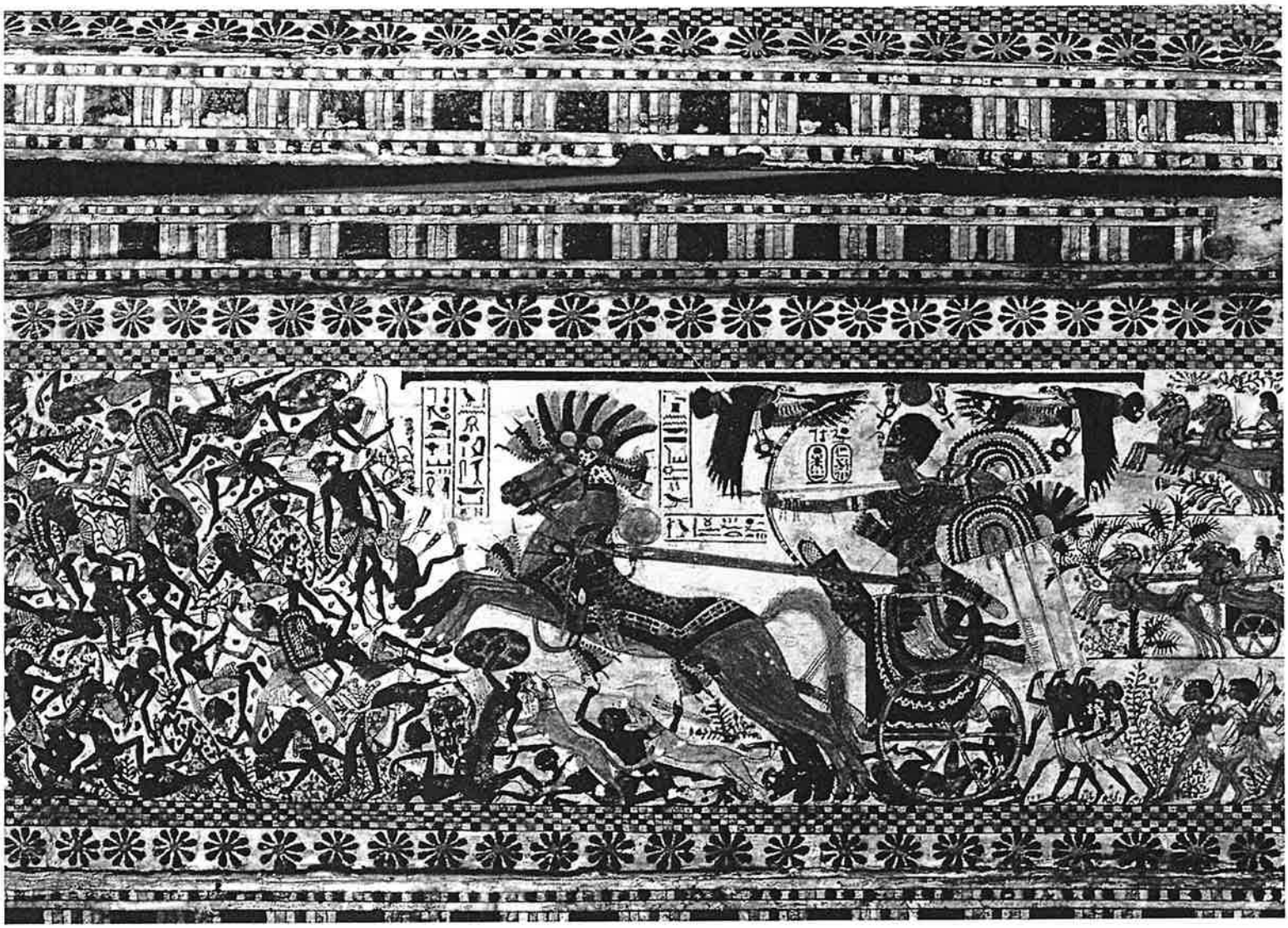
Early Civilizations



BEFORE YOU READ THIS CHAPTER

STORY LINES

- To study the earliest civilizations, historians interpret evidence from a diverse array of sources, many of them environmental, visual, and archaeological.
- All civilizations emerge as the result of complex historical processes specific to a time and place, yet share certain defining features.
- Prominent individuals can achieve power through the use of force, but maintaining power requires legitimacy.
- Those individuals wielding power in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt responded in different ways to the challenge of establishing legitimacy.

CORE OBJECTIVES

- **UNDERSTAND** the challenges involved in studying the distant past and the crucial importance of interdisciplinary methods and unconventional sources.
- **DEFINE** the key characteristics of any civilization.
- **IDENTIFY** the factors that shaped the earliest cities.
- **EXPLAIN** Hammurabi's tools for governing the cities of his empire.
- **DESCRIBE** the main differences between the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations.

THERE WAS A TIME, the story goes, when all the peoples of the earth shared a common language and could accomplish great things. Together, they aspired to build a city with a tower reaching to the sky. But their god was troubled by this, so he destroyed their civilization by making it impossible for them to understand each other's speech.

We know this as the legend of Babel. It was a story that probably circulated among peoples of the ancient world for thousands of years. It then became part of the Hebrew book we call by its Greek name, Genesis: "the beginning." This story lets us glimpse some of the conditions in which early civilizations arose, and it also singles out the challenges that make it hard to study them. We no longer speak the same languages as those ancient peoples, just as we no longer have direct access to their experiences or beliefs.

Such foundational stories are usually called *myths*, and they are an early form of history. For the people who told them, these tales helped to make sense of the present by explaining the past. The fate of Babel conveyed the message that human beings are powerful when they share a common goal, and what enables that interaction is civilization. To the peoples of the ancient world, the benefits of civilization—stability, government, art, writing, technology—were usually products of sedentary city life. The very word *civilization* derives from the Latin word *civis*, "city." Cities, however, became possible only as a result of innovations that began around the end of the last Ice Age, about 13,000 years ago, and that came to fruition some 8,000 years later. The history of civilization is therefore a short one. Within the study of humanity, which reaches back to the genus *Homo* in Africa some 1.7 million years ago, it is merely a blip on the radar screen. Even

within the history of *Homo sapiens*, the species to which we belong and that evolved about 40,000 years ago, civilization is a very recent development.

The study of the earliest civilizations is both fascinating and difficult. Historians still do not understand why cities should have developed in the region between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, in what is now Iraq. Once developed, however, the basic patterns of urban life quickly spread and proliferated. A network of trading connections linked early cities and other seasonal settlements, but intense competition for resources made alliances fragile and warfare frequent. Then, around the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. ("Before the Common Era," equivalent to the Christian dating system B.C., "Before Christ"), some rulers of independent cities started to make broader claims to power over their citizens and other states. How this happened—and how we know that it happened—is the subject of Chapter 1.

Before Civilization

Challenges Involved in Studying the Distant Past

More than 9,000 years ago, a settlement began to develop at Çatalhöyük (*CHUH-tal-hih-yik*) in Anatolia (now south-central Turkey). Over the next 2,000 years, it grew to cover an area of thirty-three acres, within which some 8,000 inhabitants lived in more than 2,000 separate houses. If this seems small, consider that Çatalhöyük's population density was actually twice that of today's most densely populated city: Mumbai, India. It was so tightly packed that there were hardly any streets. Instead, each house was built immediately next to its neighbor and generally on top of another house.

The people of Çatalhöyük developed a highly organized society. They wove woolen cloth; they made kiln-fired pottery; they painted elaborate scenes on the walls of their houses; they made weapons and tools of razor-sharp obsidian, imported from the nearby Cappadocian mountains. They honored their ancestors with religious rites and buried their dead beneath the floors of their houses. As agriculturalists, they grew grains, peas, and lentils and tended herds of domesticated sheep and goats, but also hunted and foraged for food. Their society was also egalitarian: there is no evidence of pronounced gender or

socioeconomic hierarchies. But despite a relatively diverse food supply, their life spans were very short. Men died, on average, at the age of thirty-four. Women, who bore the additional risks of childbirth, died around age thirty.

New sources of information about the remote past

The basic elements of life in Çatalhöyük are common to many early cities and societies. But how and why did such settlements emerge? And how do we access information about this remote past? The era before the appearance of written records, around 3200 B.C.E., is far longer than the eras we are able to document—and no less important. But it requires special ingenuity to identify, collect, and interpret the evidence of the distant past. In fact, historians have only just begun to explore the ways that climatology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology can augment the older findings of paleontology, archaeology, and historical anthropology.

Primates with human characteristics originated in Africa 4 to 5 million years ago, and toolmaking hominids—our distant ancestors—evolved approximately 2 million years ago. Because these early people made most of their tools out of stone, all human cultures before the fourth millennium B.C.E. (the thousand years ending in 3000 B.C.E.) are designated as belonging to the Stone Age. This vast expanse of time is divided into the Paleolithic ("Old Stone") and the Neolithic ("New Stone") Eras, with the division falling around 11,000 B.C.E.

Long before modern humans made their appearance, human activities had already begun to leave traces on the landscape. In Africa, humans were kindling and controlling fire and using it to make tools 164,000 years ago. The Neanderthals, a hominid species that flourished about 200,000 years ago, made jewelry, painted on the walls of caves, and buried their dead in distinctive graves with meaningful objects such as horns (to make music) and flowers. Scientists have recently discovered that Neanderthals were also capable of speech and that they began interbreeding with *Homo sapiens* around 60,000 years ago. How and why Neanderthals became extinct, around 40,000 years ago, is a matter of intense debate.

Archaeology has shown that, about this time, the societies that had flourished began to migrate into the Afro-Eurasian landmass, suggesting that people were better nourished as a

result of new technologies. In many places, the subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens* began to produce finely crafted and more-effective tools such as fishhooks, arrowheads, and sewing needles made from wood, antler, and bone. The most astonishing evidence of these developments was produced by such tools were cave paintings like those at Lascaux and Chauvet (France)—some of which may be 30,000 years old. These amazing scenes were purposefully painted in recesses where acoustic resonance is greatest, and were probably experienced as part of multimedia musical ceremonies. This is further evidence for the development of language and other sophisticated forms of communication.



CAVE PAINTINGS FROM LASCAUX. These paintings, which date to between 15,000 and 10,000 B.C.E., show several of the various species of animals that were hunted by people of the Ice Age. The largest animal depicted here, a species of long-horned cattle known as the *aurochs*, is now extinct.

Patterns of early human life: 1) constantly mobile, 2) few material possessions, 3) no hierarchy

Still, the basic patterns of human life altered very slowly during this era. Since many human societies were bands composed of a few dozen people who moved incessantly or seasonally in search of food, these groups left no continuous archaeological record. Yet we can discern some of the social and economic structures that make such subsistence societies different from those usually called "civilizations." They had no domesticated animals to transport goods, so they could have no significant material possessions aside from basic tools. And because they could not accumulate goods over time, the distinctions of rank and status created by disparities in wealth

could not develop. Hierarchical structures were therefore uncommon. When conflicts arose, or resources became scarce, the solution probably was to divide and separate.

Check Your Understanding: 1 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

Many elements common to early societies have been found at Çatalhöyük in present-day Turkey. These include

Select an Answer

- **A.** written records.
- **B.** evidence of strict social hierarchies.
- **C.** evidence of belief in the afterlife.
- **D.** a central temple storehouse.

Report Issue Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 2 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

Before the earliest civilizations emerged, human beings

Select an Answer

- **A.** moved constantly or seasonally in search of food.
- **B.** had no languages or other ways of communicating.
- **C.** hoarded material possessions.
- **D.** did not honor the dead.

Report Issue Check Answer

The Building Blocks of Civilization

Key Characteristics of Civilization

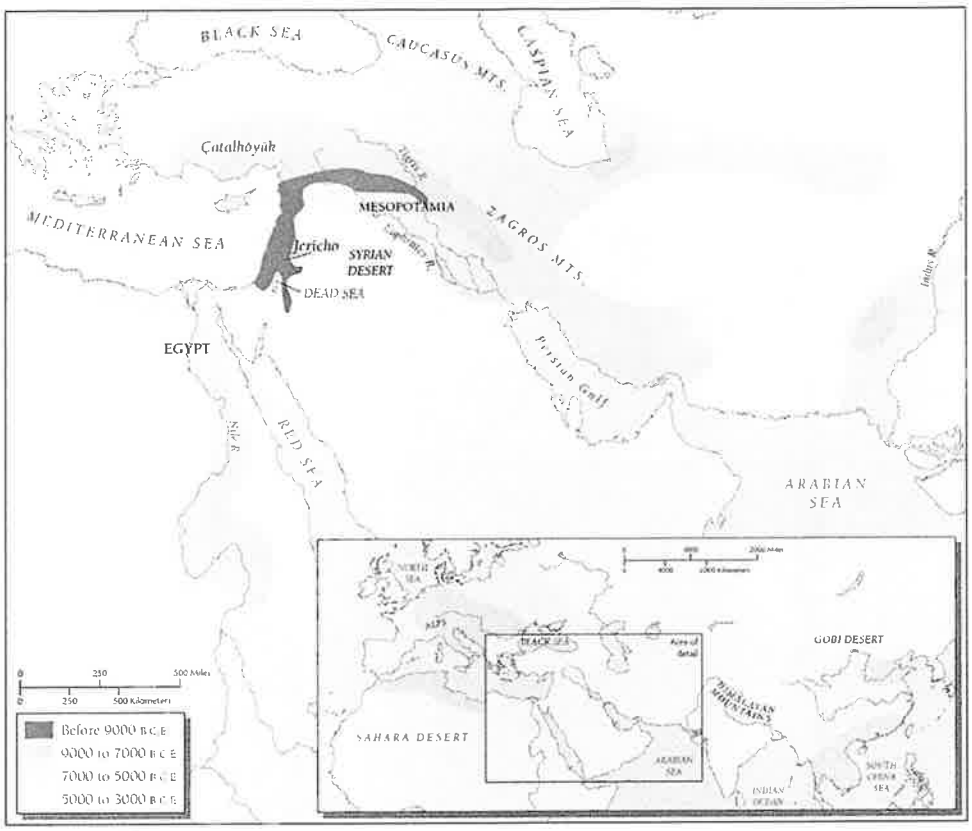
What changes enabled some societies to settle and build cities? Around 11,000 B.C.E., developments brought about by climate change led to the growth of managed food production, which in turn fostered settlements that could trade with each other. As a result, it became possible for some individuals and communities to accumulate and store wealth. This process was often resisted by groups that preferred to avoid hierarchical systems. Recent research has revealed that the **Neolithic Revolution**, the rapid changes enabled by the warming climate, was not embraced by all communities in the same ways or at the same time.

The artists who executed the cave paintings at Lascaux and Chauvet were conditioned to survive in harsh conditions. Before 11,000 B.C.E., daytime temperatures in the Mediterranean basin averaged about 60° F (16° C) in summer and about 30° F (−1° C) in winter. Compare today's temperatures: in the city of Marseilles, not far from Lascaux, they now average about 86° F (30° C) in summer and 52° F (11° C) in winter. This means that cold-loving reindeer, elk, wild boar, bison, and mountain goats

abounded in regions now famous for their beaches and vineyards. But as the glaciers receded, these species retreated with them, to Scandinavia. Some humans also migrated north with the game, while others began migrating to North America.

Within a few thousand years after the end of the Ice Age, some societies began to transition from subsistence food gathering to sustained food production. The warmer, wetter climate now allowed wild grains to flourish, greatly increasing the food supply and making permanent settlements attractive. People increasingly domesticated animals and cultivated plants. Recent research has revealed that such farming was likely seasonal and did not, in many places, replace other sources of food. Some stable settlements grew into cities, but this process could take several thousand years. Though these new findings have challenged the idea of civilizational development, this process still deserves to be called "revolutionary" because it would fundamentally alter patterns of existence that were millions of years old.

As humans began to alter the environment, some scholars posit the beginning of a new epoch: the **Anthropocene** (from the Greek word for "human," *anthropos*). During this epoch—our epoch—slow-moving geological and natural climatological fluctuations have been overtaken by large-scale human efforts to alter the earth's ecosystems. We will be paying close attention to this process and its intensification throughout the following chapters.



THE GROWTH OF AGRICULTURE. Examine the chronology of agriculture's development in this region. **› What areas began cultivating crops first, and why? › In what period did agriculture spread the most rapidly, and why? › How might rivers have played a crucial role in the exchange of farming technologies?**

The changes of this period produced new surpluses of food for some, but they could also produce new challenges and inequalities. For example, well-nourished women in sedentary communities could bear more children than could women in hunter-gatherer groups, and so some women became increasingly sequestered from their male counterparts, who in turn gave up an equal role in child care. The rapid increases in population could be countered by the rapid spread of infectious diseases. In early cities, the rise of zoonotic diseases, passed from animals to humans in close contact, also threatened population increases. Eventually, increased fertility and birthrates could outweigh these factors, and in some places human populations began to exceed the wild food supply. They therefore had to increase cultivation of the land and devise ways of storing grain between harvests. With deliberate cultivation and storage,

humans could support larger populations and also compensate for disasters (such as flooding) that might inhibit natural reseeding.

Even more important, stable and predictable surpluses of food were needed to support larger numbers of domestic animals. This brought a host of additional benefits. It not only guaranteed a more reliable supply of meat, milk, leather, wool, bone, and horn but it also provided animal power to pull carts and plows. However, it correspondingly resulted in a pattern of environmental engineering that produced devastating and unsustainable effects. In 2015, for example, a team of scientists calculated that the number of trees on earth has diminished by over 50 percent since the Neolithic Revolution began.

Emergence of cities as administrative and commercial centers

The accelerating changes of this epoch, exemplified by towns such as Çatalhöyük, where farming was balanced with hunting and foraging. Thousands of new settlements grew up between 7500 and 3500 B.C.E. Some were seasonal and marked by the construction of ritual architecture—for example, Göbekli Tepe in modern Turkey, dating from about 9000 B.C.E. Others can be classified as cities: centers of administration and commerce with relatively large populations, often protected by walls. One of these was Jericho, in the territory between modern Israel and Jordan. Jericho first emerged as a seasonal, grain-producing settlement; but by 6800 B.C.E. its inhabitants were undertaking a spectacular building program to protect their stored surplus of food. Many new dwellings were placed on stone foundations and a massive stone wall was constructed around the western edge of the settlement. It included a circular tower whose remains still reach to a height of thirty feet: a powerful expression of its builders' wealth, technical prowess, and ambitions.

Jericho was sustained by the intensive cultivation of recently domesticated strains of wheat and barley grown by farmers who were skilled irrigation engineers. Jericho's inhabitants also produced some of the earliest-known pottery, which enabled them to store grain, wine, and oils more effectively. Pottery revolutionized cooking, too: for the first time, it was possible to produce nourishing stews and porridges, as well as fermented beverages such as beer. Pottery production was not only vital to

ancient civilizations—it is vital to those who study them—for, as this technology spread throughout Eurasia, identifiable regional styles developed. By studying these different varieties, archaeologists can trace the movements of goods and people over time and space.

Jericho and Çatalhöyük illustrate the impact that stored agricultural surpluses have on human relations. In these settled societies, significant differences began to arise in the amount of wealth individuals could stockpile for themselves and their heirs. Dependence on agriculture also made it more difficult for individuals to split from the community when disputes arose. The result was a much more stratified society, with increased opportunities for a few powerful people to become dominant. The new reliance on agriculture also meant a new dependence on the land and the weather, which led to bourgeoning speculations about the natural and supernatural forces governing the land's fertility. Some forces were believed to require special services and gifts, and the regular practice of ritual and sacrifice sometimes empowered a priestly caste of individuals or families who seemed able to communicate with these forces. Spiritual leadership was allied to more worldly forms of power, including the capacity to lead war bands, enforce labor, exact tribute, and resolve disputes. Through their command of the community's resources, certain clans could establish themselves as a ruling class.

Trade was another important element in the development of early settlements. By 5000 B.C.E., both local and long-distance routes linked settlements throughout the region. Exotic and luxury goods were the most frequent objects of exchange, and long-distance trade also accelerated the exchange of ideas and information. And because status was enhanced by access to high-prestige goods, local elites sought to monopolize trade by organizing and controlling the production of commodities within their own communities and regulating their export. Certain people could now devote at least a portion of their labor to pursuits beyond food production: making pottery or cloth, manufacturing weapons or tools, building houses and fortifications, or facilitating trade. The elites who exploited the labor of others eventually became specialized themselves, as full-

time speculators and organizers, with the leisure and resources to engage in intellectual, artistic, and political pursuits. The building blocks of civilization had been laid.

Check Your Understanding: 3 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

What was one environmental impact of the transition from subsistence food gathering to agriculture?

Select an Answer

- A. It brought about the end of the last Ice Age.
- B. It prevented contact between humans and animals.
- C. It increased the incidence of disease.
- D. It increased the number of trees and density of forests.

Report Issue Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 4 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

Reliance on agriculture had a number of consequences for early civilizations, including new challenges. What was one?

Select an Answer

- **A.** It led to decreased fertility and birthrates.
- **B.** It produced new gender divisions, as surplus food enabled women to produce more children, while men ceased to play an equal role in child care.
- **C.** It did not create good conditions for domesticating animals.
- **D.** Its benefits were offset by the absence of new technologies.

Report Issue Check Answer

Urban Development in Mesopotamia

Factors That Shaped the Earliest Cities

The Greeks called it **Mesopotamia**, "the Land between Rivers." At the time, this land received only about ten inches (25 cm) of rainfall per year, its soils were sandy, and summer temperatures regularly exceeded 110° F (43° C). The two rivers supplying water —the Tigris and the Euphrates—are noted for their unpredictability: both are prone to flooding, and the Tigris was likely to change its course from year to year. It was in this challenging environment that the first urban society, the civilization of Sumer, flourished.

The earliest cities were founded by the Ubaid peoples, so called because of their settlement at al-Ubaid (now in Iraq) around 5900 B.C.E. During this era, the headwaters of the Persian Gulf extended at least a hundred miles farther inland than they do today, so some Ubaid settlements bordered on fertile marshlands, which were developed into irrigation systems. Ubaid farmers also constructed dikes and levees to control the flooding of the rivers and to direct excess water into canals.

Despite the hostile environment, Ubaid communities were soon producing surpluses sufficient to support the typical occupations of a Neolithic society.

Shrines: the first religious structures

Yet there is also evidence of something distinctive in Ubaid settlements: central structures that served religious, economic, and administrative functions. Perhaps starting out as shrines, these structures soon became remodeled as impressive temples that also served as storehouses built of dried mud brick, like the bricks in the story of Babel. Unlike the plentiful stone used at Jericho, the scarcity of stone here meant that builders had to be more resourceful. Each large settlement had such a temple, from which a political and priestly class acted as managers of the community's stored wealth.



THE WHITE TEMPLE AT URUK, c. 3400 B.C.E. This temple may have been dedicated to the sky god, An, or designed to provide all the region's gods with a mountaintop home in a part of the world known for its level plains.

After about 4300 B.C.E., some Ubaid settlements developed into larger, more prosperous, and more organized communities. The most famous of these, Uruk, is considered the first city-state of **Sumer**. It seems to have owed its rapid growth to its importance as a religious center, exemplified by the White Temple. Built between 3500 and 3300 B.C.E., it is a massive platform that still looms nearly forty feet above the landscape, its four corners oriented toward the cardinal points of the compass. Atop the platform stands the temple itself, dressed in brick and originally

painted a brilliant white. Such temples were eventually constructed in every Sumerian city, reflecting the central role that the ruling caste played in urban life.

By 3100 B.C.E. Uruk encompassed some 6 square kilometers (2.3 square miles), enclosing a population of 40,000 people. Rulers harnessed enforced or enslaved labor to increase grain production and also controlled the food supply, using these temples as storehouses. Yet many contemporary societies actively resisted sedentary agriculture and the rulers that managed it, deeming monoculture farming to be too demanding, wasteful, and subject to predatory elites.

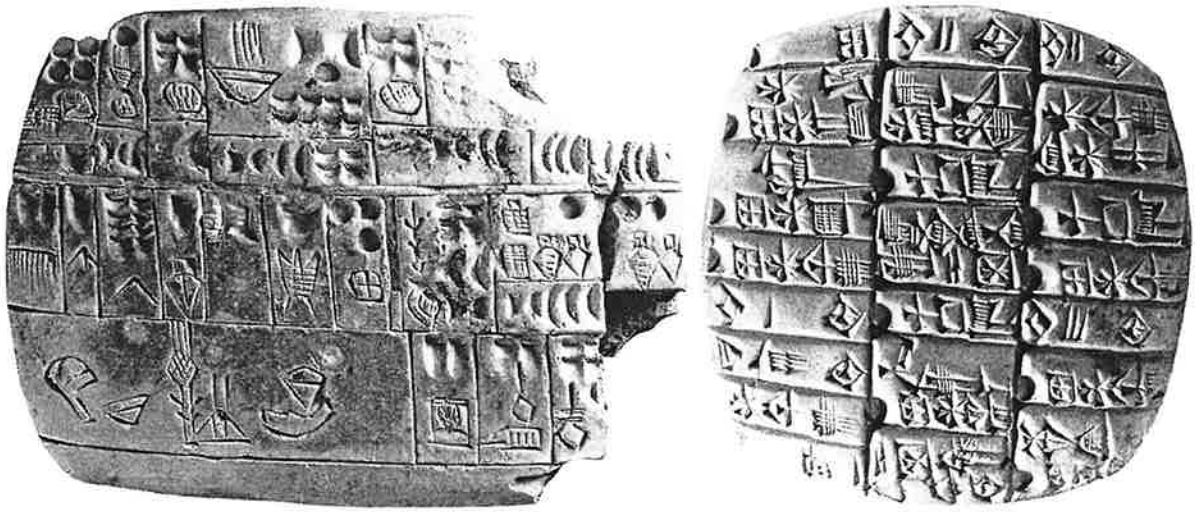
Around 4000 B.C.E., the ruling elites of Sumerian cities were already using clay tokens to keep inventories. Within a few centuries, they developed the practice of placing tokens inside hollow clay balls and inscribing, on the outside of each ball, the shapes of all the tokens it contained. By 3300 B.C.E., scribes had replaced these balls with flat clay tablets on which they incised symbols representing tokens. These tablets made keeping the tokens themselves unnecessary, and they could be archived for future reference or sent to other settlements as receipts or requests for goods.

Writing thus evolved as a practical recording technology. And because it existed to represent real things, its system of symbols—called *pictograms*—was also realistic: each pictogram resembled the thing it represented. Over time, however, a pictogram might not only symbolize a physical object but also an idea associated with that object. For example, the symbol for a bowl of food, a *ninda*, might be used to express something more abstract, such as "nourishment" or "sustenance." Pictograms also came to be associated with particular spoken sounds, or *phonemes*. Thus when a Sumerian scribe needed to employ the sound *ninda*, even as part of another word, he would use the symbol for a bowl of food to represent that phoneme. Later, special marks were added to the symbol so that a reader could tell whether the writer meant it to represent the object itself, or an abstract concept, or a sound.

Around 3100 B.C.E., Sumerian scribes also developed a specialized stylus made of reed as a tool for writing. Because this stylus leaves an impression shaped like a wedge (in Latin,

cuneus), this script is called **cuneiform** (*kyoo-NAY-i-form*). With it, symbols could be impressed more quickly into clay. But the symbols became more abstract; eventually they barely resembled pictograms at all. Meanwhile, symbols were invented for every phonetic combination in the Sumerian language, reducing the number of pictograms from about 1,200 to 600. Whereas the earliest pictograms could have been written and read by anyone, writing and reading now became specialized skills accessible only to a small, educated minority.

Cuneiform proved remarkably durable. For over 2,000 years it remained the principal writing system of antiquity, even in societies that did not speak Sumerian. It was still being used as late as the first century C.E. ("Common Era," equivalent to the traditional Christian dating by A.D., for *Anno Domini*, "in the year of the Lord"). Tens of thousands of clay tablets still survive, which makes it possible for us to know a great deal more about the Sumerians than we do about any other human society before this time. We can better understand the social structures that shaped their lives, their attitudes toward their gods, and their changing political circumstances.



CUNEIFORM WRITING. The image on the left shows a Sumerian clay tablet from about 3000 B.C.E. Here, standardized pictures are beginning to represent concepts as well as things: notice the symbol *ninda* ("bowl of food") at the top. On the right is a clay tablet of accounts, also from Sumer, but dating from about 2350 B.C.E. It reveals the evolution of cuneiform into more abstract forms over many centuries. **› Why would such abstract pictograms have been easier to reproduce quickly than the earlier, more realistic images?**

Check Your Understanding: 5 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

The massive temples that were built in Sumerian cities like Uruk served many purposes. In addition to honoring the gods of the city, they were

Select an Answer

- **A.** housing for the poor.
- **B.** military fortresses.
- **C.** royal tombs.
- **D.** storehouses managed by elites.

Report Issue Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 6 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

The development of cuneiform, the Sumerian script of ancient Mesopotamia, was characterized by a transition from

Select an Answer

- **A.** stone carving to clay.
- **B.** the use of a wedge-shaped stylus made of reed, rather than a piece of chalk.
- **C.** pictograms representing physical objects to more abstract symbols.
- **D.** abstract markings to letters of the alphabet.

Report Issue Check Answer

The Civilization of Sumer

The great centers of Sumerian civilization shared a common culture and language. But they also competed for natural resources and sources of labor—rivalries that could lead to warfare. Access to arable land and trade routes were frequently at stake.

Much of the economic production of each city passed through great temple warehouses, where ruling elites gathered and redistributed the city's produce. During the third millennium B.C.E., these great temples also began to control the production of textiles, employing thousands of enslaved people, mostly women and children. Temple elites began to play a key role in long-distance trade as both buyers and sellers of goods. Each Sumerian city therefore had its own gods and an aristocracy from which priests were drawn.

As much as half of the remaining population may have consisted of families who farmed only enough land to sustain themselves. The rest were dependents of the temple who worked as artisans or as agricultural laborers; many were enslaved (see ***Competing Viewpoints*** on page 14). Many were prisoners of war from other Sumerian city-states whose bondage was limited to three years. However, foreigners could be held indefinitely and were the property of their owners. They could be beaten, branded, bought, and sold like any other merchandise. In the pre-modern world, any person could potentially be enslaved for a variety of causes. It was not until the beginning of the modern era that slavery became closely linked to new ideas about race (see Chapter 14).

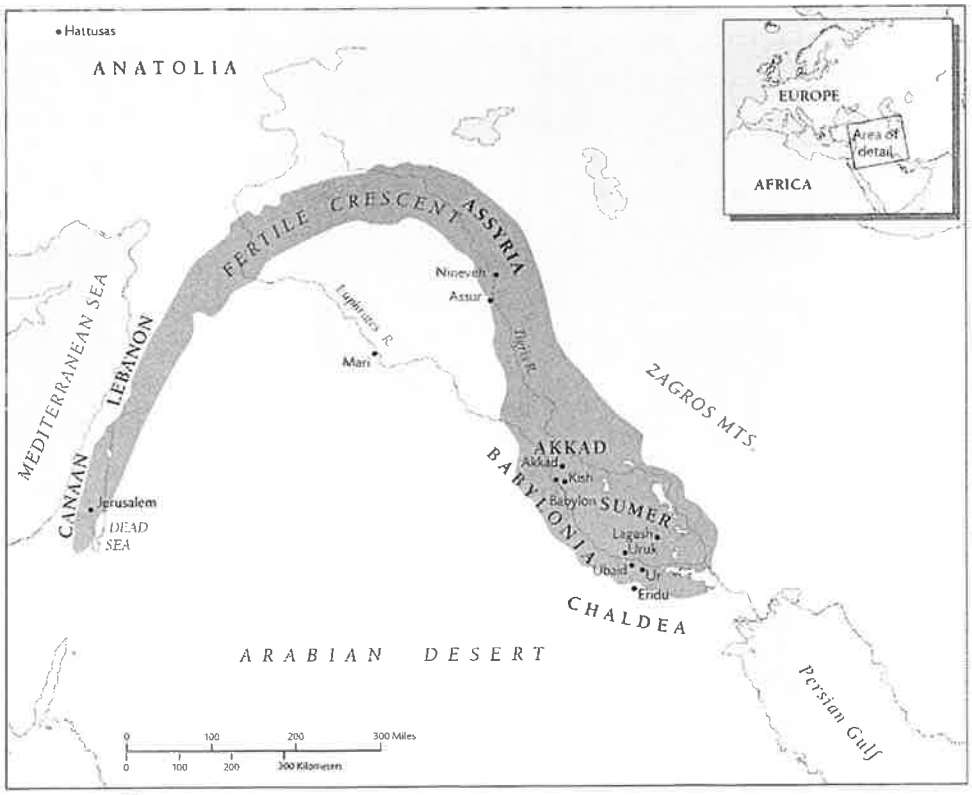
Lugals consolidate power through military prowess and create dynasties

Around 2900 B.C.E., competition for resources intensified and warfare among cities became more frequent. As a result, a new type of military leadership began to emerge. Historians call this era the Early Dynastic Period because it was dominated by powerful dynasties—families who held and handed down power—each headed by a warlord known as a *lugal*, a "big man." Unlike the ruling elites of the Uruk Period, lugals did not represent themselves as faithful servants of a city's god. Rather, they believed that success in battle had earned them the right to exploit the city's wealth.

The most striking expression of this development is the **Epic of Gilgamesh**, a series of stories recited over many generations and eventually written down on cuneiform tablets: the first literary monument in world history. It recounts the exploits of a lugal named Gilgamesh, who probably

lived in Uruk sometime around 2700 B.C.E. Gilgamesh earns his reputation through the military conquest of nonurban societies. But he becomes so powerful that his own people complain that he keeps their sons away at war and shows no respect for the nobles by carousing with their wives and compromising their daughters; he also disrespects the priesthood and commits acts of sacrilege. So the people of Uruk pray to the gods for retribution, and the gods fashion a wild man named Enkidu to challenge Gilgamesh.

The confrontation between Gilgamesh and Enkidu reveals the core values of Sumerian society. Gilgamesh is a creature of the city; Enkidu is his uncivilized Other, like the hunter-gatherers who still subsisted in unclaimed wilderness lands between cities. But then Enkidu has a sexual encounter with a beguiling woman and this urban initiation civilizes him, allowing him to befriend Gilgamesh. Together they have many adventures. But Enkidu is eventually killed by the goddess Inanna, who punishes the friends for mocking her powers. Gilgamesh, distraught with grief, searches for a magical plant that will revive his friend. He finds it at the bottom of a deep pool, only to have it stolen from him by a water snake. He becomes "The One Who Looked into the Depths," the name by which his story was known to Sumerians. The larger message seems to be that not even civilization can shield humans from the forces of nature and the inevitability of death.



THE FERTILE CRESCENT. Notice the proximity of Sumerian cities to rivers; consider the vital role played by the Tigris and the Euphrates in shaping the Mesopotamian civilizations. › How many Sumerian cities can you identify on

the map? › Why might Sumerian cities have been clustered so closely together? › What challenges and opportunities did this present?

During the Uruk Period, Sumerians had identified their gods with the capricious forces of nature. During the Early Dynastic Period, however, many societies came to imagine their gods as resembling the lugals who now lorded over them. From either perspective, Sumerians imagined that humans existed merely to work for their controlling gods or rulers: this was, indeed, why the gods had created people in the first place. There was thus a reciprocal relationship: gods and lugals depended on their servants to honor and sustain them; and in return, they occasionally bestowed gifts and favors.

COMPETING VIEWPOINTS

Inscribing Rule, Retribution, and Rights

The development of sedentary societies and early cities could lead to new forms of inequality, domination, and disagreement. The two accounts below testify to the ways that these stresses were handled by the elites of two different peoples. The first is an excerpt from a lengthy inscription added to a statue erected at the behest of Gudea, a powerful ***lugal*** *of the Sumerian city of Lagash, around 2150 B.C.E. It describes Gudea's efforts to purify the city and build a new temple to his god,* ***Ningirsu****, and the effects of this initiative on the city's people. (Note that words in parentheses have to be inferred by scholars skilled in reading such inscriptions.) The second is from the Hebrew book of* Exodus *and describes the new laws that were written down to govern the sale of enslaved people and settling of scores in a society transitioning between nomadic and sedentary lifestyles.*

Gudea's New Temple

Listen As You Read

On the day when Ningirsu looked at his city with **favor (and) called Gudea to be the faithful shepherd in the land**, when he (Ningirsu) took him by the hand from the midst of the human multitude (lit. 216,000 men); (then) he sanctified the city, cleansed it with fire, established the brick mold, (and) selected the brick by **extispicy.**

The impure man who is frightening, the man inflamed with venereal disease, (and) the woman in (her impure) birth period went out of the city. No woman lifted a work basket, (but only) the cultic functionaries (or best warriors) built for him. He built the temple of

Ningirsu in a pure place like Eridu. Whip did not crack, lash did not strike, (and) no mother struck her son (child). The governor, inspector, overseer, (and) foreman who stood over the work, the striking instrument in their hand(s) was (like) soft combed wool. In the city cemetery no hoe was used, no corpse was brought there, no cult singer brought his harp there, no one intoned lamentation music (and) no (hired female) mourner wailed a lament. **Within the boundaries of Lagash no one who had a legal complaint brought a(nother) man to the tribunal, (and) no debt collector entered a(nother) man's house.**

. . . A ruler had never built a temple fashioned in this manner for Ningirsu (but) he (Gudea) surely did built it. He inscribed the (or "his") name (on the temple), made the long enduring important things (of the temple) shine in (their) splendor, and acted faithfully on the spoken word of Ningirsu.

He brought a **diorite** stone from the land of Magan (and) shaped it into this stone statue. "I built his temple for my king; life is my reward" he named it for him (Ningirsu) and brought it into the Eninnu [the temple] for him. (Then) Gudea gave (the following) command to the statue: "O Statue, when you speak to my king (say this): 'On the day when I built for him the Eninnu, his beloved temple, I remitted debts and washed all hands (of such obligations). **For seven days no grain was ground, the slave girl was equal with her mistress, (and) the slave stood at his master's side.** The unclean person in my city laid down (only) outside; I turned all evil back from their houses. **I paid close attention to the laws of Nanshe and Ningirsu:** the orphan was not given over to the wealthy man; the widow was not given over to the powerful man; (and) in the house with no (male) heir its daughter became its heir.'" He installed the statue with this command.

Source: "Late Third Millennium BCE Sumerian Texts," Richard Averbeck et al., trans., in *The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation*, ed. Mark W. Chavalas (Malden, MA: 2006), pp. 47–49.

The Book of Exodus

Listen As You Read

Now these are the ordinances which you shall set before them. When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, **the wife and her children shall be her master's and he shall go out alone.** But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for life.

When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. **If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed; he shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt faithlessly with her.** If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a

daughter. If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee. **But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him treacherously, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die.**

Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death

Whoever steals a man, whether he sells him or is found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

When men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist and the man does not die **but keeps his bed**, then if the man rises again and walks abroad with his staff, he that struck him shall be clear; only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall have him thoroughly healed.

When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be punished. But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be punished; for the slave is his money.

When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. **If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.**

When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free for the eye's sake. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free for the tooth's sake.

Source: Exodus 21:1–27, *Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America: 1971), https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+21&version=RSV.

Chapter 1 3 STEPS

INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY

Description
The document excerpts you just read present competing viewpoints on inscribing rule, retributions, and rights in ancient society. Select "Start" to work through a series of interactive questions to ensure you understood these primary sources.

Complete this activity at your own pace. Your progress will save automatically.

▶ Start

Questions for Analysis

1. What are the similarities and differences between these two societies, based on these accounts?
2. Which groups of people are excluded from Gudea's project, and which appear to benefit from it?
3. Carefully examine the ordinances set down in Exodus. What is the role of gender differences in this community?

Lugals: "big men" (or war leaders) who often claimed gods' representation on earth

Some lugals therefore claimed to be the gods' representatives on earth, reigning as kings with special responsibilities and privileges. But kings were also obliged to honor the gods through offerings, festivals, and massive building projects. Kings who neglected these duties, or who exalted themselves at the expense of the gods, were likely to bring disaster on themselves and their people. And even kings could not evade death, when the human body returned to clay and the soul crossed into the underworld, a place of silent darkness.

Because neither their gods nor their environment were predictable, Sumerians cultivated a high degree of self-reliance and ingenuity. These qualities made them the most technologically innovative people of the ancient world. For example, despite the fact that their land had no mineral deposits, the Sumerians became skilled metallurgists. By 6000 B.C.E., a number of cultures throughout Eurasia had learned how to produce weapons and tools from copper, but Mesopotamia itself has no copper. By the Uruk Period (4300–2900 B.C.E.), however, trade routes were bringing copper ore into Sumer, where it was processed into weapons and tools.

Shortly before 3000 B.C.E., perhaps starting in eastern Anatolia (now Turkey), people also discovered that copper could be alloyed with arsenic (or later, tin) to produce bronze. Bronze is almost as malleable as copper, and it pours more easily into molds; when cooled, it also maintains its rigidity and shape better than copper. For almost 2,000 years, until about 1200 B.C.E. and the development of techniques for smelting iron (see Chapter 2), bronze was the strongest metal known to humans—the most useful and, in war, the deadliest. Like the ancient Greeks, we call this period the Bronze Age.

Invention of the wheel fosters military conquest and commercial growth

Along with writing and bronze, the invention of the wheel was a fundamental technological achievement of this era. The Sumerians were using potter's wheels by the middle of the fourth millennium B.C.E. and could quickly produce high-quality clay vessels. By around 3200 B.C.E., they were also using two- and four-wheeled chariots and carts drawn by donkeys. (Horses were still unknown in Mesopotamia.) Wheeled carts dramatically improved productivity, and chariots gave warriors a tremendous advantage over armies on foot: the earliest depiction of their use, dating from 2600 B.C.E., shows one trampling an enemy. While the use of the wheel in pottery making may have led to its adaptation for vehicles, a connection between these related uses is not inevitable. The ancient

Egyptians, too, were using the potter's wheel by at least 2700 B.C.E., but they did not use the wheel for transport until a millennium later, when they learned the technique from Mesopotamia. In the Western Hemisphere, wheeled vehicles were unknown until the sixteenth century C.E., although the Incas had a sophisticated system of roads and probably used iron rollers to move huge blocks of stone for building projects. These two points of comparison help to explain why the wheel was probably invented by nomadic peoples living on the steppes of what is now Russia. By contrast, sedentary civilizations that can rely on the manpower of thousands, or that can transport heavy cargo by water, do not feel the same necessity for invention.

The Sumerians, then, can be credited with innovations that made the most of their scarce resources. An example is the seed drill, in use for two millennia before it was depicted on a stone tablet of the seventh century B.C.E. Strikingly, this technology was unknown to any other Western civilization until the sixteenth century C.E., when Europeans adopted it from China; it would not be in general use until the nineteenth century of our era.

Other impressive Sumerian inventions derived from the study of mathematics. In order to construct their elaborate irrigation systems, farmers had developed sophisticated measuring and surveying techniques as well as the art of mapmaking. Agricultural needs may also lie behind the lunar calendar the Sumerians invented, which consisted of twelve months, six lasting 30 days and six lasting 29 days. Since this produced a year of only 354 days, the Sumerians eventually began to add a month to their calendars every few years in order to predict the recurrence of the seasons with sufficient accuracy. This Sumerian practice of dividing time has lasted to the present day, not only in our notions of the 30-day month (which corresponds approximately with the phases of the moon) but also in our division of the hour into sixty minutes, each comprising sixty seconds. Mathematics also contributed to Sumerian architecture, enabling them to build domes and arches thousands of years before the Romans would adopt and spread these architectural forms throughout the West.

Sumerian technology depended not only on ingenuity but also on the spread of information and raw materials through trade. Because their homeland was almost completely devoid of many natural resources, Sumerian pioneers traced routes up and down the rivers and into the hinterlands of Mesopotamia, following the tributaries of the Tigris and the Euphrates. They blazed trails across the deserts toward the west, where they influenced the Egyptians. By sea, they traded with the peoples of the Persian Gulf and, directly or indirectly, with the civilizations of the Indus Valley (modern Pakistan and India). And, along with merchandise, they carried ideas: stories, art, the use of writing, and the whole cultural complex that arose from their way of life. The elements of civilization, which had fused in their urban crucible, would thus come together in many other places throughout the world.



A SUMERIAN PLOW WITH A SEED DRILL. Seed drills control the distribution of seed and ensure that it falls directly into the furrow made by the plow. By contrast, the method of sowing seed practiced elsewhere in the world—and as late as the nineteenth century in Europe and the Americas—was to broadcast the seed by throwing it out in handfuls. Sumerian-style plows were developed during the third millennium B.C.E. and were still being used in the seventh century B.C.E., when this black stone tablet was engraved.

› Think of what you have learned about the Sumerians and their environment. Why would they have developed this technology?

Check Your Understanding: 7 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

In Sumerian civilization, lugals, like the legendary Gilgamesh, were

Select an Answer

- **A.** considered to be immortal.
- **B.** lawgivers and administrators.
- **C.** pious subordinates of the temple priests.
- **D.** successful warlords who exploited the city's wealth.

Report Issue Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 8 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

During the Bronze Age, the Sumerians developed an array of new technologies. What was one of the factors driving these innovations?

Select an Answer

- **A.** the need to tame unruly waterways and counter the harsh conditions of their environment
- **B.** competition with the Egyptians
- **C.** their belief that the gods commanded it
- **D.** the absence of trade with other peoples

Report Issue Check Answer

The First Empires?

Sumerian inscriptions and other writings suggest that competition among Mesopotamian cities reached a new level around 2500 B.C.E., as ambitious lugals vied to magnify themselves and their domains.

Yet no Sumerian lugal was able to impose centralized rule on his city, much less control the settlements that he conquered. As a result, Sumer remained a collection of interdependent but mutually suspicious and vulnerable states whose rulers were unable to forge any lasting structures of authority. This would ultimately make them vulnerable to a new style of rulership imposed from the north, in the person of Sargon the Akkadian.

The Akkadians were the predominant people of central Mesopotamia. Their Sumerian neighbors to the south had greatly influenced them, and they had adopted cuneiform script along with many other elements of Sumerian culture. Yet the Akkadians preserved their own Semitic language, which was part of the linguistic family that includes Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, Ethiopic, and Assyrian. Although Sumerians tended to regard the Akkadians as uncivilized, they feared the ruler whom the Akkadians called "great king": Sargon. Indeed, Sargon's inscriptions suggest that he was ambitious to subject the cities of Sumer to his authority.

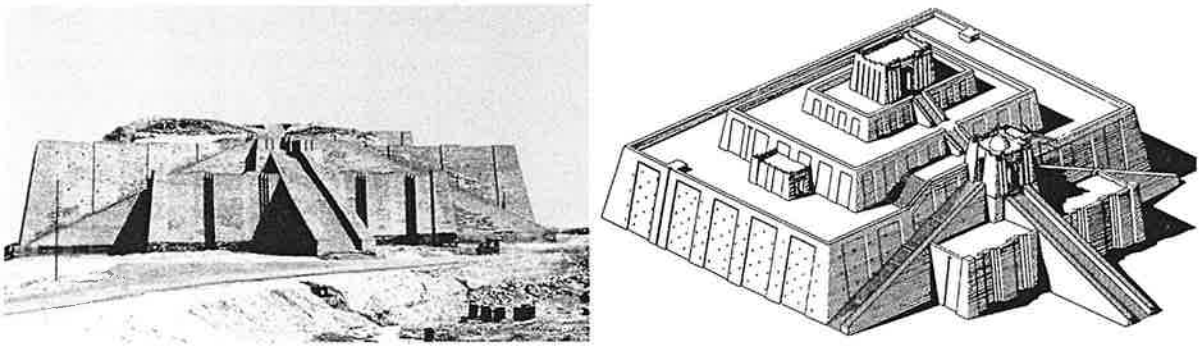
The success of his efforts could not have matched some of his more extravagant claims, but Sargon does appear to have consolidated certain powers at his capital city, Akkad, by around 2350 B.C.E. He also appears to have installed Akkadian-speaking governors in the cities under his control, where they would collect tribute and work to impose his will. Sargon was thus attempting to knit the independent cities of Mesopotamia into a larger political unit—what we now call an empire, a word derived from the Latin *imperium*, "command." This would have enabled him to manage and exploit the network of trade routes crisscrossing the region and to extend his influence from Ethiopia to India.

Although Sargon's imperialism was probably more aspirational than actual, it does seem to have had an effect on Sumerian religion and culture. Sargon took steps to merge the Akkadian and Sumerian divinities, so that, for example, the Akkadian fertility goddess Ishtar became identified with the Sumerian goddess Inanna. He also tried to lessen the rivalry of Sumerian cities by appointing a single Akkadian high priest or priestess, often a member of his own family, to preside over several temples. His own

daughter Enheduanna (*en-he-doo-AH-nah*) was high priestess of both Uruk and Ur, and her hymns in honor of Ishtar/Inanna are the earliest surviving works by a named author in world history.

The precedent that Enheduanna and her father established would continue even after Sargon's dynasty ended: for several centuries thereafter, the kings of Sumer continued to appoint their daughters as high priestesses of Ur and Uruk. And by about 2200 B.C.E., most people in central and southern Mesopotamia would have been able to converse in the language of either the Sumerians or the Akkadians. Indeed, the two civilizations became virtually indistinguishable except for these different languages.

After the death of Sargon's son and heir, Naram-Sin, Akkadian rule in the region dissolved. Around 2100 B.C.E., however, a new dynasty came to power in Ur under a king called Ur-Nammu and his son Shulgi. Ur-Nammu was responsible for the construction of the great **ziggurat** at Ur, which originally rose seventy feet (over 21 m) above the surrounding plain, as well as for many other architectural marvels. Shulgi continued his father's work, raiding lands up to the Zagros Mountains northeast of Ur and demanding massive tribute payments; one collection site accounted for 350,000 sheep per year. Shulgi then built state-run textile production facilities to process the wool. He also promulgated a code of law, calling for fair weights and measures, the protection of widows and orphans, and limitations on the death penalty for crimes.



THE ZIGGURAT OF UR. Built around 2100 B.C.E., this great temple is the best-preserved structure of its kind. It is located at Nasiriyah, in what is now Iraq. Archaeological investigations (see diagram) reveal that its central shrine, the most sacred part of the temple, was reached by climbing four sets of stairs and passing through a massive portal.

While there was no mechanism for actually enforcing this code, Shulgi's commercial expansion of his realm and his patronage of art and literature established a pattern that influenced other rulers in the region for centuries to come. It also influenced newcomers known as the Amorites, a Semitic people (like the Akkadians) who (unlike the Akkadians) had largely been nomads and warriors. But now, some Amorite leaders began to gain control of Mesopotamia's ancient cities.

How Hammurabi's Empire Was Governed

In 1792 B.C.E., a young Amorite chieftain named Hammurabi (*hah-muh-RAH-bee*) became the ruler of **Babylon**, an insignificant city in central Mesopotamia. While Babylon was precariously wedged among a number of more powerful cities, its site on the Tigris and Euphrates had great potential. Hammurabi turned this situation to his advantage, recognizing that military intelligence, diplomacy, and strategic planning might accomplish what his small army could not.

A rich archive of tablets found at the city of Mari (which eventually fell under his rule) testifies to his clever manipulation of his more powerful adversaries: for Hammurabi used writing itself as a weapon. He did not try to confront his mightier neighbors head on. Rather, through letters and embassies, double-dealing and cunning, he induced his stronger counterparts to fight each other. While other rulers exhausted their resources in costly wars, Hammurabi fanned their mutual hatred and skillfully portrayed himself as a friend and ally to all sides. Meanwhile, he quietly strengthened his kingdom, built up his army, and, when the time was right, fell on his depleted neighbors. By such policies, he transformed his small state into what historians call the Old Babylonian Empire.

Under Hammurabi's rule, Mesopotamia achieved a new degree of political integration that reached from the Persian Gulf into Assyria. The southern half of the region, formerly Sumer and Akkad, would henceforth be known as Babylonia. To help unify these territories, Hammurabi introduced another innovation, promoting the worship of the little-known patron god of Babylon, Marduk, and making him the ruler-god of his entire empire. Although he also paid homage to the ancient gods of Sumer and Akkad, Hammurabi made it clear that all his subjects now owed allegiance to Marduk.

The idea that political power derives from divine approval was nothing new, but Hammurabi's genius was to use Marduk's divine supremacy to legitimize his own claim to rule, in Marduk's name, because he was king of Marduk's home city. Hammurabi thus became the first known ruler to launch wars of aggression justified in the name of his primary god. This set

a precedent for colonial expansion that would become a characteristic feature of Western civilizations, which lies behind nearly all imperial ventures down to the present day.

Building on the precedents of past rulers, Hammurabi also issued a collection of laws, copies of which were inscribed on stone pillars and set up in public places throughout his realm. The example that survives is an eight-foot-tall pillar or *stele* (*STEH-leh*) made of gleaming black basalt, erected in the central marketplace of Babylon. The upper portion shows Hammurabi consulting with Shamash, the god of justice. The phallic form on which the laws were inscribed would have been immediately recognizable as a potent symbol of Hammurabi's authority, obvious even to those who could not read the laws themselves. (It still makes a strong impression on visitors to the Louvre Museum in Paris.)

Hammurabi's decision to represent himself as a lawgiver was symbolically important—even if, like previous rulers, he had no effective mechanism for policing his state or enforcing these laws. By collecting legal precedents, Hammurabi declared himself to be (as he stated in the code's preamble) "the shepherd of the people, the capable king"—not a mere lugal ruling through fear and caprice. This was setting a new standard of kingship and expressing a new vision of empire as a union of peoples subject to the same laws.



WOMEN AND TEXTILES. Women were the predominant producers of textiles throughout the ancient world. Even upper-class women were almost continuously engaged in spinning thread and weaving cloth for their households. Here, a servant fans an elegant lady working at her spindle.

The **Code of Hammurabi** reveals a great deal about the structure and values of Babylonian society (see ***Analyzing Primary Sources*** on page 22). The organization of its 282 pronouncements offers insight into the kinds of litigation that Hammurabi and his officials regularly handled and also suggests the relative importance of these cases. It begins with legislation against false testimony (fraud or lying under oath) and theft, followed by laws regulating business deals; laws regulating the use of public resources, especially water; laws relating to taverns and brothels, most of which appear to have been run by women; laws relating to debt and slavery; many laws dealing with marriage, inheritance, divorce, and widows' rights; and, finally, laws punishing murder, violent assault, and even medical malpractice. What emerges is a fascinating picture of a complex urban society that required more-formal legislation than the accumulated customs of previous generations.

Most of these laws appear to be aimed at free commoners, who made up the bulk of the population. Above them was an aristocratic class, tied to the king's court and active in its bureaucracy, which controlled a great deal of any community's wealth; these were the palace officials, temple priests, high-ranking military officers, and rich merchants. Indeed, even legally free individuals were probably dependents of the palace or the temple in some way, or leased land from the estates of the powerful. They included laborers and artisans, small-scale merchants and farmers, and the minor political and religious officials.

Slavery in Babylonian society

At the bottom of Babylonian society were the enslaved, who were far more numerous than had been found in the older civilizations of Sumer or Akkad. Many, indeed, had become enslaved not because of war but through trade: either sold as payment for debts or to the profit of a family with too many children, or because they had been forced to sell themselves on the open market. Others were enslaved in punishment for certain offenses. Enslaved people in the Old Babylonian Empire were treated much more harshly than in previous civilizations and were more readily identifiable as a separate group: whereas free men in Babylonia wore long hair and beards, enslaved men were shaved and both the males and females were branded.

The division among classes in this society was marked. As Hammurabi's code indicates, an offense committed against a nobleman carried a far more severe penalty than did the same crime committed against a commoner or enslaved person; nobles were also punished more severely than were commoners for crimes they committed against other nobles. Marriage arrangements also reflected class differences, with bride-prices and dowries dependent on the status of the parties involved. That said, Hammurabi's code also reveals the relatively high status of women in Babylonian society, and that they enjoyed certain important protections under the law, including the right to divorce abusive or indigent husbands. Indeed, if a husband divorced a wife "without cause," he was obliged to provide financial support for her and their children. However, a wife who went around the city defaming her spouse was subject to severe punishment. And a woman would risk death, as would her lover, if she were caught in adultery. The sexual promiscuity of husbands, by contrast, was protected under the law.

Hammurabi died around 1750 B.C.E. Although the imperial powers he had wielded were not sustainable, he had created a durable state. For another two centuries, Babylon continued to play a significant role in Mesopotamia until invaders from the north sacked the capital and occupied it. But even then, and for another thousand years thereafter, Babylon remained the region's most famous and prominent city.

Hammurabi's legacy also extended well beyond Babylonia because he had shaped a new conception of kingship. Unifying state religions became an increasingly important technique that kings used to annex and subjugate diverse territories and peoples. Hammurabi had also demonstrated the effectiveness of writing as a political tool. Diplomacy and the keeping of archives would be essential to all subsequent empires. So would the claim that rulers should be the arbiters of justice.

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

The laws of Hammurabi, published on the authority of this powerful king and set up in central places throughout the Old Babylonian Empire, were influenced both by the needs of an urban society and by older ideas of justice and punishment common among Semitic peoples. In its entirety, the code comprises 282 laws, beginning and ending with statements of Hammurabi's devotion to the gods, his peacekeeping mission, and his sense of his duties as king. The following excerpts are numbered so as to show the order in which these provisions appear on the stele that publicizes them.

When the god Marduk commanded me to provide just ways for the people of the land in order to attain appropriate behavior, I established truth and justice as the declaration of the land. I enhanced the well-being of the people.

* * *

1. If a man accuses another man and charges him with homicide but cannot bring proof against him, his accuser shall be killed.
2. If a man charges another man with practicing witchcraft but cannot bring proof against him, he who is charged with witchcraft shall go to the divine River Ordeal, he shall indeed submit to the divine River Ordeal; if the divine River Ordeal should overwhelm him, his accuser shall take full legal possession of his estate; if the divine River Ordeal should clear that man and should he survive, he who made the charge of witchcraft against him shall be killed; he who submitted to the divine River Ordeal shall take full legal possession of his accuser's estate.
3. If a man comes forward to give false testimony in a case but cannot bring evidence for his accusation, if that case involves a capital offense, that man shall be killed.

* * *

6. If a man steals valuables belonging to the god or to the palace, that man shall be killed, and also he who received the stolen goods from him shall be killed.
7. If a man should purchase silver, gold, a slave, a slave woman, an ox, a sheep, a donkey, or anything else whatsoever, from a son of a man or from a slave of a man without witnesses or a contract—or if he accepts the goods for safekeeping—that man is a thief, he shall be killed.
8. If a man steals an ox, a sheep, a donkey, a pig, or a boat—if it belongs either to the god or to the palace, he shall give thirtyfold; if it belongs to a commoner, he shall replace it tenfold; if the thief does not have anything to give, he shall be killed.

* * *

15. If a man should enable a palace slave, a palace slave woman, a commoner's slave, or a commoner's slave woman to leave through the main city-gate, he shall be killed.

* * *

53. If a man neglects to reinforce the embankment of the irrigation canal of his field and then a breach opens and allows the water to carry away the common irrigated area, the man in whose embankment the breach opened shall replace the grain whose loss he caused.

• • •

104. If a merchant gives a trading agent grain, wool, oil, or any other commodity for local transactions, the trading agent shall collect a sealed receipt for each payment in silver that he gives to the merchant.

• • •

128. If a man marries a wife but does not draw up a formal contract for her, she is not a wife.

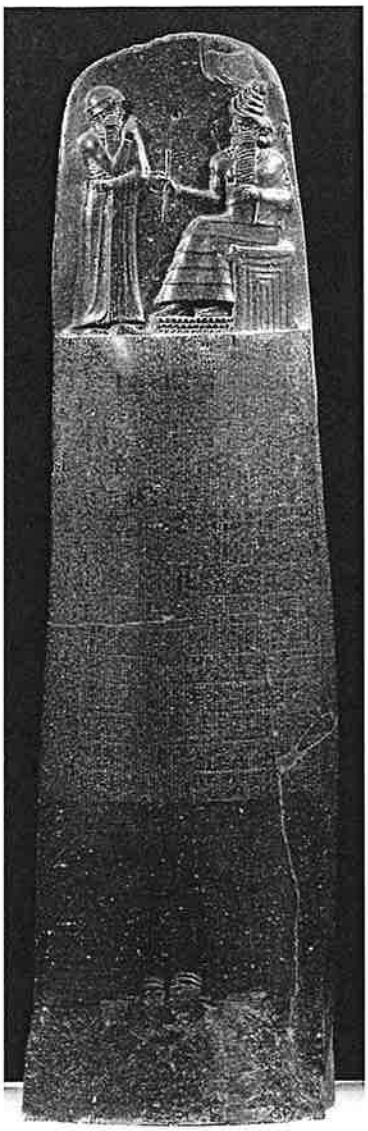
129. If a man's wife should be seized lying with another male, they shall bind them and throw them into the water; if the wife's master allows his wife to live, then the king shall allow his subject [i.e., the other male] to live.

• • •

142. If a woman repudiates her husband, and declares, "You will not have marital relations with me"—her circumstances shall be investigated by the authorities of her city quarter, and if she is circumspect and without fault, but her husband is wayward and disparages her greatly, that woman will not be subject to any penalty; she shall take her dowry and she shall depart for her father's house.

Source: Martha T. Roth, ed., *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (Atlanta: 1995), pp. 76–135 (excerpted).

1. On the basis of these excerpts, what conclusions can you draw about the societal values of the Old Babylonian Empire? For example, what types of crimes are punishable by death, and why?
2. In what ways does the Code of Hammurabi exhibit the influences of the urban civilization for which these laws were issued? What are some characteristics and consequences of urbanization? What, for example, do we learn about economic developments?
3. Examine the photographs of the stele preserving the code. What is the significance of the image that accompanies the laws, Hammurabi's conference with the enthroned god Shamash? What is the significance of the stele itself as the medium that conveyed these laws to the people?



THE CODE OF HAMMURABI. The laws of Hammurabi survive on an eight-foot column made of basalt. The top quarter of the column depicts the Babylonian king (standing, at left) being vested with authority by Shamash, the god of justice. Directly below are the cuneiform inscriptions that are the law code's text. **How would the very format of these laws send a powerful message about Hammurabi's kingship?**

Check Your Understanding: 9 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

The first attempts at empire building in Mesopotamia included

Select an Answer

- **A.** Sargon's renunciation of the traditional demands for tribute.
- **B.** Sargon's appointment of his daughter as a priestess uniting the temples and gods of two cities.
- **C.** the imposition of foreign laws and customs on the peoples conquered by Sargon.
- **D.** the abolition of slavery in Sargon's realm.

Report Issue Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 10 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

Hammurabi's law code exemplifies methods for governing a complex urban society. Its remarkable features include

Select an Answer

- **A.** the insistence that all classes of people should be treated equally under the law.
- **B.** the relaxation of the death penalty for adulterous women.
- **C.** the prohibition of divorce.
- **D.** the use of writing to publicize his status as a lawgiver and protector.

Report Issue Check Answer

The Development of Civilization in Egypt

Describe the Main Differences between Mesopotamian and Egyptian Civilizations

At about the time that Sumerian civilization was transforming Mesopotamia, another civilization was taking shape in a different part of the world and in very different ways. Unlike the Sumerians, the Egyptians did not have to wrest survival from a hostile and unpredictable environment. Instead, their land was renewed every year by the flooding of the Nile River. The fertile black soil that was left behind every summer made theirs the richest agricultural region in the entire Mediterranean world.

Egypt's distinctive civilization rests on this fundamental ecological fact. It also explains why ancient Egypt was a narrow, elongated kingdom, running along the Nile north from the First Cataract (a series of rapids near the ancient city of Elephantine) toward the Mediterranean Sea for a distance of more than 600 miles (some 965 km). Outside this narrow band of territory—14 miles (23 km) at the widest—lay uninhabitable desert. This contrast between the fertile Nile Valley and the desiccated land beyond deeply influenced the Egyptian worldview, in which the Nile itself was the center of the cosmos and the lands beyond were hostile.

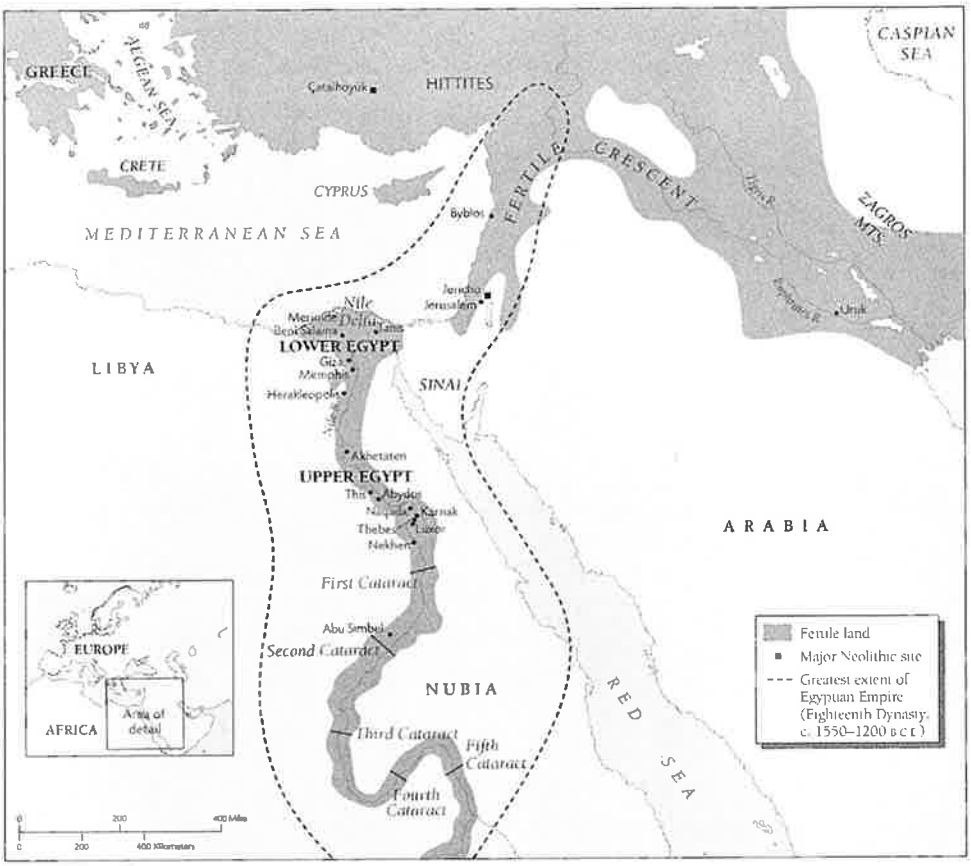
In many respects, ancient Egyptian civilization enjoyed a remarkable continuity. Its roots date back to at least 5000 B.C.E., and Egypt continued to thrive as an independent and distinctive entity even after it was conquered by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.E. (see Chapter 4) and then subsumed into the Roman Empire after 30 B.C.E. (see Chapter 5). The defining element of this civilization would be the pervasive influence of a

powerful, centralized bureaucratic state headed by a **pharaoh** (*FARE-oh*), a ruler who was regarded as a living god. No other civilization in world history has ever been governed so steadily, for so long.

For convenience, historians have traditionally divided ancient Egyptian history into distinctive "kingdoms" and "periods." Following ancient chroniclers, modern historians have also tended to portray these Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms as characterized by unity and prosperity, punctuated by chaotic interludes known as Intermediate Periods. Like all attempts at periodization, these divisions do not capture the complexities or real pace of historical development.

Predynastic Egypt refers to the period before the emergence of the pharaohs and their royal dynasties, an era for which archaeological evidence is scarce. Many predynastic settlements were destroyed by the waters of the Nile and are now buried under layers of silt. The first known permanent settlement, situated at the southwestern edge of the Nile Delta (near the modern town of Merimde Beni Salama: see the map on page 25), dates to approximately 4750 B.C.E. It was a farming community that may have numbered as many as 16,000 residents, which means that some Egyptian communities were much larger than those of Mesopotamia at the same time. By around 3500 B.C.E., evidence shows that the Egyptian economy rapidly became more diversified and that the residents of the delta had extensive commercial contacts with the Sinai Peninsula, the eastern Mediterranean, and the upper reaches of the Nile some several hundred miles to the south. This northern area is known as Lower Egypt because it was downstream. Comparable developments were also occurring upstream, and by the end of this Predynastic Period, Egyptian culture was more or less uniform from the southern edge of the delta throughout the vast length of the Nile known as Upper Egypt.

Although settlements in Lower Egypt were more numerous, it was in Upper Egypt that the first Egyptian cities developed. By 3200 B.C.E.—when the Sumerian city of Uruk had been thriving for a thousand years—important communities such as Nekhen, Naqada, This, and Abydos had all developed high degrees of occupational and social specialization. They had encircled themselves with sophisticated fortifications and built elaborate shrines to honor their gods. Indeed, as in Mesopotamia, a city's role as the center of a prominent religious cult attracted travelers and encouraged the growth of industries. And compared with travel in Mesopotamia, travel in Egypt was relatively easy: the Nile bound cities together, and the lack of competition for resources fostered peace.



ANCIENT EGYPT AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN. Notice the peculiar geography of ancient Egypt and the role played by the Nile River. Identify the Nile on the map. › In what direction does the Nile flow? › How did the lands on either side help to isolate Egyptian culture from outside influences? › Consider how the Nile helped forge Egypt into a unitary state under a powerful centralized government. Yet how might Egypt's relationship to the Nile be potentially hazardous as well as beneficial?

Importance of the Nile River in Egyptian society

It was due to the Nile, therefore, that the region south of the delta was able to forge a cultural and political unity, despite its enormous length. The Nile fed Egypt and was a conduit for people, goods, and information. Centralizing rulers could project their power quickly and effectively up and down its course. Within a remarkably short time, then, just a century or two after the first cities' appearance in Upper Egypt, they had banded together in a confederacy under the leadership of the city of This. The pressure exerted by this confederacy in turn forced the towns of Lower Egypt to adopt their own form of political organization. By 3100 B.C.E., the rivalry between these regions had given rise to the two nascent kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt.

With the rise of powerful rulers in these two kingdoms, Egyptian history enters a new phase, one that can be chronicled with unusual precision. The system for numbering the ruling dynasties that emerged in this era—known as the Archaic Period—was actually devised nearly 3,000 years later

by a historian named Manetho (*mahn-EH-thoh*), who wrote in the third century B.C.E. By and large, Manetho's work has withstood the scrutiny of modern historians, although recent research has added a "Zero Dynasty" of early kings whom Manetho did not record because he didn't know about them; we know them almost exclusively through archaeological evidence. Among them was an Upper Egyptian warlord dubbed King Scorpion because the image of a scorpion accompanies engravings that assert his authority. Another warlord, King Narmer, appears to have ruled both Upper and Lower Egypt. His exploits, too, come down to us in powerful pictures (see ***Interpreting Visual Evidence*** on page 28). Both these kings probably came from Abydos in Upper Egypt, where they were later buried. Their administrative capital, however, was at Memphis, the capital city of Lower Egypt and an important center for trade with the wider region.

Following the political unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, the basic features of Egypt's distinctive centralized kingship took shape along lines that would persist for the next 3,000 years. The title used to describe this kingship was *pharaoh*, a word that actually means "great household" and thus refers not merely to an individual but to the whole apparatus that sustained his rule. This fact helps to explain the extraordinary stability of Egyptian civilization. Kingship in Mesopotamia was a form of personal rule, and even the empires of Sargon and Ur-Nammu scarcely survived another generation or two after their deaths. But in Egypt, the office of the pharaoh was durable enough to survive the deaths of many individual successors, facilitating the peaceful transition of power to new rulers and withstanding the incompetence of many.

This was partly accomplished by the efficiency of palace bureaucracy, but it was also a function of the pharaoh's close identification with the divine. Like the seasons, the pharaoh died only to be born again, renewed, and empowered. Egyptian rulers thus laid claim to a sacred nature quite different and more powerful than that governing Sumer. By the end of the Second Dynasty, which coincides with the end of the Archaic or Early Dynastic Period (2686 B.C.E.), the pharaoh was not just the ruler of Egypt, he *was* Egypt: a personification of the land, the people, and their gods.

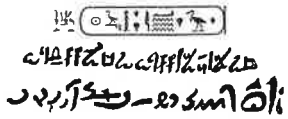
Because few written documents of the **Old Kingdom** survive, historians have to rely on surviving funerary texts from the tombs of the elite. These sources have tended to convey the impression that Egyptians were obsessed with death; and they also tell us little about the lives of ordinary people. Further complicating the historian's task is the early Egyptians' own belief in the unchanging, cyclical nature of the universe.

However, the surviving inscriptions and art of the Third Dynasty (c. 2686–2613 B.C.E.) do tell us a great deal about the workings of the "great household" that undergirded the vast power of the pharaoh who, as the embodiment of Egypt, was the intermediary among the land, its people, and their gods. Hence, all the resources of Egypt belonged to him. Long-distance trade was entirely controlled by pharaohs, as were systems of

taxation and conscripting labor. To administer these, the pharaohs installed provincial governors, many of whom were members of the royal family.

Old Kingdom pharaohs kept tight control over their lesser officials, to prevent them from establishing local roots in the territories they administered. Writing was therefore critical to communication and the management of Egypt's wealth. This dependence on writing gave rise to a whole class of scribal administrators who enjoyed the power, influence, and status that went along with literacy: a skill few people could command, since few could master the intricate writing Egyptian system (see below). Even a child just beginning his scribal education was considered worthy of great respect because the training was so difficult. But it carried great rewards. According to the author of a document called "The Satire of the Trades," the beginning student should persevere because, in the end, he would be so much better off than everyone else.

Among the many fascinating facets of ancient Egyptian culture is the system of pictographic writing. Called **hieroglyphs** (*HI-eroh-glifs*) or "sacred carvings" by the Greeks, these elaborate symbols remained completely mysterious to modern scholars until the nineteenth century, when a Frenchman named Jean François Champollion deciphered them with the help of history's most famous decoding device, the Rosetta Stone. This stele preserves three versions of the same decree issued by one of the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt in 196 B.C.E. (see Chapter 3), written in ancient Greek, demotic (a later Egyptian script), and hieroglyphs—still in use after more than 3,000 years. Because he could read the text in Greek, Champollion was eventually able to translate the demotic and hieroglyphic texts as well.



EGYPTIAN WRITING. Egyptian scribes used a variety of scripts: hieroglyphs for inscriptions and religious texts (top row), a cursive hieratic script for administrative documents (middle row), and a more informal shorthand for note-taking (bottom row). › **What are the relationships among these three forms of writing?**

The development of hieroglyphic writing in Egypt dates to around 3200 B.C.E., about the time when pictograms began to appear in Mesopotamia. But the two scripts are so different that they probably developed independently, and the uses of writing certainly developed far more quickly in Egypt. And unlike Sumerian cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs never evolved into a system of simplified phonograms. Instead, the Egyptians developed a faster, cursive script for representing hieroglyphs, called *hieratic*, which they employed for everyday business. They also developed a shorthand version that scribes could use for rapid note-taking.

INTERPRETING VISUAL EVIDENCE

The Narmer Palette



The Narmer Palette (c. 3100 B.C.E.) is a double-sided carving made of green siltstone. Palettes were used to grind pigments for the making of cosmetics, but the large size (63 cm; over 2 feet) of this one is unusual. It was discovered in 1897 by archaeologists excavating a temple dedicated to the god Horus at Nekhen, the capital of Upper Egypt. Found nearby were other artifacts, including the so-called Narmer Macehead, thought to depict the marriage of Narmer, king of Upper Egypt, to a princess of Lower Egypt.

On the left, dominating the central panel, Narmer wears the White Crown of Upper Egypt. He wields a mace and seizes the hair of a captive kneeling at his feet. Above the captive's head is a cluster of lotus leaves (a symbol of Lower Egypt) and a falcon representing the god Horus, who may be drawing the captive's life force (*ka*) from his body. The figure behind Narmer is carrying the king's sandals; he is depicted as smaller because he is an inferior. The two men in the lower panel are either running or sprawling on the ground, and the symbols above them indicate the name of a defeated town. On the right, the other side of the palette shows Narmer as the chief figure in a procession. He now wears the Red Crown of Lower Egypt and holds a mace and a flail, symbols of conquest. Behind him is the same servant carrying his sandals, and in front of him are a man with long hair and four standard-bearers. There are also ten headless corpses. Below, the entwined necks of two mythical creatures (serpopards, leopards with serpents' heads) are tethered to leashes held by two men. In the lowest section, a bull tramples the body of a man whose city Narmer is destroying.

Questions for Analysis

1. This artifact has been called "the first historical document in the world," but scholars are still debating its meanings. For example, does it represent something that actually happened? Or is it political propaganda? In your view, is this proof that Narmer has united the two kingdoms? Why or why not?
2. Do the two sides of the palette tell a coherent story? If so, on which side does that story begin?
3. What might be significant about the site where the palette was found? Should the palette be interpreted as belonging with the mace, found nearby? If so, how might that change your interpretation of the palette's significance?



A. Narmer wearing the White Crown of Upper Egypt.

B. Narmer wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt.

Little of this hieratic script remains, however, owing to the perishable nature of its written support: papyrus. Produced by hammering, drying, and processing river reeds, papyrus was much lighter, easier to write on, and more transportable than the Sumerians' clay tablets. When sewn together into scrolls, papyrus also made it possible to record and store large quantities of information in a rolled, portable package. Production of this versatile writing material remained one of Egypt's most important industries and exports into the Middle Ages. Yet even in the arid environment of Egypt, papyrus is fragile and subject to decay. Compared with the huge volume of papyrus documents that would have been produced, therefore, the quantity that survives is small, and this significantly limits our understanding of Old Kingdom Egypt.

The origins of the ancient Egyptian language in which these texts were written have long been a matter of debate. It can be plausibly linked to both the Semitic languages of western Asia and a number of African language groups. Whatever its origins, the Egyptian language has enjoyed a long history. Eventually, it became the tongue known as Coptic, which is still used today in the liturgy of the Coptic Christian church, in Ethiopia.



THE ROSETTA STONE. This famous stone, carved in 196 B.C.E., preserves three translations of a single decree in three different forms of writing: hieroglyphs (top), demotic Egyptian (middle), and classical Greek (bottom). › **Why would scholars be able to use the classical Greek text to decipher the hieroglyphic and demotic scripts?**

One of the greatest administrators in the history of Egypt exemplifies both the skills and the possibilities for advancement that a talented scribe could command. Imhotep (*im-HO-tep*) rose through the ranks to become the right-hand man to Djoser (*ZOH-ser*), a pharaoh of the Third Dynasty (c. 2686–2613 B.C.E.). Imhotep's expertise embraced medicine, astronomy, and mathematics; above all, he was an architect. It was Imhotep who designed the Step Pyramid, the first extant building in history constructed entirely of dressed stone. It was not only to be the final resting place of Djoser but an expression of his transcendent power as pharaoh.

Built west of the administrative capital at Memphis, the Step Pyramid towers over the desert to a height of 200 feet (61 m). Its design was based on an older form of burial monument, the *mastaba*, a low rectangular structure built entirely of brick with a flat top and sloping sides. Imhotep probably began with this model in mind, but he radically altered it by stacking one smaller mastaba on top of another and constructing each entirely of limestone. Surrounding this structure was a huge temple and mortuary complex whose buildings served two purposes. First and foremost, they would provide Djoser's *ka*, his spirit or life force, with a home and sustenance in the afterlife. Second, the design of the buildings, with their immovable doors and labyrinthine passageways, would (it was hoped) thwart tomb robbers.

Imhotep set a precedent to which all other pharaohs would aspire. The pyramids on the plain of Giza, built during the Fourth Dynasty (2613–2494 B.C.E.), are a case in point. The Great Pyramid itself, built for the pharaoh Khufu (*KOO-foo*; called *Cheops* by the Greeks), was originally 481 feet high and 756 feet along each side of its base (147 by 235 m) and was constructed from more than 2.3 million limestone blocks, enclosed a volume of about 91 million cubic feet (2.6 million cubic meters). Originally, the entire pyramid was encased in gleaming white limestone and topped by a gilded capstone, as were the two massive but slightly smaller pyramids built for Khufu's successors. During the Middle Ages, the Muslim rulers of nearby Cairo had their builders strip off the pyramid's casing stones and used them to construct their new city. (The gold capstones had probably disappeared already.) But in antiquity, these pyramids would have glistened brilliantly by day and glowed by night, making them visible for miles. The Greek historian Herodotus (*heh-RAH-duh-tuhs*), who toured Egypt more than 2,000 years after the pyramids were built, estimated that it must have taken a hundred thousand laborers twenty years to build the Great Pyramid.



STEP PYRAMID OF PHARAOH DJOSER. This monument to the pharaoh's power and divinity was designed by the palace official Imhotep around 2650 B.C.E.

Once thought to have been the work of enslaved laborers, the pyramids were in fact raised by tens of thousands of peasants. Some workers may have been conscripts, but most probably participated willingly, since these projects glorified the living god who served as their link to the cosmic order. Still, the investment of human and material resources required to build the pyramids put strains on Egyptian society. Control over the lives of individual Egyptians increased, and the number of administrative officials employed by the state grew ever larger. So too did the contrast between the lifestyle of the pharaoh's splendid court at Memphis and that of Egyptian society as a whole. A gap was opening between the pretensions of the pharaohs and the continuing loyalties of Egyptians to their local gods and local leaders.

Perhaps as a result of these disparities, the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties of the Old Kingdom (2494–2181 B.C.E.) witnessed the slow erosion of pharaonic power. Although pyramid construction continued, the monuments of this period are less impressive in design, craftsmanship, and size. Meanwhile, the priesthood of the sun god Ra at Nekhen, which was also the center of worship for the great god Horus and the place where Narmer's unification of Egypt was memorialized, began to assert its own authority. Ultimately, it declared that the pharaoh was not a god, but merely the god's earthly son. This was a blow to the heart of the pharaoh's political power. A more practical threat was the growing power of the pharaoh's provincial governors, whose increased authority had enabled them to become a hereditary local nobility. Some of these nobles became so influential that one Sixth Dynasty pharaoh even married into their ranks.

It appears that the extraordinarily costly building efforts of the Fourth Dynasty had overtaxed the economy, while the channeling of resources to the royal capital at Memphis increased shortages and resentments in the provinces. Other evidence points to changing climatic conditions that may have disrupted the regular inundations of the Nile, leading to famine. Meanwhile, small states were beginning to form to the south in Nubia, perhaps in response to Egyptian aggression. With better organization and equipment, the Nubians may even have restricted Egyptian access to precious-metal deposits around the First Cataract, further crippling the Egyptian economy.

As a result of these developments, local governors and religious authorities began to emerge as the only effective guarantors of stability and order. By 2160 B.C.E., the beginning of what historians call the First Intermediate Period, Egypt had effectively ceased to exist as a unified entity. The central authority of the pharaoh in Memphis collapsed, and a more ancient distribution of power reemerged: a northern center of influence was opposed by a southern regime headquartered at Thebes, with families from each region claiming to be the legitimate pharaohs of all Egypt.

The First Intermediate Period: Egyptian central authority collapses

Compared with the centralized authority of the Old Kingdom, this looks like chaos. But redistribution of power always leads to the opening of new opportunities. In Egypt, wealth became more widely and evenly distributed than it had been, as did access to education and possibilities for personal advancement. Resources that the pharaoh's court at Memphis had once monopolized now remained in the provinces, enabling local elites to emerge as both protectors and as patrons. The result was a much wider and more rapid dispersal of cultural forms and goods throughout Egyptian society. Many of these arts and luxuries—including elaborate rites for the dead—had been developed originally at the pharaoh's court and limited to it. Now, however, they became available to Egyptian society at large.

Check Your Understanding: 11 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

The Egyptian word *pharaoh* to designate the ruler is significant because

Select an Answer

- **A.** it has the same meaning as the Sumerian word *lugal*.
- **B.** it means "great household."
- **C.** it has the same meaning as the word for "god."
- **D.** it refers to the personal rule of the individual king.

Report Issue **Check Answer**

Check Your Understanding: 12 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

The ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writing system differed from the cuneiform writing of Sumer. What was one main difference?

Select an Answer

- **A.** Hieroglyphs evolved much earlier.
- **B.** It was much easier to master.
- **C.** Hieroglyphs did not develop into a more simplified set of markings.
- **D.** Hieroglyphs have never been deciphered.

Report Issue Check Answer

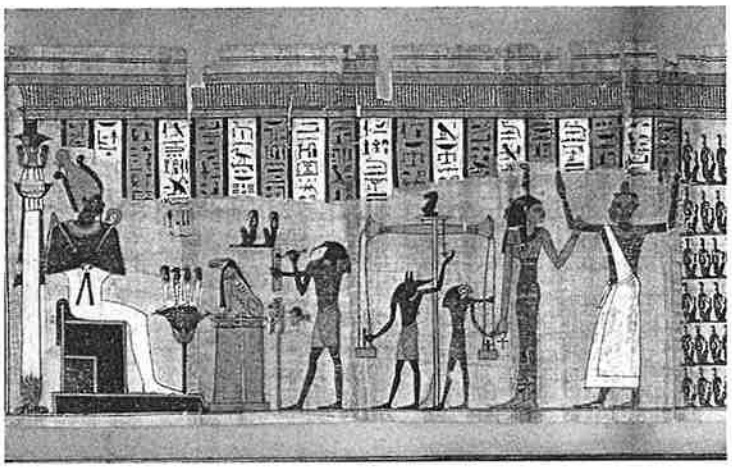
Egyptian Culture and Society

The unique environment of Egypt and the special benefits it conferred on its inhabitants were construed as divine gifts that made Egyptians superior to all other civilizations. For Egyptians, it was simply self-evident that their country—nurtured by the Nile and guarded by the deserts and seas that surrounded it—was the center of the universe.

Unlike the peoples of Mesopotamia, who were constantly faced with new and terrible challenges—both environmental and political—the Egyptians experienced existence as predictably repetitive. This was mirrored in their perception of the cosmos. At the heart of Egyptian religion lay the myth of the gods Osiris and Isis, not only brother and sister but husband and wife. Osiris was, in a sense, the first pharaoh: the first god to hold kingship on earth. His brother Seth, however, wanted the throne for himself. So Seth betrayed and killed Osiris, sealing his body in a coffin. But their loyal sister Isis retrieved the corpse and managed to revive it long enough to conceive her brother's child, the god Horus. Enraged by this, Seth seized Osiris's body and hacked it to pieces, spreading the remains all over Egypt. Still undeterred, Isis sought the help of Anubis, the god of the afterlife. Together they reassembled and preserved the scattered portions of Osiris's body, thus inventing the practice of mummification. Then Horus, with the help of his mother, managed to defeat Seth.



PHARAOH MENKAURE AND HIS QUEEN, KHAMERERNEBTY II. A sculpture from the Fourth Dynasty, c. 2500 B.C.E., shows this queen as her husband's royal partner.



FUNERARY PAPYRUS. This scene, inscribed on a papyrus scroll dating from the Thirtieth Dynasty (380–343 B.C.E.), shows the heart of the princess for whom this book was prepared being weighed in a balance (left) before the god Osiris. On the

other side of the balance (right) are the symbols for life (the *ankh*) and the feather of the goddess Ma'at.

Osiris was thereby avenged, and revived as god of the underworld. Like Egypt itself, he could not be killed; and the cycle of his death, dismemberment, and resurrection was reflected in the yearly renewal of life along the Nile.

In addition to embodying Egypt's continual regeneration, Osiris exemplified the Egyptian attitude toward death, which was very different from the Sumerians' rather bleak view. For the Egyptians, death was a rite of passage to be endured on the way to an afterlife that was more or less like earthly existence, only better. Yet the journey was full of dangers because the individual's ka had to roam the Duat, the underworld, searching for the House of Judgment. There, Osiris and forty-two other judges would decide the ka's fate. If successful and judged worthy, the deceased would enjoy immortality as an aspect of Osiris.

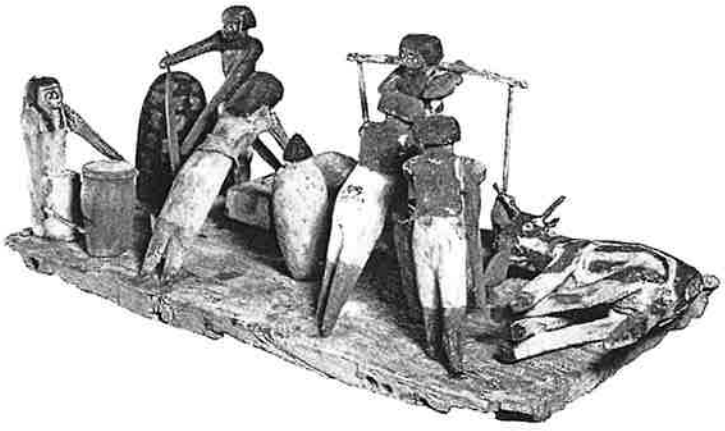
Egyptian funerary rites emulated the example set by Isis and Anubis, who had carefully preserved the parts of Osiris's body and enabled his afterlife. This is why the Egyptians developed their sophisticated techniques of embalming, whereby many of the body's organs were removed and treated with chemicals—except for the heart, which played a key role in the ka's final judgment. A portrait mask was then placed on the mummy before burial, so that the deceased would be recognizable. To sustain the ka, food, clothing, utensils, weapons, and other items of vital importance would be placed in the grave along with the body.

"Coffin texts," or books of the dead, also accompanied the body and were designed to speed the ka's journey. They contained special instructions, including magic spells and incantations, which would help the ka travel through the underworld and prepare for the final test. They also described the "negative confession" the ka would make before the court of Osiris: a formal denial of offenses committed in life. The god Anubis would then weigh the deceased's heart against the principle of ***ma'at***: truth, order, justice. Because *ma'at* was envisioned as a goddess wearing a plumed headdress, a feather from this headdress would be placed in the scales, along with the heart, at the time of judgment; only if the heart was light (empty of wrongdoing) and in perfect balance with the feather would the ka achieve immortality.

Throughout the era of the Old Kingdom, the privilege of undergoing these preparations (and thus of ensuring immortality) was reserved for the royal family alone (see ***Analyzing Primary Sources*** on page 34). By the time of the Middle Kingdom, it was becoming possible for many Egyptians to ensure that their bodies would participate in these rituals, too. This manner of confronting death was inherently life-affirming, bolstered by confidence in the resilience of nature and the renewal of creation. Binding together the endless cycle was *ma'at*, the serene order of the universe with which the individual must remain in harmony, and against which each

person's ka would be weighed after death. Embodying *ma'at* on earth was the pharaoh. For most of the third millennium, thanks to a long period of successful harvests and peace, the Egyptians were able to maintain their belief in this perfectly ordered paradise and the pharaoh that ensured it. But when that order broke down, so did their confidence in the pharaoh's power.

Given the powerful impression conveyed by the pyramids, it may seem surprising that the ancient Egyptians lagged far behind the Mesopotamians in science, mathematics, and the development of new technologies. Only in the calculation of time did the Egyptians make notable advances. Their close observation of the sun led them to develop a solar calendar that was far more accurate than the Mesopotamian lunar calendar. Whereas the Sumerians invented our means of dividing and measuring the day, the Egyptian calendar is the direct ancestor of the calendar adopted for Rome by Julius Caesar in 45 B.C.E. (see Chapter 5) and later corrected by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 C.E. This is the calendar we use today. The Egyptians also devised some effective irrigation and water-control systems, but they did not adopt labor-saving devices like the wheel until much later, perhaps because the available pool of peasant manpower was virtually inexhaustible.



FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY OF THE KA. These wooden models show peasants plowing, grinding grain, baking bread, brewing beer, and slaughtering a steer. Bread and beer were the staple foods of ancient Egypt; beef was too expensive for ordinary consumption, but cattle were frequently sacrificed as funerary offerings. Such models were placed in Middle Kingdom tombs to provide food for the afterlife.

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

The construction and furnishing of elaborate pyramids were not the only vehicles for ensuring the soul's successful passage through the perils of the afterlife. Pharaohs, in particular, benefited from the ritual incantations that were performed as part of the entombment ceremony, and that were also inscribed on the walls of the burial chamber. The oldest surviving examples were preserved in the tomb of Unas, a pharaoh of the Fifth Dynasty, which ended around 2300 B.C.E. They project Unas's journey from burial to immortality in several stages.

The king joins the sun-god

Re-Atum, this Unas comes to you,
A spirit indestructible
Who lays claim to the place of the four pillars!
Your son comes to you, this Unas comes to you,
May you cross the sky united in the dark,
May you rise in lightland, the place in which you shine!
Horus, go proclaim to the powers of the east
And their spirits:
"This Unas comes, a spirit indestructible,
Whom he wishes to live will live,
Whom he wishes to die will die!"

The king crosses over to the eastern sky

It is well with Unas and his *ka,*
Unas shall live with his *ka,*
His panther skin is on him,
His staff in his arm, his scepter in his hand.
He subjects to himself those who have gone there,
They bring him those four elder spirits,
The chiefs of the sidelock wearers,
Who stand on the eastern side of the sky
Leaning on their staffs,
That they may tell this Unas's good name to Re,
Announce this Unas to Nebebkau,
and greet the entry of this Unas.
Flooded are the Fields of Rushes
That Unas may cross on the Winding Water.
Ferried is this Unas to the eastern side of lightland,
Ferried is this Unas to the eastern side of sky,
His sister is Sothis his offspring the dawn.

The king summons the ferryman

Awake in peace, you of back-turned face, in peace,
You who looks backward, in peace,
Sky's ferryman, in peace,
Nut's ferryman, in peace,
Ferryman of gods, in peace.
Unas has come to you
That you may ferry him in this boat in which you ferry the gods.
Unas has come to his side as a god comes to his side,
Unas has come to his shore as a god comes to his shore.
No one alive accuses Unas,
No dead accuses Unas;
No goose accuses Unas,

No ox accuses Unas.
If you fail to ferry Unas,
He will leap and sit on the wing of Thoth,
Then *he* will ferry Unas to that side!

The king feeds on the gods

Sky rains, stars darken,
The vaults quiver, earth's bones tremble,
The planets stand still
At seeing Unas rise as power,
A god who lives on his fathers,
Who feeds on his mothers!

***

Unas is master of cunning
Whose mother knows not his name;
Unas's glory is in heaven,
His power is in lightland;
Like Atum, his father, his begetter,
Though his son, he is stronger than he!

***

Unas is the bull of heaven
Who rages in his heart,
Who lives on the being of every god,
Who eats their entrails
When they come, their bodies full of magic
From the Isle of Flame.

***

He has encompassed the two skies,
He has circled the two shores;
Unas is the great power that overpowers the powers,
Unas is the divine hawk, the great hawk of hawks,
Whom he finds on his way he devours whole,
Unas's place is before all the nobles in lightland,
Unas is god, oldest of the old,
Thousands serve him, hundreds offer to him,
Great-Power rank was given him by Orion, father of gods.

***

The dignities of Unas will not be taken from him,
For he has swallowed the knowledge of every god;
Unas's lifetime is forever, his limit is eternity
In his dignity of "If-he-likes-he-does if-he-hates-he-does-not,"
As he dwells in lightland for all eternity.
Lo, their power is in Unas's belly,
Their spirits are before Unas as broth of the gods,
Cooked for Unas from their bones.
Lo, their power is with Unas,
Their shadows (are taken) from their owners,
For Unas is of those who risen is risen, lasting lasts.
Not can evildoers harm Unas's chosen seat
Among the living in this land for all eternity!

The king climbs to the sky on a ladder

Hail, daughter of Anubis, above the hatches of heaven,
Comrade of Thoth, above the ladder's rails,
Open Unas's path, let Unas pass!
Hail, Ostrich on the Winding Water's shore,
Open Unas's path, let Unas pass!
Hail, four-horned Bull of Re,
Your horn in the west, your horn in the east,
Your southern horn, your northern horn:
Bend your western horn for Unas, let Unas pass!

The king serves the sun-god

Unas is gods' [steward], behind the mansion of Re,
Born of Wish-of-the gods, who is in the bow of Re's bark;
Unas squats before him,
Unas opens his boxes,
Unas unseals his decrees,
Unas seals his dispatches,
Unas sends his messengers who tire not,
Unas does what Unas is told.

Source: Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, vol. 1, *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: 1975), pp. 30–31, 34–39.

1. Trace the stages of Unas's journey through the afterlife. What rites of passage does he undergo, and why?
2. How does the pharaoh's relationship with the gods change over the course of this journey? What do these changes suggest about his own *ka*'s transformation?
3. Many activities, such as eating, binding, sealing, and the sending of messengers, form part of this journey. What are the importance and significance of these actions? How do they reflect the pharaoh's powers after death?

The social pyramid of Old Kingdom Egypt was extremely steep. At its apex stood the pharaoh and his extended family. Below them was a class of nobles whose primary role was to serve as priests and officials of the pharaoh's government; scribes were usually recruited and trained from among the sons of these families. All of these Egyptian elites lived in considerable luxury. They owned extensive estates, exotic possessions, and fine furniture. They kept dogs and cats and monkeys as pets, and hunted and fished for sport.

Conditions of everyday Egyptians

But most Egyptians lived in crowded conditions in simple mud-brick dwellings. During a period of prosperity, master craftsmen might improve their own conditions and those of their families but they did not constitute anything like a "middle class." Other skilled professionals—potters, weavers, masons, merchants—also enjoyed some measure of respect as well

as a higher standard of living. The vast majority of Egyptians, however, were peasant laborers. Beneath them were enslaved people, typically captives from foreign wars.

And yet this Egyptian hierarchy does not appear to have been particularly oppressive. Commoners' belief in the pharaoh's divinity made them willing subjects, as did the material benefits of living in a stable, well-governed society. Even enslaved people had certain legal rights, including the ability to own, sell, and bequeath personal property. Unfortunately, though, the written laws and records produced by the lugals of Mesopotamia do not have any Old Kingdom parallels. The Egyptians of this era apparently had no need for written laws beyond what was customary in their communities or what was proclaimed as law by their pharaoh. This makes it difficult for historians to reconstruct their lives in any detail.



NUBIAN STELE. In 2017–2018, an enormous necropolis (literally, a "city of the dead") was discovered along the Nile in the ancient land of Nubia. Dating from the seventh to fourth centuries B.C.E., it includes more than a hundred tombs, over eighty brick pyramids, and other monuments. This monument bears an inscription honoring Ataqeloula, the matriarch of a powerful family, written in Meroitic, the oldest language in Africa.

Although we have no formal law codes to consult, there is evidence that Egyptian women enjoyed unusual freedoms by the standards of the ancient world. Female commoners were recognized as persons in their own right and were allowed to initiate lawsuits (including suits for divorce), to defend themselves in court and to act as witnesses, to possess property of their own and to dispose of it. And they could do all of this without the permission of a male guardian, as was typically required in most Western societies until the twentieth century. Women were not allowed to undergo formal scribal training, but surviving personal notes exchanged between highborn ladies suggest that some could read and even write.

Normally, women were barred from holding high office, apart from that of priestess. But queens were often represented as the partners of their royal husbands and were certainly instrumental in ruling alongside them: note the proud, confident bearing of Queen Khamerernebty II (*kah-mehr-en-EB-tee*; see image on page 31). And occasionally, a woman from the royal family might assume pharaonic authority for a time, as Queen Nimaathap may have done for her son Djoser, before he came of age. Some women may even have ruled in their own right; this was certainly the case during the New Kingdom (see Chapter 2).

Among the peasantry, gender divisions were less clearly defined—as is the case in most rural societies. Women often worked in the fields alongside men and carried out a number of vital tasks in the community. Whatever their status, though, women did not enjoy sexual equality. Although most Egyptians practiced monogamy, wealthy men could and did keep a number of lesser wives, concubines, and enslaved women; and any Egyptian man, married or not, enjoyed freedoms that were denied to women, who were subject to severe punishments under the law if they were viewed as guilty of any misconduct.

After the disruption of Old Kingdom authority around 2160 B.C.E., warfare between two competing pharaonic dynasties would continue for more than a century. Then, in 2055 B.C.E., the Theban king Mentuhotep (*men-too-HO-tep*) II conquered the northerners and declared himself the ruler of a reunited Egypt. His reign marks the beginning of Egypt's **Middle Kingdom** and the reestablishment of a central government, this time based in Thebes rather than Memphis. The head of this new government was Mentuhotep's chief supporter, Amenemhet (*ah-meh-NEHM-het*), who actually seized power after the king's death and established himself and his descendants as Egypt's Twelfth Dynasty. This succession of remarkable pharaohs remained in power for nearly 200 years and began to expand Egypt's influence and capacity for trade with its neighbors.

This may have brought Egypt into conflict with the Nubian civilization of Kerma (present-day Sudan), whose sandy soil contained numerous rich gold deposits. This was the gateway to the rest of Africa and provided a foothold for Egyptian expansion farther down the Nile, as well as to the coast of the Red Sea in what is now Somalia. Recent archaeological discoveries have revealed an enormous trove of funerary texts in the Meroitic language of this region: the oldest-known writing system of sub-Saharan Africa. These are still being deciphered, but they shed an especially bright light on the high status of women in Nubia, a matrilineal society in which both men and women traced their ancestry through the female line.

Meanwhile, diplomatic relations with the smaller principalities of the Levant (the region on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean) led to decisive Egyptian political and economic dominance in this region. These lands were not incorporated into Egypt; instead, Amenemhet constructed the Walls of the Prince in Sinai, to guard against incursions by foreigners. These huge fortifications symbolize a marked shift in the Egyptian outlook on the world. The placid serenity of *ma'at* and the devotion to the pharaoh that had built the pyramids had been challenged, and Egyptians could no longer disregard the world beyond their borders. Unlike their Old Kingdom ancestors, the Egyptians of the Middle Kingdom began to turn outward.

Although continuing to enjoy a position as divine representative on earth, the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom represented themselves as good shepherds, tenders of their flock. Only by diligently protecting Egypt from a hostile world could a pharaoh provide the peace, prosperity, and security desired by his subjects; his alignment with *ma'at* was now clearly conditional, and it had to be earned.

Portraits of the great pharaohs of the Twelfth Dynasty mirror this new status, as does the literature of the Middle Kingdom. Among the most popular of the new literary forms were manuals ostensibly written by or for kings, detailing the duties and perils of high office and offering advice for dealing with difficult situations. *The Instruction of Ptah-Hotep*, attributed to a court official of the Old Kingdom, achieved a wide readership—much as Machiavelli's *The Prince* (see Chapter 12) has become a "self-help" book for business executives and politicians in our own time. Other examples of this genre are bleakly pragmatic. A pharaoh must trust

no one: not a brother, not a friend, not intimate companions. He must crush the ambitions of local nobles with ruthless ferocity. He must always be on the lookout for trouble. In return for his exertions on behalf of his people, he should expect neither gratitude nor reward; he should expect only that each year will bring new dangers and more pressing challenges. Reading between the lines, we discern that Egyptian elites' sense of their own superiority had been diminished. They were being drawn into a much wider world that they could not control.

Check Your Understanding: 13 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

In contrast to the environment of Mesopotamia, that of ancient Egypt fostered a different worldview. Why?

Select an Answer

- ○ **A.** The annual flooding of the Nile Valley and renewal of its soil fostered a belief in a reliable cycle of life.
- ○ **B.** It gave rise to the belief that the pharaoh could control the natural world.
- ○ **C.** The annual flooding of the Nile Valley was perceived as a sign of the gods' anger and caprice.
- ○ **D.** It suggested that the gods were inclined to the harsh punishment of humans.

Report Issue Check Answer

Check Your Understanding: 14 Of 14 INCOMPLETE

Question

Mummification and other elaborate preparations of the body for burial indicate that the ancient Egyptians' attitude toward death is best described as

Select an Answer

- **A.** fear of the unknown.
- **B.** a sign that they regarded the body and the soul, or *ka*, as entirely separate.
- **C.** affirming their belief in the renewal of life.
- **D.** a greater concern for the preservation of the body than of the soul.

Report Issue Check Answer

Conclusion

Whereas the story of Babel records the loss of a shared language, this chapter shows that people of the distant past can still communicate with us. The remains of their daily lives, their written records, and their very bodies make it possible for historians to piece together evidence and to make sense of it. And every year, new sources come to light, meaning that we have to be ready to revise—constantly—our understanding of the past.

Although this chapter has emphasized the differences between the early civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, it is worth noting some significant similarities. Both developed the fundamental technologies of writing at about the same time, and this facilitated political alliances, long-distance trade, and the transmission of vital information to posterity. During the third millennium B.C.E., both underwent a process of political consolidation and a melding of spiritual and political leadership. Both engaged in massive building and irrigation projects, and both commanded material and human resources on an enormous scale. Although they had some contact with each other, they had few significant political or cultural interactions. This relative isolation was about to change, however. The next millennium would see the emergence of large-scale, land-based empires that would transform life in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and their Mediterranean neighbors. These are the developments we examine in Chapter 2.

AFTER YOU READ THIS CHAPTER

CHRONOLOGY

11,000 B.C.E.	Neolithic Revolution begins
7500–5700 B.C.E.	Çatalhöyük flourishes
6800–3000 B.C.E.	Jericho flourishes
4300–2900 B.C.E.	The rise of Uruk in Sumer
c. 3200 B.C.E.	Development of writing
c. 3100 B.C.E.	King Narmer unites Upper and Lower Egypt
2900–2500 B.C.E.	Early Dynastic Period in Sumer
c. 2700 B.C.E.	Reign of Gilgamesh
c. 2686–2160 B.C.E.	Old Kingdom of Egypt
c. 2650 B.C.E.	Imhotep engineers the Step Pyramid for King Djoser
c. 2350 B.C.E.	Sargon of Akkad consolidates power in Sumer
2160–2055 B.C.E.	First Intermediate Period in Egypt
2100–2000 B.C.E.	Ziggurat of Ur constructed
2055–c. 1650 B.C.E.	Middle Kingdom of Egypt
c. 1792–1750 B.C.E.	Reign of Hammurabi

REVIEWING THE OBJECTIVES

- The study of the distant past is challenging because written sources are rare. What other sources of information do historians use?
- All civilizations require the same basic conditions for survival and share certain characteristics. What are they?
- The cities of Mesopotamia remained largely independent from one another yet shared a common culture. Why was this the case?
- Hammurabi's efforts created a new precedent for governance in Mesopotamia. How did he achieve this?
- The civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt differ in profound ways. What were the major causes of their differences?

PEOPLE, IDEAS, AND EVENTS IN CONTEXT

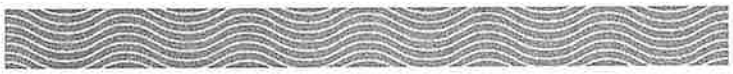
- What fundamental changes associated with the **NEOLITHIC REVOLUTION** made early civilizations possible? Why is this considered to be the beginning of a new epoch, the **ANTHROPOCENE**?
- What new technologies allowed the peoples of **SUMER** to master the environment of **MESOPOTAMIA**? How did these technologies contribute to the development of a new, urbanized society?
- By contrast, why did the Nile River foster a very different civilization and enable the centralized authority of the

PHARAOH?

- How do the differences between CUNEIFORM and HIEROGLYPHS reflect the different circumstances in which they were invented and the different uses to which they were put?
- In what ways are the EPIC OF GILGAMESH and the CODE OF HAMMURABI rich sources of information about the civilizations of Sumer and BABYLON?
- How do the ZIGGURATS of Mesopotamia and the pyramids of Egypt exemplify different forms of power, different ideas about the gods, and different beliefs about the afterlife?
- Why was the worldview of ancient Egyptians, which was strongly reflected in the concept of *MA'AT* during the OLD KINGDOM, altered in significant ways by the time of the MIDDLE KINGDOM?

THINKING ABOUT CONNECTIONS

- How do the surviving sources of any period limit the kinds of questions that we can ask and answer about the distant past? In your view, which sources for this early era have been undervalued? For example, if writing had not been developed in Mesopotamia and Egypt, what would we still be able to know about the civilizations of these two regions?
- What features of ancient civilizations do modern civilizations share? What might be the implications of these shared ideas, social structures, and technologies? Why might some Neolithic societies have resisted the pull of cities and the lifestyle of sedentary agriculturalists?
- In particular, what lessons can we draw from humans' tendency to manipulate their environment? How should knowledge of the distant past influence current debates over sustainability and climate change?





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