

Early Western Civilization

4000–1000 B.C.E.

Ancient Egyptian kings believed that the gods judged them after death to decide their fate in the afterlife. In *Instructions for Merikare*, for example, written sometime around 2100–2000 B.C.E., Merikare’s father, the king, warns his son to rule with justice because even a king would face a day of judgment to determine whether his choices had been good or evil: “Make secure your place in the cemetery by being upright, by doing justice, upon which people’s hearts rely. . . . When a man is buried and mourned, his deeds are piled up next to him as treasure.” Being judged pure of heart led to an eternal reward; if the dead king reached the judges “without doing evil,” he would be transformed so that he would “abide [in the afterlife] like a god, roaming [free] like the lords of time.” A central part of the justice demanded of an Egyptian king was to keep the country unified under a strong central authority and combat disorder. It was the development of centralized authority that brought the most striking changes to the lives of people as civilization emerged following the Neolithic Age.

The gods provided the Egyptians with a model of central authority. Eventually ordinary Egyptians came to believe that they, like the kings, could win eternal rewards by living justly and worshipping the gods with prayers and rituals. An illustrated guidebook containing instructions for mummies on how to travel safely in the underworld, commonly called the *Book of the Dead*, explained that on the day of judgment the jackal-headed god Anubis would weigh the dead person’s heart on a scale against the goddess Maat (literally “What Is Right”) and her feather of Truth, with the bird-headed god Thoth carefully

Weighing of the Heart on Judgment Day

This painting on papyrus (paper made from a river reed) from about 1275 B.C.E. illustrates a main concern of ancient Egyptian religious belief: the day of judgment when the gods decided a person’s fate after death. Here, a man named Any is having his heart (in the left balance) weighed against the feather of Truth of the goddess Maat. The feather stands for “What Is Right.” The jackal-headed god Anubis works the scales, while the bird-headed god Thoth records the result. The standing male figure on the left symbolizes Any’s destiny, and the seated figures above are the jury of gods. The painting formed part of Any’s copy of the *Book of the Dead*, a collection of instructions and magic spells to help the dead person in the afterlife, on the assumption that the verdict would be positive and bestow a blessed eternal life.

(British Museum, London, UK / Bridgeman Art Library.)

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writing down the result (see the illustration on page 2). Pictures in the *Book of the Dead* also show the Swallower of the Damned—a hybrid monster featuring a crocodile’s head, a lion’s body, and a hippopotamus’s hind end—who crouched behind Thoth ready to eat the heart of anyone who failed the test of purity. These stories, like many others in Egyptian mythology, taught that living a just life was the most important human goal because it was the key to winning the gods’ help for a blessed existence after death.

The earliest Western civilizations arose in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Anatolia, Crete and other Aegean islands, and Greece. Each of these civilizations believed in the need for a centralized authority, but the forms of that authority differed. In Egypt, a single, central authority united the country; in other civilizations, smaller independent states competed with each other. Each civilization believed that religion and justice were basic building blocks for organizing human society. All believed that many gods existed; other religious beliefs and practices could differ, however. For example, the Greeks, unlike the Egyptians, believed that most people could expect only a gloomy, shadowlike existence following their deaths.

International trade and wars to win territory and glory were constants in all these civilizations. Trade and war brought the peoples of these civilizations into frequent contact with other populations far away; they exchanged not only goods and technologies but also ideas. This sort of cultural diversity has always characterized Western civilization. The question arises, then, of what historians mean by the concept *Western civilization*. What defines it in particular, as compared to other civilizations?

FOCUS QUESTION: What changes did Western civilization bring to human life?

The Controversial Concept of Western Civilization

The meaning of the concept *Western civilization* begins with geography. The study of civilization in “the West” focuses on the peoples living on the continent of Europe and around the Mediterranean Sea on the continents of Africa and Asia. Chronologically, the story of Western civilization begins with the history of Sumer in Mesopotamia and of Egypt in Africa and extends to the present day. Defining *Western civilization* with greater depth is a difficult challenge because it involves three passionately debated topics: the concept of civilization in general, the vagueness of the idea of the West geographically, and—most controversial of all—the nature and the value of the West’s ideas and ways of life.

Defining Western Civilization

To define Western civilization, we begin by defining **civilization** in general (see “Terms of History,” page 6). Historians traditionally define it as a way of life in political states with a central authority based on cities and a more complex level of human activity and interaction than in earlier times. A village became a city by growing in population to house tens of thousands of people in a dense settlement with large buildings and by becoming a political center. The first civilizations are also identified by having diverse economies generating surplus resources, strong social hierarchies, a sense of local identity, and some knowledge of writing. As these political states acquired larger surpluses,

civilization: A way of life that includes political states based on cities with dense populations, large buildings constructed for communal activities, diverse economies, a sense of local identity, and some knowledge of writing.

■ 4000–1000 Bronze Age

■ 3050 Egypt united

4000 B.C.E.

3500 B.C.E.

3000 B.C.E.

2500 B.C.E.

■ 4000–3000 Writing, first cities

■ 2687–2190 Old Kingdom

they built armies and fought ever more frequent and intense wars.

We generally use *civilization* and related terms such as *civilized behavior* as if everyone agreed that the development of civilization brought progress and afforded people greater opportunities for prosperity and more complex interactions with one another, but some commentators deny that civilization represents a better and more just way of life than the way the earliest human beings lived. They argue that people were healthier, more equal in power, and more peaceful before they created cities and political states. Such comparisons are hard to evaluate because there is so little evidence about early human life (see the Prologue). If there truly was less war then, it might be simply because so many fewer people existed and they were spread so much farther apart—but it also probably matters that they lacked the surpluses to support extensive warfare. In any case, human beings all over the world chose to develop civilization, and no peoples have ever decided to reject it in favor of a simpler life.

The assumption that civilizations are defined by geography and their particular ideas and practices (their culture) began in ancient times. The Greeks invented the geographic notion of the West. Building on ideas they probably learned from their Near Eastern neighbors, they created the term *Europe* to indicate the West (where the sun sets), as distinct from the East (where the sun rises). The Greeks, like modern historians, were not sure exactly where to draw the boundaries of the West because its geographical meaning was then, and remains now, vague. The boundaries shift depending on what period is being described, and the word *Western* in *Western civilization* sometimes refers to peoples and places beyond Europe, and sometimes not. For example, the region that is today Turkey was certainly part of Western civilization at the time of the Roman Empire; yet in

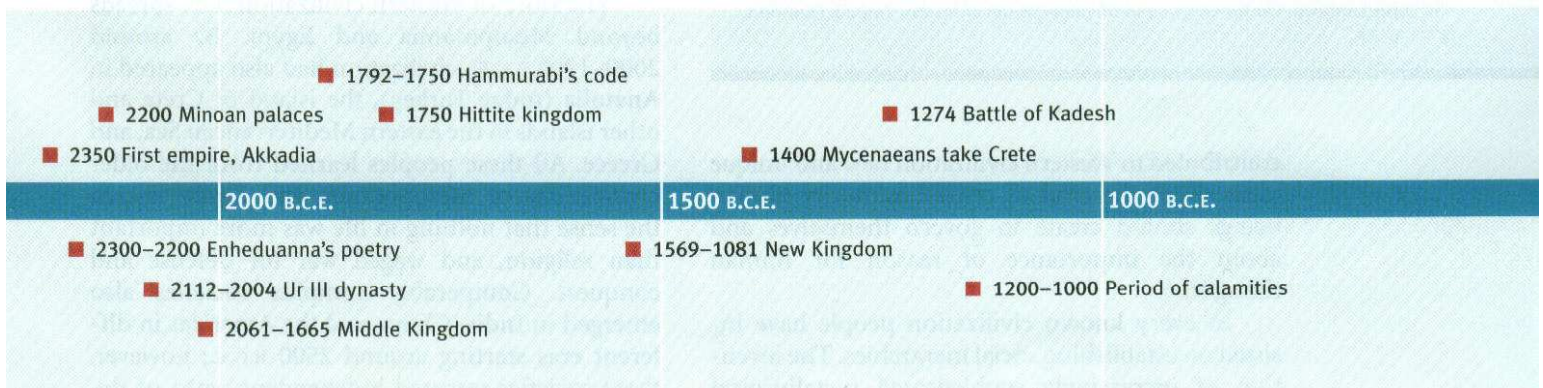
the opening years of the twenty-first century, Europeans and Turks alike are debating what changes in Turkish life and politics it would take—and what the financial and cultural costs would be—for Turkey to be judged Western enough to join the European Union.

Because it is difficult to identify precisely what set of ideas and customs makes up the culture of a particular civilization, the most controversial questions about Western (or any) civilization are, What are its particular ideas and practices? and Are those ideas and practices different from and superior to those of others? For example, Mesopotamian religion and Egyptian religion were both forms of **polytheism**. The Sumerians, who built the world's first cities, believed that the deities were unpredictable and often harsh to humans, and that people had to ward off divine anger by serving the gods obediently, building them temples, worshipping them, and bringing them gifts. The Egyptians also believed that they had to respect the gods to find happiness, but they thought that their gods lovingly provided them with life's delights and that, if their king fulfilled his duties, Maat would bless them with justice. As we will see in Chapters 2 and 3, the Hebrews made **monotheism** (belief in one god) a distinctive feature in Western civilization.

The Greeks inherited from their neighbors in the Near East the idea that regional differences meant that one people's culture was better than another's. Merikare's father, for instance, sternly warned him, "[Beware of the] miserable Asiatic [Near Easterner], wretched because of where he's from, a place with no water, no wood. . . . He doesn't live in one place, hunger propels his legs. . . . He doesn't announce the day of battle, he's like a thief darting around a crowd." The Greeks also

polytheism: The worship of multiple gods.

monotheism: The belief in only one god, as in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.



TERMS OF HISTORY

Civilization

Our word *civilization* comes from the ancient Roman word *civilis*, which meant “suitable for a private citizen” and “behaving like an ordinary, unpretentious person.” Today, the word *civilization* often expresses the judgment that being civilized means achieving a superior way of life. Consider, for example, these definitions from *The Random House Webster’s College Dictionary* (1997), p. 240:

civilization: 1. an advanced state of human society, in which a high level of culture, science, and government has been reached. 2. those people or nations that have reached such a state. 3. any type of culture, society, etc. of a specific place, time, or group: *Greek civilization*. 4. the act or process of civilizing or being civilized. 5. cultural and intellectual refinement. 6. cities or populated areas in general, as opposed to unpopulated or wilderness areas. 7. modern comforts and conveniences, as made possible by science and technology.

All these definitions imply that *civilization* means an “advanced” or “refined” way of life compared to a “savage” or “rude” way. Ancient peoples often drew this sort of comparison between themselves and those whom they saw as crude. Much later, this notion of superiority became prominent in European thought after voyagers to the Americas reported on what they saw as the barbarous life of the peoples they called Indians. Because these Europeans saw Native American life as lacking discipline, government, and, above all, Christianity, it seemed to them to be “uncivilized.” Today, this sense of comparative superiority in the word *civilization* has become so accepted that it can even be used in nonhuman contexts, such as in the following startling comparison: “some communities of ants are more advanced in civilization than others.”¹

Sometimes *civilization* is used without much definitional content at all, as in the *Random House* dictionary’s third definition. Can the word have any deep meaning if it can be used to mean “any type of culture, society, etc. of a specific place, time, or group”? This empty definition reveals that studying civilization still presents daunting challenges to students of history today. It should be their task to make *civilization* a word with intellectual content and a reality with meaning for improving human life, as those who first used the word thought that it was.

¹ Sir John Lubbock, *On the Origin and Metamorphoses of Insects*, 2nd ed. (London, 1874), p. 13.

contributed to Western civilization new and unique ideas about the kind of central authority human beings should create to govern themselves and about the importance of reason for human thought.

In every known civilization people have insisted on establishing social hierarchies. The invention of increasingly sophisticated metallurgical

technology, for example, led to the creation of ever better tools and weapons, but it also turned out to be another factor prompting more visible differences in social status: people constructed status for themselves in part by acquiring metal objects. Some contemporary scientists claim that this development was inevitable because human beings are by nature “status-protecting organisms.”

It would be misleading, however, to define Western civilization by a simple list of characteristics: we have to find the nature and value of Western civilization by studying its history. As we shall see, Western civilization evolved to a large extent through cultural interaction provoked by international trade and war. Contact with unfamiliar ways and technologies spurred people to learn from one another and to adapt for themselves the inventions and beliefs of others. Western civilization therefore developed in a mixing of different cultures. In the long run, the story of Western civilization expanded to include not only cultural and political interaction among the West’s diverse peoples themselves but also between them and the peoples of the rest of the globe. It is clearly a mistake to understand the word *Western* to mean “fenced off in the West from the rest of the world.”

Locating Early Western Civilization

The first step in defining Western civilization and studying its history is locating where it began. If we accept the traditional definition of *civilization* in general, then civilization in the West locates its deepest foundations in two places: (1) Mesopotamia, where the people of Sumer had developed separate cities and political states by 4000–3000 B.C.E., and (2) Egypt, in northeastern Africa, whose civilization emerged beginning around 3050 B.C.E., when a strong ruler made the country into a unified political state stretching along the Nile River. Both these societies waged frequent wars to protect their civilization, to demonstrate their superiority over outsiders, and to seize resources through conquest.

The story of Western civilization next spreads beyond Mesopotamia and Egypt. By around 2000–1900 B.C.E., civilization had also appeared in Anatolia (today Turkey), the island of Crete and other islands in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, and Greece. All these peoples learned from the older civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, shared the sense that nothing in life was more important than religion, and waged war for defense and conquest. Comparably complex societies also emerged in India, China, and the Americas in different eras starting around 2500 B.C.E.; however, these societies pursued independent paths of de-

velopment. Their direct connections to the West began only much later.

If studying the history of Western civilization is the best way to seek its definition, we must then trace the commercial, military, and intellectual interactions of its diverse peoples and regions. We begin with the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians, the Minoans on Crete and the Aegean islands, and the Mycenaeans in Greece. The fragility of what we traditionally call civilization will become apparent when we come to the mysterious era of widespread violence that lasted from about 1200 to 1000 B.C.E. and nearly put an early end to civilization in the West.

REVIEW: What are the challenges of defining Western civilization?

Mesopotamia, Home of the First Civilization, 4000–1000 B.C.E.

The Neolithic Revolution (see the Prologue, pages P-8–P-10) created the economic basis of civilization by providing enough surplus agricultural resources to allow many people to work full-time at occupations other than farming and by encouraging permanent settlements that could grow into cities. These changes in the physical conditions of life generated changes in society. The first place where farming villages gradually became cities was Mesopotamia, where climate change had promoted agriculture and domestication of animals in the Fertile Crescent. Sumer, the name for southern Mesopotamia, developed the first cities. By 4000–3000 B.C.E., the Sumerians had built large urban communities, each controlling its surrounding territory as a separate political state. Studies have revealed the interlocking physical and social conditions of the first civilization: cities at the center of society, successful agriculture on arid plains made possible by complex irrigation, religion as the guide to life, a social hierarchy with kings at the top and slaves at the bottom, the invention of writing to keep track of economic transactions and record people's stories and beliefs, and war to demonstrate cultural superiority and gain land and riches.

The riches for which people now fought had a new component: metal. Items made of metal had become central to wealth and power after craft workers invented the technology of metallurgy about 4000 B.C.E. Historians label the period from

about 4000 to 1000 B.C.E. the Bronze Age because at this time bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, was the most important metal for weapons and tools; iron was not yet in common use. Owning metal objects strengthened visible status divisions in society between men and women and rich and poor. Long-distance commerce increased to satisfy people's desire for resources and goods not available in their homelands and stimulated the invention of the alphabet to supplement earlier forms of writing. Rulers created systems of law to regulate the complex economic and social activities of civilization, instruct their subjects to be obedient to their rulers, and show the gods that they were fulfilling the divine command to maintain order by dispensing justice.

Cities and Society, 4000–2350 B.C.E.

The first cities, and thus the first civilization, emerged in Sumer when its inhabitants figured out how to raise crops on the fertile but dry plains between and around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Map 1.1). This flat region was spacious enough for the growth of cities, but it was not ideal for agriculture: little rain fell, temperatures soared to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and devastating floods occurred unpredictably. First Sumerians and then other Mesopotamians turned this marginal environment into rich farmland by diverting water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to irrigate the plains. A system of irrigation canals that required constant maintenance helped limit flooding. The need to organize workers to maintain the canals promoted the growth of centralized authority in Mesopotamian city-states, which led to the emergence of kings as rulers. In this way, civilization created monarchy as a political system.

Food surpluses produced by Mesopotamian farmers spurred population growth, increased the number of crafts producers, and led to the emergence of cities. Each city controlled agricultural land outside its fortification walls and built large temples inside them. Historians call this arrangement—an urban center exercising political and economic control over the countryside around it—a **city-state**. Mesopotamia became a land of separate and independent city-states, each with its own central authority.

The Cities of Sumer. We do not know the origins of the Sumerians; they spoke a language whose background remains obscure. By around 3000

city-state: An urban center exercising political and economic control over the surrounding countryside.



MAP 1.1 The Ancient Near East, 4000–3000 B.C.E.

The diverse region we call the ancient Near East encompassed many different landscapes, climates, peoples, and languages. Kings ruled its independent city-states, the centers of the world's first civilizations, beginning around 4000–3000 B.C.E. Trade by land and sea for natural resources, especially metals, and wars of conquest kept the peoples of the region in constant contact and conflict with one another.

■ How did geography facilitate—or hinder—the development of civilization in the Near East?

B.C.E. the Sumerians had established twelve independent city-states—including Uruk, Eridu, and Ur—which remained fiercely separate communities warring over land and natural resources. By around 2500 B.C.E., each of the Sumerian cities had expanded to twenty thousand residents or more.

These first city-states had similar layouts. Irrigated fields filled the outer perimeter of their territories, with villages housing agricultural workers closer to the urban center. A fortress wall surrounded the city itself. Outside the city's gates, bustling centers of trade developed, either at a harbor on the river or in a marketplace along the overland routes leading to the city. Inside the city, the most prominent buildings were the **ziggurats** (see the ziggurat of Ur in Sumer at right), temples of a stair-step design that soared up to ten stories high.

ziggurats (ZIH guh rats): Mesopotamian temples of massive size built on a stair-step design.

Cities were crowded, though some space was left open for parks. Urban dwellers lived in mud-brick houses constructed around an open court. Most houses had only one or two rooms, but the wealthy constructed two-story dwellings that had a dozen or more rooms. Rich and poor alike could become ill from the water supply, which was often contaminated by sewage because no system of waste disposal existed. Pigs and dogs scavenged in the streets and areas where garbage was dumped before it could be cleared away.

Agriculture and trade made Sumerian city-states prosperous. They bartered grain, vegetable oil, woolens, and leather with one another and with foreign regions, from which they acquired natural resources not found in Sumer, such as metals, timber, and precious stones. Sumerian traders traveled as far east as India, sailing for weeks to reach that distant land, where the Indus civilization's large cities emerged about five



The “Standard of Ur” of Sumer

This wooden box, about twenty inches long and eight inches high, was found in a large grave in the Royal Cemetery at Ur dating to about 2600–2400 B.C.E. Its pictures, inlaid in white shell, red limestone, and blue lapis lazuli on all sides of the box, have made this mysterious object famous because they provide some of our earliest visual evidence for Sumerian life. This side shows animals being led to a banquet scene, where a musician playing a lyre entertains men in their characteristic woolen fleeces or fringed skirts. The

large figure at the left is probably the king, here celebrating his role as the gods’ representative to his subjects. The other side shows a Sumerian army. (© The Trustees of the British Museum.)

■ For more help analyzing this image, see the visual activity for this chapter in the Online Study Guide at bedfordstmartins.com/hunt.

hundred years after Sumer’s. Technological innovation further strengthened the early Mesopotamian economy, especially beginning around 3000 B.C.E., when Sumerians invented the wheel in a form sturdy enough to be used on carts for transport.

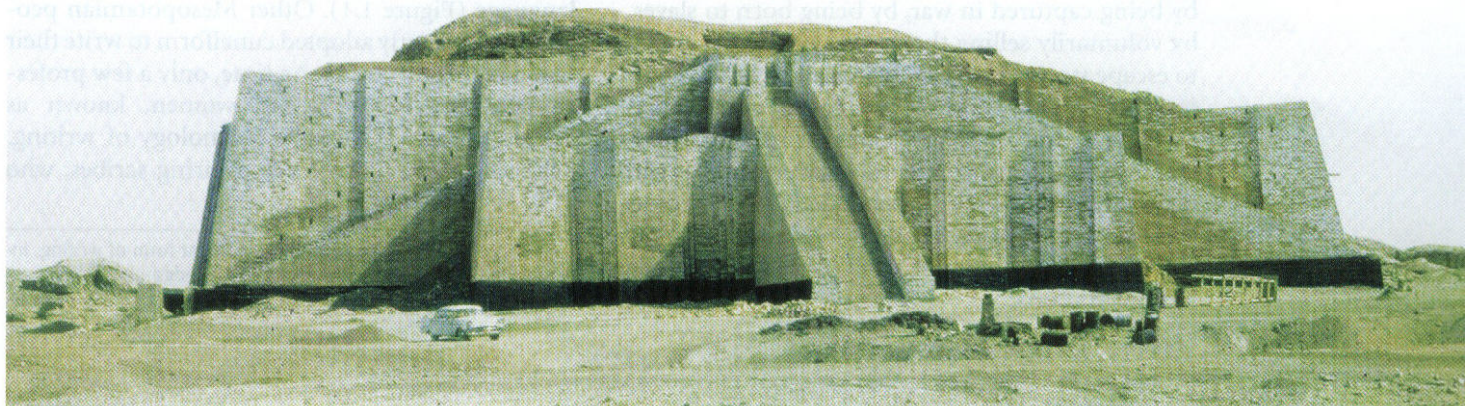
Religious officials predominated in the early Sumerian economy because they controlled large farms and gangs of laborers, whose work for the gods supported the ziggurats and their related activities. Priests and priestesses supervised a large amount of property and economic activity. By around 2600 B.C.E., however, kings dominated the economy because their leadership in Mesopotamia’s

frequent wars won them control of their territories’ resources; some private households also amassed significant wealth by working large fields.

Kings in Sumer. Kings and their royal families were the highest-ranking people in the Sumerian social hierarchy. A king formed a council of older men as his advisers and praised the gods as his rulers and the guarantors of his power. This claim to divinely justified power gave priests and priestesses political influence. Although a Sumerian queen was respected as the wife of the king and the mother of the royal children, the king held supreme power in the patriarchal city-states of

The Ziggurat of Ur in Sumer

King Ur-Nammu and his son Shulgi built this massive temple as an architectural marvel for their city of Ur (in what is today southern Iraq) in the early twenty-first century B.C.E. Its three massive terraces, one above another and connected by stairways, were constructed with a mud-brick core covered by a skin of baked brick, glued together with tar. The ziggurat’s walls were more than seven feet thick to sustain its enormous weight. Its original height is uncertain, but the first terrace alone soared some forty-five feet above the ground. The enormous bulk of the Great Pyramid in Egypt, however, dwarfed it (see page 19). (Hirmer Fotoarchiv.)



Mesopotamia. Still, women had more legal rights under Sumerian law than they would in later Mesopotamian societies; only Egypt would give women greater legal standing than Sumer did.

The king's supreme responsibility was to ensure justice, which meant pleasing the gods, developing law, keeping order among the people, and fighting wars against other city-states both for defense and for conquest. In return, the king extracted surpluses from the working population as taxes to support his family, court, palace, army, and officials. If the surpluses came in regularly, the king mostly left the people alone to live their daily lives, although from time to time he relieved the poor of their debts as part of his divine mission to fight injustice.

To demonstrate their status atop the social hierarchy, Sumerian kings and their families lived in luxurious palaces that rivaled the scale of the great temples. The palace served as the city-state's administrative center and the storehouse for the ruler's enormous wealth. Members of the royal family dedicated a significant portion of the community's economic surplus to displaying their superior status. Archaeological excavation of the immense royal cemetery in Ur, for example, has revealed the dazzling extent of the rulers' riches—spectacular possessions crafted in gold, silver, and precious stones. These graves also yielded grislier evidence of the exalted status of the king and queen: the bodies of the servants sacrificed to serve their royal masters after death. The spectacle of wealth and power that characterized Sumerian kingship reveals the enormous gap between the upper and lower ranks of Sumerian society.

Slaves in Sumer. Just as it created monarchy, civilization also created slavery. Scholars dispute precisely how and why people began enslaving other people, but a greatly increased rigidity in social hierarchy was slavery's foundation. Slaves were those confined to the bottom. No single description of Mesopotamian slavery covers all its diverse forms or its social and legal consequences. Both the gods (through their temple officials) and private individuals could own slaves. People lost their freedom by being captured in war, by being born to slaves, by voluntarily selling themselves or their children to escape starvation, or by being sold by their creditors to satisfy debts. Foreigners enslaved as captives in war or in raids were considered inferior to citizens who fell into slavery to pay off debts. Children whose parents dedicated them as servants to the gods counted as slaves, but they could rise to prominent positions in the temple administrations.

In general, slaves depended almost totally on other people. They usually worked without pay and lacked nearly all rights. Although slaves frequently married each other and had families and sometimes formed relationships with free persons, masters could sell their slaves at will. Slave owners could buy, sell, demand sex from, beat, or even kill their slaves with impunity. Sumerians, like later Mesopotamians, apparently accepted slavery as a fact of nature, and there is no evidence of any sentiment for abolishing it.

Slaves worked as household servants, craft producers, and farm laborers, but historians dispute their economic significance compared with that of free workers. Most labor for the city-state seems to have been performed by free persons who paid their taxes through work rather than with money (which consisted of measured amounts of food or precious metal; coins were not invented until around 700 B.C.E. in Anatolia). Under certain conditions slaves could gain their freedom: masters' wills could liberate them, or they could purchase their freedom with earnings they could sometimes accumulate.

The Invention of Writing. Writing was also a creation of civilization. Beginning around 3500 B.C.E., the Sumerians invented writing to do accounting because economic transactions had increased in complexity as their populations expanded. Before writing, people drew small pictures on clay tablets to represent objects. At first, these pictographs symbolized concrete objects only, such as a cow. Over several centuries of development, nonpictorial symbols and marks were added to the pictographs to stand for the sounds of spoken language. The final version of Sumerian writing was not an alphabet, in which a symbol represents the sound of a single letter, but a mixed system of phonetic symbols and pictographs that represented the sounds of entire syllables or entire words.

Archaeologists call the Sumerians' fully developed script **cuneiform** (from *cuneus*, Latin for "wedge") because the writers used wedge-shaped marks pressed into clay tablets to record spoken language (Figure 1.1). Other Mesopotamian peoples subsequently adopted cuneiform to write their own languages. For a long time, only a few professionally trained men and women, known as scribes, mastered the new technology of writing. Schools sprang up to teach aspiring scribes, who

cuneiform (kyoo NEE uh form): The earliest form of writing, invented in Mesopotamia and done with wedge-shaped characters.

could then find jobs as accountants. Kings, priests, and wealthy landowners employed scribes to record who had paid their taxes and who still owed.

Writing soon created a new way to hand down stories and beliefs previously preserved only in memory and speech. The scribal schools extended their curriculum to cover nature lore, mathematics, and foreign languages. Written literature provided a powerful new tool for passing on a culture's traditions to later generations. Enheduanna, an Akkadian woman of the twenty-third century B.C.E., composed the world's oldest written poetry whose author is known. She was a priestess, prophetess, and princess, the daughter of King Sargon of the city of Akkad. Her poetry, written in Sumerian, praised the awesome power of the life-giving goddess of love, Inanna (also known as Ishtar): "the great gods scattered from you like fluttering bats, unable to face your intimidating gaze . . . knowing and wise queen of all the lands, who makes all creatures and people multiply." Later princesses, who wrote love songs, lullabies, songs of mourning, and prayers, continued the Mesopotamian tradition of royal women as authors and composers.

Mesopotamian Myths and Religion.

Writing developed into a crucial technology of perpetuating civilization because it provided a new way to record the traditions that helped hold communities together, especially myths (stories about the gods and the origins of civilization that people believed to be true) and religion (people's beliefs and communal practices in worshipping the gods). Mesopotamians believed that the gods had created the universe as a hierarchy demanding obedience from inferiors to superiors. They also believed that the gods controlled all areas affecting human existence, from war to fertility to the weather. The more critical a divinity's power over people's well-being, the more important the god. Each city-state honored a particular major deity as its special protector.

Mesopotamians viewed the gods as absolute masters to whom they owed total devotion, just as ordinary people owed complete obedience to their rulers. They believed that their deities looked like human beings and had human emotions, especially anger and an arbitrary will. Myths empha-































					SAG Head
					NINDA bread
					GU ₇ eat
					AB ₂ cow
					APIN plough
					SUHUR carp
c. 3100 B.C.E.	c. 3000 B.C.E.	c. 2500 B.C.E.	c. 2100 B.C.E.	c. 700 B.C.E. (Neo-Assyrian)	Sumerian reading + meaning



FIGURE 1.1 Cuneiform Writing

The earliest known form of writing developed in different locations in Mesopotamia in the 3000s B.C.E. when people began linking meaning and sound to signs such as these. The scribes who mastered the system used sticks or reeds to press dense rows of small wedge-shaped marks into damp clay tablets or chisels to engrave them on stone. Cuneiform was used for at least fifteen Near Eastern languages and continued to be written for three thousand years. Written about 1900 B.C.E., this cuneiform text records a merchant's complaint that a shipment of copper contained less metal than he had expected. His letter, impressed on a clay tablet several inches long, was enclosed in an outer clay shell, which was then marked with the sender's private seal. This envelope (photo at left) protected the inner text from tampering or breakage. (© The Trustees of the British Museum.)

sized the gods' awesome but unpredictable power and the limits of human control over what the gods might do to them. Mesopotamian divinities such as Enlil, god of the sky, and Ishtar (also called Inanna), goddess of love and war, would punish human beings who offended them by causing disasters like floods and famine.

The long poem *Epic of Gilgamesh* addresses the questions of the nature of civilization in a world ruled by divine central authority and the price that civilization demands from human beings. It tells the adventures of the hero Gilgamesh, who as king of the city of Uruk forces the city's young men to construct a temple and a fortification wall, and compels its young women to sleep with him. When the distressed inhabitants implore Anu, lord of the gods, to grant them a rival to Gilgamesh, Anu calls on Aruru, the mother of the gods, to create a wild man, Enkidu, "hairy all

over . . . dressed as cattle are.” A week of sex with a prostitute tames this brute, preparing him for civilization: “Enkidu was weaker; he ran slower than before. But he had gained judgment, was wiser.” After wrestling to a draw, Enkidu and Gilgamesh become friends and set out to conquer Humbaba (or Huwawa), the ugly, giant monster of the Pine Forest. Gilgamesh later insults the goddess Ishtar, who sends the Bull of Heaven to challenge him and Enkidu. The two comrades prevail, but when Enkidu makes matters worse by hurling the dead bull’s haunch at Ishtar, the gods condemn him to death. In despair over human failure and frailty, Gilgamesh tries to find the secret of immortality, only to have his quest foiled by a thieving snake. He subsequently realizes that immortality for human beings comes only from the fame generated by their achievements, above all building a great city such as Uruk, which encompasses “three square miles and its open ground.” Only memory and gods live forever, he finds.

A late version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* includes a description of a huge flood that covers the earth, recalling the devastating inundations that often struck Mesopotamia. When the gods send the flood, they warn one man, Utnapishtim, of the impending disaster, telling him to build a boat. He loads his vessel with his relatives, artisans, possessions, domesticated and wild animals, and “everything there was.” After a week of torrential rains, he and his passengers disembark to repopulate and rebuild the earth. This story shows that ancient Mesopotamians realized their civilization might be flawed—after all, it angered the gods enough to want to destroy it. Their flood story foreshadows the biblical account of the flood and Noah’s ark. The themes of Mesopotamian mythology, which lived on in poetry and song, also powerfully influenced the mythology of distant peoples, most notably the Greeks.

Religion lay at the heart of Mesopotamian civilization because people believed that the divinely created hierarchy of the universe determined the conditions of their lives. As a result, the priest or priestess of a city’s chief deity enjoyed high status. The most important duty of Mesopotamian priests was to discover the will of the gods by divination. To perform this function, they studied natural signs by tracking the patterns of the stars, interpreting dreams, and cutting open animals to examine their organs for deformities signaling trouble ahead. These inspections helped the people

decide when and how to please their fickle gods, whether by giving them gifts or by celebrating festivals in their honor. During the New Year holiday, for example, the reenactment of the mythical marriage of the goddess Inanna and the god Dumuzi was believed to ensure successful reproduction by the city’s humans, animals, and plants for the coming year.

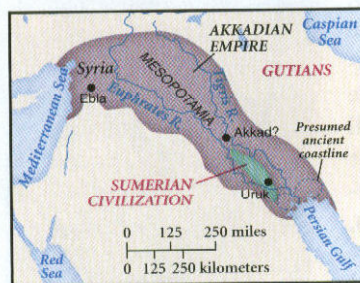
Metals, the Akkadian Empire, and the Ur III Dynasty, c. 2350–c. 2000 B.C.E.

The growth of agriculture and trade promoted ever stronger city-states in Mesopotamia. Their prosperity led them into competition and conflict, as rulers led armies on brutal campaigns to conquer their neighbors and win glory and wealth. Although agricultural production remained the greatest source of wealth, the desire to acquire riches in metals pushed the kings of the Akkadians, a Mesopotamian people from the city-state of Akkad, to wage war to create the world’s first **empire** (a political state in which one or more formerly independent territories or peoples are ruled by a single sovereign power).

Early metallurgy presents a clear example of a recurrent theme in history since the Neolithic Revolution: technological change leading to changes in social

customs and standards. In the case of metal, craftsmen invented ways to smelt ore and to make metal alloys at high temperatures. Pure copper, which had been available for some time, easily lost its shape and edge; bronze, by contrast, a copper-tin alloy hard enough to hold a razor edge, enabled smiths to produce durable and deadly swords, daggers, and spearheads. This new technology of metallurgy led kings and the social elite of the Akkadian empire to seek new and more expensive luxury goods in metal, improved tools for agriculture and construction, and, above all, bronze weapons of war.

The desire to accumulate wealth and to possess status symbols stimulated demand for metals and for the skilled workers who could create lavishly adorned weapons and exquisitely crafted jewelry. Rich men, especially, paid metalworkers to make them bronze swords and daggers decorated with expensive inlays, as on costly guns today. Such



The Akkadian Empire, 2350–2200 B.C.E.

empire: A political state in which one or more formerly independent territories or peoples are ruled by a single sovereign power.

weapons increased visible social differences between men and women because they marked the status of the masculine roles of hunter and warrior.

Mesopotamian monarchs' craving for metals spawned the development of empires. Ambition pushed rulers to acquire metals by conquest rather than by trade, and they started wars to capture territory containing ore mines. The first empire began around 2350 B.C.E., when Sargon, king of Akkad, launched invasions far to the north and south of his homeland in mid-Mesopotamia. In violent campaigns he overtook Sumer and the regions all the way westward to the Mediterranean Sea. Since Akkadians expressed their ideas about their own history in poetry and believed that the gods determined their fate, it was fitting that a poet of around 2000 B.C.E. credited Sargon's success to the favor of the god Enlil: "to Sargon the king of Akkad, from below to above, Enlil had given him lordship and kingship."

Sargon's grandson Naram-Sin continued the family tradition of conquering distant places. By around 2250 B.C.E., he had severely damaged Ebla, a large city whose site has only recently been discovered in modern Syria, more than five hundred miles from his home base in Mesopotamia. Archaeologists have unearthed many cuneiform tablets at Ebla, some of them in more than one language. These discoveries suggest that Ebla thrived as an early center for learning as well as a trading station.

The process of building an empire by force had the unintended consequence of spreading Mesopotamian literature and art throughout the Near East. The Akkadians, like many other peoples of the Near East, spoke a Semitic language unrelated to Sumerian, but in conquering Sumer they took over most of the characteristics of that region's religion, literature, and culture. The other peoples whom the Akkadians overran were then exposed to Sumerian beliefs and traditions, which they in turn adapted to suit their own purposes. In this way, war promoted cultural interaction.

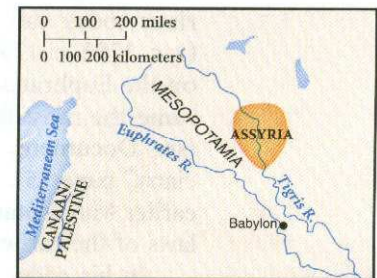
Violence ended the Akkadian Empire. The traditional explanation for the empire's fall has been that the Gutians, a neighboring hill people, overthrew the Akkadian dynasty around 2200 B.C.E. by swooping down from, in the words of a poet, "their land that rejects outside control, with the intelligence of human beings but with the form and stumbling words of a dog." Research has revealed, however, that civil war is a more likely explanation for the Akkadian Empire's demise. A newly resurgent Sumerian dynasty called Ur III (2112–2004 B.C.E.) then seized power in Sumer and presided over a flourishing of Sumerian literature.

The Ur III rulers created a centralized economy, published the earliest preserved law code, and justified their rule by proclaiming their king to be divine. The best-preserved ziggurat was built in their era. Royal hymns, a new literary form, glorified the king; one example reads: "Your commands, like the word of a god, cannot be reversed; your words, like rain pouring down from heaven, are without number."

The development of civilization based on the centralized authority of kings did not bring stability to Mesopotamia. The Ur III kings could not protect their dynasty from monarchy's fatal weakness—its tendency to inspire powerful and ambitious internal rivals to conspire to overthrow the ruling dynasty and take power themselves. When civil war weakened the regime, Amorite marauders from nearby saw their opportunity to conduct damaging raids. The Ur III dynasty collapsed after only a century of rule.

Assyrian, Babylonian, and Canaanite Achievements, 2000–1000 B.C.E.

Assyrian innovations in commerce, Babylonian achievements in law, and the Canaanite invention of the alphabet are important landmarks in the history of Western civilization. New kingdoms emerged in Assyria and Babylonia in the second millennium B.C.E. following the fall of the Akkadian Empire and the Sumerian Ur III dynasty. Their accomplishments are especially remarkable because they occurred while Mesopotamia was experiencing prolonged economic troubles caused by climate change and agricultural pollution. By around 2000 B.C.E. the region's intensive irrigation had the unintended consequence of increasing the salt level of the soil so much that crop yields declined. When an extended period of decreased rainfall, especially in southern Mesopotamia, made the situation worse, the resulting economic stress generated political instability that lasted for centuries. In Canaan (ancient Palestine) on the eastern Mediterranean coast, a lively maritime trade with many diverse regions and the export of timber from inland fostered the growth of independent city-states.



The Kingdom of Assyria, 1900 B.C.E.

The Assyrians and Long-Distance Commerce. The Assyrians inhabited northern Mesopotamia, just east of Anatolia. They took advantage of their geography to build an independent kingdom that

allowed long-distance trade conducted by private entrepreneurs. The city-states of Anatolia were rich sources of wood, copper, silver, and gold for many Mesopotamian states. By acting as intermediaries in this trade between Anatolia and Mesopotamia, the Assyrians became the leading merchants of the Near East. They produced woolen textiles for export to Anatolia in exchange for its raw materials, which they in turn sold to the rest of Mesopotamia.

Centralized state monopolies in which the king's officials managed international trade and redistributed goods according to their notions of who needed what had previously dominated the economies of Mesopotamian city-states. This kind of **redistributive economy** never disappeared in Mesopotamia, but by 1900 B.C.E. the Assyrian kings were allowing individuals to transact large commercial deals on their own initiative. This system allowed private entrepreneurs to maximize profits as a reward for taking risks in business. Private Assyrian investors provided funds to traders to purchase an export cargo of cloth. The traders then formed donkey caravans to travel hundreds of miles to Anatolia, where, if they survived the dangerous journey, they could make huge profits to be split with their investors. Royal regulators settled complaints of trader fraud and losses in transit.

Hammurabi of Babylon and Written Law.

Mesopotamians established well-publicized laws, an important part of Western civilization. The growth of private commerce and property ownership in Mesopotamia created a pressing need to guarantee fairness and reliability in contracts and other business agreements. Mesopotamians believed that the king had a sacred duty to make divine justice known to his subjects by rendering judgments in all sorts of cases, from commercial disputes to crime. Once written down, the record of the king's decisions amounted to what historians today call a law code. King **Hammurabi** (r. c. 1792–c. 1750 B.C.E.) of Babylon, a great city on the Euphrates River in what is today Iraq, became the most famous lawgiver in Mesopotamia (see Document, “Hammurabi’s Laws for Physicians,” page 15). In making his laws, he drew on earlier Mesopotamian legal traditions, such as the laws of the earlier Sumerian Ur III dynasty.

In his code, Hammurabi proclaimed that his goals as ruler were to support “the principles of

truth and equity” and to protect the less powerful members of society from exploitation. He gave a new emphasis to relieving the burdens of the poor as a necessary part of royal justice. The code legally divided society into three categories: free persons, commoners, and slaves. We do not know what made the first two categories different, but they reflect a social hierarchy in which some people were assigned a higher value than others. An attacker who caused a pregnant woman of the free class to miscarry, for example, paid twice the fine levied for the same offense against a commoner. In the case of physical injury between social equals, the code specified “an eye for an eye” (an expression still used today). But a member of the free class who killed a commoner was not executed, only fined.

Most of Hammurabi’s laws concerned the king’s interests as a property owner who leased many tracts of land to tenants in return for rent or services. The laws imposed severe penalties for offenses against property, including mutilation or a gruesome death for crimes ranging from theft to wrongful sales and careless construction. Women had only limited legal rights in this patriarchal society, but they could make business contracts and appear in court. A wife could divorce her husband for cruelty; a husband could divorce his wife for any reason. The law protected the wife’s interests, however, by requiring a husband to restore his wife’s property to her in the case of divorce.

Hammurabi’s laws publicized an ideal of justice, but they did not necessarily reflect everyday reality. Indeed, Babylonian documents show that legal penalties were often less severe than the code specified. The people themselves assembled in courts to determine most cases by their own judgments. Why, then, did Hammurabi have his laws written down? He announces his reasons at the beginning and end of his code: to show Shamash, the Babylonian sun god and god of justice, that he had fulfilled the moral responsibility imposed on him as a divinely installed monarch — to ensure justice and the moral and material welfare of his people: “So that the powerful may not oppress the powerless, to provide justice for the orphan and the widow . . . let the victim of injustice see the law which applies to him, let his heart be put at ease.” The king’s responsibility for his society’s welfare corresponded to the strictly hierarchical and religious vision of society accepted by all Mesopotamian peoples.

City Life and Learning. Hammurabi’s laws offer glimpses into the daily life of Bronze Age Mesopotamian city dwellers. For example, crimes of burglary and assault apparently plagued urban

redistributive economy: A system in which state officials control the production and distribution of goods.

Hammurabi (ha muh RAH bee): King of Babylonia in the eighteenth century B.C.E., famous for his law code.

DOCUMENT

Hammurabi's Laws for Physicians

In Hammurabi's collection of 282 laws, the following decisions set the fees for successful operations and the punishment for physicians' errors. The prescription of mutilation of a surgeon as the punishment for mutilation of a patient from the highest social class (law number 218) squares with the legal principle of equivalent punishment ("an eye for an eye") that pervades Hammurabi's collection.

215. If a physician performed a major operation on a freeman with a bronze scalpel and has saved the freeman's life, or he opened up the eye-socket of a freeman with

a bronze scalpel and has saved the freeman's eye, he shall receive ten shekels¹ of silver.

216. If it was a commoner, he shall receive five shekels of silver.

217. If it was a freeman's slave, the owner of the slave shall give two shekels of silver to the physician.

218. If a physician performed a major operation on a freeman with a bronze scalpel and has caused the freeman's death, or he opened up the eye-socket of a freeman and has destroyed the freeman's eye, they shall cut off his hand.

219. If a physician performed a major operation on a commoner's slave with

a bronze scalpel and has caused his death, he shall make good slave for slave.

220. If he opened up [the slave's] eye-socket with a bronze scalpel and has destroyed his eye, he shall pay half his value in silver.

Source: Adapted from James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with supplement (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 175.

¹A shekel is a measurement of weight (about three-tenths of an ounce), not a coin. A hired laborer earned about one shekel per week. The average price of a slave was about twenty shekels.

residents. Marriages were arranged by the bride's father and the groom and sealed with a legal contract. The detailed laws on surgery make clear that doctors practiced in the cities. Because people believed that angry gods or evil spirits caused serious diseases, Mesopotamian medicine included magic as well as treatment with potions and diet. A doctor might prescribe an incantation as part of his therapy. Magicians or exorcists offered medical treatment that depended primarily on spells and on interpreting signs, such as the patient's dreams or hallucinations.

Archaeological evidence supplements the information on urban life found in Hammurabi's code. City dwellers evidently enjoyed alcoholic drinks in a friendly setting because cities had many taverns and wine shops, often run by women proprietors. Contaminated drinking water caused many illnesses because sewage disposal was rudimentary. Relief from the odors and crowding of the streets could be found in the city's open spaces. The oldest known map in the world, an inscribed clay tablet showing the outlines of the Babylonian city of Nippur about 1500 B.C.E., indicates a substantial area set aside as a city park.

Bringing people together in cities evidently helped promote intellectual developments; Mesopotamian achievements in mathematics and astronomy had a profound effect that endures to this day. Creating maps, for example, required sophisticated techniques of measurement and knowledge of spatial relationships. Mathemati-

cians devised algebra to solve complex problems, and they could derive the roots of numbers. They invented place-value notation, which makes a numeral's position in a number indicate ones, tens, hundreds, and so on. The system of reckoning based on sixty, still used in the division of hours and minutes and degrees of a circle, also comes from Mesopotamia. Mesopotamian expertise in recording the paths of the stars and planets probably arose from the desire to make predictions about the future, in accordance with the astrological belief that the movement of celestial bodies directly affects human life. The charts and tables compiled by Mesopotamian stargazers laid the foundation for later advances in astronomy.

Canaanites, Commerce, and the Alphabet. The Canaanites expanded their population by absorbing merchants from many lands. Some scholars believe that the political structure of the Canaanite communities provided an antecedent for the city-states of Greece. The interaction in their cities of traders and travelers from many different cultures encouraged innovation in the recording of business transactions. This multilingual business environment produced an overwhelmingly important writing technology about 1600 B.C.E.: the alphabet. In this new system of writing, a simplified picture—a letter—stood for only one sound in the language, a dramatic change from complicated scripts such as cuneiform. The alphabet developed in the Canaanite cities later became the basis for

the Greek and Roman alphabets and, hence, of modern Western alphabets. The Canaanite alphabet therefore ranks as one of the most important legacies contributing to the foundation of Western civilization.

REVIEW: How did life change for people in Mesopotamia when they began to live in cities?

Egypt, the First Unified Country, 3050–1000 B.C.E.

The other earliest Western civilization arose in Egypt, in northeastern Africa. The Egyptians built a wealthy, profoundly religious, and strongly centralized civilization ruled by kings. Unlike the Mesopotamian city-states, Egypt became a unified country, the world's first large-scale state, whose prosperity and stability depended on the king's success in maintaining strong central authority over the entire country and defeating enemies. Egypt was located close enough to Mesopotamia to learn from its peoples but was geographically protected enough to develop its own distinct culture, which Egyptians believed was superior to any other. Like the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians believed that a just society was hierarchical and that justice should be dispensed top-down by the rulers to the rest of the people. The Egyptian rulers' belief in the immortality of their souls and the possibility of a happy afterlife motivated them to construct the most imposing tombs in history, the pyramids. Egyptian architecture, art, and religious ideas influenced later Mediterranean peoples, especially the Greeks.

From Egyptian Unification to the Old Kingdom, 3050–2190 B.C.E.

When climate change dried up the grasslands of the Sahara region of Africa about 5000–4000 B.C.E., people slowly migrated from there to the northeast corner of the continent, settling along the Nile River. They had formed a large political state by about 3050 B.C.E., when King Narmer (also called Menes)¹ united the previously separate territories

¹ Representing ancient Egyptian names and dates presents serious problems. Since the Egyptians did not include vowel sounds in their writing, we are not sure how to spell their names. The spelling of names here is taken from *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, edited by Donald B. Redford (2001), with alternate names given in cases where they might be more familiar. Dates are approximate and similarly controversial; the scattered evidence for

of Upper (southern) Egypt and Lower (northern) Egypt. (*Upper* and *Lower* refer to the direction of the Nile River, which begins south of Egypt and flows northward to the Mediterranean.) The Egyptian ruler therefore referred to himself as King of the Two Lands. By around 2687 B.C.E., the monarchs had forged a strong, centralized state, called the Old Kingdom by historians, which lasted until around 2190 B.C.E. (Map 1.2). Unlike their Mesopotamian counterparts, who ruled independent states in a divided land, Egyptian kings built only a few large cities in their united country. The first capital of the united country, Memphis (south of modern Cairo), grew into a metropolis packed with mammoth structures.

Narmer's unification created a state based on the narrow strip of fertile land on either side of the Nile, a ribbon of green fields zigzagging along the river's course for seven hundred miles southward from the Mediterranean Sea. The great desert flanking the fields on both sides protected Egypt from invasion, except through the northern Nile delta and from Nubia in the south. Under normal weather conditions, the Nile overflowed its channel for several weeks each year, when melting snow from the mountains of central Africa swelled its waters. This annual flood enriched the soil with nutrients from the river's silt and diluted harmful mineral salts. Unlike the random and catastrophic floods of the Mesopotamian rivers, the flooding of the Nile was predictable and beneficial. Trouble came only if dry weather in the mountains kept the flood from occurring. The surpluses that Egypt's multitude of farmers usually produced made the country prosperous. Date palms, vegetables, grass for pasturing animals, and grain grew in abundance. From their ample supplies of grain, the Egyptians made bread and beer, a staple beverage. Other sources of Egyptian wealth were the metal ores found in its deserts, the seaborne commerce conducted in its ports, and the goods exchanged with its African neighbors.

Egypt's diverse population included people whose skin color ranged from light to dark. Many ancient Egyptians would be regarded as black by modern racial classification, a distinction ancient people did not observe. The modern controversy over whether Egyptians were people of color is therefore anachronistic; if asked, ancient Egyptians

Egyptian chronology embroils scholars in "a world of uncertainty and acrimonious debate" (Redford, *The Oxford Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, p. xi; for an explanation of the problems, see the article titled "Chronology and Periodization," vol. 1, pp. 264–68). The dates appearing in this book are compiled with as much consistency as possible from articles in *The Oxford Encyclopedia* and in the "Egyptian King List" given at the back of each of its volumes.

would presumably have answered that they identified themselves by geography, language, religion, and traditions. Like many ancient groups, the Egyptians called themselves simply *The People*. Later peoples, especially the Greeks, admired Egyptian civilization for its great antiquity and religion.

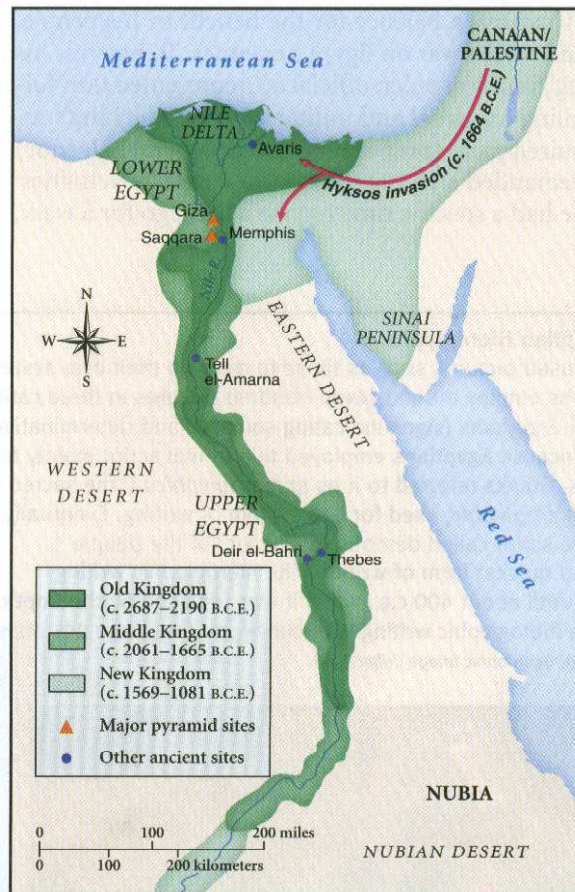
Although early Egyptians absorbed knowledge from both the Mesopotamians and their southern African neighbors, the Nubians, they developed their own scripts rather than using cuneiform. To write formal and official texts they used an ornate pictographic script known as **hieroglyphs** (Figure 1.2, page 18). They also developed other scripts for everyday purposes.

Nubian society perhaps deeply influenced early Egypt. A Nubian social elite lived in dwellings much grander than the small huts housing most of the population. Egyptians interacted with Nubians while trading for raw materials such as gold, ivory, and animal skins, and some scholars argue that Nubia's hierarchical political and social organization influenced the development of Egypt's politically centralized Old Kingdom. Eventually, however, Egypt's greater power led it to dominate its southern neighbor.

Religion and the Old Kingdom's Central Authority.

Although the Egyptians created a new path for civilization by creating a unified country under a central authority, keeping the country unified and stable turned out to be difficult. When the kings were strong, as during the Old Kingdom, the country was peaceful and rich, with flourishing international trade, especially along the eastern Mediterranean coast. However, when regional governors became rebellious and the king was weak, political instability resulted.

The king's power and success depended on his fulfilling his religious obligations. Like the Mesopotamians, Egyptians centered their lives on religion. They worshipped a great variety of gods, who were often shown in paintings and sculptures as creatures with both human and animal features, such as the head of a jackal or a bird atop a human body. This style of representing deities did not mean that people worshipped animals, but rather that they believed the gods each had a particular animal through which they revealed themselves to human beings. At the most basic level, Egyptian gods were associated with powerful natural objects, emotions, qualities, and technologies—examples are Re, the sun god; Isis, the



MAP 1.2 Ancient Egypt

Arid deserts closely embraced the Nile River, which provided Egyptians with water to irrigate their fields and a highway for traveling north to the Mediterranean Sea and south to Nubia. The only easy land route into and out of Egypt lay through the northern Sinai peninsula into the coastal area of the eastern Mediterranean; Egyptian kings always fought to control this region to secure the safety of their land.

goddess of love and fertility; and Thoth, the god of wisdom and the inventor of writing.

Egyptians regarded their king as a divinity in human form, identified with the hawk-headed god Horus. In the Egyptian view, the king's rule was divine because he helped generate *maat*, the supernatural force that brought order and harmony to human beings if they maintained a stable hierarchy. The goddess **Maat** embodied this force, which was the source of justice in a world that would, the Egyptians believed, fall into violent disorder if the king did not rule properly. To rule according to *maat*, the king made law, kept the forces

hieroglyphs: The ancient Egyptian pictographic script for writing official texts.

Maat (MAH aht): The Egyptian goddess (“What Is Right”) embodying truth, justice, and cosmic order.

of nature in balance for the benefit of his people, and waged war on Egypt's enemies. To buttress his legitimacy as ruler, official art represented him fulfilling his ritual and military duties. The king's required piety (proper religious belief and behavior) demanded strict regulation of his daily activities: he had a specific time to take a bath, go for a walk,

or make love to his wife. Most important, he had to ensure the country's fertility and prosperity. Thus, the king was supposed to guarantee a proper flooding of the Nile by performing his duties justly and in accordance with traditional order. A failure of the flood gravely weakened the king's authority and encouraged rebellions.

FIGURE 1.2 Egyptian Hieroglyphs

Ancient Egyptians used pictures such as these to develop their own system of writing around 3000 B.C.E. Egyptian hieroglyphs employ around seven hundred pictures in three categories: ideograms (signs indicating things or ideas), phonograms (signs indicating sounds), and determinatives (signs clarifying the meaning of the other signs). Because Egyptians employed this formal script mainly for religious inscriptions on buildings and sacred objects, Greeks referred to it as *ta hieroglyphica* ("the sacred carved letters"), from which comes the modern word *hieroglyphic*, used for this system of writing. Eventually, Egyptians also developed the handwritten cursive script called demotic (Greek for "of the people"), a much simpler and quicker form of writing. The hieroglyphic writing system continued until about 400 C.E., when it was replaced by the Coptic alphabet. Compare hieroglyphic writing with cuneiform (see page 11). (Victor R. Boswell, Jr. © National Geographic Image Collection.)



Hieroglyph	Meaning	Sound value
	vulture	glottal stop
	flowering reed	consonantal I
	forearm and hand	ayin
	quail chick	W
	foot	B
	stool	P
	horned viper	F
	owl	M
	water	N
	mouth	R
	reed shelter	H
	twisted flax	slightly guttural
	placenta (?)	H as in "loch"
	animal's belly	slightly softer than h
	door bolt	S
	folded cloth	S
	pool	SH
	hill	Q
	basket with handle	K
	jar stand	G
	loaf	T

Pyramids and the Afterlife. Successful Old Kingdom rulers used expensive building programs to demonstrate their piety and exhibit their status atop the social hierarchy. In the desert outside Memphis, the Old Kingdom rulers erected the most stunning manifestations of their status and their religion: their huge tombs. These tombs—the pyramids (see photograph below)—formed the centerpieces of elaborate groups of buildings for royal funerals and religious ceremonies. Although the pyramids were not the first monuments built from enormous worked stones (that honor goes to temples on the Mediterranean island of Malta), they rank as the grandest.

Old Kingdom rulers spent vast resources on these huge complexes to proclaim their divine status and protect their mummified bodies for existence in the afterlife. King Khufu (r. 2609–2584 B.C.E.; also known as Cheops) commissioned the hugest monument of all—the Great Pyramid at Giza. At about 480 feet high, it stands taller than a forty-story skyscraper. Covering more than thirteen acres and 760 feet long on each side, it required more than two million blocks of limestone, some of which weighed fifteen tons apiece. Its exterior blocks were quarried along the Nile and then floated to the site on barges. Free workers (not slaves) dragged them up ramps into position using rollers and sleds.

The Old Kingdom rulers' lavish preparations for death reflected their strong belief in an after-

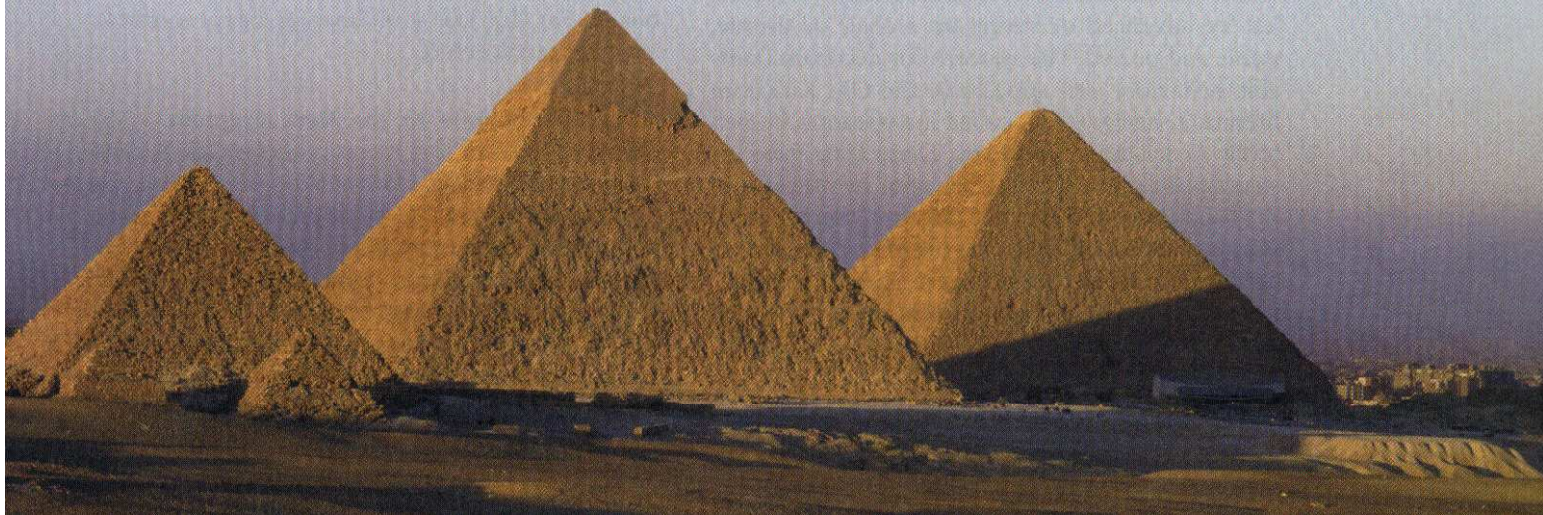
life. A hieroglyphic text addressed to the god Atum expresses the hope that the ruler will have a secure afterlife: "O Atum, put your arms around King Neferkare Pepy II [r. c. 2300–2206 B.C.E.], around this construction work, around this pyramid. . . . May you guard lest anything happen to him evilly throughout the course of eternity." The royal family equipped their tombs with elaborate delights for their existence in the world of the dead. Gilded furniture, sparkling jewelry, exquisite objects of all kinds—the dead kings had all this and more placed beside their coffins, in which rested their mummies. Archaeologists have even uncovered two full-sized cedar ships buried next to the Great Pyramid, meant to carry King Khufu on his journey into eternity.

Hierarchy and Order in Egyptian Society. Old Kingdom rulers organized Egyptian society in a tightly structured hierarchy to preserve their authority and therefore support what they regarded as the proper order. Egyptians believed that their ordered society was superior to any other, and they despised foreigners, such as the Near Easterners criticized by Merikare's father.

The king and queen topped the hierarchy. Brothers and sisters in the royal family could marry each other, perhaps because such matches were believed necessary to preserve the purity of the royal line and to imitate the marriages of the gods. The priests, royal administrators, provincial

The Pyramids at Giza in Egypt

The kings of the Egyptian Old Kingdom constructed massive stone pyramids for their tombs, the centerpieces of large complexes of temples and courtyards stretching down to the banks of the Nile or along a canal leading to the river. The inner burial chambers lay at the end of long, narrow tunnels snaking through the pyramids' interiors. The biggest pyramid shown here is the so-called Great Pyramid of King Khufu (aka Cheops), erected at Giza (in the desert outside what is today Cairo) in the twenty-sixth century B.C.E. and soaring almost 480 feet high, several times taller than the famous Parthenon temple in fifth-century B.C.E. Athens (see page 79). (© John Lawrence/Super Stock.)



governors, and commanders of the army ranked next in the hierarchy. Then came the free common people, most of whom worked in agriculture. Free workers had heavy obligations to the state. For example, in a system called *corvée* labor, the kings commanded commoners to work on the pyramids during slack times for agriculture. The state fed, housed, and clothed them while they performed this seasonal work, but their labor was a way of paying taxes. Rates of taxation reached 20 percent on the produce of free farmers. Slaves captured in foreign wars served the royal family and the priests in the Old Kingdom, but privately owned slaves working in free persons' homes or on their farms did not become numerous until after the Old Kingdom. The king hired mercenaries, many from Nubia, to form the majority of the army.

Egypt preserved more of the gender equality of earlier times than did its neighbors. Women generally enjoyed the same legal rights as free men. They could own land and slaves, inherit property, pursue lawsuits, transact business, and initiate divorces. Old Kingdom portrait statues show the equal status of wife and husband: each figure is the same size and sits on the same kind of chair. Men dominated public life, while women devoted themselves mainly to private life, managing their households and property. When their husbands went to war or were killed in battle, however, women often took on men's work. Women could therefore serve as priestesses, farm managers, or healers.

The formalism of Egypt's art illustrates how much the civilization valued order and predictability. Almost all Egyptian sculpture and painting comes from tombs or temples, testimony to its people's deep desire to maintain proper relations with the gods. Old Kingdom artists excelled in stonework, from carved ornamental jars to massive portrait statues of the kings. These statues represent the subject either standing stiffly with the left leg advanced or sitting on a chair or throne, stable and poised. The concern for decorum (suitable behavior) also appears in the Old Kingdom literature the Egyptians called instructions, known today as **wisdom literature**. These texts gave instructions for appropriate behavior by officials. In the *Instruction of Ptahhotep*, for example, the royal minister Ptahhotep instructs his son, who will succeed him in office, not to be arrogant or overconfident just because he is well educated and to seek advice from ignorant people as well as the wise.

wisdom literature: Texts giving instructions for proper behavior by officials.

The Middle and New Kingdoms in Egypt, 2061–1081 B.C.E.

The Old Kingdom began to disintegrate in the late third millennium B.C.E. The causes remain mysterious. One suggestion is that climate changes caused the annual Nile flood to shrink and the ensuing agricultural failure discredited the regime—people believed the kings had betrayed Maat. Economic hard times probably fueled rivalry for royal rule between ambitious families, and civil war between a northern and a southern dynasty then ripped apart the Kingdom of the Two Lands. This destruction of the Old Kingdom's unity allowed regional governors to increase their power. Some governors, who had supported the kings while times were good, seized independence for their regions. It was the troubles of this period that made Merikare's father's advice so pressing: famine and civil unrest during the so-called First Intermediate Period (2190–2061 B.C.E.) thwarted all attempts to reestablish political unity.

The Middle Kingdom. The kings of what historians label the Middle Kingdom (2061–1665 B.C.E.) gradually restored the strong central authority their Old Kingdom predecessors had lost. They waged war to extend the boundaries of Egypt farther south, while to the north they expanded diplomatic and trade contacts in the eastern Mediterranean region and with the island of Crete.

Middle Kingdom literature reveals that the reclaimed national unity contributed to a deeply felt pride in the homeland. The Egyptian narrator of *The Story of Sinuhe*, for example, reports that he lived luxuriously during a forced stay in Syria but still longed to return: "Whichever deity you are who ordered my exile, have mercy and bring me home! Please allow me to see the land where my heart dwells! Nothing is more important than that my body be buried in the country where I was born!" For this lost soul, love for Egypt outranks even personal riches.

From Hyksos Rule to the New Kingdom. The Middle Kingdom lost its unity during the Second Intermediate Period (1664–1570 B.C.E.), when the kings proved too weak to suppress foreigners who had migrated into Egypt and gradually set up independent communities. By 1664 B.C.E., diverse bands of a Semitic people originally from the eastern Mediterranean coast took advantage of the troubled times to become Egypt's rulers. The Egyptians called these foreigners Hyksos (literally, "rulers of the foreign countries"). Recent archae-

ological discoveries have emphasized the role of Hyksos settlers in transplanting elements of foreign culture to Egypt: their capital, Avaris, boasted wall paintings done in the Minoan style current on the island of Crete. Some historians think the Hyksos also introduced such innovations as bronze-making technology, new musical instruments, humpbacked cattle, and olive trees; they certainly promoted frequent contact with other Near Eastern states. They also strengthened Egypt's capacity to make war by expanding the use of chariots and more powerful bows.

After a long struggle with the Hyksos, the leaders of Thebes, in southern Egypt, reunited the kingdom; the resultant series of royal dynasties is called the New Kingdom (1569–1081 B.C.E.). The kings of this period, known as pharaohs, rebuilt central authority by restricting the power of regional governors and promoted a renewed sense of national identity. To prevent invasions, the pharaohs built on the Hyksos innovations in military technology to create a standing army, still employing many mercenaries, and a military elite to lead it. Recognizing that knowledge of the rest of the world was necessary for safety, they engaged in regular diplomacy with neighboring monarchs to increase their cosmopolitan contacts. In fact, the pharaohs regularly exchanged letters on matters of state with their “brother kings,” as they called them, in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and the eastern Mediterranean region.

Warrior Pharaohs. The New Kingdom pharaohs sent their reorganized military into foreign wars to gain territory and show their superiority to foreigners. They waged many campaigns abroad and presented themselves in official propaganda and art as the incarnations of warrior gods. They invaded lands to the south to win access to gold and other precious materials, and they fought up and down the eastern Mediterranean coast to control that land route into Egypt. Their imperialism has today earned them the epithet *warrior pharaohs*.

Massive riches supported the power of the warrior pharaohs. Egyptian traders exchanged local fine goods, such as ivory, for foreign luxury goods, such as wine and olive oil transported in painted pottery from Greece. Egyptian royalty displayed their wealth most conspicuously in the enormous sums spent to build stone temples. Queen Hatshepsut (r. 1502–1482 B.C.E.), for example, built her massive mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri, near Thebes, including a temple dedicated to the god Amun (or Amen), to buttress her claim to divine birth and the right to rule. After

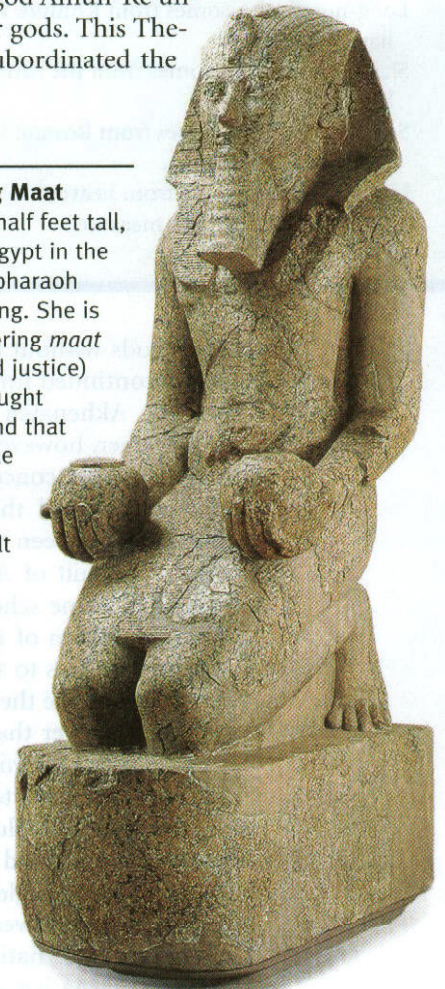
her husband (who was also her half brother) died, Hatshepsut proclaimed herself “female king” as co-ruler with her young stepson. In this way, she shrewdly sidestepped Egyptian political ideology, which made no provision for a queen to reign in her own right. She often had herself represented in official art as a king, with a royal beard and male clothing.

Religious Tradition and Upheaval. Egyptians believed that their many gods oversaw all aspects of life and death. Glorious temples honored the traditional gods, and by the time of the New Kingdom their cults (that is, worship traditions and rituals) enriched the religious life of the entire population. The principal festivals of the gods involved lavish public celebrations. A calendar based on the moon governed the dates of religious ceremonies. (The Egyptians also developed a calendar for administrative and fiscal purposes that had 365 days, divided into 12 months of 30 days each, with the extra 5 days added before the start of the next year. (Our modern calendar derives from it.)

The early New Kingdom pharaohs from Thebes promoted their state god Amun-Re until he overshadowed the other gods. This Theban cult incorporated and subordinated the

Hatshepsut as Pharaoh Offering Maat

This granite statue, eight and a half feet tall, portrayed Hatshepsut, ruler of Egypt in the early fifteenth century B.C.E., as pharaoh wearing a beard and male clothing. She is performing her royal duty of offering *maat* (the divine principle of order and justice) to the gods. Egyptian religion taught that the gods “lived on maat” and that the land's rulers were responsible for providing it. Hatshepsut had this statue, and many others, placed in a huge temple she built outside Thebes, in Upper Egypt. Compare her posture to that of the statue of a woman grinding grain on page P-13. Why do you think Hatshepsut is shown as calm and relaxed, despite having her toes severely flexed? (*The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1929 (29.3.1)* Photograph by Schecter Lee. Photograph © 1986 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.)



DOCUMENT

Declaring Innocence on Judgment Day in Ancient Egypt

The Egyptian collection of spells known today as the Book of the Dead instructed the dead person how to make a declaration of innocence to the gods judging the person's fate on the day of judgment. The declaration listed evils that the person denied having committed; presumably the divine judges could tell whether the deceased was speaking truthfully. This selection of denials, each directed to a specific deity, reveals what Egyptians regarded as just and proper behavior.

Wide-of-Stride who comes from On: I have not done evil.

Flame-grasper who comes from Kheraha: I have not robbed.

Long-nosed who comes from Khmun: I have not coveted.

Shadow-eater who comes from the cave: I have not stolen.

Savage-faced who comes from Rostau: I have not killed people.

Lion-Twins who come from heaven: I have not trimmed the measure.

Flint-eyed who comes from Kehm: I have not cheated.

Fiery-one who comes backward: I have not stolen a god's property.

Bone-smasher who comes from Hnes: I have not told lies.

Flame-thrower who comes from Memphis: I have not seized food.

Cave-dweller who comes from the west: I have not sulked.

White-toothed who comes from Lakeland: I have not trespassed.

Blood-eater who comes from slaughterplace: I have not slain sacred cattle.

Entrail-eater who comes from the tribunal: I have not extorted.

Lord of Maat who comes from Maaty: I have not extorted.

Wanderer who comes from Bubastis: I have not spied.

Pale-one who comes from On: I have not prattled.

Villain who comes from Anjdty: I have contended only for my goods.

Fiend who comes from slaughterhouse: I have not committed adultery.

Examiner who comes from Min's temple: I have not defiled myself.

Chief of the nobles who comes from Imu: I have not caused fear.

Wrecker who comes from Huy: I have not trespassed.

Disturber who comes from the sanctuary: I have not been violent.

Child who comes from On: I have not been deaf to Maat.

Foreteller who comes from Wensi: I have not quarreled.

Bastet who comes from the shrine: I have not winked.

Backward-face who comes from the pit: I have not copulated with a boy.

Flame-footed who comes from the dusk: I have not been false.

Dark-one who comes from darkness: I have not reviled.

Source: Translation from Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), vol. 2, 126–27.

other gods without denying either their existence or the continued importance of their priests. The pharaoh Akhenaten (r. 1372–1355 B.C.E.) went a step further, however: he proclaimed that official religion would concentrate on worshipping Aten, who represented the sun. Akhenaten made the king and the queen the only people with direct access to the cult of Aten; ordinary people had no part in it. Some scholars identify Akhenaten's religion as a form of monotheism, but its underlying purpose was to strengthen his rule.

To showcase the royal family and the concentration of power that he sought, Akhenaten built a new capital for his god at Tell el-Amarna (see Map 1.2). He tried to force his revised religion on the priests of the old cults, but they resisted. Historians have blamed Akhenaten's religious zeal for leading him to neglect the practical affairs of ruling the kingdom, weakening its defense, but recent research on international correspondence found at Tell el-Amarna has shown that the pharaoh used

diplomacy in an attempt to pit foreign enemies against each other to prevent them from becoming strong enough to threaten Egypt. His policy failed, however, when the Hittites defeated the Mitanni, Egypt's allies in eastern Syria. Akhenaten's religious reform also died with him. During the reign of his successor, Tutankhamun (r. 1355–1346 B.C.E.)—famous today through the discovery in 1922 of his rich, unlooted tomb—the cult of Amun-Re reclaimed its leading role. The crisis created by Akhenaten's attempted reform emphasizes the overwhelming importance of religious conservatism in Egyptian life and the control of religion by the ruling power.

Life and Belief in the New Kingdom. Despite the period's wars, ordinary Egyptians' daily lives still revolved around their labor and the annual flood of the Nile. During the months when the river stayed between its banks, they worked their fields, rising early in the morning to avoid the searing

heat. When the flooding halted agricultural work, the king required them to labor on his building projects. They lived in workers' quarters erected next to the building sites. Although slaves became more common as household workers in the New Kingdom, free workers, performing labor instead of paying taxes in money, did most of the work on this period's mammoth royal construction projects. Written texts reveal that workers lightened their burden by singing songs and telling adventure stories. They labored extensively: the majority of temples remaining in Egypt today come from the New Kingdom.

Ordinary people worshipped many different deities, especially gods they hoped would protect them in their daily lives. They venerated Bes, for instance, a dwarf with the features of a lion, as a protector of the household. They carved his image on amulets, beds, headrests, and the handles of mirrors. By the time of the New Kingdom, ordinary people believed that they, too, could have a blessed afterlife and therefore put great effort into preparing for it. Those who could afford the cost arranged to have their tombs outfitted with all the goods needed for the journey to their new existence. Most important, they had their corpses mummified so that they could have a body in the afterlife. Making a mummy required removing the brain and internal organs, drying the body with mineral salts to the consistency of old leather, and wrapping it in linen soaked with ointments. Every mummy had to travel to the afterlife with a copy of the *Book of the Dead*, whose collection of magical instructions warded off dangers and coached the dead person through his or her trial before the gods. The text listed many denials of sins that the dead person had to be able to recite, including "I have not committed crimes against people; I have not mistreated cattle; I have not robbed the poor; I have not caused pain; I have not caused tears" (see Document, "Declaring Innocence on Judgment Day in Ancient Egypt," page 22).

Magic played a large role in the lives of Egyptians. They sought spells and charms, both written and oral, from professional magicians to promote their eternal salvation, ward off demons, smooth the rocky course of love, exact revenge on enemies, and find relief from disease and injury. Egyptian doctors knew many medicinal herbs

(knowledge that was passed on to later civilizations), and they could perform demanding surgeries, including opening the skull. Still, no doctor could cure severe infections; as in the past, sick people continued to rely on the help of supernatural forces through prayers and spells.

REVIEW: How did religion guide peoples' lives in ancient Egypt?

The Hittites, Minoans, and Mycenaeans, 2200–1000 B.C.E.

The first civilizations in the central Mediterranean region emerged in Anatolia, dominated by the warlike Hittite kingdom (see Map 1.1); on the large island of Crete and nearby islands, home to Minoan civilization; and on the Greek mainland, where Mycenaean civilization grew rich from raiding and trade (Map 1.3). As early as 6000 B.C.E., people from Anatolia began migrating westward and



MAP 1.3 Greece and the Aegean Sea, 1500 B.C.E.

A closely packed jumble of mountains, islands, and seas defined the geography of Greece. The distances between settlements were mostly short, but rough terrain and seasonally stormy sailing made travel a chore. The distance from the mainland to the largest island in this region, Crete, where Minoan civilization arose, was sufficiently long to keep Cretans isolated from the turmoil of most of later Greek history.

southward to inhabit islands in the Mediterranean Sea. By around 2200 B.C.E., the rich civilization of the Minoans had emerged on the island of Crete and other islands in the Aegean Sea. The Anatolian peoples who stayed on the mainland also developed civilizations, of which the most aggressive and ambitious was the kingdom of the Hittites, who came into conflict with New Kingdom Egypt.

The peoples of all these civilizations enjoyed advanced technologies, elaborate architecture, striking art, a marked taste for luxury, and extensive trade contacts with Egypt and the Near East. The Hittites, like the Egyptians, created a unified state under a single central authority. The Minoans and the Mycenaeans, like the Mesopotamians, established separate states. All inhabited a dangerous world in which regional disruptions from around 1200 to 1000 B.C.E. ultimately overwhelmed their prosperous cultures. Nevertheless, their accomplishments paved the way for the later civilization of Greece, which would greatly influence the course of Western history.

The Hittites, 1750–1200 B.C.E.

By around 1750 B.C.E. the Hittites had made themselves the most powerful people of central Anatolia. They had migrated from the Caucasus area, between the Black and Caspian seas, and overcome

indigenous peoples to set up their centralized kingdom. It flourished because they inhabited a fertile upland plateau in the peninsula's center, excelled in war and diplomacy, and controlled trade in their region and southward. The Hittites' military campaigns knifing southward threatened Egypt's possessions on the eastern Mediterranean coast.

Since the Hittites spoke an Indo-European language, they belonged to the linguistic family that eventually populated most of Europe. The original Indo-European speakers, who were pastoralists and raiders, had migrated as separate groups into Anatolia and Europe, including Greece, from somewhere in western Asia. Recent archaeological discoveries there of graves of women buried with weapons suggest that women in these groups originally occupied positions of leadership in war and peace alongside men; the prominence of Hittite queens in documents, royal letters, and foreign treaties perhaps sprang from that tradition.

As in other early civilizations, rule in the Hittite kingdom depended on religion. Hittite religion combined worship of the gods of Indo-European religion with worship of deities inherited from the original Anatolian population. The king served as high priest of the storm god, and Hittite belief demanded that he maintain a strict purity in his life as a demonstration of his justice and guardianship of social order. His drinking water, for example, always had to be strained. So strong was this insistence on purity that the king's water carrier was executed if so much as one hair was found in the water. Like Egyptian kings, Hittite rulers felt responsible for maintaining the gods' goodwill toward their subjects. King Mursili II (r. 1321–1295 B.C.E.), for example, issued a set of prayers begging the gods to end a plague: "What is this, o gods, that you have done? Our land is dying. . . . We have lost our wits, and we can do nothing right. O gods, whatever sin you behold, either let a prophet come forth to identify it . . . or let us see it in a dream!"

The kings conducted many religious ceremonies in



Hittite Royal Couple Worshipping the Weather God

This relief sculpture from Alaca Höyük, in north central Anatolia, shows a Hittite king and queen worshipping the weather god, as he was called, who is represented here by his sacred animal, the bull, standing on an altar. In Hittite mythology, the weather god was thought to ride over the mountains in a chariot pulled by bulls. He was a divine hero who overcame evil by slaying a great dragon. At first the monster defeated him, but the goddess Inaras tricked the dragon into getting drunk so that the weather god could kill him. What characteristics of bulls and dragons made them relevant for expressing religious ideas? (Hirmer Fotoarchiv.)

their capital, Hattusas, which grew into one of the most impressive cities of its era. Ringed by massive defensive walls and stone towers, it featured huge palaces aligned along straight, gravel-paved streets. Sculptures of animals, warriors, and, especially, the royal rulers decorated public spaces. Hittite kings maintained their rule by forging personal alliances—cemented by marriages and oaths of loyalty—with the noble families of the kingdom.

These rulers aggressively employed their troops to expand their power. In the periods during which ties between the kings and the nobles remained strong and the kingdom therefore preserved its unity, they launched extremely ambitious military campaigns. In 1595 B.C.E., for example, the royal army raided as far as Babylon, destroying that kingdom. Scholars no longer accept the once popular idea that the Hittites owed their success in war to a special knowledge of making weapons from iron, although their craftsmen did smelt iron, from which they made ceremonial implements. (Weapons made from iron did not become common in the Mediterranean world until well after 1200 B.C.E.—at the end of the Hittite kingdom.) Their army excelled in the use of chariots, and perhaps this skill gave them an edge.

The economic strength of the Hittite kingdom flowed from control over long-distance trade routes for essential raw materials, especially metals. The Hittites worked mightily to dominate the lucrative trade moving between the coast and inland northern Syria. The Egyptian New Kingdom pharaohs fiercely resisted Hittite expansion and power in this region. The Anatolian kingdom proved too strong, however, and in the bloody battle of Kadesh, around 1274 B.C.E., the Hittites checked the Egyptians in Syria, leading to a stalemate. Fear of Assyria eventually led the Hittite king to negotiate with his Egyptian rival, and the two war-weary kingdoms became allies sixteen years after the battle of Kadesh by agreeing to a treaty that is a landmark in the history of international diplomacy. Remarkably, both Egyptian and Hittite copies of the treaty survive. In it, the two monarchs pledged to be “at peace and brothers forever.” The alliance lasted, and thirteen years later the Hittite king gave his daughter to his Egyptian “brother” as his wife.

The Minoans, 2200–1400 B.C.E.

Study of early Greek civilization traditionally begins with the people today known as Minoans, who inhabited the island of Crete and islands in the Aegean Sea by the late third millennium. The

word *Minoan* was applied after the archaeologist Arthur Evans (1851–1941) searched the island for traces of King Minos, renowned in Greek myth as a fierce ruler who built the first great navy. Scholars today are not sure whether to count the Minoans as the earliest Greeks because they are uncertain whether the Minoan language, whose decipherment remains controversial, was related to Greek.

Minoans apparently had no written literature, only official records. They wrote these records in a script today called Linear A. If further research confirms a recent suggestion that Minoan was a member of the Indo-European family of languages (the ancestor of many languages, including Greek, Latin, and, much later, English), then Minoans can be seen as the earliest Greeks. Regardless of what the nature of the Minoans’ language turns out to be, their interactions with the mainland deeply influenced Greek civilization.

By around 2200 B.C.E., Minoans on Crete and nearby islands had created what scholars call a **palace society**, in recognition of its sprawling, multichambered buildings that apparently housed both the rulers and their families and servants and the political, economic, and religious administration of the state. Minoan rulers combined the functions of ruler and priest, dominating both politics and religion. The palaces seem to have been largely independent, with no single one imposing unity. The general population clustered around the palaces in houses adjacent to one another; some of these settlements reached the size and density of small cities. On Crete, Knossos, which Evans thought had been Minos’s headquarters, is the most famous such palace complex. Other, smaller settlements dotted outlying areas of the island, especially on the coast. The Minoans’ excellent ports supported extensive international trade, above all with the Egyptians and the Hittites.

The most surprising feature of Minoan communities is that they did not build elaborate defensive walls. Palaces, towns, and even isolated country houses apparently saw no need to fortify themselves. The remains of the newer palaces—such as the one at Knossos, with its hundreds of rooms in five stories, indoor plumbing, and colorful scenes painted on the walls—have led some historians to the controversial conclusion that Minoans avoided war among themselves, despite their having no single central authority over their

palace society: Minoan and Mycenaean social and political organization centered on multichambered buildings housing the rulers and the administration of the state.



Wall Painting from Knossos, Crete

Minoan artists painted with vivid colors on plaster to enliven the walls of buildings. This painting from the palace at Knossos depicted an acrobatic performance in which a youth leaped in an aerial somersault over the back of a charging bull. Some scholars speculate this dangerous activity was a religious ritual instead of just a circus act; do you think this could be possible? Unfortunately, time and earthquakes have severely damaged most Minoan wall paintings, and the versions we see today are largely reconstructions painted around surviving fragments of the originals. (©National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece / The Bridgeman Art Library)

independent settlements. Others object to this romantic vision of peaceful Minoans, arguing that the most powerful Minoans on Crete dominated some neighboring islands. Recent discoveries of tombs on Crete have revealed weapons caches, and a find of bones cut by knives has even raised the possibility of human sacrifice. The prominence of women in palace frescoes and the numerous figurines of buxom goddesses found on Minoan sites have also prompted speculation that Minoan society was female-dominated, but no texts have come to light to verify this. Minoan art certainly depicts women prominently and nobly, but the same is true of contemporary civilizations that men controlled. More archaeological research is needed to resolve the controversies concerning the nature of Minoan civilization.

The development of **Mediterranean polyculture**—the cultivation of olives, grapes, and grains in a single, interrelated agricultural system—profoundly increased the prosperity of Minoan society. This innovation made the most efficient use of a farmer's labor by combining crops that required intense work at different sea-

sons. This system, which still dominates Mediterranean agriculture, had two major consequences. First, the combination of crops provided a healthy diet (the Mediterranean diet, as it is called in today's medical community), which in turn stimulated population growth. Second, agriculture became both more diversified and more specialized, increasing production of the valuable products olive oil and wine.

Agricultural surpluses spurred the growth of specialized crafts, just as they had in Mesopotamia and Egypt. To store and transport surplus food, Minoan artisans manufactured huge storage jars (the size of a modern refrigerator), in the process creating another specialized industry. Crafts workers, producing their sophisticated wares using time-consuming techniques, no longer had time to grow their own food or make the goods, such as clothes and lamps, they needed for everyday life. Instead, they exchanged the products they made for food and other goods. In this way, Minoan society experienced increasing economic interdependence.

The vast storage areas in Minoan palaces suggest that the rulers, like some Mesopotamian kings before them, controlled this interdependence through a redistributive economic system.

Mediterranean polyculture: The cultivation of olives, grapes, and grains in a single, interrelated agricultural system.

The Knossos palace, for example, held hundreds of gigantic jars capable of storing 240,000 gallons of olive oil and wine. Bowls, cups, and dippers crammed storerooms nearby. Palace officials would have decided how much each farmer or crafts producer had to contribute to the palace storehouse and how much of those contributions would then be redistributed to each person in the community for basic subsistence or as an extra reward. In this way, people gave the products of their labor to the local authority, which redistributed them as it saw fit.

The Mycenaeans, 1800–1000 B.C.E.

Ancestors of the Greeks had moved into the mainland region of Greece by perhaps 8000 B.C.E.; the first civilization definitely identified as Greek because of its Indo-European language arose in the early second millennium B.C.E., about the same time as the Hittite kingdom. These first Greeks are called Mycenaeans, a name derived from the hill-top site of Mycenae, famous for its rich graves, multichambered palace, and massive fortification walls. Located in the Peloponnese (the large peninsula forming southern Greece; see Map 1.3), Mycenae dominated its local area, but neither it nor any other settlement ever ruled all of Bronze Age Greece. Instead, the independent communities of Mycenaean civilization vied with one another in a fierce competition for natural resources and territory.

The nineteenth-century German millionaire Heinrich Schliemann was the first to discover treasure-filled graves at Mycenae. The burial objects revealed a warrior culture organized in independent settlements and ruled by aggressive kings. Constructed as stone-lined shafts, the graves contained entombed dead, who had taken hordes of valuables with them: golden jewelry, including heavy necklaces festooned with pendants, gold and silver vessels, bronze weapons decorated with scenes of wild animals inlaid in precious metals, and delicately painted pottery.

In his excitement at finding treasure, Schliemann proudly announced that he had found the grave of Agamemnon, the legendary king who commanded the Greek army against Troy, a city in northwestern Anatolia, in the Trojan War. Homer, Greece's first and most famous poet, immortalized this war in his epic poem *The Iliad*. Archaeologists now know the shaft graves date to around 1700–1600 B.C.E., long before the Trojan War could have taken place. Schliemann, who paid for his own excavation at Troy to prove to skeptics that the city had really existed, infuriated scholars with

his self-promotion. But his passion to confirm that Greek myth preserved a kernel of historical truth spurred him on to the work at Mycenae, which provided the most spectacular evidence for mainland Greece's earliest civilization.

Mycenaean Interaction with Minoan Crete. Since the hilly terrain of Greece had little fertile land but many useful ports, settlements tended to spring up near the coast. Mycenaean rulers enriched themselves by dominating local farmers, conducting naval raids, and participating in seaborne trade. Palace records inscribed on clay tablets reveal that the Mycenaeans operated under a redistributive economy. On the tablets scribes made detailed lists of goods received and goods paid out, recording everything from chariots to livestock, landholdings, personnel, and perfumes, even broken equipment taken out of service. Like the Minoans, Mycenaeans apparently did not use writing to record the oral literature that scholars believe they created.

A special kind of burial chambers, called *tholos* tombs—spectacular underground domed chambers built in beehive shapes with closely fitted stones—shows that some Mycenaeans had become very rich by about 1500 B.C.E. The architectural details of the tholos tombs and the style of the burial goods placed in them testify to the far-flung expeditions for trade and war that Mycenaean rulers conducted throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Above all, however, they show a close connection with Minoan civilization because they display many motifs clearly inspired by Minoan designs.

Underwater archaeology has revealed the influence of international commerce during this period in promoting cultural interaction. Divers have discovered, for example, that a late-fourteenth-century B.C.E. shipwreck off Uluburun in Turkey carried such a mixed cargo and such varied personal possessions—from Canaan, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, Babylon, and elsewhere in the Near East—that it is impossible to attach a single nationality to this tramp freighter.

The sea brought the Mycenaean and Minoan civilizations into close contact, but they remained different in significant ways. The Mycenaeans spoke Greek and made burnt offerings to the gods; the Minoans did neither. The Minoans extended their religious worship outside their centers, establishing sacred places in caves, on mountaintops, and in country villas, while the mainlanders concentrated the worship of their gods inside their walled communities. When the Mycenaeans started building palaces in the fourteenth century B.C.E., unlike the Minoans they designed them around *megarons*—rooms with



Decorated Dagger from Mycenae

The hilltop fortress and palace at Mycenae was the capital of Bronze Age Greece's most famous kingdom. The picture of a lion hunt inlaid in gold and silver on this sixteenth-century B.C.E. dagger expressed how wealthy Mycenaean men saw their roles in society: as courageous hunters and warriors overcoming the hostile forces of nature. The nine-inch blade was found in a circle of graves inside Mycenae's walls, where the highest-ranking people were buried with their treasures as evidence of their status. (*Nimatallah / Art Resource, NY.*)

prominent ceremonial hearths and thrones for the rulers. Some Mycenaean palaces had more than one megaron, which could soar two stories high with columns to support a roof above the second-floor balconies.

Documents found in the palace at Knossos reveal that by around 1400 B.C.E. the Mycenaean had acquired dominance over Crete, possibly in a war over commerce in the Mediterranean. The documents were tablets written in **Linear B**, a pictographic script based on Minoan Linear A. The twentieth-century architect Michael Ventris proved that Linear B was used to write not Minoan, but a different language: Greek. Because the Linear B tablets date from before the final destruction of Knossos in about 1370 B.C.E., they show that the palace administration had been keeping its records in a foreign language for some time and therefore that Mycenaean were controlling Crete well before the end of Minoan civilization. By the middle of the fourteenth century B.C.E., then, the Mycenaean had displaced the Minoans as the Aegean region's preeminent civilization.

War in Mycenaean Society. By the time Mycenaean took over Crete, war at home and abroad was the principal concern of well-off Mycenaean men, a tradition that they passed on to later Greek civilization. Contents of Bronze Age tombs in Greece reveal that no wealthy man went to his grave without his war equipment. Armor and weapons were so central to a Mycenaean man's identity that he could not do without them, even in death. Warriors rode into battle in expensive hardware—lightweight, two-wheeled chariots pulled by horses. These revolutionary vehicles, perhaps introduced by Indo-Europeans migrating

from Central Asia, first appeared in various Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies not long after 2000 B.C.E.; the first picture of such a chariot in the Aegean region occurs on a Mycenaean grave marker from about 1500 B.C.E. Wealthy people evidently desired this new form of transportation not only for war but also as proof of their social status.

The Mycenaean seem to have spent more on war than on religion. In any case, they did not construct any giant religious buildings like Mesopotamia's ziggurats or Egypt's pyramids. Their most important deities were male gods concerned with war. The names of gods found in the Linear B tablets reveal that Mycenaean passed down many divinities to the Greeks of later times.

The Period of Calamities, 1200–1000 B.C.E.

A state of political equilibrium, in which kings corresponded with one another and traders traveled all over the area, characterized the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world around 1300 B.C.E. Within a century, however, calamity had struck almost every major political state in the region, including Egypt, some kingdoms of Mesopotamia, and the Hittite and Mycenaean kingdoms. Neither the civilizations united under a single central authority nor the ones with separate and independent states survived. This period of international violence from about 1200 to 1000 B.C.E. remains one of the most fascinating and disturbing puzzles in the history of Western civilization.

The best clue to what happened comes from Egyptian and Hittite records. They document many foreign invasions in this period, especially from the sea. According to an inscription, in about 1190 B.C.E. a warrior pharaoh defeated a powerful coalition of seaborne invaders from the north, who had fought their way to the edge of Egypt. These

Linear B: The Mycenaean's pictographic script for writing Greek.

Sea Peoples, as historians call them, comprised many different groups. Some had been mercenary soldiers in the armies of rulers whom they deserted; some were raiders by profession. Many may have been Greeks. The famous story of the Trojan War probably recalls this period of calamities because it portrays a seaborne Greek army attacking Troy and the surrounding region in Anatolia.

Apparently no single, unified group of Sea Peoples launched a tidal wave of violence. Rather, many different bands devastated the region. A chain reaction of attacks and flights in a recurring and expanding cycle put even more bands on the move. The turmoil reached far inland. The Babylonian kingdom collapsed, the Assyrians were confined to their homeland, and much of western Asia and Syria was devastated.

The reasons for these widespread calamities remain mysterious, but their consequences for the eastern Mediterranean region are clear. The once mighty Hittite kingdom fell around 1200 B.C.E., when raiders cut off its trade routes for raw materials. Invaders razed its capital city, Hattusas, which never revived. Egypt's New Kingdom repelled the Sea Peoples with a tremendous military effort, but the raiders destroyed the Egyptian long-distance trade network. Power struggles between the pharaohs and the leading priests undermined political stability. By the end of the New Kingdom, around 1081 B.C.E., Egypt had shrunk to its original territorial core along the Nile's banks. The calamities ruined Egypt's credit. For example, when an eleventh-century B.C.E. Theban temple official traveled to Phoenicia to buy cedar for a ceremonial boat, the city's ruler demanded cash in advance. Although the Egyptian monarchy hung on, power struggles between pharaohs and priests, made worse by frequent attacks from abroad, prevented the reestablishment of centralized authority. No Egyptian dynasty ever again became an aggressive international power.

In Greece, the troubles were homegrown. The Mycenaeans reached the zenith of their power around 1400–1250 B.C.E. The enormous domed tomb at Mycenae, called the Treasury of Atreus, testifies to the riches of this period. The tomb's elaborately decorated facade and soaring roof reveal the self-confidence of the Mycenaean warrior princes. The last phase of the extensive palace at Pylos on the west coast of the Peloponnese also dates from this time. It boasted glorious wall paintings, storerooms bursting with food, and a royal

bathroom with a built-in tub and intricate plumbing. But these prosperous Mycenaeans did not escape the widespread calamities that began around 1200 B.C.E. Linear B tablets record the disposition of troops to the coast to guard the palace at Pylos at this time. The palace inhabitants of eastern Greece constructed defensive walls so massive that the later Greeks thought giants had built them. These fortifications would have protected coastal palaces against seafaring attackers, who could have been either outsiders or Greeks. The wall around the inland palace at Gla in central Greece, however, which foreign raiders could not easily reach, confirms that, above all, Mycenaean communities had to defend themselves against other Mycenaean communities.

In Greece itself, then, the Sea Peoples apparently did relatively little damage. Rather, internal turmoil and major earthquakes destroyed Mycenaean civilization. Archaeology offers no evidence for the ancient tradition that Dorian Greeks invading from the north caused the destruction. Near-constant civil war by jealous local rulers overburdened the elaborate administrative balancing act necessary for the palaces' redistributive economies and hindered recovery from earthquake damage. The violence killed many Mycenaeans, and the disappearance of the palace-based redistributive economy put many others on the road to starvation. The calamity uprooted many of the remaining Greeks from their homes and forced them to wander abroad in search of new places to settle. Like people from the earliest times, they had to move to build a better life.

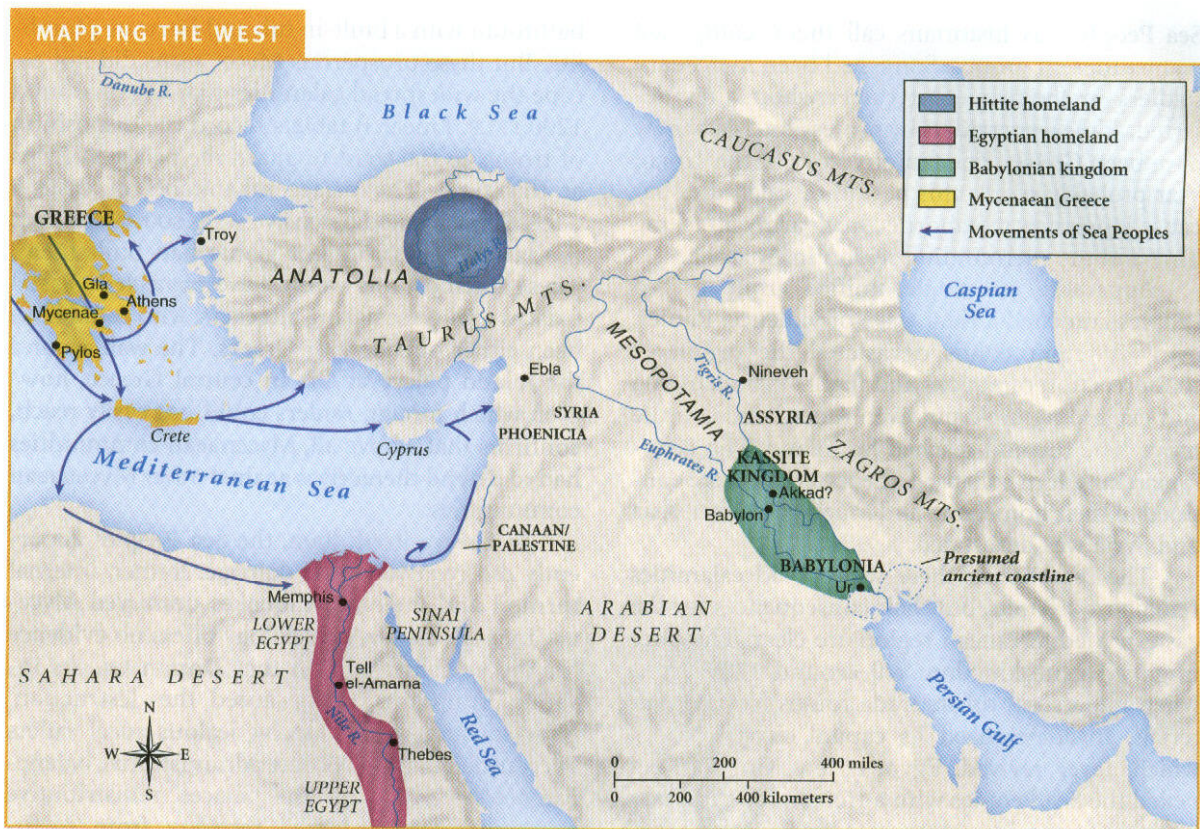
REVIEW: How did war determine the fates of the early civilizations of Anatolia, Crete, and Greece?

Conclusion

The best way to define Western civilization is to study its history, which begins in Mesopotamia and Egypt; these cultures in turn influenced the later civilization of Greece. Cities first arose in Mesopotamia around 4000 to 3000 B.C.E. Hierarchy had characterized society to some degree from the very beginning, but it, along with patriarchy, grew more pronounced once civilization and political states with centralized authority became widespread.

Trade and war were constants, both aiming in different ways at profit and glory. Indirectly, they often generated cultural interaction by putting

Sea Peoples: The diverse groups of raiders who devastated the eastern Mediterranean region in the period of calamities around 1200–1000 B.C.E.



The Period of Calamities, 1200–1000 B.C.E.

Bands of wandering warriors and raiders set the eastern Mediterranean aflame at the end of the Bronze Age. This violence displaced many people and ended the power of the kingdoms of the Egyptians, the Hittites, and the Mycenaeans. Even some of the Near Eastern states well inland from the eastern Mediterranean coast felt the effects of this period of unrest, whose causes remain mysterious.

civilizations into close contact to learn from one another. Technological innovation was also a prominent characteristic of this long period. The invention of metallurgy, monumental architecture, mathematics, and alphabetic writing greatly affected people's lives. Religion was at the center of society, with the gods seen as demanding just and righteous conduct from everyone.

The Mediterranean Sea was a two-edged sword for the early civilizations that grew up around and near it: as a highway for transporting goods and ideas, it was a boon; as an artery for conveying attackers, it was a bane. Ironically, the raids of the Sea Peoples that smashed the prosperity of the eastern Mediterranean region around 1200–1000 B.C.E. also set in motion the forces that led to the next step in our story, the resurgence of Greece. Strife among Mycenaean rulers turned the regional unrest of those centuries into a local catastrophe; fighting each other for dominance, they so weakened their monarchies that they could not recover after natural disasters. To an outside observer, Greek society by around 1000 B.C.E. might

have seemed destined for irreversible economic and social decline, even oblivion. Chapter 2 shows how wrong this prediction would have been. After a difficult period of economic and population decline, Greeks invented a new form of social and political organization and breathed renewed life into their culture, inspired by their neighbors in the Near East and Egypt.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- For suggested references, including Web sites, for topics in this chapter, see page SR-1 at the end of the book.
- For additional primary-source material from this period, see Chapter 1 in *Sources of THE MAKING OF THE WEST*, Third Edition.
- For Web sites and documents related to topics in this chapter, see *Make History* at bedfordstmartins.com/hunt.

CHAPTER REVIEW

KEY TERMS AND PEOPLE

civilization (4)	Hammurabi (14)
polytheism (5)	hieroglyphs (17)
monotheism (5)	Maat (17)
city-state (7)	wisdom literature (20)
ziggurats (8)	palace society (25)
cuneiform (10)	Mediterranean polyculture (26)
empire (12)	Linear B (28)
redistributive economy (14)	Sea Peoples (29)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the challenges of defining Western civilization?
2. How did life change for people in Mesopotamia when they began to live in cities?
3. How did religion guide peoples' lives in ancient Egypt?
4. How did war determine the fates of the early civilizations of Anatolia, Crete, and Greece?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the environmental factors affecting the emergence of the world's first civilizations in Mesopotamia and Egypt.
2. What were the advantages and disadvantages of living in a unified country under a single central authority compared to living in a region with separate city-states?

For practice quizzes, a customized study plan, and other study tools, see the Online Study Guide at bedfordstmartins.com/hunt.

IMPORTANT EVENTS

4000–1000 B.C.E.	Bronze Age in southwestern Asia, Egypt, and Europe	2112–2004 B.C.E.	Ur III dynasty rules in Sumer
4000–3000 B.C.E.	Mesopotamians invent writing and establish first cities	2061–1665 B.C.E.	Middle Kingdom in Egypt
3050 B.C.E.	Narmer (Menes) unites Upper and Lower Egypt into one kingdom	1792–1750 B.C.E.	Hammurabi rules Babylon and issues his law code
2687–2190 B.C.E.	Old Kingdom in Egypt	1750 B.C.E.	Hittites establish their kingdom in Anatolia
2350 B.C.E.	Sargon establishes the world's first empire in Akkadia	1569–1081 B.C.E.	New Kingdom in Egypt
2300–2200 B.C.E.	Enheduanna, princess of Akkad, composes poetry	1400 B.C.E.	The Mycenaeans build their first palaces in Greece and take over Minoan Crete
2200 B.C.E.	Minoans build their first palaces	1274 B.C.E.	Battle of Kadesh in Syria between the Egyptians and the Hittites
		1200–1000 B.C.E.	Period of calamities ends many kingdoms