the king was now more directly concerned with his people. In art, instead of the supremely confident faces of the Old Kingdom pharaohs, the Middle Kingdom rulers seem thoughtful, careworn, and brooding.

Egypt's relations with its neighbors became more aggressive during the Middle Kingdom. To the south, royal fortresses were built to control Nubia and the growing trade in African resources. To the north and east, Syria and Palestine increasingly came under Egyptian influence, even as fortifications sought to prevent settlers from the Levant from moving into the Delta.

**The Second Intermediate Period and the New Kingdom (1630–1075 B.C.E.)** During Dynasty 13, the kingship changed hands rapidly and the western Delta established itself as an independent Dynasty 14, ushering in the Second Intermediate period. The eastern Delta, with its expanding Asiatic populations, came under the control of the Hyksos (Dynasty 15) and minor Asiatic kings (Dynasty 16). Meanwhile, the Dynasty 13 kings left their northern capital and regrouped in Thebes (Dynasty 17).

The Hyksos were almost certainly Amorites from the Levant, part of the gradual infiltration of the Delta during the Middle Kingdom. After nearly a century of rule, the Hyksos were expelled, a process begun by Kamose, the last king of Dynasty 17, and completed by his brother Ahmose, the first king of the Eighteenth Dynasty and the founder of the New Kingdom.

Chronology	
Major Periods in Ancient Egyptian History (Dynasties in Roman Numerals)	
3100–2700 B.C.E.	Early Dynastic period (I–II)
2700–2200 B.C.E.	Old Kingdom (III–VI)
2200–2025 B.C.E.	First Intermediate period (VII–XI)
2025–1630 B.C.E.	Middle Kingdom (XII–XIII)
1630–1550 B.C.E.	Second Intermediate period (XIV–XVII)
1550–1075 B.C.E.	New Kingdom (XVIII–XX)



 **See the Map**  
Egypt in the New Kingdom  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](http://MyHistoryLab.com)

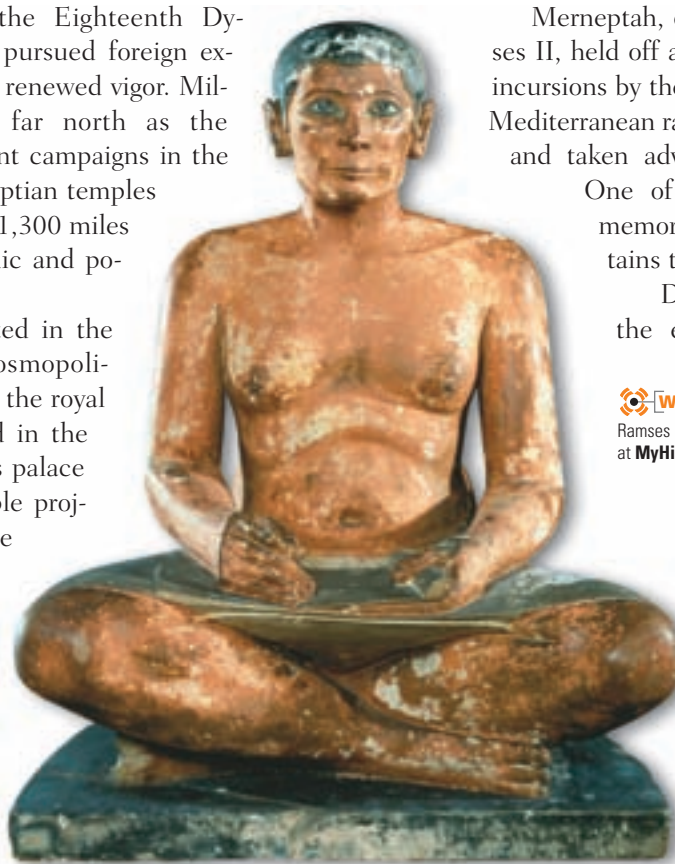
During the Eighteenth Dynasty, Egypt pursued foreign expansion with renewed vigor. Military expeditions reached as far north as the Euphrates in Syria, with frequent campaigns in the Levant. To the south, major Egyptian temples were built in the Sudan, almost 1,300 miles from Memphis. Egypt's economic and political power was at its height.

Egypt's position was reflected in the unprecedented luxury and cosmopolitanism of the royal court and in the ambitious palace and temple projects undertaken throughout the country. The Eighteenth Dynasty pharaohs were the first to cut their tombs deep into the rock cliffs of a desolate valley in Thebes, known today as the Valley of the Kings. To date, only one intact royal tomb has been discovered there, that of the young Eighteenth Dynasty king Tutankhamun, and even it had been disturbed shortly after his death. The thousands of goods buried with him, many of them marvels of craftsmanship, give a glimpse of Egypt's material wealth during this period.

Following the premature death of Tutankhamun in 1323 B.C.E., a military commander named Horemheb assumed the kingship, which passed in turn to his own army commander, Ramses I. The Ramessides of Dynasty 19 undertook numerous monumental projects, among them Ramses II's rock-cut temples at Abu Simbel, south of the First Cataract, which had to be moved to a higher location when the Aswan High Dam was built in the 1960s. There and elsewhere, Ramses II left textual and pictorial accounts of his battle in 1285 B.C.E. against the Hittites at Kadesh on the Orontes in Syria. Sixteen years later, the Egyptians and Hittites signed a formal peace treaty, forging an alliance against an increasingly volatile political situation in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean during the thirteenth century B.C.E.

 **View the Image**  
Egyptian Throne of  
Tutankhamun, 1333–1323 B.C.E.  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](http://MyHistoryLab.com)

 **View the Image**  
Great Temple of Abu Simbel  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](http://MyHistoryLab.com)



**Seated Egyptian Scribe.** One of the hallmarks of the early river valley civilizations was the development of writing. Ancient Egyptian scribes had to undergo rigorous training but were rewarded with a position of respect and privilege. This statue from the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2510–2460 B.C.E.) is of painted limestone and measures 21 inches (53 cm) in height. *Musée du Louvre, Paris, © Giraudon/Art Resource, New York.*

Merneptah, one of the 100 offspring of Ramses II, held off a hostile Libyan attack, as well as incursions by the Sea Peoples, a loose coalition of Mediterranean raiders who seem to have provoked and taken advantage of unsettled conditions.

One of Merneptah's inscriptions commemorating his military triumphs contains the first known mention of Israel.

Despite Merneptah's efforts, by the end of the Twentieth Dynasty, Egypt's period of imperial glory had passed. The next thousand years witnessed a Third

Intermediate period, a Saite renaissance, Persian domination, conquest by Alexander the Great, the Ptolemaic period, and finally, defeat at the hands of the Roman emperor Octavian in 30 B.C.E.

 **Watch the Video**  
Ramses II's Abu Simbel  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](http://MyHistoryLab.com)

### Language and Literature

Writing first appears in Egypt about 3000 B.C.E. The writing system, dubbed **hieroglyphs** ("sacred carvings") by the Greeks, was highly sophisticated, involving hundreds of picture signs that remained relatively constant in the way

they were rendered for over 3,000 years. A cursive version of hieroglyphs was used for business documents and literary texts, which were penned rapidly in black and red ink. The Egyptian language, part of the Afro-Asiatic (or Hamito-Semitic) family, evolved through several stages—Old, Middle, and Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic—thus giving it a history of continuous recorded use well into the medieval period.

Egyptian literature includes narratives, myths, books of instruction in wisdom, letters, religious texts, and poetry, written on papyri, limestone flakes, and potsherds. (See Document, "Love Poems from the New Kingdom.") Unfortunately, only a small fraction of this enormous literature has survived, and many texts are incomplete. Though they surely existed, we have no epics or dramas from ancient Egypt. Such nonliterary documents as lists of kings, autobiographies in tombs, wine jar labels, judicial records, astronomical observations, and medical and other scientific texts are invaluable for our understanding of Egyptian history and civilization.

**Scene from the *Book of the Dead*.** The Egyptians believed in the possibility of life after death through the god Osiris. Before the person could be presented to Osiris, forty-two assessor-gods tested aspects of the person's life. In this scene from a papyrus manuscript of the *Book of the Dead*, the deceased and his wife (on the left) watch the scales of justice weighing his heart (on the left side of the scales) against the feather of truth. The jackal-headed god Anubis also watches the scales, while the ibis-headed god Thoth keeps the record. *British Museum, London/The Bridgeman Art Library International Ltd.*

[View the Image](#)  
Egyptian Relief of Anubis  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](#)



**Religion: Gods and Temples** Egyptian religion encompasses a multitude of concepts that often seem mutually contradictory to us.

The Egyptian gods, or pantheon, defy neat categorization, in part because of the common tendency to combine the character and function of one or more gods. Amun, one of the eight entities in the Hermopolitan cosmogony, provides a good example. Thebes, Amun's cult center, rose to prominence in the Middle Kingdom. In the New Kingdom, Amun was elevated above his seven cohorts and took on aspects of the sun god Re to become Amun-Re.

Not surprisingly in a nearly rainless land, solar cults and mythologies were highly developed. Much thought was devoted to conceptualizing what happened as the sun god made his perilous way through the underworld in the night hours between sunset and sunrise. Three long texts trace Re's journey as he vanquishes immense snakes and other foes.

The Eighteenth Dynasty was one of several periods during which solar cults were in ascendancy. Early in his reign, Amunhotep IV promoted a single, previously minor aspect of the sun, the Aten ("disc") above Re himself and the rest of the gods. He declared that the Aten was the creator god who brought life to humankind and all living beings, with himself and his queen Nefertiti the sole mediators between the Aten and the people. He went further, changing his name to Akhenaten ("the effective spirit of the Aten"), building a new capital called Akhetaten ("the horizon of the Aten") near Amarna north of Thebes and chiseling out the name of Amun from inscriptions everywhere. Shortly after his death, Amarna was abandoned and partially razed. A large diplomatic archive of tablets written in Akkadian was left at the site, which give us a vivid, if one-sided, picture of the political correspondence of the day. During the reigns of Akhenaten's succes-

sors, Tutankhamun (born Tutankhaten) and Horemheb, Amun was restored to his former position, and Akhenaten's monuments were defaced and even demolished.

In representations, Egyptian gods have human bodies, possess human or animal heads, and wear crowns, celestial discs, or thorns. The lone exception is the Aten, made nearly abstract by Akhenaten, who altered its image to a plain disc with solar rays ending in small hands holding the hieroglyphic sign for life to the nostrils of Akhenaten and Nefertiti. The gods were thought to reside in their cult centers, where, from the New Kingdom on, increasingly ostentatious temples were built and staffed by full-time priests. At Thebes, for instance, for over 2,000 years successive kings enlarged the great Karnak temple complex dedicated to Amun. Although the ordinary person could not enter a temple precinct, great festivals took place for all to see. During Amun's major festival of Opet, the statue of the god traveled in a divine boat along the Nile, whose banks were thronged with spectators.

The Egyptians thought that the afterlife was full of dangers, which could be overcome by magical means, among them the spells in the *Book of the Dead*. The goals were to join and be identified with the gods, especially Osiris, or to sail in the "boat of millions." Originally, only the king could hope to enjoy immortality with the gods, but gradually this became available to all. Since the Egyptians believed that the preservation of the body was essential for continued existence in the afterlife, early on they developed mummification, a process that by the New Kingdom took seventy days.

[Watch the Video](#)  
The Temple of Karnak  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](#)

[Read the Document](#)  
Papyrus of Ani, The Egyptian  
Book of the Dead c. 1200 B.C.E.  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](#)

[View the Image](#)  
Scene from the Egyptian  
Afterlife  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](#)

# Document

## Love Poems from the New Kingdom

Numerous love poems from ancient Egypt reveal the Egyptians' love of life through their frank sensuality.

■ *How does the girl in the first poem propose to escape the supervision of her parents? What ails the young man in the second poem?*

*SHE: Love, how I'd love to slip down to the pond, bathe with you close  
by on the bank.  
Just for you I'd wear my new Memphis swimsuit, made of sheer linen,  
fit for a queen—Come see how it looks in the water!  
Couldn't I coax you to wade in with me? Let the cool creep slowly  
around us?  
Then I'd dive deep down and come up for you dripping,  
Let you fill your eyes with the little red fish that I'd catch.  
And I'd say, standing there tall in the shallows:  
Look at my fish, love, how it lies in my hand,  
How my fingers caress it, slip down its sides . . .  
But then I'd say softer, eyes bright with your seeing:*

*A gift, love. No words.  
Come closer and look, it's all me.  
HE: I think I'll go home and lie very still, feigning terminal illness.  
Then the neighbors will all troop over to stare, my love, perhaps,  
among them.  
How she'll smile while the specialists snarl in their teeth!—she  
perfectly well knows what ails me.*

Source: From *Love Songs of the New Kingdom*, trans. from the Ancient Egyptian by John L. Foster, copyright © 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, and 1974 by John L. Foster, pp. 20 and 72. By permission of the University of Texas Press.

**Women in Egyptian Society** Women's prime roles were connected with the management of the household. They could not hold office, go to scribal schools, or become artisans. Nevertheless, women could own and control property, sue for divorce, and, at least in theory, enjoy equal legal protection.

Royal women often wielded considerable influence, particularly in the Eighteenth Dynasty. The most remarkable was Hatshepsut, daughter of Thutmose I and widow of Thutmose II, who ruled as pharaoh for nearly twenty years. Many Egyptian queens held the title "god's wife of Amun," a power base of great importance.

In art, royal and nonroyal women are conventionally shown smaller than their husbands or sons, yet it is probably of greater significance that they are so frequently depicted in such a wide variety of contexts. Much care was lavished on details of their gestures, clothing, and hairstyles. With their husbands, they attend banquets, boat in the papyrus marshes, make and receive offerings, and supervise the myriad affairs of daily life.

**Slaves** Slaves did not become numerous in Egypt until the growth of Egyptian imperial power in the Middle Kingdom (2052–1786 B.C.E.). During that period, black Africans from Nubia to the south and Asians from the east were captured in war and brought back to Egypt as slaves. The great period

of Egyptian imperial expansion, the New Kingdom (1550–1075 B.C.E.), vastly increased the number of slaves and captives in Egypt. Sometimes an entire people were enslaved, as the Hebrews were, according to the Bible.

Slaves in Egypt performed many tasks. They labored in the fields with the peasants, in the shops of artisans, and as domestic servants. Others worked as policemen and soldiers. Many slaves labored to erect the great temples, obelisks, and other huge monuments of Egypt's imperial age. As in Mesopotamia, slaves were branded for identification and to help prevent their escape. Egyptian slaves could be freed, although manumission seems to have been rare. Nonetheless, former slaves were not set apart and could expect to be assimilated into the mass of the population.

### Ancient Near Eastern Empires

In the time of the Eighteenth Dynasty in Egypt, new groups of peoples had established themselves in the Near East: the Kassites in Babylonia, the Hittites in Asia Minor, and the Mitannians in northern Syria and Mesopotamia (see Map 1–3). The Kassites and Mitannians were warrior peoples who ruled as a minority over more civilized folk and absorbed their culture. The Hittites established a kingdom of their own and forged an empire that lasted some 200 years.



## The Hittites

The Hittites were an Indo-European people, speaking a language related to Greek and Sanskrit. By about 1500 B.C.E., they established a strong, centralized government with a capital at Hattusas (near Ankara, the capital of modern Turkey). Between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E., they emerged as a leading military power in the Middle East and contested Egypt's ambitions to control Palestine and Syria. This struggle culminated in a great battle between the Egyptian and Hittite armies at Kadesh in northern Syria (1285 B.C.E.) and ended as a stand-off. The Hittites also broke the power of the Mitannian state in northern Syria. The Hittites adopted Mesopotamian writing and many aspects of Mesopotamian culture, especially through the Hurrian peoples of northern Syria and southern Anatolia. Their extensive historical records are the first to mention the Greeks, whom the Hittites called Ahhiyawa (the Achaeans of Homer). By 1200 B.C.E., the Hittite Kingdom disappeared, swept away in the general invasions and collapse of the Middle Eastern nation-states at that time. Successors to the empire, called the Neo-Hittite states, flourished in southern Asia Minor and northern Syria until the Assyrians destroyed them in the first millennium B.C.E.

The government of the Hittites was different from that of the Mesopotamians in that Hittite kings did not claim to be divine or even to be the chosen representatives of the gods.

 **Read the Document**  
Hittite Law Code: excerpts from  
*The Code of the Nesilim*  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](http://MyHistoryLab.com)

In the early period, a council of nobles limited the king's

power, and the assembled army had to ratify his succession to the throne.

**The Discovery of Iron** An important technological change took place in northern Anatolia, somewhat earlier than the creation of the Hittite Kingdom, but perhaps within its region. This was the discovery of how to smelt iron, along with the decision to use it rather than copper or bronze to manufacture weapons and tools. Archaeologists refer to the period after 1100 B.C.E. as the Iron Age.

## The Kassites

The Kassites were a people of unknown origin who spoke their own Kassite language and who established at Babylon a dynasty that ruled for nearly 500 years. The Kassites were organized into large tribal families and carved out great domains for themselves in Babylonia. They promoted Babylonian culture, and many of the most important works of Babylonian literature were written during their rule. Under the Kassites, Babylonia became one of the great nation-states of the late Bronze Age, along with Mitanni on the upper Euphrates, Assyria, Egypt, and the empire of the Hittites in Anatolia. The kings of these states

frequently wrote to each other and exchanged lavish gifts. They supported a military aristocracy based on horses and chariots, the prestige weaponry of the age. Though equally matched in power, the kings of this time conspired against each other, with Egypt and the Hittites hoping to control Syria and Palestine, and Babylonia and Assyria testing each other's borders.

## The Mitannians

The Mitannians belonged to a large group of people called the Hurrians, some of whom had been living in Mesopotamia and Syria in the time of the kings of Akkad and Ur. Their language is imperfectly understood, and the location of their capital city, Washukanni, is uncertain. The Hurrians were important mediators of Mesopotamian culture to Syria and Anatolia. They developed the art of chariot warfare and horse training to a high degree and created a large state that reached from the Euphrates to the foothills of Iran. The Hittites destroyed their kingdom, and the Assyrian Empire eventually incorporated what was left of it.

## The Assyrians

The Assyrians were originally a people living in Assur, a city in northern Mesopotamia on the Tigris River. They spoke a Semitic language closely related to Babylonian. They had a proud, independent culture



**Assyrian Palace Relief.** This eighth-century B.C.E. relief of a hero gripping a lion formed part of the decoration of an Assyrian palace. The immense size of the figure and his powerful limbs and muscles may well have suggested the might of the Assyrian king. *Giraudon/Art Resource, New York.*

## Document

### An Assyrian Woman Writes to Her Husband, ca. 1800 B.C.E.

The wives of early Assyrian businessmen were often active in their husbands' business affairs. They made extra money for themselves by having slave girls weave textiles that the husbands then sold on business trips. Their letters are among the largest groups of women's records from the ancient world. The woman writing this letter, Taram-Kubi, complains of her husband's selfishness and points out all the matters she has worked on during his absence on business.

■ *What functions did this woman perform on behalf of the family? How do you judge her real power in regard to her husband? On what evidence do you base that judgment? What does this document reveal about the place of women in Assyrian society?*

You wrote to me saying, "You'll need to safeguard the bracelets and rings which are there so they'll be available [to buy] food." In fact you sent [the man] Ilum-bani a half pound of gold! Which are the bracelets you left me? When you left, you didn't leave me an ounce of silver, you picked the house clean and took away everything! After you left, there was a severe famine in the city. Not so much as a quart of grain did you leave me, I always had to buy grain for our food. Besides that, I paid the assessment for the divine icon(?); in fact, I paid for my part in

full. Besides that, I paid over to the Town Hall the grain owed [the man] Atata. What is the extravagance you keep writing to me about? There is nothing for us to eat—we're the ones being extravagant? I picked up whatever I had to hand and sent it to you—today I'm living in an empty house. It's high time you sent me the money realized on my weavings, in silver, from what you have to hand, so I can buy ten quarts of grain!

Source: Trans. by Benjamin R. Foster, 1999.

heavily influenced by Babylonia. Assur had been an early center for trade but emerged as a political power during the fourteenth century B.C.E., after the decline of Mitanni. The first Assyrian Empire spread north and west against the neo-Hittite states but was brought to an end in the general collapse of Near Eastern states at the end of the second millennium. A people called the Arameans, a Semitic nomadic and agricultural people originally from northern Syria who spoke a language called Aramaic, invaded Assyria. Aramaic is still used in parts of the Near East and is one of the languages of medieval Jewish and Middle Eastern Christian culture.

### The Second Assyrian Empire

After 1000 B.C.E., the Assyrians began a second period of expansion, and by 665 B.C.E. they controlled all of Mesopotamia, much of southern Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt to its southern frontier. They succeeded thanks to a large, well-disciplined army and a society that valued military skills. Some Assyrian kings boasted of their atrocities, so that their names inspired terror throughout the Near East. They constructed magnificent palaces at Nineveh and Nimrud (near modern Mosul, Iraq), surrounded by parks and gardens. The walls of the reception rooms and

 **See the Map**  
Empire of Assyria, ca.  
1800 B.C.E.  
at **MyHistoryLab.com**

hallways were decorated with stone reliefs and inscriptions proclaiming the power and conquests of the king. (See Document, "An Assyrian Woman Writes to Her Husband, ca. 1800 B.C.E.")

The Assyrians organized their empire into provinces with governors, military garrisons, and administration for taxation, communications, and intelligence. Important officers were assigned large areas of land throughout the empire, and agricultural colonies were set up in key regions to store up supplies for military actions beyond the frontiers. Vassal kings had to send tribute and delegations to the Assyrian capital every year. Tens of thousands of people were forcibly displaced from their homes and resettled in other areas of the empire, partly to populate sparsely inhabited regions, partly to diminish resistance to Assyrian rule. Among those resettled were the people of the kingdom of Israel, which the Assyrians invaded and destroyed.

The empire became too large to govern efficiently. The last years of Assyria are obscure, but civil war apparently divided the country. The Medes, a powerful people from western and central Iran, had been expanding across the Iranian plateau. They were feared for their cavalry and archers,

against which traditional Middle Eastern armies were ineffective. The Medes attacked Assyria and were joined by the Babylonians, who had always been restive under Assyrian rule, under the leadership of a general named Nebuchadnezzar. In 612 B.C.E., they so thoroughly destroyed the Assyrian cities, including Nineveh, that Assyria never recovered. The ruins of the great Assyrian palaces lay untouched until archaeologists began to explore them in the nineteenth century.

The Neo-Babylonians

 See the Map  
The Neo-Babylonian Empire,  
ca. 580 B.C.E.  
at MyHistoryLab.com

The Medes did not follow up on their conquests, so Nebuchadnezzar took over much of the Assyrian Empire. Under him and his successors, Babylon grew into one of the greatest cities of the world. The Greek traveler Herodotus described its wonders, including its great temples, fortification walls, boulevards, parks, and palaces, to a Greek readership that had never seen the like. Babylon prospered as a center of world trade, linking Egypt, India, Iran, and Syria-Palestine by land and sea routes. For centuries, an astronomical center at Babylon kept detailed records of observations that were the longest running chronicle of the ancient world. Nebuchadnezzar’s dynasty did not last long, and the government passed to various men in rapid succession. The last independent king of Babylon set up a second capital in the Arabian Desert and tried to force the Babylonians to honor the moon god above all other gods. He allowed dishonest or incompetent speculators to lease huge areas of temple land for their personal profit. These policies proved unpopular—some said that the king was insane—and many Babylonians may have welcomed the Persian conquest that came in 539

B.C.E. After that, Babylonia began another, even more prosperous phase of its history as one of the most important provinces of another great Eastern empire, that of the Persians. We shall return to the Persians in Chapter 4.

Early Indian Civilization

To the east of Mesopotamia, beyond the Iranian plateau and the mountains of Baluchistan, the Asian continent projects sharply southward below the Himalayan mountain barrier to form the Indian subcontinent (see Map 1–4 on page 24). Several sizable rivers flow west and south out of the Himalayas in Kashmir and the Punjab (*Panjab*, “five rivers”), merging into the single stream of the Indus River in Sind before emptying into the Indian Ocean. The headwaters of south Asia’s other great river system—the Ganges and its tributaries—are also in the Himalayas but flow south and east to the Bay of Bengal on the opposite side of the subcontinent.

The earliest evidence of a settled, Neolithic way of life on the subcontinent comes from the foothills of Sind and Baluchistan and dates to about 5500 B.C.E., with evidence of barley and wheat cultivation, baked brick dwellings, and, later, domestication of animals such as goats, sheep, and cows, and, after about 4000 B.C.E., metalworking. The subcontinent’s earliest literate, urban civilization arose in the valley of the Indus River sometime after 2600 B.C.E. and by about 2300 B.C.E. was trading with Mesopotamia. Known as the Indus valley culture (or the **Harappan** civilization, after the archaeological site at which it was first recognized), it lasted only a few centuries and left many unanswered questions about its history and culture. The region’s second identifiable civilization was of a different character. Dating to about 1500 B.C.E., it is known as the Vedic Aryan civilization—after the nomadic Indo-European immigrant people, or **Aryans**, who founded it, and their holy texts, or **Vedas**. This civilization endured for nearly a thousand years without cities or writing, but its religious and social traditions commingled with older traditions in the subcontinent—notably that of the Indus culture—to form the Indian civilization as it has developed in the past 2,500 years.

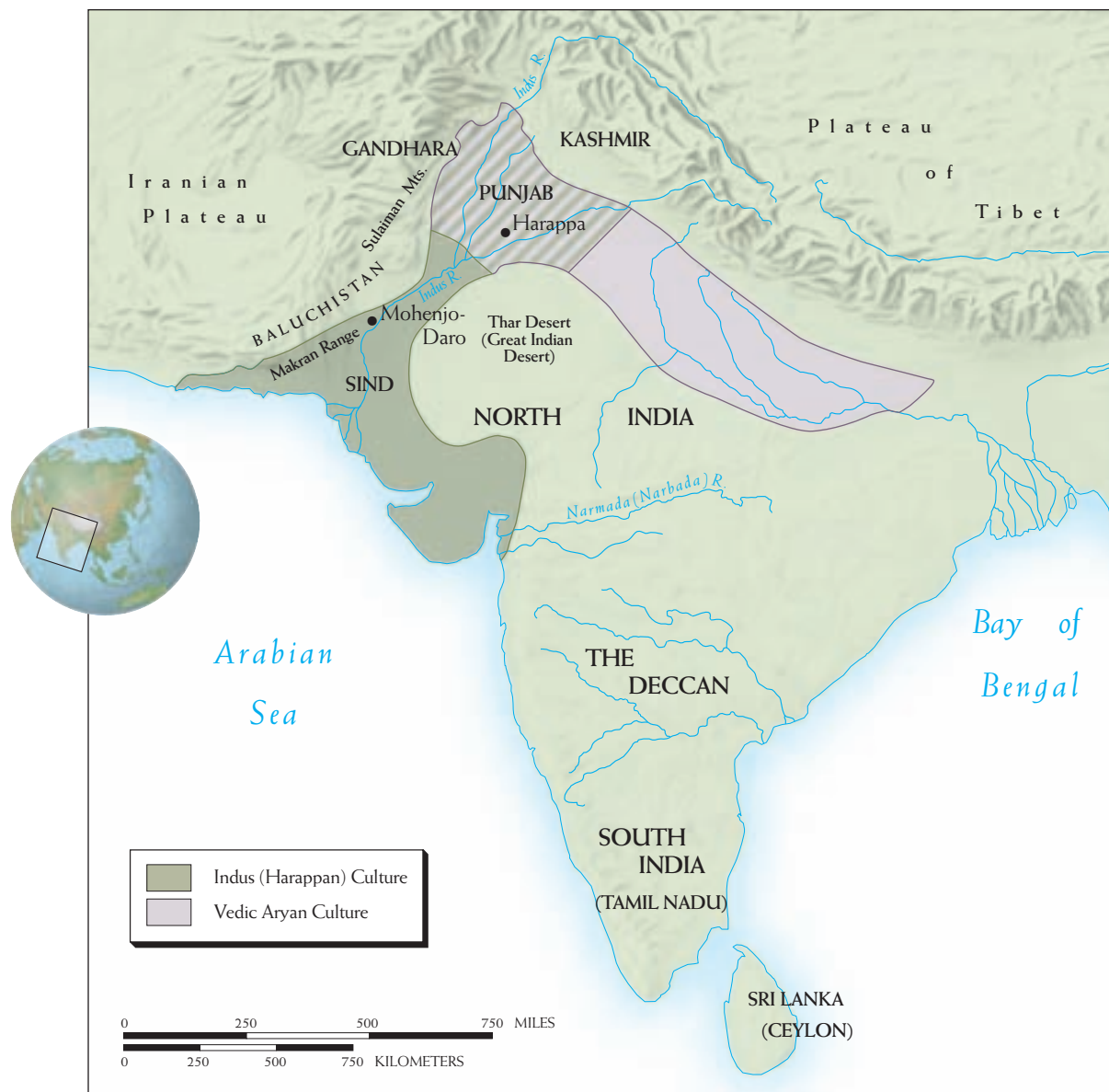
Chronology

Key Events in the History of Ancient Near Eastern Empires	
ca. 1400–1200 B.C.E.	Hittite Empire
ca. 1100 B.C.E.	Rise of Assyrian power
732–722 B.C.E.	Assyrian conquest of Syria-Palestine
671 B.C.E.	Assyrian conquest of Egypt
612 B.C.E.	Destruction of Assyrian capital at Nineveh
612–539 B.C.E.	Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) Empire

The Indus Civilization

Archaeologists discovered the existence of the Indus culture at the site of Harappa in the 1920s. Since then, some seventy cities, the largest being Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, have been identified over a vast area from the Himalayan foothills west and south on the coasts of the Arabian Sea. This urban civilization had bronze tools, writing, covered





**Map 1-4. Indus and Vedic Aryan Cultures.** Indus culture likely influenced the Vedic Aryans, although the influence cannot be proved. Some scholars surmise, for example, that the fortified Aryan city of Hariyupiya, mentioned in later texts, may have been the same site as the older Indus city of Harappa.

drainage systems, and a diversified social and economic organization. Because it disappeared before 1500 B.C.E. and its writing is still undeciphered, it remains the least understood of the early river valley civilizations. Archaeological evidence and inferences from later Indian life, however, allow us to reconstruct something of its highly developed and once thriving culture.

**General Character** The Indus culture covered an area many times larger than either Middle Kingdom Egypt or Third Dynasty Ur, yet the archaeological finds show it to have been remarkably homogeneous. City layouts, building

construction, weights and measures, seal inscriptions, patterned pottery and figurines, and even the burnt brick used for buildings and flood walls are unusually uniform in all Indus towns, suggesting an integrated economic system and good internal communications.

Indus culture was also remarkably constant over time. Because the main cities and towns lay in river lowlands subject to flooding, they were rebuilt often, with each reconstruction closely following the previous pattern. Similarly, the Indus script, known from more than 2,000 stamp seals and apparently using both pictographic and phonetic symbols, shows no evidence of change over time. This evidence

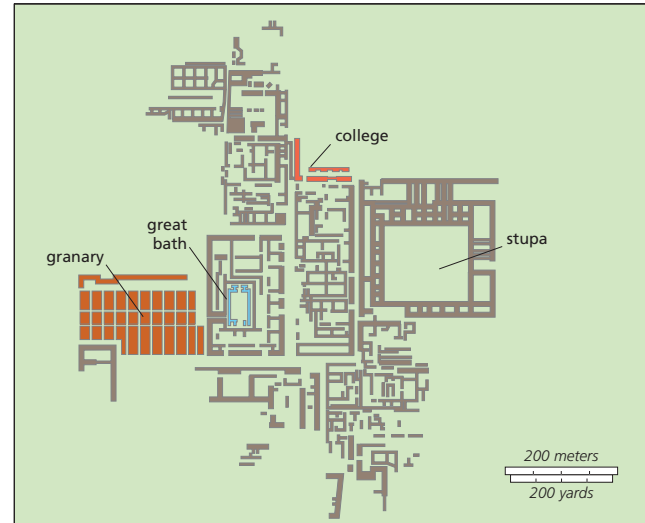
of stability, regularity, and traditionalism has led scholars to speculate that a centralized government, perhaps a conservative (priestly) theocracy rather than a more unstable royal dynasty and court, controlled this far-flung society.

**Cities** Both Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro apparently had populations of more than 35,000 and were meticulously designed on a similar plan. To the west of each stood a large, walled citadel on a raised rectangular platform about 800 by 1,400 feet in size. East of this the town proper was laid out on a north-south, east-west grid of main avenues, some as wide as 30 feet. The citadel apparently contained the main public buildings. A large bath with a brick-lined pool, a subterranean furnace, and columned porticoes have been excavated at Mohenjo-Daro. Both Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro had buildings tentatively identified as temples.

The periphery of each city had a cemetery and a large granary for food storage. The town “blocks” formed by the main avenues were crisscrossed by small, less rigidly planned lanes, off which opened private houses, sometimes of more than one story. The typical house was built around a central courtyard and presented only blank walls to the lanes or streets outside, an arrangement still common in many Near Eastern and south Asian cities.



**Ancient Mohenjo-Daro.** Like most cities of the Indus Valley civilization, Mohenjo-Daro was built principally of mud brick. The structures are laid on straight lines; streets cross each other at right angles. The impression is one of order, prosperity, and civic discipline. *Borromeo/Art Resource, New York.*



**Map 1-5. Mohenjo-Daro**

Perhaps the most striking feature of these cities was a complex system of covered drains and sewers. Private houses were serviced by wells, bathrooms, and latrines, and the great bath at Mohenjo-Daro was filled from its own large well. The drainage system that served these facilities was an engineering feat unrivaled until the time of the Romans, nearly 2,000 years later (see Map 1-5).

**Economic Life** The economy of the Indus state or states was based on agriculture. Wheat and barley were the main crops; rice, peas, lentils, sesame, dates, and cotton were also important. Cattle, dogs, cats, goats, sheep, and fowl were raised, and elephants and water buffalo were likely used as beasts of burden. The Indus valley people wove cloth from cotton, made metal tools, and used the potter's wheel.

Evidence points to trade between the Indus culture and Mesopotamia. Indus stone stamp seals have been found in Mesopotamia, and Akkadian texts mention a “Melukka” region, perhaps the Indus basin, as a source of ivory, precious stones, and other wares. The island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf may have been a staging point for Indus-Mesopotamian sea trade. Metals and semiprecious stones were apparently imported into the Indus region from present-day Iran and Afghanistan, as well as from central Asia, from farther south on the Indian peninsula, and perhaps from Arabia. Similarities in artistic styles suggest that trade contacts resulted in cultural borrowings.

**Material Culture** Among the most striking accomplishments of the Indus culture are fine bronze and stone sculptures. Other evidence of the skill of Indus artisans includes copper and bronze tools and vessels, black-on-red painted pottery, dressed stonework, stone and terra-cotta figurines

and toys, silver vessels and ornaments, gold jewelry, and dyed woven fabric. Indus stamp seals, which provide the only examples of the still undeciphered Indus script, also bear representations of animals, humans, and what are thought to be divine or semidivine beings. Similar figures are also found on painted pottery and engraved copper tablets. Compared with the art of Egypt or Mesopotamia, this art seems limited, however. Except for some decorative brickwork, no monumental friezes, mosaics, or sculpture have been found.

**Religion** The Indus remains reveal somewhat more regarding the religious realm. The elaborate bath facilities suggest that ritual bathing and water purification rites were important, as they still are in India today. The stone images from the so-called temples of Mohenjo-Daro and the more common terra-cotta figurines from other sites also suggest links to later Indian religious practices and symbols. The many images of male animals such as the humped bull might be symbols of power and fertility or might indicate animal worship. A recurring image of a male figure with leafy headdress and horns, often seated in a posture associated later in India with yogic meditation, has been likened to the Vedic Aryan “Lord of All Creatures.” He has features in common with the Hindu god Shiva, especially where he is depicted with three faces and an erect phallus. Also found in Indus artifacts are the pipal tree and the left-handed swastika, both symbols of later importance to Hindus.

Terra-cotta figurines of females, often pregnant or carrying a child, are similar to female images in several prehistoric cultures. As possible precursors of Shiva’s consort (known as Devi, Durga, and by other names), they too may represent an element of pre-Aryan religion that reemerged later to figure in “Hindu” culture. Yet other aspects of Indus religion—burial customs, for example—are not clearly related to later Indian practices. They remind us, however, that the Indus peoples, like all others, had their own ways of coming to terms with the mysteries of birth, life, and death.

**The Passing of Indus Civilization** Sometime in the period from about 1800 to 1700 B.C.E., Indus civilization disappeared. It is not clear whether its demise was related to the warlike Aryan invaders who may first have appeared in the upper Indus about 1800 B.C.E. and later used their horse-drawn chariots to subdue indigenous peoples and move across the north Indian plains. Some scholars think it was destroyed by abnormal flooding (perhaps from careless

damming of the Indus), changes in the course of the Indus, collapse of military power, or a long period of dessication even before the Aryans arrived. Regardless of cause, the Indus culture disappeared by about 1700 B.C.E. and remains too shadowy for us to measure its proper influence. Nonetheless, these predecessors of the Aryans likely made significant contributions to later life in the subcontinent in ways that we have yet to discover.

## The Vedic Aryan Civilization

We know more about the Aryan culture that effectively “re-founded” Indian civilization around 1500 B.C.E. Yet unlike Indus civilization, it was not urban and left neither city ruins nor substantial artifacts beyond tools, weapons, and pottery. Virtually our only source of knowledge about ancient Aryan life are the words of the Vedas, the Aryan sacred texts—hence we know the culture as “Vedic.” Although the latest Vedic texts date from perhaps 500 B.C.E., the earliest may go back to 1700 B.C.E. Transmitted orally through the centuries, the Vedas were not written down until writing was reintroduced to India sometime after 700 B.C.E. (Indeed, until recently, writing down the Vedas at all was shunned in favor of memorization and recitation among the Brahmins.) The Vedas are ritual, priestly, and speculative, not historical works. They reveal little about events but do offer insight into the religion, society, values, and thought of early Aryan India.

*Veda*, which means “knowledge,” is the collective term for the texts still recognized today by most Indians as the holiest sources of their tradition. For Hindus, Veda is the eternal wisdom of primordial seers preserved for thousands of years in an unbroken oral tradition. The Vedas are the four major compilations of Vedic ritual, explanatory, and speculative texts. The collection of 1,028 religious hymns

known as the *Rig-Veda* represents the oldest materials of the Vedas. The latest of these hymns date from about 1000 B.C.E., the oldest from perhaps 1700–1200 B.C.E., when the Aryans spread across the northern plains to the upper reaches of the Ganges.

*Aryan* is a different kind of term. The second-millennium invaders of northern India called themselves *Aryas* as opposed to the peoples whom they conquered. Vedic Sanskrit, the language of the invaders, gave this word to later Sanskrit as a term for “noble” or “free-born” (*arya*). The word is found also in old Iranian, or Persian, texts, and even the term *Iran* is derived from the Old Persian



**Indus Stamp Seal.** Note the familiar humped bull of India on this stone stamp seal. © Scala/Art Resource, New York.



equivalent of *arya*. It was apparently the original name of peoples who migrated out of the steppeland between eastern Europe and Central Asia into Europe, Greece, Anatolia, the Iranian plateau, and India during the second and first millennia B.C.E. Those who came to India are thus more precisely designated Indo-Aryans, or Vedic Aryans.

In the nineteenth century, *Aryan* was the term applied to the widespread language group known more commonly today as **Indo-European**. To this widely distributed family belong Greek, Latin, the Romance and Germanic languages, the Slavic tongues, and the Indo-Iranian languages, including Persian and Sanskrit and their derivatives. The Nazis perversely misused “Aryan” to refer to a white “master race.” Today most scholars use *Aryan* only to identify the Indo-European speakers who invaded India and the Iranian plateau in the second millennium B.C.E. and the Indo-Iranian languages.

**“Aryanizing” of North India** The Vedic Aryans were seminomadic warriors who reached India in small tribal groups through the mountain passes of the Hindu Kush. They were horsemen and cattle herders rather than farmers and city builders. They left their mark not in material culture, but in the changes that their conquests brought to the regions they overran: a new language, social organization, techniques of warfare, and religious forms and ideas.

The early Aryans penetrated first into the Punjab and the Indus valley around 1800–1500 B.C.E., presumably in search of grazing lands for their livestock. Their horses, chariots, and copper-bronze weapons likely gave them military superiority over the Indus peoples or their successors. Rig-Vedic hymns echo these early conflicts. The god Indra, for example, is hailed as the warrior who smashes the fortifications of enemies (Indus citadels?) and slays the great serpent who had blocked the rivers (referring to the destruction of the dams that controlled the Indus waters?). The references to human rather than divine warriors in some later Rig-Vedic hymns may reflect actual historical events. One late hymn praises the king of the *Bharatas*, giving us the Indian name for modern India, *Bharat*, “land of the Bharatas.”

During the Rig-Vedic age (ca. 1700–1000 B.C.E.), the newcomers settled in the Punjab and beyond, where they took up agriculture and stockbreeding. How far they penetrated before 1000 B.C.E. is not clear, but their main locus remained the Punjab and the plains west of the Yamuna River. Then, between about 1000 and 500 B.C.E., the *Late Vedic Age*, these Aryan Indians spread across the plain between the Yamuna and the Ganges and eastward. They cleared (probably by burning) the heavy forests that covered this region and then settled there. They also moved farther northeast to the Himalayan foothills and southeast along the Ganges, in what was to be the cradle of subsequent Indian civilization. During this age the importance of the Punjab receded.

The late Vedic period is also called the Brahmanic Age because it was dominated by the priestly religion of the Brahman class, as evidenced in commentaries called the *Brahmanas* (ca. 1000–800 or 600 B.C.E.). It is also sometimes called the Epic Age because it provided the setting for India’s two classical epics, the **Mahabharata** and the **Ramayana**. Both works were composed much later, probably between 400 B.C.E. and 200 C.E., but contain older

 **Read the Document**  
Excerpt from Mahābhārata  
(1000–600 B.C.E.)  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](http://MyHistoryLab.com)

material and refer to older events. The *Mahabharata*, the world’s longest epic poem, centers on the rivalry of two Aryan clans in the region

northwest of modern Delhi, perhaps around 900 B.C.E. The *Ramayana* tells of the legendary, dramatic adventures of King Rama. Both epics reflect the complex cultural and social mixing of Aryan and other earlier subcontinent peoples.

By about 200 C.E., this mixing produced a distinctive new “Indian” civilization over most of the subcontinent. Its basis was clearly Aryan, but its language, society, and religion incorporated many non-Aryan elements. Harappan culture vanished, but both it and other regional cultures contributed to the formation of Indian culture as we know it.

**Vedic Aryan Society** Aryan society was apparently patrilineal—with succession and inheritance in the male line—and its gods were likewise predominantly male. Marriage appears to have been monogamous, and widows could remarry. Related families formed larger kin groups. The largest social grouping was the tribe, ruled by a chieftain or **raja** (“king” in Sanskrit), who shared power with a tribal council. In early Vedic days the ruler was chosen for his prowess; his chief responsibility was to lead in battle, and he had no priestly function or sacred authority. A chief priest looked after the sacrifices on which religious life centered. By the Brahmanic age the king, with the help of priests, had assumed the role of judge in legal matters and become a hereditary ruler claiming divine qualities. The power of the priestly class had also increased.

Although there were probably subgroups of warriors and priests, Aryan society seems originally to have had only two basic divisions: noble and common. The Dasas—the darker, conquered peoples—came to form a third group (together with those who intermarried with them) of the socially excluded. Over time, a more rigid scheme of four social classes (excluding the non-Aryan Dasas) evolved. By the late Rig-Vedic period, religious theory explicitly sanctioned these four divisions, or *varnas*—the priestly (*Brahman*), the warrior/noble (*Kshatriya*), the peasant/tradesman (*Vaishya*), and the servant (*Shudra*). Only the members of the three upper classes participated fully in social, political, and religious life. This scheme underlies the rigid caste system that later became fundamental to Indian society.

**Material Culture** The early, seminomadic Aryans lived simply in wood-and-thatch or, later, mud-walled dwellings. They measured wealth in cattle and were accomplished at carpentry and bronze working (iron probably was not known in India before 1000 B.C.E.). They used gold for ornamentation and produced woolen textiles. They also cultivated some crops, especially grains, and were familiar with intoxicating drinks, including soma, used in religious rites, and a kind of mead.

References to singing, dancing, and musical instruments suggest that music was a favored pastime in the Vedic period. Gambling, especially dicing, appears to have been popular. One of the few secular pieces among the Vedic hymns is a “Gambler’s Lament,” which closes with a plea to the dice: “Take pity on us. Do not bewitch us with your fierce magic. Let no one be trapped by the brown dice!”

The Brahmanic Age left few material remains. Urban culture remained undeveloped, although mud-brick towns appeared as new lands were cleared for cultivation. Established kingdoms with fixed capitals now existed. Trade grew, especially along the Ganges, although there is no evidence of a coinage system. Later texts mention specialized artisans, including goldsmiths, basket makers, weavers, potters, and entertainers. Writing had been reintroduced to India around 700 B.C.E., perhaps from Mesopotamia along with traded goods.

**Religion** Vedic India’s main identifiable contributions to later history were religious. The Vedas reflect the broad development of Vedic Brahmanic religion in the millennium after the coming of the first Aryans. They tell us primarily about the public cult and domestic rituals of the Aryan upper classes. Among the rest of the population, non-Aryan practices and ideas likely continued to flourish. Apparently non-Aryan elements are visible occasionally even in the Vedic texts themselves, especially later ones. The Upanishads (after ca. 800 B.C.E.) thus refer to fertility and female deities, ritual pollution and ablutions, and the transmigration of the soul after death.

The central Vedic cult—controlled by priests serving a military aristocracy—remained dominant until the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. By that time other, perhaps older, religious forms were evidently asserting themselves among the populace. The increasing ritual formalism of Brahmanic religion provoked challenges both in popular practice and in religious thought that culminated in Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions of piety and practice (see Chapter 2).

The earliest Indo-Aryans seem to have worshiped numerous gods, most of whom embodied or were associated with powers of nature. The Rig-Vedic hymns are addressed to anthropomorphic deities linked to natural phenomena such as

the sky, the clouds, and the sun. These gods are comparable to those of ancient Greece (see Chapter 3) and are apparently distantly related to them through the Indo-European heritage the Greeks and Aryans shared. The name of the Aryan father-god Dyaus, for example, is linguistically related to the Greek Zeus. In Vedic India, however, unlike Greece, the father-god had become less important than his children, especially Indra, god of war and the storm, who led his heavenly warriors across the sky to slay dragons or other enemies with his thunderbolt. (See Document, “Hymn to Indra.”)

Also of major importance was Varuna, who may have had connections with the later Iranian god Ahura Mazda (see Chapter 4) and the Greek god of the heavens, Uranos. Varuna was more remote from human affairs than Indra. Depicted as a regal figure seated on his heavenly throne, he guarded the cosmic order, *Rta*, which was both the law of nature and the universal moral law or truth. As the god who commanded awe and demanded righteous behavior, Varuna had characteristics of a supreme, omnipresent divinity.

Another prominent Vedic god was Agni, the god of fire (his name, which is the Sanskrit word for fire, is related to Latin *ignis*, meaning “fire,” and thus to English *ignite*). He mediated between heaven and earth through the fire sacrifice, and was thus the god of sacrifice and the priests. He was also god of the hearth, and thus of the home. Like flame itself, he was a mysterious deity.

Chronology	
Ancient India	
ca. 2250–1750 (2500–1500?) B.C.E.	Indus (Harappan) civilization (written script still undeciphered)
ca. 1800–1500 B.C.E.	Aryan peoples invade northwestern India
ca. 1500–1000 B.C.E.	Rig-Vedic period: composition of Rig-Vedic hymns; Punjab as center of Indo-Aryan civilization
ca. 1000–500 B.C.E.	Late Vedic period: Doab as center of Indo-Aryan civilization
ca. 1000–800/600 B.C.E.	Composition of Brahmanas and other Vedic texts
ca. 800–500 B.C.E.	Composition of major Upanishads
ca. 700–500 B.C.E.	Probable reintroduction of writing
ca. 400 B.C.E.–200 C.E.	Composition of great epics, the <i>Mahabharata</i> and <i>Ramayana</i>

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# Document

## Hymn to Indra

This hymn celebrates the greatest deed ascribed to Indra, the slaying of the dragon Vritra to release the waters needed by people and livestock (which is also heralded at one point in the hymn as the act of creation itself). These waters are apparently those of the dammed-up rivers, but possibly also the rains as well. This victory also symbolizes the victory of the Aryans over the dark-skinned Dasas. Note the sexual as well as water imagery. The *kadrukas* may be the bowls used for soma in the sacrifice. The *vajra* is Indra's thunderbolt; the name *Dasa* for the lord of the waters is also that used for the peoples defeated by the Aryans and for all enemies of Indra, of whom the *Pani* tribe is one.

■ *What are the main kinds of imagery used for Indra and his actions in the hymn?*  
*What divine acts does the hymn ascribe to Indra?*

Indra's heroic deeds, indeed, will I proclaim, the first ones which the wielder of the vajra accomplished. He killed the dragon, released the waters, and split open the sides of the mountains.

He killed the dragon lying spread out on the mountain; for him Tvashtar fashioned the roaring vajra. Like bellowing cows, the waters, gliding, have gone down straightway to the ocean.

Showing off his virile power he chose soma; from the three kadrukas he drank of the extracted soma. The bounteous god took up the missile, the vajra; he killed the first-born among the dragons.

When you, O Indra, killed the first-born among the dragons and further overpowered the wily tricks (*maya*) of the tricksters, bringing forth, at that very moment, the sun, the heaven and the dawn—since then, indeed, have you not come across another enemy. Indra killed Vritra, the greater enemy, the shoulderless one, with his mighty and fatal weapon, the vajra. Like branches of a tree lopped off with an axe, the dragon lies prostrate upon the earth. . . .

Over him, who lay in that manner like a shattered reed flowed the waters for the sake of man. At the feet of the

very waters, which Vritra had [once] enclosed with his might, the dragon [now] lay [prostrate]. . . .

With the Dasa as their lord and with the dragon as their warder, the waters remained imprisoned, like cows held by the Pani. Having killed Vritra, [Indra] threw open the cleft of waters which had been closed.

You became the hair of a horse's tail, O Indra, when he [Vritra] struck at your sharp-pointed vajra—the one god [eka deva] though you were. You won the cows, O brave one, you won soma; you released the seven rivers, so that they should flow. . . .

Indra, who wields the vajra in his hand, is the lord of what moves and what remains rested, of what is peaceful and what is horned. He alone rules over the tribes as their king; he encloses them as does a rim the spokes.

*Rig-Veda 1.32*

Source: From *Sources of Indian Tradition* by William Theodore de Bary. Copyright © 1988 by Columbia University Press. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

Other Vedic gods include Soma, the god of the hallucinogenic soma plant and the drink made from it; Ushas, goddess of dawn (one of few female deities); Yama, god of the dead; Rudra, the archer and storm god; Vishnu, a solar deity; and the sun god, Surya. The Vedic hymns praise each god they address as possessing almost all powers, including those associated with other gods.

Ritual sacrifice was the central focus of Vedic religion, its goal apparently to invoke the presence of the gods to whom an offering was made rather than to expiate sins or express thanksgiving. Drinking soma juice was part of the ritual. A recurring theme of the Vedic hymns that accompa-

nied the rituals is the desire for prosperity, health, and victory. Fire sacrifices were particularly important.

The late Vedic texts emphasize magical and cosmic aspects of ritual and sacrifice. Indeed, some of the *Brahmanas* maintain that only exacting performance of the sacrifice can preserve the world order.

The word *Brahman*, originally used to designate the ritual utterance or word of power, came to refer also to the generalized divine power present in the sacrifice. In the **Upanishads**, some of the latest Vedic texts and the ones most concerned with speculation about the universe, *Brahman* was extended to refer to the Absolute, the



transcendent principle of reality. As the guardian of ritual and the master of the sacred word, the priest was known throughout the Vedic Aryan period by a related word, *Brahmana*, for which the English is *Brahman*. Echoes of these associations were to lend force in later Hindu tradition to the special status of the Brahman caste groups as the highest social class (see Chapter 4).

Early Chinese Civilization  
Neolithic Origins in the Yellow River Valley

Agriculture began in China about 4000 B.C.E. in the basin of the southern bend of the Yellow River. This is the northernmost of East Asia’s four great river systems. The others are the Yangtze in central China, the West River in southern

China, and the Red River in what is today northern Vietnam (see Map 1–6). All drain eastward into the Pacific Ocean. In recent millennia, the Yellow River has flowed through a deforested plain, cold in winter and subject to periodic droughts. But in 4000 B.C.E., its climate was warmer, with forested highlands in the west and swampy marshes to the east. The bamboo rat that today can be found only in semi-tropical Southeast Asia lived along the Yellow River.

The chief crop of China’s agricultural revolution was millet. A second agricultural development focusing on rice may have occurred on the Huai River between the Yellow River and the Yangtze near the coast. In time, wheat entered China from the west. The early Chinese cleared land and burned its cover to plant millet and cabbage and, later, rice and soybeans. When the soil became exhausted, fields were

See the Map  
Ancient China  
at MyHistoryLab.com



Map 1–6. Bronze Age China during the Shang Dynasty, 1766–1050 B.C.E. Anyang was a late Shang dynasty capital. Sian and Luoyang were the capitals of the Western and Eastern Zhou.

abandoned, and sometimes early villages were abandoned, too. Tools were of stone: axes, hoes, spades, and sickle-shaped knives. The early Chinese domesticated pigs, sheep, cattle, dogs, and chickens. Game was also plentiful, and hunting continued to be important to the village economy. In excavated village garbage heaps of ancient China are found the bones of deer, wild cattle, antelopes, rhinoceros, hares, and marmots. Grain was stored in pottery painted in bold, geometric designs of red and black. This pottery gave way to a harder, thin black pottery, made on a potter's wheel, whose use spread west along the Yellow River and south to the Yangtze. The tripodal shapes of Neolithic pots prefigure later Chinese bronzes.

The earliest cultivators lived in wattle-and-daub pit dwellings with wooden support posts and sunken, plastered floors. Their villages were located in isolated clearings along slopes of river valleys. Archaeological finds of weapons and remains of earthen walls suggest tribal warfare between villages. Little is known of the religion of these people, although some evidence suggests the worship of ancestral spirits. They practiced divination by applying heat to a hole drilled in the shoulder bone of a steer or the undershell of a tortoise and then interpreting the resulting cracks in the bone. They buried their dead in cemeteries with jars of food. Tribal leaders wore rings and beads of jade.

## Early Bronze Age: The Shang

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The traditional history of China tells of three ancient dynasties: Xia (2205–1766 B.C.E.), Shang (1766–1050 B.C.E.), and Zhou (1050–256 B.C.E.). Until early in this century, historians thought the first two were legendary. Then, in the 1920s, archaeological excavations at “the wastes of Yin” near present-day Anyang uncovered the ruins of a walled city that had been a late Shang capital (see Map 1–6).

 **See the Map**  
The Shang Kingdom  
at **MyHistoryLab.com**

Other Shang cities have been discovered more recently. The ruins contained the archives of the department of divination of the Shang court, with thousands upon thousands of “oracle bones” incised with archaic Chinese writing. The names of kings on the bones fit almost perfectly those of the traditional historical record. This evidence that the Shang actually existed has led historians to suggest that the Xia may also have been an actual dynasty. Perhaps the Xia was a late Neolithic black-pottery kingdom; perhaps it already had bronze and was responsible for the earliest, still missing stage of Chinese writing.

 **View the Image**  
An Inscribed Oracle Bone  
at **MyHistoryLab.com**

The characteristic political institution of Bronze Age China was the city-state. The largest city-state was the Shang capital, which, since it frequently moved, lacked the monumental architecture of Egypt or Mesopotamia. The walled city contained public buildings, altars, and the residences of the

aristocracy; it was surrounded by a sea of Neolithic tribal villages. By late Shang times, several such cities were spotted across the north China plain. The Shang kings possessed political, economic, social, and religious authority. When they died, they were sometimes succeeded by younger brothers and sometimes by sons. The rulers of other city-states acknowledged their authority.

The military aristocracy went to war in chariots, supported by levies of foot soldiers. Their weapons were spears and powerful compound bows. Accounts tell of armies of 3,000 or 4,000 troops and of a battle involving 13,000. The Shang fought against barbarian tribes and, occasionally, against other city-states in rebellion against Shang rule. Captured prisoners were enslaved.

The three most notable features of Shang China were writing, bronzes, and the appearance of social classes. (See “Chinese Writing.”) Scribes at the Shang court kept records on strips of bamboo, but these have not survived. What have survived are inscriptions on bronze artifacts and the oracle bones. Some bones contain the question put to the oracle, the answer, and the outcome of the matter. Representative questions were: Which ancestor is causing the king's ear-ache? If the king goes hunting at Qi, will there be a disaster? Will the king's child be a son? If the king sends his army to attack an enemy, will the deity help him? Was a sacrifice acceptable to ancestral deities?

What we know of Shang religion is based on the bones. The Shang believed in a supreme “Deity Above,” who had authority over the human world. Also serving at the court of the Deity Above were lesser natural deities—the sun, moon, earth, rain, wind, and the six clouds. Even the Shang king sacrificed not to the Deity Above but to his ancestors, who interceded with the Deity Above on the king's behalf. Kings, while alive at least, were not considered divine but were the high priests of the state.

In Shang times, as later, religion in China was closely associated with cosmology. The Shang people observed the movements of the planets and stars and reported eclipses. Celestial happenings were seen as omens from the gods. The chief cosmologists also recorded events at the court. The Shang calendar had a month of 30 days and a year of 360 days. Adjustments were made periodically by adding an extra month. The king used the calendar to tell his people when to sow and when to reap.

Bronze appeared in China about 2000 B.C.E., 1,000 years later than in Mesopotamia and 500 years later than in India. Because Shang casting methods were more advanced than those of Mesopotamia and because the designs on Shang bronzes continued those of the preceding black pottery culture, in all likelihood the Shang developed its bronze technology independently. The metal was used for weapons, armor, and chariot fittings, as well as for a variety of ceremonial vessels of amazing fineness and beauty.

Among the Shang, as with other early river valley civilizations, the increasing control of nature through agriculture and metallurgy was accompanied by the emergence of a rigidly stratified society in which the many were compelled to serve the few. A monopoly of bronze weapons enabled aristocrats to exploit other groups. A hierarchy of class defined life in the Chinese city-state. The king and the officials of his court lived within the walled city. Their houses were spacious, built above the ground with roofs supported by rows of wooden pillars, resting on foundation stones. Their lifestyle was opulent for ancient times. They wore fine clothes, feasted at banquets, and drank wine from bronze vessels. In contrast, a far larger population of agricultural workers lived outside the city in cramped pit dwellings. Their life was meager and hard. Archaeological excavations of their underground hovels have uncovered only clay pots.

Nowhere was the gulf between the royal lineage and the baseborn more apparent than it was in the Shang institution of human sacrifice. One Shang tomb 39 feet long, 26 feet wide, and 26 feet deep contained the decapitated bodies of humans, horses, and dogs, as well as ornaments of bone, stone, and jade. When a king died, hundreds of slaves or prisoners of war, sometimes together with those who had served the king during his lifetime, might be buried with him. Sacrifices also were made when a palace or an altar was built.

### Late Bronze Age: The Western Zhou

To the west of the area of Shang rule, in the valley of the Wei River, a tributary of the Yellow River, lived the Zhou people. Culturally closer to the Neolithic black-pottery people, they were less civilized and more warlike than the Shang. References to the Zhou in the Shang oracle bones indicate that the Shang had relations with them—sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. According to the traditional historical record, the last Shang kings were weak, cruel, and tyrannical. By 1050 B.C.E., they had been debilitated by campaigns against nomads in the north and rebellious tribes in the east. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Zhou made alliances with disaffected city-states and swept in, conquering the Shang.

In most respects, the Zhou continued the Shang pattern of life and rule. The agrarian-based city-state continued to be the basic unit of society, and it is estimated that there were about 200 of them in the eighth century B.C.E. The Zhou so-



**Oracle Bone.** Inscribed oracle bone from the Shang Dynasty city of Anyang.

cial hierarchy was not unlike that of the Shang, with kings and lords at the top, officials and warriors below them, and peasants and slaves at the bottom. Slaves served primarily as domestic servants. The Zhou assimilated Shang culture, continuing without interruption the development of China's ideographic writing. The Zhou also maintained the practice of casting bronze ceremonial vessels, but their vessels lack the fineness that set the Shang above the rest of the Bronze Age world.

 **Read the Document**  
Shih, from The Shih-Ching  
at [MyHistoryLab.com](http://MyHistoryLab.com)

The Zhou kept their capital in the west but set up a secondary capital at Luoyang, along the southern bend of the Yellow River (see Map 1–6). They appointed their kinsmen or other aristocratic allies to rule in other city-states. Blood or lineage ties were essential to the Zhou pattern of rule. The Zhou king was the head of the senior branch of the family. He performed the sacrifices to the Deity Above for the entire family.

The rankings of the lords of other princely states reflected their degree of closeness to the senior line of Zhou kings.

One difference between the Shang and the Zhou was in the nature of the political legitimacy each claimed. The Shang kings, descended from shamanistic (priestly) rulers, had a built-in religious authority and needed no theory to justify their rule. But the Zhou, having conquered the Shang, needed a rationale for why they, and not the Shang, were now the rightful rulers. Their argument was that Heaven (the name for the supreme being that gradually replaced the Deity Above during the early Zhou), appalled by the wickedness of the last Shang king, had withdrawn its mandate to rule from the Shang, awarding it instead to the Zhou. This concept of the **Mandate of Heaven** was subsequently invoked by every dynasty in China down to the twenty-first century. The ideograph for Heaven is related to that for man, and the concept initially had human, or anthropomorphic, attributes. In the later Zhou, however, although it continued to be viewed as having a moral will, Heaven became less anthropomorphic and more of an abstract metaphysical force.

### Iron Age: The Eastern Zhou

In 771 B.C.E. the Wei valley capital of the Western Zhou was overrun by barbarians. The explanation of the event in Chinese tradition calls to mind the story of “the boy who cried wolf.”



## Chinese Writing

The Chinese system of writing dates back at least to the Shang Dynasty (1766–1050 B.C.E.), when animal bones and tortoise shells (the so-called oracle bones) were incised for the purpose of divination. About half of the 3,000 characters used in Shang times have been deciphered. They evolved over the centuries into the 50,000 characters found in the largest dictionaries. But even today only about 3,000 or 4,000 are in common use. A scholar may know twice that number.

Characters developed from little pictures. Note the progressive stylization. By 200 B.C.E., the writing had become standardized and close to the modern form of the printed character.

	Shang (1400 B.C.E.)	Zhou (600 B.C.E.)	Seal Script (200 B.C.E.)	Modern
Sun				
Moon				
Tree				
Bird				
Mouth				
Horse				

Other characters combined two pictures to express an idea. The following examples use modern characters:

Sun		+ moon		= bright	
Mouth		+ bird		= to chirp	
Woman		+ child		= good	
Tree		+ sun		= east	

It was a matter of convention that the sun behind a tree meant the rising sun in the east and not the setting sun in the west.

Characters were formed in several other ways. In one, a sound element was combined with a meaning element. Chinese has many homonyms, or words with the same sound. The character, for example, is read *tai* and means “elevation” or “to raise up.” But in spoken Chinese, there are other words with the same sound that mean “moss,” “trample,” “a nag,” and “idle.” Thus,

Tai		+ grass		= moss	
Tai		+ foot		= trample	
Tai		+ horse		= a nag	
Tai		+ heart		= idle	

In each case the sound comes from the, and the meaning from the other element. Note that the may be at the bottom, the top, or the right. This positioning, too, is a matter of convention.

Source: Tables by A. Craig; calligraphy by Teruko Craig.

The last Western Zhou king was so infatuated with a favorite concubine that, to please her, he repeatedly lit bonfires signaling a barbarian attack. His concubine would clap her hands in delight at the sight of the army assembled in martial splendor. But the army tired of the charade, and when invaders actually came, the king's beacons were ignored. The king was killed and the Zhou capital sacked. The heir to the throne, with some members of the court, escaped to the secondary capital at Luoyang, 200 miles to the east and just south of the bend in the Yellow River, beginning the Eastern Zhou period.

The first phase of the Eastern Zhou, sometimes called the Spring and Autumn period after a classic history by that name, lasted until 481 B.C.E. After their flight to Luoyang, the Zhou kings were never able to reestablish their old authority. By the early seventh century B.C.E., Luoyang's political power was nominal, although it remained a center of culture and ritual observances. (See Document, “Human Sacrifice in Early China.”) Kinship and religious ties to the Zhou house had worn thin, and it no longer had the military strength to reimpose its rule. During the seventh and sixth

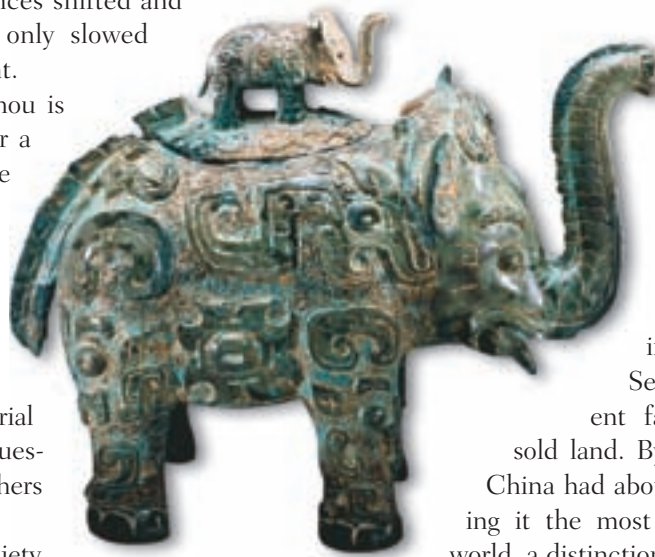
centuries B.C.E., the political configuration was an equilibrium of many small principalities on the north-central plain surrounded by larger, wholly autonomous territorial states along the borders of the plain (see Map 1–7 on page 34). The larger states consolidated the areas within their borders, absorbed tribal peoples, and expanded, conquering states on their periphery.

To defend themselves against the more aggressive territorial states, and in the absence of effective Zhou authority, smaller states entered defensive alliances. The earliest alliance, in 681 B.C.E., was directed against the half-barbarian state of Chu, which straddled the Yangtse in the south. Princes and lords of smaller states elected as their *hegemon* (or military overlord) the lord of a northern territorial state and pledged him their support. At the formal ceremony that established the alliance, a bull was sacrificed. The hegemon and other lords smeared its blood on their mouths and swore oaths to the gods to uphold the alliance. That the oaths were not always upheld can be surmised from the Chinese expression, “to break an oath while the blood is still wet on one's lips.”

During the next two centuries, alliances shifted and hegemony changed. At best, alliances only slowed down the pace of military aggrandizement.

The second phase of the Eastern Zhou is known as the Warring States period after a chronicle of the same name treating the years from 401 to 256 B.C.E. By the fifth century B.C.E., all defensive alliances had collapsed. Strong states swallowed their weaker neighbors. The border states grew in size and power. Interstate stability disappeared. By the fourth century B.C.E., only eight or nine great territorial states remained as contenders. The only question was which one would defeat the others and go on to unify China.

Three basic changes in Chinese society contributed to the rise of large territorial states. One was the expansion of population and agricultural lands. The walled cities of the Shang and Western Zhou had been like oases in the wilds, bounded by plains, marshes, and forests. Game was plentiful; thus, hunting, along with sheep and cattle breeding, supplemented agriculture. But in the Eastern Zhou, as population grew, wilds began to disappear, the economy became almost entirely agricultural, and hunting became an aristocratic pastime. Friction arose over boundaries as states began to abut. These changes



**Bronze Vessel from the Shang Dynasty.** The little elephant on top forms the handle of the lid. Wine was poured through the spout formed by the big elephant's trunk. *The Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.*

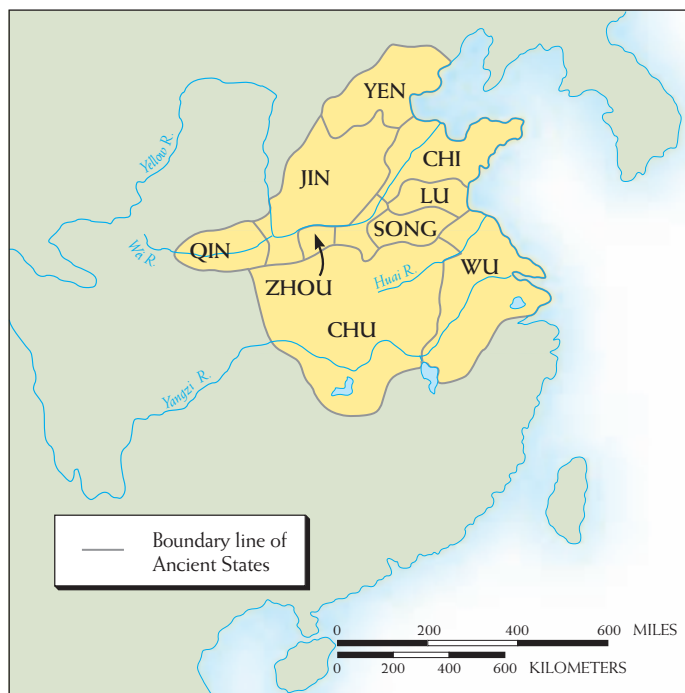
accelerated in the late sixth century B.C.E. after the start of the Iron Age. With iron tools, farmers cleared new lands and plowed deeper, raising yields and increasing agricultural surpluses. Irrigation and drainage canals became important for the first time.

Serfs gave way to independent farmers, who bought and sold land. By the third century B.C.E., China had about 20 million people, making it the most populous country in the world, a distinction it has never lost.

A second development, which would continue for several centuries, was the rise of commerce. Roads built for war were used by merchants. Goods were transported by horses, oxcarts, riverboats, and the camel, which entered China in the third century B.C.E. The products of one region were traded for those of another. Copper coins joined bolts of silk and precious metals as media of exchange. Rich merchants rivaled in lifestyle the landowning lower nobility. New outer walls were added to cities to provide for expanded merchant quarters. Bronze bells and mirrors, clay figurines, lacquer boxes, and musical instruments found in late Zhou tombs give ample evidence that the material and artistic culture of China leaped ahead during this period, despite its endemic wars.

A third change that doomed the city-state was the rise of a new kind of army. The war chariots of the old aristocracy, practical only on level terrain, gave way to cavalry armed with crossbows. Most of the fighting was done by conscript foot soldiers. Armies of the territorial states numbered in the hundreds of thousands. The old nobility gave way to professional commanders. The old aristocratic etiquette, which governed behavior even in battle, was supplanted by military tactics that were bloody and ruthless. Prisoners were often massacred.

Change also affected government. Lords of the new territorial states began to style themselves as kings, taking the title that previously only Zhou royalty had enjoyed. At some courts, the hereditary nobility began to decline, replaced by ministers appointed for their knowledge of statecraft. To survive, new states had to transform their agricultural and commercial wealth into military strength. To collect taxes, conscript soldiers, and administer the affairs of state required records and literate officials. Academies were established to fill the need. Beneath the ministers, a literate bureaucracy developed. Its members were referred to as *shi*, a term that had



**Map 1-7. Early Iron Age Territorial States in China during the Sixth Century B.C.E.** After the fall of the Western Zhou in China in 771 B.C.E., large territorial states formed that became increasingly independent of the later Zhou kings.

# Document

## Human Sacrifice in Early China

By the seventh century B.C.E. human sacrifice was less frequent in China but still happened. This poem was composed when Duke Mu of the state of Qin died in 631 B.C.E. (For want of better terms, Chinese titles are usually translated into roughly equivalent titles among the English nobility.) Were human feelings different, a thousand years earlier during the Shang? The poem suggests that despite religious belief and the honor accorded the victims, they may not have gone gladly to the grave. Note the identification of Heaven with “that blue one,” the sky.

■ *We believe today that it is honorable to die in war for one's nation. How is that different from dying to serve one's lord in the afterlife?*

*“Kio” sings the oriole  
As it lights on the thorn-bush.  
Who went with Duke Mu to the grave?  
Yen-hsi of the clan Tsu-chu.  
Now this Yen-hsi  
Was the pick of all our men;  
But as he drew near the tomb-hole  
His limbs shook with dread.  
That blue one, Heaven,  
Takes all our good men.  
Could we but ransom him  
There are a hundred would give their lives.  
“Kio” sings the oriole  
As it lights on the mulberry-tree.*

*Who went with Duke Mu to the grave?  
Chung-hang of the clan Tsu-chu.  
Now this Chung-hang  
Was the sturdiest of all our men;  
But as he drew near the tomb-hole  
His limbs shook with dread.  
That blue one, Heaven,  
Takes all our good men.  
Could we but ransom him  
There are a hundred would give their lives.*

Source: From *The Book of Songs*, trans. by Arthur Waley (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 311.

once meant “warrior” but gradually came to mean “scholar-bureaucrat.” The *shi* were of mixed social origins, including petty nobility, literate members of the old warrior class, land-lords, merchants, and rising commoners. From this class, as we will see in Chapter 2, came the philosophers who created the “one hundred schools” and transformed China’s culture.

## Chronology

### Early China

4000 B.C.E.	Neolithic agricultural villages
1766 B.C.E.	Bronze Age city-states, aristocratic charioteers, pictographic writing
771 B.C.E.	Iron Age territorial states
500 B.C.E.	Age of philosophers
221 B.C.E.	China is unified

## The Rise of Civilization in the Americas

During the last ice age the Bering region between Siberia and Alaska was dry land. Sometime before 12,000 years ago, and perhaps as early as 30,000 years ago, humans crossed this land bridge, probably in several migrations. Over many centuries these Asian immigrants moved south and east until they eventually crossed the more than 11,000 miles to the tip of South America and the more than 4,000 miles to the eastern regions of North America. In light of the vast distances and imposing geographic barriers involved, these ancient migrations must have been as heroic as any in human history. From them arose a wide variety of original American cultures and many hundreds of languages.

The earliest immigrants to the Americas, like all other Paleolithic peoples, lived by hunting, fishing, and gathering. At the time of the initial migrations, herds of large game animals such as mammoths were plentiful. By the end of the ice age, however, mammoths and many other forms of game had become extinct in the Americas. Compared to Africa and Eurasia, many parts of North and South America were poor in



animal resources and in the rich source of protein they provide. Neither horses nor cattle populated the American continents. Where fishing or small game were not sufficiently plentiful, people had to rely on protein from vegetable sources. One result was the remarkable manner in which the original Americans participated in the Neolithic revolution. American production of plants providing protein far outpaced that of European agriculture. In this regard one of the most important early developments was the cultivation of maize (corn). Wherever maize could be extensively grown, a major ingredient in the food supply was secured. The cultivation of maize appears to have been in place in Mexico by approximately 4000 B.C.E. and to have developed farther south somewhat later. Other important foods were potatoes (developed in the Andes), manioc, squash, beans, peppers, and tomatoes. Many of these foods entered the diet of Europeans, Asians, and other peoples after the European conquest of the Americas in the sixteenth century C.E.

Eventually four areas of relatively dense settlement emerged in the Americas. One of these, in the Pacific Northwest in the area around Puget Sound, depended on the region's extraordinary abundance of fish rather than on agriculture; this area did not develop urbanized states. Another was the Mississippi valley, where, based on maize agriculture, the inhabitants developed a high level of social and political integration that had collapsed several centuries before European contact. The other two, Mesoamerica and the Andean region of South America, saw the emergence of strong, long-lasting states. In other regions with maize agriculture and settled village life—notably the North American Southwest—food supplies might have been too insecure to support the development of states.

Chapter 13 examines Mesoamerican and Andean civilization in detail. Here we give only a brief overview of their development. **Mesoamerica**, which extends from the central part of modern Mexico into Central America, is a region of great geographical diversity, ranging from tropical rain forest to semiarid mountains (see Map 1–8). Archaeologists traditionally divide its preconquest history into three broad periods: Pre-Classic or Formative (2000 B.C.E.–150 C.E.), Classic (150–900 C.E.), and Post-Classic (900–1521). The earliest Mesoamerican civilization, that of the Olmecs, arose during the Pre-Classic on the Gulf Coast beginning approximately 1500 B.C.E. The Olmec centers at San Lorenzo (c. 1200–c. 900 B.C.E.) and La Venta (c. 900–c. 400 B.C.E.) exhibit many of the character-



**Olmec Head** This colossal Olmec head, now in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, was excavated at San Lorenzo. Carved of basalt, it may be a portrait of an Olmec ruler. Olmec civilization thrived between 1500 and 800 B.C.E.

istics of later Mesoamerican cities, including the symmetrical arrangement of large platforms, plazas, and other monumental structures along a central axis and possibly courts for the ritual ball game played throughout Mesoamerica at the time of the Spanish conquest. Writing developed in Mesoamerica during the Late Formative period. As we will see in Chapter 13, succeeding civilizations—including the Classic period civilization of Teotihuacán, the Post-Classic civilizations of the Toltecs and Aztecs, and the Classic and Post-Classic civilization of the Mayas—created large cities, developed sophisticated calendar systems, and were organized in complex social and political structures.

The Andean region is one of dramatic contrasts. Along its western edge, the narrow coastal plain is one of the driest deserts in the world. The Andes rise abruptly from the coastal plain and then descend gradually into the Amazon basin to the east. Agriculture is possible on the coast only in the valleys of the many rivers that flow from the Andes into the Pacific. The earliest monumental architecture in the Andean region, built on the coast at the site of Aspero by people who depended on a combination of agriculture and the Pacific's rich marine resources, dates to about 2750 B.C.E., contemporary with the Great Pyramids of Egypt's Old Kingdom.

From 800 to 200 B.C.E. a civilization associated with the site of Chavín de Huantar in the highlands of Peru exerted great influence in the Andes. Artifacts in the distinctive Chavín style can be found over a large area dating to this period, which archaeologists call the Early Horizon. In many areas, this was a time of technical innovation, including pottery, textiles, and metallurgy. Whether the spread of the Chavín style represents

## Chronology

### Early Civilizations of Mesoamerica

1500–400 B.C.E.	The Olmecs
200–750 C.E.	The Classic period in central Mexico. Dominance of Teotihuacán in the Valley of Mexico and Monte Alban in the Valley of Oaxaca
150–900 C.E.	The Classic period of Mayan civilization in the Yucatán and Guatemala

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**Map 1-8. Civilization in Mesoamerica and the Andes.** Both Mesoamerica and the Andean region of South America saw the development of a series of civilizations beginning between 1500 and 1000 B.C.E.

actual political integration or the influence of a strong religious center is not known. The period following the decline of Chavín, which archaeologists call the Early Intermediate period, saw the development of distinctive cultures in several regions. Notable among these are the Moche culture on the northern coast of Peru and the Nazca culture on the southern coast. A second period of transregional integration—called the Middle Horizon—occurred around 600 C.E., this time probably associated with empires centered on the highland sites of Huari and Tiahuanaco. The succeeding Late Intermediate pe-

riod was dominated on the northern coast of Peru by the Chimú successors of the Moche state. This period ended with the founding of the vast, tightly controlled empire of the Incas in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries C.E.

**Summary**

**The Emergence of Civilization.** Beginning in 10,000 B.C.E., human beings shifted from a hunter-gather way of life to one marked by settled agriculture and the domestication of animals—a shift known as the “Neolithic Revolution.” Between 4000 and 3000 B.C.E., civilization began to appear in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys in Mesopotamia, then along the Nile River in Egypt, and somewhat later in the Indus valley in India and the Yellow River basin in China. Each of these early civilizations developed urban centers, monumental architecture, a hierarchical society, and a system of writing. The period is known as the Bronze Age because it coincided with the discovery of the technique for making bronze tools and weapons.

**Mesopotamia.** The Sumerians founded the oldest Mesopotamian cities around 3000 B.C.E. Beginning around 2370 B.C.E., the Sumerian city-states were conquered and

Chronology	
Early Civilization of the Andes	
ca. 2750 B.C.E.?	Monumental architecture at Aspero
800–200 B.C.E.?	Chavín (Early Horizon)
200 B.C.E.–600 C.E.	Early Intermediate period (Moche on the northern coast of Peru, Nazca on the southern coast)

absorbed in turn by the Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian Empires. The Sumerians passed much of their civilization down to their successors: a system of writing on clay tablets called *cuneiform*, the worship of gods based on natural forces, semidivine kings, and a highly developed bureaucracy.

**Egypt.** Watered by the Nile River and protected by deserts and the sea, Egyptian civilization was more secure and peaceful than that of Mesopotamia. Egypt became a unified kingdom around 2700 B.C.E. Religion dominated Egyptian life. The kings, or pharaohs, were considered gods on whom the lives and prosperity of their people depended. Egyptian history is divided into three main periods: Old Kingdom (2700–2200 B.C.E.), Middle Kingdom (2052–1786 B.C.E.), and New Kingdom (1575–1087 B.C.E.). Under the New Kingdom, Egypt contended for mastery of the Near East with the Hittite Empire.

**Indus Civilization.** By 2300 B.C.E., at least seventy Indus cities, the largest being Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, had developed a sophisticated urban culture. Between 1800 and 1700 B.C.E., Indus civilization disappeared for unknown reasons. In its place, Indo-European (or Aryan) invaders established the “Vedic” culture, named after the ritual writings known as the Vedas. In turn, Vedic culture evolved into a “new” Indian civilization that spread over the whole subcontinent and laid the foundations for the subsequent development of Hindu traditions.

**China.** The Shang Dynasty (1766–1050 B.C.E.) founded the earliest known Bronze Age civilization in China. The Shang and their successors, the Zhou (1050–256 B.C.E.), ruled as warrior aristocrats from city-states that fought outsiders and each other. By the fourth century B.C.E., as population and commerce expanded, rulers needed bigger armies to defend their states and trained bureaucrats to administer them. The result was the consolidation of many petty states into a few large territorial units.

**The Americas.** The first civilizations in the Americas arose in places that produced an agricultural surplus. In Mesoamerica (central Mexico and Central America) this was based on the cultivation of maize (corn). In the Andes valleys, it was based on a combination of agriculture and the rich marine resources of the Pacific. The Olmecs (1500–400 B.C.E.) established the first civilization in Mesoamerica, whereas the first monumental architecture appeared in the Andes region around 2750 B.C.E.

Key Terms

- Aryans (AIR-yuhns)** (p. 23)
- Bronze Age** (p. 8)
- civilization** (p. 8)
- culture** (p. 2)
- cuneiform (koo-NAY-form)** (p. 10)

- diffusion** (p. 3)
- Harappan** (p. 23)
- hieroglyphs** (p. 18)
- Indo-European** (p. 27)
- Mahabharata and Ramayana** (p. 27)
- Mandate of Heaven** (p. 32)
- Mesoamerica** (p. 36)
- Mesopotamia** (p. 7)
- Neolithic Revolution** (p. 7)
- Paleolithic Age** (p. 2)
- pharaoh** (p. 16)
- raja (rah-JAH)** (p. 27)
- Upanishads (oo-PAHN-ee-shahdz)** (p. 29)
- Vedas (vay-DAHZ)** (p. 23)

Review Questions

1. How was life during the Paleolithic Age different from that in the Neolithic Age? What advances in agriculture and human development had taken place by the end of the Neolithic era? Is it valid to speak of a “Neolithic Revolution”?
2. What defines civilization? What are the similarities and differences among the world’s earliest civilizations?
3. What general conclusions can you draw about the differences in the political and intellectual outlooks of the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia? Compare especially Egyptian and Mesopotamian religious views. In what ways did the regional geography influence the religious outlooks of these two civilizations?
4. Why were the Assyrians so successful in establishing their Near Eastern Empire? How did their empire differ from that of the Hittites or Egyptians? In what ways did this empire benefit the civilized Middle East? Why did the Assyrian Empire ultimately fail to survive?
5. How does the early history of Indian civilization differ from that of the river valley civilizations of China, Mesopotamia, and Egypt? What does the evidence suggest were the social, economic, and political differences between the Indus civilization and the Vedic Aryan civilization?
6. What were the stages of early Chinese history? What led each to evolve toward the next?
7. From the appearance of civilization in the Americas, what can you conclude about the factors that give rise to it?

**Note:** To learn more about the topics in this chapter, please turn to the Suggested Readings at the end of the book. For additional sources related to this chapter, please see MyHistoryLab.





## Connections

Reinforce what you learned in this chapter by studying the many documents, images, maps, review tools, and videos available at [www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com).

### Read and Review

#### ✓ [Study and Review Chapter 1]

- [Read the Document] *From Hunter-gatherers to Food-producers—Overcoming Obstacles*, p. 2
- The Development of Religion in Primitive Cultures*, p. 3
- The Toolmaker (3300 B.C.E.)*, p. 6
- The Neolithic Village*, p. 6
- Redefining Self—From Tribe to Village to City 1500 B.C.E.*, p. 6
- Two Accounts of an Egyptian Famine 2600s B.C.E.*, p. 8
- Sumerian Law Code: The Code of Lipit-Ishtar*, p. 10
- Excerpts from The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 12
- Workings of Ma'at: "The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant"*, p. 16
- The Report of Wenamun*, p. 18
- Papyrus of Ani, The Egyptian Book of the Dead c. 1200 B.C.E.*, p. 19
- Hittite Law Code: excerpts from The Code of the Nesilim*, p. 21
- Excerpt from Mahābhārata (1000-600 B.C.E.)*, p. 27
- Shih, from The Shih-Ching*, p. 32
- [See the Map] *The Beginnings of Food Production*, p. 3
- Egypt in the Middle Kingdom*, p. 17
- Egypt in the New Kingdom*, p. 18
- Empire of Assiria, ca. 1800 B.C.E.*, p. 22
- The Neo-Babylonian Empire, ca. 580 B.C.E.*, p. 23
- The Shang Kingdom*, p. 31
- [View the Image] *Hammurabi Receives His Law Code from the Gods*, p. 10
- The Pyramids at Giza*, p. 17
- The Sphinx*, p. 17
- Egyptian Throne of Tutankhamun, 1333–1323 B.C.E.*, p. 18

- Great Temple of Abu Simbel*, p. 18
- Egyptian Relief of Anubis*, p. 19
- Scene from the Egyptian Afterlife*, p. 19
- An Inscribed Oracle Bone*, p. 31

- [Watch the Video] *Geography and Civilization: Egypt and Mesopotamia—Impact of Agriculture?*, p. 8
- Ramses II's Abu Simbel*, p. 18
- The Temple of Karnak*, p. 19

### Research and Explore

- [See the Map] *Prehistoric Human Migration Patterns: From 1 million to 15,000 years ago*, p. 3



- [See the Map] *Ancient China*, p. 30



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