2 Early Middle Eastern and Northeast African Civilizations

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2.1 CHRONOLOGY

Ancient Mesopotamia

c. 10,000 BCE	Beginnings of the Agricultural Revolution
c. 3500 BCE	Appearance of Sumerian city-states in lower Mesopotamia
c. 3200 BCE	Early use of cuneiform
c. 2900 BCE	Production of bronze
2334 – 2100 BCE	Akkadian Empire
c. 2000 BCE	Gilgamesh first recorded in cuneiform
1792 – 1595 BCE	Babylonian Empire
1792 – 1750 BCE	Reign of Hammurabi
900 – 612 BCE	Assyrian Empire
626 – 539 BCE	New Babylonian Empire
605 – 562 BCE	Reign of Nebechadnezzar

Ancient Israel

c. 1300 – 1200 BCE	Israelites leave Egypt (following Moses)
c. 1050 – 1010 BCE	Israelites establish a kingdom
c. 1000 – 970 BCE	Reign of King David
c. 979 – 930 BCE	Reign of King Solomon
931 BCE	Israel divides into two kingdoms
586 – 539 BCE	Babylonian captivity of Israelites

Northeast Africa (Egypt and Nubia)

c. 7000 BCE	Beginnings of Agricultural Revolution in Northeast Africa
c. 6000 – 3500 BCE	Desiccation of the Sahara Desert pushed people towards Nile River Valley

c. 4000 BCE	Towns and villages grew along the Nile River
c. 3100 BCE	Unification of Egypt
3100 – 2600 BCE	Egyptian Archaic Period
2660 – 2160 BCE	Egyptian Old Kingdom
2400 – 1450 BCE	The Kingdom of Kerma
2040 – 1640 BCE	Egyptian Middle Kingdom
1640 – 1570 BCE	Egypt's Second Intermediate Period (Egypt under Hyksos Rule)
1530 – 1070 BCE	Egyptian New Kingdom
1350 – 1325 BCE	Amarna Period (under Pharaoh Akhenaten)
1040 – 332 BCE	Egyptian Late Period
750 – 656 BCE	The Kingdom of Kush ruled Egypt, creating the "Ethiopian Dynasty"
750 – 593 BCE	Kingdom of Kush (with capital at Napata)
656 – 639 BCE	Assyrians occupied Egypt
593 BCE	Egyptian army sacked Napata, the capital of Kush
593 BCE	The Kingdom of Kerma moved its capital to Meroe
525 BCE	Persian conquest of Egypt
323 BCE	Alexander the Great conquered Egypt/Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt
30 BCE	Roman conquest of Egypt

2.2 INTRODUCTION: DEFINING CIVILIZATION

The term **civilization** often elicits mostly idealized images of ancient empires, monumental architecture, and the luxurious lives of ruling classes. Civilization, however, is a tricky term. In the United States, students of history studied Western Civilization, almost exclusively, through the 1950s. In their studies, civilizations were advanced societies with urban centers, rooted in European or Middle Eastern culture. America's origins in these western civilizations was used to explain our own high level of development. However, more recent scholars have definitely broadened the geographical focus by recognizing that worldwide from 3500 to 1000 BCE at least seven independent civilizations emerged in different regions. These recent scholars also continue to debate the definition of civilization, and the current compromise amongst World Historians is to recognize characteristics that civilizations tended to share. Common characteristics of civilizations included food surpluses, higher population densities, social stratification, systems of taxation, labor specialization, regular trade, and accumulated learning (or knowledge passed down from generation to generation). The list here is not all-inclusive by any means, but it indicates the complexity of the societies that scholars have labeled civilizations.

In addition to heated debates about its exact definition, civilization is a loaded term, meaning that it can contain a value judgment. If we use the term carelessly, it seems to indicate that some societies are deemed civilized and worthy of inclusion, while others are uncivilized and thus not worth our study. In part, our sensitivity to this issue is a response to the tendency of past historians, including many of those working in Europe in the 1800s, to assume that there was a

natural progression from an uncivilized state to civilization. These historians viewed people who had values, ways of living, and religious beliefs different than theirs as uncivilized. They further believed that these allegedly uncivilized peoples were behind or needed to catch up with those who were civilized. Today, World Historians try to appreciate the great diversity of human experiences and consciously remove these sorts of value judgments. World Historians avoid assumptions that some societies in the past were better or further along than others. Therefore, many World Historians remain wary of the uncritical use of the term civilization.

For our purposes, let us leave aside any value judgments. Societies labeled as civilizations were not inherently better than any others. In fact, as we will see, civilizations demonstrated various vulnerabilities. Considering things like war, slavery, and the spread of diseases, there were sometimes advantages to living outside the nexus of civilizations. For example, in comparing societies, scholars have found that in many instances people residing in decentralized states were healthier and lived longer than did their counterparts in early civilizations. However, people living in societies with social stratification, labor specialization, and trade usually left more written records and archeological evidence, which historians can analyze to narrate our past. The available resources mean that civilizations tend to be better represented in the written historical records. As you read about past civilizations, keep in mind that historians are currently enhancing our understanding of societies that perhaps remained mobile, rejected hierarchies, or preserved their histories orally. These societies were also part of our shared past, even if they are harder to study or have received less scholarly attention.

This chapter focuses on early civilizations in the Fertile Crescent and Northeast Africa. The civilizations in these regions left written records. They also all initially had economies based on farming and developed alongside rivers. Their locations alongside rivers allowed populations in the Fertile Crescent and Northeast Africa to grow the surplus food that they used to support urbanization, social stratification, labor specialization, and trade.

2.3 QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR READING

1. Explain why the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers were significant for ancient Mesopotamians.
2. Describe the characteristics of civilizations that were found in ancient Mesopotamia.
3. What does the *Epic of Gilgamesh* tell scholars about Mesopotamian values, views of the environment, and conceptions of the afterlife?
4. How did the rulers of ancient Mesopotamian empires attempt to bring together and control the people within their realms?
5. Describe the legacies of the civilization in ancient Mesopotamia.
6. Explain the central beliefs of Judaism that are evident in the early written tradition.

7. How did the United Kingdom of Israel develop and who were its key leaders?
8. Describe how the Israelites and their traditions have been influential.
9. How did the Nile River and the region's climate and geography influence the development of Egyptian civilization?
10. Which characteristics of civilizations were seen in Ancient Egypt?
11. What major continuities were evident throughout Dynastic Egypt?
12. Describe Egypt's intermediate periods.
13. Explain the significance of pyramids.
14. Describe the major innovations of the New Kingdom.
15. What are the legacies of Ancient Egypt?
16. Compare the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt.
17. What were the defining features of Nubian civilization?
18. Describe Kerma and Kush's relationship with Egypt.

2.4 KEY TERMS

- Amarna Period
- Assyrian Empire
- Aten
- Cataract
- City-states
- Civilization
- Covenant
- Cuneiform
- Desiccation
- Divine kingships
- Empire
- Exodus
- Hammurabi's Code
- Hieroglyphics
- Kerma
- Kush
- Levant
- Meroe
- Meroitic
- Mesopotamia
- Middle Kingdom
- Monotheism
- Nebuchadnezzar II
- New Kingdom
- Nile River
- Nubia

- Old Kingdom
- Ostraca
- Palette of Narmer
- Polytheistic
- Prophets
- Pyramids
- Sargon of Akkad
- Sumerian King List
- The Ten Commandments
- Valley of Kings
- Western Deffufa
- Ziggurat

2.5 ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

Mesopotamia is located in an area known as the Fertile Crescent. Archeologists have found some of the earliest known sites of agricultural production in the Fertile Crescent. Although much of this region received little or irregular rainfall, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers provided large amounts of freshwater, facilitating agricultural production and the development of early civilizations. The Greeks later recognized the significance of the river systems to these ancient societies and referred to the region as "the Land between the Rivers" or **Mesopotamia**.

The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers both originate in the Taurus Mountains of eastern Anatolia and flow southward to empty into the Persian Gulf. The rivers carry and deposit silt downstream, enriching the soil. In general, the richer soils and availability of water in areas that in the north otherwise had little rain, or else towards the south had concentrated months of rainfall followed by long, dry spells, encouraged settlement near the rivers. The areas closer to the Persian Gulf, known as Lower Mesopotamia, in particular, were attractive to early settlers because they had extremely fertile soils. People built some of the earliest cities, including Uruk, Eridu, and Ur, in Lower Mesopotamia.

While the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers did provide water to the region, their floods were unpredictable and could even be catastrophic when they washed away entire settlements. In response, the

Map 2.1 | The Fertile Crescent
Author: User "Ras67"
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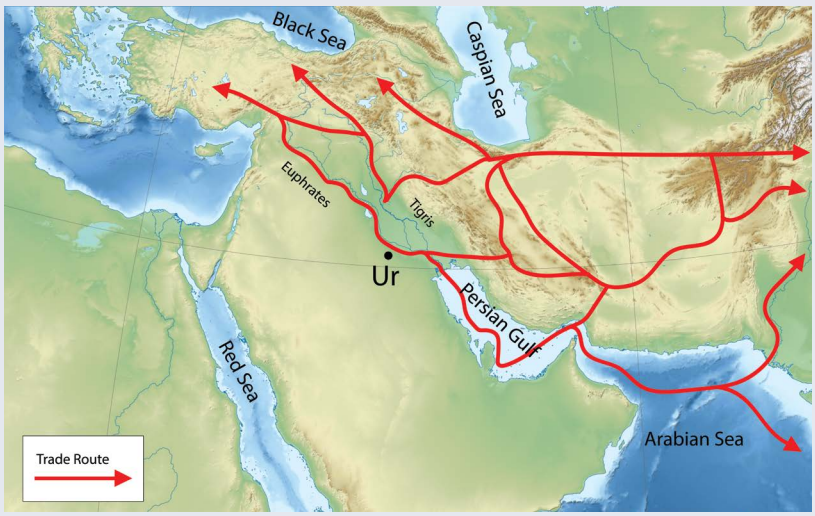
region's residents created irrigation canals and drainage ditches to control the flow of water. They also stored water in reservoirs to use during the dry months of the year. Additionally, in parts of Lower Mesopotamia, the courses of the rivers and their tributaries changed frequently, so people either had to move to follow the water's new path or divert a river to continue supplying water for their settlement. As regular access to water supported agricultural surpluses and population growth, people tended to fare better against the unpredictability of the floods, seasonal changes, and the rivers' changing courses when they lived in settlements capable of maintaining irrigation canals, drainage ditches, and water reservoirs.

The rivers offered another benefit to ancient Mesopotamians. Just as the rivers were definitely important to meet people's everyday needs for water and for agricultural production, so they also facilitated trade. While people made use of local resources, like mud to build their homes, in general, Lower Mesopotamia lacked other desired resources, including wood, stone, and precious metals. Traders were able to use the rivers to bring in these resources from Assyria, Anatolia, the Levant, and areas adjacent to the Persian Gulf. Early Mesopotamians also obtained goods from as far away as what today are northern Pakistan and India. Merchants used overland routes that crossed the Iranian Plateau and sea routes, exchanging Mesopotamian products like grains and textiles for luxury goods from the east. Royal cemeteries show that by 2500 BCE Mesopotamian elites were buried with a variety of imports, including beads brought from the Indus River Valley. The rivers and the overland trade routes also facilitated communication and, with it, the sharing of ideas and technologies.



Map 2.2 | Trade Routes in Early Mesopotamia | In the third millennium BCE, people in Lower Mesopotamia used river routes to trade northward. They also used sea routes through the Persian Gulf, and they connected with traders to the east by crossing the Iranian Plateau.
Author: Corey Parson
Source: Original Work
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2.6 SUMERIAN CITY-STATES

Lower Mesopotamia, or the southern areas of Mesopotamia towards the Persian Gulf, drew settlers, who moved to take advantage of rich soils and the availability of water in the area commonly known as Sumer. The people who lived in Sumer are generally referred to as

Sumerians. Prior to 3,000 BCE, Sumerians, whose origins remain a subject of debate, founded a number of independent cities in Lower Mesopotamia. In these cities, Sumerians had organized religions, centralized governments, social hierarchies, and access to trade networks. As these cities expanded, their leaders claimed control over adjacent territories, forming at least a dozen **city-states**, which became the basic organizational structure of Sumerian civilization in the third millennium BCE. By incorporating the surrounding territories into city-states, urban centers were able to draw on more resources.

Sumerian cities had certain characteristics in common. First, a temple complex or a ziggurat was usually the visual focus of the urban landscape. Sumerians believed that their entire city belonged to its main deity, and built a massive temple, the most important building in the city, to be the dwelling place of their city's main god or goddess. A complex that comfortably housed many of the priests and priestesses who served the city's deity surrounded each temple. In addition to attending to the religious needs of the community, temples complexes also owned land, managed industries, were involved in trade, and acted as banks. Their wide-ranging roles meant that temples often had additional outbuildings, like granaries and storage sheds, in the surrounding countryside. Sumerians were **polytheistic**, meaning they worshipped multiple gods and goddesses. Because Sumerians believed each god had a family, they also built smaller shrines and temples dedicated to these divine family members. Therefore, each city would have a number of temples while many Sumerian homes had small altars dedicated to other gods. Sometimes, urban temples or ritual spaces were built atop a **ziggurat,** a solid rectangular tower made of sun-dried mud bricks. Archaeological evidence shows that temple complexes were expanded and rebuilt over time and, by the late third millennium BCE, temples in many of the Sumerian city-states were raised on platforms or else situated on a ziggurat. The towering architecture of the ziggurat stressed the significance of the temple to the surrounding community. The best-preserved ziggurat, the Great Ziggurat of Ur, was constructed with an estimated 720,000 baked bricks and rose to a height of about 100 feet. The people of Ur constructed this ziggurat for their patron deity, the moon goddess Nanna. They likely brought regular offerings to Nanna and also received food rations from the Great Ziggurat of Ur.

Figure 2.1 | The Great Ziggurat of Ur | Located in what is today the Dhi Qar Province of Iraq, Sumerians originally built the ziggurat in the Third Dynasty of Ur (c. 2100 BCE). It has been restored several times since, including fairly recently in the 1980s.
Author: User "GDK"
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Viewing nature as unpredictable, people brought offerings to their city's temple complexes or ziggurat, hoping to

please the gods who controlled the natural forces of their world. Priests and priestesses collected and redistributed the offerings, demonstrating the vital roles they played in Sumerian society. The relatively privileged position of priests and priestesses at the temple complex also shows Sumerian social stratification (the development of a hierarchy) and how agricultural surpluses supported the specialization of labor. Some of the early leaders of Sumerian cities may have been "priest-kings," who attained elevated positions through their association with the temples. The later rulers of city-states definitely supported the temples, claiming to be acting on behalf of the gods who brought divine favor to their followers.

Sumerian city-states had local rulers, who lived in large palaces, but most of these local rulers were not considered kings. So far, archeologists have dated the earliest known royal palaces to c. 2600 BCE and conclude that Sumerian city-states had centralized governments with secular rulers by at least that timeframe. While there does seem to have been a sense of inhabiting a shared space in Southern Mesopotamia, referred to as "the Land" in written records, city-states had distinctive identities. In part, their distinctive identities revolved around their main deity. The rulers of city-states alternately supported, competed with, and fought against one another. The **Sumerian King List** (Figure 2.2), a manuscript that listed early kings and described their reigns (with some presumably fictive and exaggerated elements), provides evidence of these alliances, competition, and war. For example, it describes En-mebarages as the second to last king of the 1st Dynasty of Kish, "...who carried away as spoil the weapons of the land of Elam, became king, and reigned 900 years..."[1] Local rulers often came to power after proving themselves militarily.

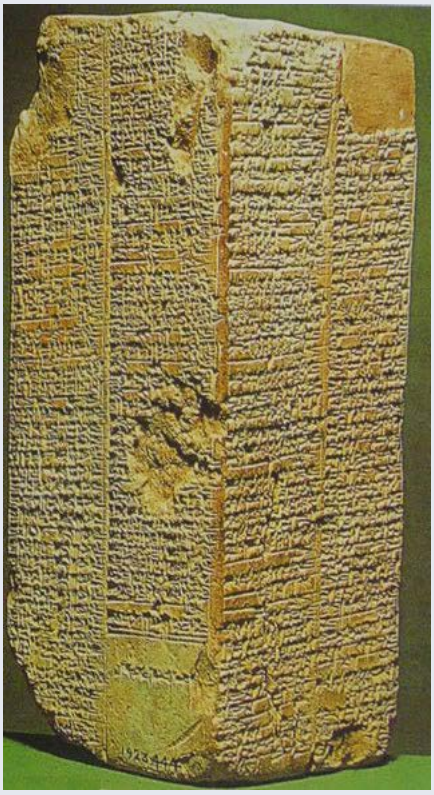

Figure 2.2 | The Sumerian King List
Author: Taiwania Justo
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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Furthermore, the Sumerian King List recognized only rulers who had established control over multiple city-states as kings (with the title of *lugal* in the Sumerian language) belonging to distinct dynasties. While it lasted, a dynasty generally passed down the kingship through the male line. According to the Sumerian King List, the seat of power, held by hereditary kings, shifted from city-state to city-state with the rise and fall of dynasties through the third millennium BCE. Significantly, the Sumerian King List began its recorded history "when kingship came down from heaven," legitimizing secular kings through their association with gods.[2] Sumerian kings, often along with more local rulers, led armies, collected taxes, organized labor for state projects, and meted out justice. At the top of the hierarchy and with control over

1 J.N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History*, (London: Routledge, 1994): 28.
2 Ibid.

multiple city-states, kings expected obedience from local rulers and their subjects, and support from the priests and priestesses of the temples.

Kings, local rulers, priests, and priestesses held influential positions in Sumerian societies. However, farmers, taken as a whole, made up an estimated 90% of the population. Other skilled people included animal-breeders, merchants, craftspeople, fishermen, doctors, soldiers, architects, and scribes. Surplus agricultural production collected as tribute as well as wealth generated by trade supported such labor specialization. One important outcome of labor specialization was innovation in metalworking. In approximately 2900 BCE, metalworkers began producing bronze, which was stronger than copper. Stronger weapons and farming tools gave Sumerians advantages when it came to combat and agricultural production.

Social stratification is further evident as some Sumerians and even institutions, including temples, owned slaves. Slaves performed a variety of tasks like construction, weaving, agricultural and domestic labor, tending animals, and even administrative work as scribes. Some slaves were chattel slaves, meaning that society treated them as property with no rights. Usually, chattel slaves were prisoners of war or slaves bought from outside communities. They were branded by barbers or tattoo artists and forced to work at the will of their masters. If they tried to run away, the law required slaves to be returned. The more widespread type of servitude in most Sumerians societies was likely debt slavery, which was generally temporary until a debtor paid off a loan and its interest. Over the past century or so, archaeologists have added a great deal to our understanding of Sumerian social distinctions through their work at numerous excavation sites, but many gaps in our knowledge still exist.

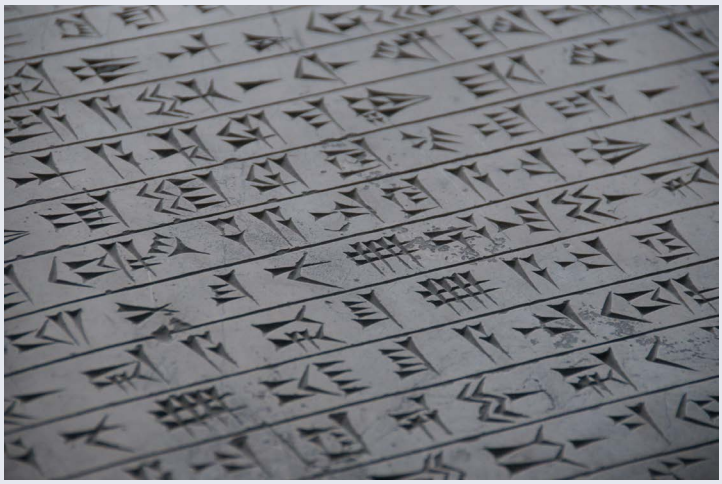

Figure 2.3 | Cuneiform | Cuneiform script on a clay tablet currently housed at the National Archaeological Museum in Tehran.
Author: A. Davey
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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The archaeological discovery of cuneiform tablets at these excavation sites has aided efforts to learn about this civilization. Sumerians developed **cuneiform**, a written script of wedge shaped marks, around 3200 BCE. Cuneiform was one of the earliest, if not the very first, written script in the world. The Sumerian King List, discussed above, was recorded in cuneiform. Merchants, scribes, administrators, priests, and others kept written records describing financial transactions, court proceedings, administrative decisions, and architectural plans. They also wrote legends, epic poems, chants, and prayers. Most people were not literate, so scribes—who had been specially trained in scribal schools—generated many of the records. While in school, in addition to copying written passages, scribes learned arithmetic. The Sumerians

system of arithmetic was based on the number 60, which we still use to divide time into hours, minutes, and seconds. Scribes used styluses made of reed to write on clay tablets that were dried and could be stored. The discovery of cuneiform tablets has greatly aided archaeologists, but only a small percentage of the tablets found to date have been translated.

Using archaeological and written evidence, scholars have pieced together what they can about everyday life for Sumerians, though some questions remain. For instance, it has been a challenge to determine the layout of urban spaces beyond the prominence of the temples and the relative grandeur of palaces. From archaeological finds, scholars suspect that Sumerian cities were divided into neighborhoods by occupation and according to kinship groups, but uncertainties about specifics linger. Legal documents and tax records show that people owned property in both the cities and the countryside. Also, evidence suggests social stratification, as some Sumerians owned fairly large chunks of land, while others had much smaller plots or presumably no land at all. Wills, court proceedings, and temple documents show that land and temple offices were usually bought or else acquired through military or other service to the state. A man inherited land, property, offices, and their attendant obligations to the state (like reoccurring military service) from his father. The eldest son seems to have frequently inherited a larger share than younger brothers and have been given control over the family home. He was tasked with performing regular rituals to honor dead ancestors, who were usually buried underneath the home. From the written documents, we also get glimpses into other aspects of Sumerian life, like marriage and divorce.

Sumerians viewed marriage as a contract between two families and, as a result, the male heads of the two families arranged a couple's marriage. Documents show that both families contributed resources to seal the union or complete the marriage contract. The man's family gave gifts or money and hosted a feast, while the woman's family amassed a dowry. Although a woman did not automatically receive an inheritance upon the death of her father, she could expect (and use the court system to make sure she got) to receive a dowry, even if it came from her father's estate after his death. Divorce was possible but sometimes led to social ostracism or even punishment if there were accusations of misconduct, such consequences being especially the case for the woman. Records indicate that polygamy was not common, but wealthier men did keep slave-girls as concubines. Overall, Sumerians considered marriage an essential institution in that it brought families together and ensured the continuation of the family lineage.

Legends, myths, poems, and literary texts tell us about Sumerians, too. For example, we can explore their values and views of the afterlife through reading the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* relates the adventures of Gilgamesh, a legendary king, who may have lived around 2700 BCE. The epic has multiple versions and was told orally before it was first written down in cuneiform in about 2000 BCE. The epic follows the heroic exploits of Gilgamesh and his companion, Enkidu, to emphasize the importance of values such as loyalty and humility. In one section, the epic describes a very gloomy afterlife where "people see no light, they sit in darkness,"[3] reflecting Mesopotamian beliefs that the afterlife was miserable for all, even those who had lived virtuously. Additionally, it portrays the environment as potentially violent and hostile as in its

3 Excerpt from: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Nancy Sandars (New York: Penguin Books, 1960), http://web.archive.org/web/20010217041824/http://www.humanities.ccny.cuny.edu/history/reader/gilgames.htm

Figure 2.4 | The Queen's Lyre | The Queen's Lyre is a reconstructed musical instrument modeled after a lyre found by archaeologist Leonard Wooley in one of the graves at the Royal Cemetery of Ur. The original instrument has been dated to c. 2500 BCE. The reconstructed instrument is held at the British Museum in London.
Author: User "Fae"
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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flood story, which in some ways resembles the account of Noah and the flood found in Genesis. Ultimately, Gilgamesh fails at his quest to find eternal life but learns to work for the glory of the gods and for worthwhile human achievements.

Other archaeological finds and the written documents also give some hint of the wider popular culture and artistic conventions in ancient Mesopotamia. For example, cuneiform tablets with pictures of dancers and singers, as well as instruments found in graves, suggest that Sumerians placed importance on music, using it for entertainment and ritual purposes. Trying to learn more about Sumerian music, scholars and other enthusiasts have replicated these instruments and presented their best estimation of Sumerian scales and tuning. The documentary evidence suggests that hymns from the ancient Sumerian city-states were shared with later Mesopotamian empires and even spread into the Mediterranean world.

2.7 MESOPOTAMIAN EMPIRES

In the second half of the third millennium BCE, Sumerian city-states fought each other, and dynasties rose and fell. Kings consolidated power over multiple city-states in the region. Then, King Sargon of Akkad enlarged the scale by conquering the Sumerian city-states and parts of Syria, Anatolia, and Elam. In doing so, he created one of the world's first empires in approximately 2334 BCE. For generations, Mesopotamian literature celebrated the Akkadian Empire (c. 2334 – 2100 BCE) that King Sargon founded. Like the Akkadian Empire, three subsequent empires, the Babylonian Empire (c. 1792 – 1595 BCE), the Assyrian Empire (c. 900 – 612 BCE), and the Neo-Babylonian Empire (c. 605 – 539 BCE), also ruled large parts of Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent.

2.7.1 The Akkadian Empire (c. 2334 – 2100 BCE)

Sargon of Akkad founded the first empire in Mesopotamia. Legends about Sargon of Akkad stress that he rose from obscurity to become a famous, powerful king. While the legends all tend to describe him as coming from humble origins and rising to the top using his own wits, there are many variations. One much later Babylonian tablet, from the seventh century BCE, describes his background as descendent of a high priestess and an anonymous father. His mother hid her pregnancy and the birth of Sargon, secreting him away in a wicker basket on a river, where he was

Map 2.3 | The Akkadian Empire, c. 2300 BCE
Author: User "Nareklm"
Source: Wikipedia
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rescued and then raised by Aqqi, a water-drawer. This version of the legend links Sargon with a more elite family through his birth-mother, a high priestess, but also shows how he had to advance himself up to king after being adopted by the rather more humble figure of a water-drawer.

From his allegedly humble origins, Sargon of Akkad conquered Sumerian city-states one by one, creating an **empire,** or a large territory, encompassing numerous states, ruled by a single authority. It's quite possible that Sargon of Akkad's predecessor, who claimed to rule over the large region stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf, began the process of building the empire, but Sargon is remembered for accomplishing the task. One of the reasons we attribute the empire to him is his use of public monuments. He had statues, stellae (tall, upright pillars), and other monuments built throughout his realm to celebrate his military victories and to build a sense of unity within his empire. Archaeologists have not found the empire's capital city, Akkad. However, from the available information, archaeologists have estimated its location, placing it to the north of the early Mesopotamian city-states, including Ur and Sumer. It is clear that Sargon of Akkad turned the empire's capital at Akkad into one of the wealthiest and most powerful cities in the world. According to documentary sources, the city's splendor stood as another symbol of Sargon's greatness. The city grew into a cosmopolitan center especially because of its role in trade. Akkadian rulers seized and taxed trade goods, with trade routes extending as far as India. Sargon ruled the empire for over fifty years. His sons, grandson, and great grandson attempted to hold the empire

together. After about 200 years, attacks from neighboring peoples caused the empire to fall. After the fall of the Akkadian Empire, Hammurabi founded the next empire in the region in 1792 BCE.

2.7.2 The Babylonian Empire (1792 – 1595 BCE)

Hammurabi, who aspired to follow Sargon's example, created the next empire in the region, the Babylonian Empire. With well-disciplined foot soldiers armed with copper and bronze weapons, he conquered Mesopotamian city-states, including Akkad and Sumer, to create an empire with its capital at Babylon. Although he had other achievements, Hammurabi is most famous for the law code etched into a stele that bears his name, the Stele of Hammurabi.

The Stele of Hammurabi records a comprehensive set of laws. Codes of law existed prior to Hammurabi's famous stele, but **Hammurabi's Code** gets a lot of attention because it is still intact and has proven very influential. As seen in Figure 2.5, the upper part of the stele depicts Hammurabi standing in front of the Babylonian god of justice, from whom Hammurabi derives his power and legitimacy. The lower portion of the stele contains the collection of 282 laws. One particularly influential principle in the code is the law of retaliation, which demands "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." The code listed offenses and their punishments, which often varied by social class. While symbolizing the power of the King Hammurabi and associating him with justice, the code of law also attempted to unify people within the empire and establish common standards for acceptable behavior. An excerpt of Hammurabi's Code appears below:

> 6. If anyone steal the property of a temple or of the court, he shall be put to death, and also the one who receives the stolen thing from him shall be put to death.
>
> 8. If any one steal cattle or sheep, or an ass, or a pig or a goat, if it belong to a god or to the court, the thief shall pay thirtyfold therefore; if they belonged to a freed man of the king he shall pay tenfold; if the thief has nothing with which to pay he shall be put to death.

Figure 2.5 | The Stele of Hammurabi
Author: User "Mbzt"
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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15. If any one receive into his house a runaway male or female slave of the court, or of a freedman, and does not bring it out at the public proclamation of the major domus, the master of the house shall be put to death.

53. If any one be too lazy to keep his dam in proper condition, and does not so keep it; if then the dam break and all the fields be flooded, then shall he in whose dam the break occurred be sold for money, and the money shall replace the corn which he has caused to be ruined.

108. If a tavern-keeper (feminine) does not accept corn according to gross weight in payment of drink, but takes money, and the price of the drink is less than that of the corn, she shall be convicted and thrown into the water.

110. If a "sister of god" open a tavern, or enter a tavern to drink, then shall this woman be burned to death.

127. If any one "point the finger" (slander) at a sister of a god or the wife of any one, and can not prove it, this man shall be taken before the judges and his brow shall be marked. (by cutting the skin or perhaps hair)

129. If a man's wife be surprised (in flagrante delicto) with another man, both shall be tied and thrown into the water, but the husband may pardon his wife and the king his slaves.

137. If a man wish to separate from a woman who has borne him children, or from his wife who has borne him children: then he shall give that wife her dowry, and a part of the usufruct of field, garden, and property, so that she can rear her children. When she has brought up her children, a portion of all that is given to the children, equal as that of one son, shall be given to her. She may then marry the man of her heart.

195. If a son strike his father, his hands shall be hewn off.

196. If a man put out the eye of another man his eye shall be put out. (An eye for an eye)

197. If he break another man's bone, his bone shall be broken.

198. If he put out the eye of a freed man, or break the bone of a freed man, he shall pay one gold mina.

199. If he put out the eye of a man's slave, or break the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half of its value.

> 202. If any one strike the body of a man higher in rank than he, he shall receive sixty blows with an ox-whip in public.
>
> 203. If a free-born man strike the body of another free-born man or equal rank, he shall pay one gold mina.
>
> 205. If the slave of a freed man strike the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off.[4]

Hammurabi also improved infrastructure, promoted trade, employed effective administrative practices, and supported productive agriculture. For example, he sponsored the building of roads and the creation of a postal service. He also maintained irrigation canals and facilitated trade all along the Persian Gulf. After Hammurabi's death, his successors lost territory. The empire declined, shrinking in size. The Hittites, from Anatolia, eventually sacked the city of Babylon in 1595 BCE, bringing about the official end of the Babylonian Empire.

2.7.3 The Assyrian Empire (c. 900 – 612 BCE)

The **Assyrian Empire**, which saw its height of power at the end of the first millennium to the seventh century BCE, was larger than any empire that preceded it.

Dominating the region, its well-equipped soldiers used their stronger iron weapons to extend the empire's control through Mesopotamia, Syria, parts of Anatolia, Palestine, and up the Nile into Egypt. They used siege warfare, along with battering rams, tunnels, and moveable towers, to get past the defenses of cities. The Assyrians had a large army (with perhaps as many as 150,000 soldiers) that utilized a core of infantry, a cavalry, as well as chariots. As part of their military strategy, the Assyrians purposefully tried to inspire fear in their enemies; they decapitated conquered kings, burnt cities to the ground, destroyed crops, and dismembered defeated enemy soldiers. One Assyrian soldier claimed:

> In strife and conflict I besieged [and] conquered the city. I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword…I captured many troops alive: I cut off of some of their arms [and] hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears, [and] extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living [and] one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city.[5]

The Assyrians expected these methods to deter potential rebellions and used their spoils of war, like precious metals and livestock, to finance further military campaigns. After conquering an area, they conscripted men into their army, and employed resettlement and deportation as techniques to get laborers where they wanted them and deal with communities who opposed

4 "The Code of Hammurabi, c. 1780 BCE." *Ancient History Sourcebook*. Fordham University. https://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/hamcode.asp#text

5 Quoted in Erika Belibtreau, "Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death," http://faculty.uml.edu/ethan_Spanier/Teaching/documents/CP6.0AssyrianTorture.pdf

Map 2.4 | The Assyrian Empire at its height.
Author: User "Ningyou"
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain

their regime. They also collected annual tributes that were apparently high enough to, at least occasionally, spur rebellions despite the Assyrians' reputation for violent retribution.

In addition to its military strength, the Assyrian empire also stands out for the size of its cities and its administrative developments. The empire's biggest cities, such as Nineveh and Assur, each had several million people living within them. Administratively, kings ruled Assyria, appointing governors to oversee provinces and delegates to keep tabs on the leaders of allied states. There were between 100 and 150 governors, delegates, and top officials entrusted by the king with ruling in his place and helping him maintain the empire. In the later centuries of the Assyrian Empire, kings chose these officials on the basis of merit and loyalty. Kings met with large groups of officials for rituals, festivals, and military campaigns. Evidence of such meetings has led some scholars to propose the possibility that the king and his officials might have worked together in something resembling a parliamentary system, though there is no scholarly consensus on the point. Ultimately, the Assyrian Empire became too large to control; rebellions occurred with more frequency and were difficult for its overextended military to quell. The empire fell after the conquest of Nineveh in 612 BCE.

2.7.4 The New Babylonian Empire (c. 626 – 539 BCE)

With the weakening of the Assyrian Empire, the New Babylonian Empire began to dominate Mesopotamia. Lasting for less than 100 years, the New Babylonian Empire is best known for its ruler, **Nebuchadnezzar II**, and its great architectural projects. As described in the Hebrew Scriptures (also known as the Old Testament), Nebuchadnezzar II, who ruled from 605 – 562 BCE, was a ruthless leader. He gained notoriety for destroying the city of Jerusalem and deporting many of the city's Jews to Babylon. The captive Jews suffered in exile, as they were not allowed to return to their homeland. Nebuchadnezzar II also rebuilt Babylon with fortresses, temples, and enormous palaces. He associated the New Babylonian Empire with the glory of ancient Babylonia by reviving elements of Sumerian and Akkadian culture. For example, he had artists restore ancient artwork and celebrated the kings of old, like Hammurabi. Nebuchadnezzar is often also credited with rebuilding the city's ziggurat, *Etemanaki*, or the "Temple of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth." When completed, the ziggurat rose several stories above the city and seemed to reach to the heavens. Some scholars claim that the Babylonian ziggurat was the famous Tower of Babel described in the Old Testament. Another one of Nebuchadnezzar's purported projects, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, was considered by the later Greek historian Herodotus to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World. According to legend, Nebuchadnezzar had the hanging gardens built for his wife. He made the desert bloom to remind her of her distant homeland; the elaborate gardens planted on rooftops and terraces were designed so that the plants' leaves would spill down high walls. Since definitive archaeological evidence of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon has not been found, scholars continue to debate its most likely location and even its very existence. After the death of Nebuchadnezzar II, outside military pressures as well as internal conflict weakened the empire until the much larger Persian Empire conquered the New Babylonian Empire in 539 BCE.

2.8 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MESOPOTAMIA FOR WORLD HISTORY

Mesopotamia saw the emergence of some of the first cities and the world's first empires. The city-states of the region flourished from about 3000 to 2300 BCE. Then, Sargon of Akkad and subsequent rulers built empires, expanding their control and influence over even larger territories.

There were cultural links and commonalities found in the Sumerian city-states of the third millennium BCE. With agricultural production dependent on access to water, cities initially grew in Southern Mesopotamia near rivers, namely the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and their tributaries. Sumerians tried to control their environment using irrigation, drainage ditches, water reserves, and other methods. With unpredictable floods and other environmental challenges, the Sumerians viewed nature as hostile and their expectations of the afterlife tended to be pessimistic. Their understanding of nature as unpredictable also spurred engineering innovations as Sumerians prepared for floods, water shortages, and other natural events. While farming was the mainstay of their economies, city-states were also involved in robust long-distance trade networks, which allowed them to garner the many resources not available in their region. These city-states alternately allied with, competed

against, and waged war on one another, with kingship emerging as rulers dominated multiple city-states. As evidenced by the centrality of temples and the belief that kingship came from heaven, religion was of fundamental importance to these societies. Archaeologists have also uncovered ample evidence of social stratification and labor specialization in these ancient city-states. Archeologists have been able to recognize Sumerian developments, in part, because the Sumerians left behind a wealth of information documented in cuneiform, one of the world's first written scripts. Scholars have begun to describe life in ancient Sumerian societies and appreciate the many Sumerian achievements, like those in math, where they introduced a computation system based on 60 (which we still use to divide time and in geometry as a circle has 360°). Overall, Sumerians were innovators, with some of the first cities, one of the first systems of writing, notable achievements in engineering and architecture, the creation of larger political entities, and more.

Starting with the Akkadian Empire, four empires controlled vast territories in Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent. Over a period of almost 1800 years, these empires brought together diverse communities, often by military conquest and force. The empires facilitated trade, and spread ideas and culture. Their rulers developed administrative, military, and other techniques to try to ensure compliance and recognition of their authority. As intended, the rulers and the cities they built live on in legends, even though their empires eventually withered and fell.

2.9 THE ISRAELITES AND ANCIENT ISRAEL

The Israelites, "or children of Israel," were Semetic-speakers who lived in Canaan and traced their descent back to Abraham through his grandson Israel. Hebrew tradition begins their history with Abraham's departure from Ur in southern Mesopotamia (see Map 2.1). Therefore, Abraham is important in Jewish tradition, as he has been recognized as the first Jew, the patriarch from whom all Jews trace their descent, and a role model. As described in the Hebrew Scriptures, known to Christians as the Old Testament, Abraham also made a covenant with God, which blessed his descendants. Jews, Christians, and Muslims of today all recognize Abraham as a significant figure, though these major monotheistic religions view him a little differently. Respect for Abraham by believers in all three of these religions is just one indication that the world's three major monotheistic religions are connected. Examining these connections reveals the extraordinary contributions that the Israelites made to World History. The Israelites were highly influential in developing the idea of **monotheism**, or belief in one god. Furthermore, they recorded their history orally at first, until their tradition was written down in the Hebrew Scriptures (alternatively referred to as the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament of the Christian Bible). The Hebrew Scriptures has been one of the most important texts ever written.

Eventually, by the end of the second millennium BCE (likely between 1200 and 1000 BCE), the Israelites established small kingdoms in the **Levant**. The Levant refers to areas adjacent to the eastern Mediterranean; in the ancient world, it comprised roughly the area from southern Anatolia through coastal areas of the eastern Mediterranean south and westward to the Egyptian delta. The Israelite kingdoms were concentrated along the Mediterranean coast in what are today Israel and the contested territory of the West Bank/Palestine.

Much debate exists amongst scholars about the sources used to reconstruct the history of the Israelites with much of the debate revolving around the use and interpretation of religious texts, particularly the Hebrew Scriptures. Right now, scholars rely fairly heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures to discuss periods before about 1200 BCE because other sources just do not exist. Some main points of contention have centered on dates, the purpose of religious texts, the reality that the Hebrew Scriptures were written centuries after the events they described, and the relationship between the scriptures and historical fact. Additionally, there has been back and forth discussion about whether archaeological finds confirm or disprove the narrative in the religious texts. These heated debates have led some scholars to question whether it is even possible to write a history of the ancient Israelites. For our purposes, this section will give an overview of Hebrew tradition and, using archaeological and collaborating evidence when possible, describe the development of the Israelite civilization.

2.10 EARLY ISRAELITES

By leading people out of Ur, his homeland in Southern Mesopotamia, to eventually settle in Canaan, later called Palestine, Abraham began the traditional history of the Israelites. According to Hebrew tradition, even before leaving Ur, Abraham taught his followers about the existence of a single, creator god and rejected the idol-worship and sin of Ur. The narrative continues to explain how when Abraham agreed to God's directive to leave his homeland, God blessed him and all of his descendants. God entered into a **covenant** with Abraham, saying, "…And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great…and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."[6] Jews recognize this covenant as indicating their special relationship with God, and it remains one of the most important aspects of the Jewish faith.

Tradition recounts how several generations later Abraham's grandson, Israel (also called Jacob), had twelve sons, who became the ancestors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. One of these twelve sons, Joseph, led followers from Canaan during a famine to settle in Egypt. As the biblical text describes, the Israelites were prosperous at first and were becoming powerful, leading the Egyptian pharaoh to fear their influence. To try to stem the Israelite influence, the pharaoh put restrictions on births and forced them into slave labor. Then, Moses, whose mother had secreted him away in a waterproof basket on the Nile River, played an important role in delivering his people from subjugation. According to Hebrew tradition, God tasked Moses with leading his people out of Egypt, a flight to freedom called **Exodus**. Moses led "the children of Israel" into Sinai, where they entered into the Sinai Covenant. This covenant bound all Israelites into a pact with God. Israelites agreed to worship God alone and obey his law, while God confirmed the place of the Israelites as his "Chosen People," whom he would protect. As part of the covenant, Israelites agreed to follow **the Ten Commandments**. According to Hebrew tradition, God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, instructing the Israelites to worship only him, keep the Sabbath, and honor their parents. The Ten Commandments also prohibit idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, theft, dishonesty, and coveting.

6 As quoted in "Abraham and the Covenant," Israel and Judaism Studies. http://www.ijs.org.au/Abraham-and-the-Covenant/default.aspx

These written traditions established important elements of the Jewish faith. For example, the Hebrew Scriptures trace Jewish descent from the Hebrew patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Israel (alternatively known as Jacob), and the twelve sons of Israel. They also describe the transition to monotheism and the covenant relationship between God and "the children of Israel." Israelites believed in one god, Yahweh, who created and ruled over everything in the universe, and overall, they perceived Yahweh as being just and merciful. The ideas that there is a single, universal god and that his laws apply to everyone have been defining tenets of other monotheistic religions. Subsequent written and oral traditions, like the Talmud, reflect further development of Jewish beliefs, ethics, laws, and practice.

2.11 THE UNITED KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

After Exodus, the Israelites resettled in Canaan and in time began to unify. They formed kingdoms in the Levant just prior to 1000 BCE. King Saul (c. 1030 – 1009 BCE), a member of one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, established the first Israelite monarchy, but ruled over a fairly limited territory and died in battle with the Philistines. He was crowned king and began the process of unification, but did not completely defeat his enemies and finish unification before he died. His son, King David, (d. 969 BCE), is often portrayed as Israel's greatest ruler or a model king. He established the United Kingdom of Israel, with its capital at Jerusalem. King David's successor, his son Solomon, further shaped the kingdom.

In popular memory, King David is probably most remembered for defeating Goliath. Historical traditions also celebrate him for expanding the borders of a newly unified Israel, contributing to the Book of Psalms, and, in Christian tradition, for being a forbear of Jesus. David was a "warrior king," who defeated both internal and external enemies to unite Israel. He maintained a large standing army that helped extend his influence and create neighboring tributary states. With control of trade routes and tribute coming in from neighboring territories, Israel became a wealthy state under David. With this wealth, David began to build Jerusalem into the capital city of the Israelites, with further plans to build a temple to house the Ark of the Covenant (which according to Hebrew tradition held the Ten Commandments). David died before building this temple, but tradition credits him with other achievements, including composing many of the hymns and prayers in the Book of Psalms. Like Abraham, David is considered an important figure by Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

King Solomon, David's son, ruled a mostly peaceful realm. He accomplished his father's goal of building the first Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The temple exemplified monumental architecture and became a focal point for the Jews of Jerusalem. Its ruins, known as the Western Wall or the Wailing Wall, are still a site of Jewish prayer and pilgrimage. Solomon also directed the building of a royal palace, a defensive wall around the city of Jerusalem, and fortresses along the kingdom's frontier. Administratively, Solomon set up twelve districts, overseen by purveyors, who collected tribute in kind (usually as crops or foodstuffs). Each of the twelve districts was charged with supplying the king and the court for one month a year. Finally, Solomon used treaties and reciprocal trade agreements to maintain relatively peaceful relationships with Israel's neighbors. He also forged

diplomatic relations through marriage; according to scripture, he had 700 wives! After Solomon's death, what had been the United Kingdom of Israel split into two pieces: Israel and Judah. Over the long term, some of Solomon's policies, including forced labor and tributary payments, likely contributed to the divide.

After the decline of the United Kingdom of Israel, Hebrew tradition describes the significance of great **prophets** or teachers, who spoke on behalf of god and set moral and ethical standards for the whole community. Yahweh sent these prophets to warn the Israelites that they were not abiding by their covenant. The prophets during this later period, especially Jeremiah and Second Isaiah, cultivated a new conceptualization of the covenant, which was much more personal as it was a relationship between Yahweh and each individual.

The Assyrians and later the Greeks and then the Romans brought parts of the former United Kingdom of Israel under their rule. These conquests and persecution forced members of the Jewish population into exile. This conceptualization of being members of a **diaspora,** that is, a scattered people who desire to return to their homeland, has played an important part in the formation of a Jewish identity. Also, in part, due to this history, preservation of cultural and religious heritage has become an enduring objective of Jews.

Map 2.5 | The United Kingdom of Israel | The map shows the unified state in blue, as well as the surrounding territories that paid tribute to the United Kingdom of Israel.
Author: Regno di Davide
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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2.12 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISRAELITES AND ANCIENT ISRAEL

The Israelites left an extraordinary religious and ethical legacy. They were some of the first monotheists, worshipping a single god, whom they referred to as Yahweh. Their religious texts from the ancient world, including the Hebrew Scriptures, served as the foundational texts of Judaism. The Hebrew Scriptures were also the basis of the Christian Old Testament, and Islam

recognizes parts of the scriptures as divine revelations. There were other, widespread religious influences as well. For example, Christians and Muslims consider many of the figures, including Abraham, Moses, and David, and teachings, like the Ten Commandments, from the Hebrew Scriptures to be very important. Furthermore, the Hebrew Scriptures contained the idea that everyone, regardless of status, was bound to obey the law.

The United Kingdom of Israel was a "golden age," associated with the creation of a unified, wealthy state with its new capital in Jerusalem. This civilization had well-developed religious traditions, political power vested in a king, monumental architecture, and administrative innovations. It also maintained a strong military, multiple tributary states, long-distance trade networks, and well-established diplomatic relationships with foreign states.

2.13 ANCIENT EGYPT

In our study of World History, ancient Egypt serves as an excellent example of a complex society with cross-cultural connections, adaption to and control over changing environments, and sophisticated political and religious developments. All of these themes are evident in an examination of the origins of Egypt. Egyptian leaders unified Upper and Lower Egypt around 3100 BCE, creating a powerful ancient state. Developments in the millennia preceding unification, including the sharing of innovations and responses to environmental change, set the stage for the emergence of the Egyptian civilization.

Cross-cultural connections introduced the people of Northeast Africa to domesticated wheat and barley, two of the crops that they grew and whose surpluses supported the process of social differentiation and eventually the pharaonic, elite, and skilled classes of ancient Egypt. People in Northeast Africa had likely been gathering wild barley since before 10,000 BCE. However, sharing in the knowledge spreading from the Fertile Crescent around 7,000 BCE, they began cultivating wheat and barley and also keeping domesticated animals, including sheep and goats. At that time, agricultural production and herding were possible in areas that are today part of the Sahara Desert. The period was much wetter than now. People in the region settled into small communities, and archaeological evidence of hearths, grinding stones, and storage silos show the growth of settlements in areas that today are not well watered enough for agricultural production. The presence of crocodile bones, along with similar pottery styles, also suggest a history of contact between communities emerging along the Nile River and these settlements farther west. However, environmental change was leading to the **desiccation** or drying out of areas not adjacent to the Nile River, and by about 5,000 BCE, it was no longer possible to farm much beyond the floodplain of the Nile River. Many people adapted by moving towards the Nile River, and the Nile River became increasingly important to Egypt's populations.

The **Nile River** flows south to north, fed by two main river systems: the White Nile and the Blue Nile. The White Nile flows steadily throughout the year and has its origins in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa. The Blue Nile originates in the Ethiopian highlands, and brings floodwaters up past the first **cataract** in the summers. (The first cataract lies roughly at Aswan on the map in Map 2.6.) Cataracts are generally considered impassable by boat due to their shallows,

rocks, and rapids. Comparatively, the flood plain of the Nile River is narrow, leading, especially with the desiccation of the surrounding areas, to high population densities close to the river. The winds also blow north to south, in the opposite direction of the river flow, thus facilitating trade and contact between Upper Egypt (to the south) and Lower Egypt (to the north). Upper and Lower Egypt lie north of the first cataract, usually allowing river traffic to proceed uninterrupted throughout the territory. Egyptian views of the Nile generally recognized the river's centrality to life as demonstrated in the "Hymn to the Nile," dated to approximately 2100 BCE. The praise-filled ode to the Nile River begins, "Hail to thee, O Nile! Who manifests thyself over this land, and comes to give life to Egypt."[7] The course of the Nile River definitely impacted settlement patterns, while the river also allowed for trade and the development of larger agricultural communities.

Map 2.6 | The Path of the Nile | The White Nile originates near Lake Victoria, in the Great Lakes region of East Africa. The Blue Nile flows from the Ethiopian Highlands. Both rivers merge at Khartoum, in present day Sudan, and flow northward to empty into the Mediterranean Sea.
Author: User "Hel-hama"
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

At the tail end of that era of desiccation, from about 3600 to 3300 BCE, complex societies formed in areas adjacent to the Nile River. These communities exerted increased influence over their environments, exhibited social differentiation, and showed evidence of labor specialization. For example, people in the settlements of Naganda and Hierakonpolis in Upper Egypt cleared trees and built dykes, canals, and early irrigation systems. By about 3500 BCE, they used these methods to quadruple the amount of cleared, arable land and could support population densities of up to one thousand people per square mile. Just as one example, recent archaeological finds at Hierakonpolis also show evidence of both social differential and specialization with separate burials for the settlement's elite, the oldest known painted tomb, and the remnants of a large-scale brewery, capable of producing up to 300 gallons of beer a day. It is believed that early leaders in Naganda, Hierakonpolis, and similar communities cemented their roles by claiming control over the environment as rainmakers or commanders of the floods. Over time, some of these leaders created **divine kingships**, asserting their right to even more power and access to resources, power that they legitimized by claiming

7 "Hymn to the Nile, c. 2100 BCE." *Ancient History Sourcebook* Fordham University. http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/hymn-nile.asp

special relationships with, or even descent from, gods. Once Egypt was unified, pharaohs ruled as divine kings, as the personification of the gods. They promised order in the universe. When things went well, the pharaohs were credited with agricultural productivity and the success of the state. There was no separation between religion and the state in ancient Egypt.

The **Palette of Narmer** (see Figure 2.6 and Figure 2.7), which is used to date the unification of Egypt, shows signs that King Narmer legitimized his rule, in part, by claiming a special relationship with the gods. King Narmer, who is referred to in some text as Menes, is commonly recognized as the first unifier of Upper (to the south) and Lower (to the north) Egypt in approximately 3100 BCE (see Map 2.7). Unification brought together Egypt from the first cataract at Aswan to the Nile Delta. The Palette of Narmer, which was found in Hierakonpolis, shows King Narmer's conquest of both regions. The right side in Figure 2.6 shows him slaying an enemy of Upper Egypt. The largest figure, Narmer is wearing the crown of Upper Egypt and beheading a rival king, while standing atop conquered enemies. The left side also shows him as a conqueror, wearing the crown of Lower Egypt and directing flag bearers to mark his victory. Religious imagery appears in the inclusion of the goddess Hathor at the top of the palette as well as the falcon, a reference to Horus, the patron god of Hierakonpolis, who later in dynastic Egypt became the god of sun and kingship.

Figure 2.6 | Both Sides of the Palette of Narmer
Author: User "Jean88"
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC0 1.0

Figure 2.7 | Detail of Palette of Narmer | Close-up of the left side of the Palette of Narmer. Note the larger figure of King Narmer, with celebratory flag bearers preceding him.
Author: User "NebMaatRa"
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Both sides of the Palette of Narmer also have some of the earliest known hieroglyphs. **Hieroglyphics** emerged as written text, combining pictograms (a pictorial symbol for a word or phrase) and phonograms (a symbol representing a sound), during the period of unification. Tax assessment and collection likely necessitated the initial development of Hieroglyphics. Ancient Egyptians eventually used three different scripts: Hieroglyphic, Hieratic, and Demotic. Hieroglyphics remained the script of choice for ritual texts. Students of Egyptian history are most familiar with hieroglyphics as

they were usually what artists used to record the history of Egypt's elite. For example, skilled artisans used hieroglyphs to chronicle glorified accounts of their patrons' lives on the sides of their tombs. The Egyptians developed Hieratic and Demotic, the two other scripts, slightly later and used them for administrative, commercial, and many other purposes. The Egyptian administration tended to use ink and papyrus to maintain its official records. On the other hand, literate people used **ostraca,** pieces of broken pottery and chips of limestone, for less formal notes and communications. Over the past decades, archaeologists have uncovered a treasure trove of ostraca that start to tell us about the lives of the literate elite and skilled craftsmen. Just like Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt had one of the oldest written scripts found anywhere in the world.

In addition to one of the earliest writing systems and Egyptian paper (papyrus), archaeologists have credited ancient Egyptians with a number of other innovations. For construction purposes, ancient Egyptians invented the ramp and lever. They also developed a 12-month calendar with 365 days, glassmaking skills, arithmetic (including one of the earliest decimal systems) and geometry, and medical procedures to heal broken bones and relieve fevers. Finally, Egyptians used stone-carving techniques and other crafting skills and tools that were shared throughout the Mediterranean.

2.14 DYNASTIC EGYPT

Scholars break the 1500 years following unification, a time known as dynastic Egypt, into three main periods: the Old Kingdom (c. 2660–2160 BCE), the Middle Kingdom (c. 2040 – 1640 BCE), and the New Kingdom (c. 1530–1070 BCE). There is some disagreement about the exact dates of the periods, but, in general, these spans denote more centralized control over a unified Egypt. During dynastic Egypt, pharaohs ruled a united Upper and Lower Egypt. In between these periods of centralized control were intermediate periods, during which the Egyptian pharaohs had less authority. The intermediate periods were characterized by political upheaval and military violence, the latter often at least partially resulting from foreign invasions.

Striking continuities existed in Egypt throughout the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom. Egypt had stable population numbers, consistent social stratification, pharaohs—who exercised significant power—and a unifying religious ideology, which linked the pharaohs to the gods. As Egypt transitioned from the period of unification under King Narmer to the Old Kingdom, the pharaohs and the elite became increasingly wealthy and powerful. They further developed earlier systems of tax collection, expanded the religious doctrine, and built a huge state bureaucracy.

Social distinctions and hierarchies remained fairly consistent through all of dynastic Egypt. Most people were rural peasant farmers. They lived in small mud huts just above the flood plain and turned over surplus agricultural produce to the state as taxes. When they weren't farming, they were expected to perform rotating service for the state, by, for example, working on a pharaoh's tomb, reinforcing dykes, and helping in the construction of temples. The labor of the majority of the population supported the more elite and skilled classes, from the pharaoh down through the governing bureaucrats, priests, nobles, soldiers, and skilled craftspeople, especially those who

worked on pyramids and tombs. (Visit the following link for a diagram of the Egyptian social hierarchy: http://dgh.wikispaces.com/file/view/wh06fs_c04000006a.jpg/76595189/385x235/wh06fs_c04000006a.jpg.)

Another continuity in dynastic Egypt was the relative equality of women to men. At least compared to women in other ancient societies, women in ancient Egypt had considerable legal rights and freedoms. Men and women did generally have different roles; Egyptian society charged men with providing for the family and women with managing the home and children. Society's ascribed gender roles meant that women were usually defined primarily by their husbands and children, while men were defined by their occupations. This difference could leave women more economically vulnerable than men. For example, in the village of craftspeople who worked on the pharaoh's tomb at Deir el Medina, houses were allocated to the men who were actively employed. This system of assigning housing meant that women whose husbands had died would be kicked out of their homes as replacement workers were brought in. Despite some vulnerability, Egyptian law was pretty equal between the sexes when it came to many other issues. Egyptian women could own property, and tax records show that they did. Egyptian women could also take cases to court, enter into legally binding agreements, and serve actively as priestesses. There were also female pharaohs, most famously Hatshepsut

Map 2.7 | Upper and Lower Egypt | Note the narrowness of the floodplain, marked in green. The narrow floodplain, usually not more than 15 miles wide and often considerably less, encouraged high population densities close to the Nile River.
Author: Jeff Dahl
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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who ruled for twenty years in the fifteenth century BCE. One last, perhaps surprising, legal entitlement of ancient Egyptian women was their right to one-third of the property that a couple accumulated over the course of their marriage. Married women had some financial independence, which gave them options to dispose of their own property or divorce. Therefore, while women did face constraints in terms of their expected roles and had their status tied to the men in their families, they nevertheless enjoyed economic freedoms and legal rights not commonly seen in the ancient world.

Figure 2.8 | Female figurines from ancient Egypt | These figurines show some of the everyday tasks carried out by women. They made bread, brewed beer, and prepared for family meals.
Author: Andreas Praefcke
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain

While scholars working over the past several decades have used artwork, archeology, and the surviving legal documents to draw conclusions about women's roles in ancient Egypt, there is much ongoing debate about the prevalence of slavery within this society. Part of the disagreement stems from how various scholars define slavery. There is also great uncertainty about the number of slaves within the Egyptian population. The emerging consensus suggests that Egyptians increasingly used slaves from the Middle Kingdom onward. The majority of the slaves in these later dynasties were either prisoners of war or slaves brought from Asia. Slaves performed many tasks. For example, they labored in agricultural fields, served in the army, worked in construction, helped their merchant owners in shops, and were domestic servants for the Egyptian elite. Slaves were branded and, if possible, would be captured and returned to their masters if they tried to escape. Some masters undoubtedly abused their slaves, though the image of thousands of slaves sacrificed to be buried with pharaohs incorrectly depicts dynastic Egypt. Manumission (freeing a slave) was seemingly not very common, but if they were freed, former slaves were not stigmatized; instead, they were considered part of the general free population. These new scholarly conclusions about the relatively small numbers of slaves in Egypt, especially during the Old Kingdom, have impacted our understanding of how pyramids, tombs, and temples were constructed during dynastic Egypt.

The **Old Kingdom** saw pharaohs harness their influence to build **pyramids** to emphasize their relationship to the divine and facilitate their ascent to the gods after their earthly deaths. Pyramids, with their distinctive shape, which you can see in Figure 2.9, contained tombs for the pharaohs and their wives. They were marvels of engineering, built on a massive scale to honor the pharaohs and usher them into the afterlife. Pharaohs were mummified to preserve their bodies and

were buried with everything considered necessary for the afterlife, including furniture, jewelry, makeup, pottery, food, wine, clothing, and sometimes even pets. The most recognizable pyramids from the Old Kingdom are the three pyramids at the Giza complex, which were built for a father (Egyptian pharaoh Khufu), and his son and grandson, who all ruled during the fourth dynasty.

The Great Pyramid of Giza, built for Pharaoh Khufu, is the largest of the three pyramids. Still largely intact today, it was the largest building in the world until the twentieth century. Over 500 feet high, it covered an area of 200 square yards, and was built with over 600 tons of limestone. Recent studies on the construction of the pyramids have put much more emphasis on the roles of skilled craftsmen—who might work at multiple pyramid sites over the course of their lifetimes—and rotating groups of unskilled workers than on slaves. These studies suggest that skilled craftsmen and local labor forces of Egyptians were the primary builders of the pyramids, including the Great Pyramid of Giza. The Great Pyramid of Giza took an estimated 20 years to construct and employed skilled stonemasons, architects, artists, and craftsmen, in addition to the thousands of unskilled laborers who did the heavy moving and lifting. The construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza was an enormous, expensive feat. The pyramid stands as testimony to the

Figure 2.9 | The Great Pyramid at Giza
Author: User "Jeancaffou"
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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increased social differentiation, the great power and wealth of the Egyptian pharaohs, and the significance of beliefs in the afterlife during the Old Kingdom.

In addition to the construction of pyramids, the Old Kingdom saw increased trade and remained a relatively peaceful period. The pharaoh's government controlled trade, with Egypt exporting grain and gold (the latter from Nubia to the south) and importing timber, spices, ivory, and other luxury goods. During the Old Kingdom, Egypt did not have a standing army and faced few foreign military threats. Lasting almost 400 years, the Old Kingdom saw the extension of the pharaoh's power, especially through the government's ability to harness labor and control trade.

However, the power of the pharaohs began to wane in the fifth dynasty of the Old Kingdom. Continuing environmental change that led to droughts and famine, coupled with the huge expense of building pyramids likely impoverished pharaohs in the last centuries of the Old Kingdom. Additionally, the governors known as *nomes*, who administered Egypt's 42 provinces from the fifth dynasty onward, became more independent and took over functions that had been overseen by the state. As an added blow, the pharaohs lost control of trade. While dynastic leaders still referred to themselves as pharaohs, they lacked central authority over a unified Egypt by 2180 BCE.

Following the decentralized First Intermediate Period of roughly 150 years, Pharaoh Mentohotep II reunified Egypt to found the **Middle Kingdom**. The Middle Kingdom saw the reorganization of the state's bureaucratic apparatus to control the *nomes*. To further strengthen their authority, the pharaohs also moved their capital from the Old Kingdom capital of Thebes south to Lisht, halfway between Upper and Lower Egypt. With military expeditions, they extended the boundaries of the state north to Lebanon and south to the second cataract of the Nile into a region known as Nubia. With this extension of territory, Egypt had access to more trade goods, and the organization of trade shifted so that professional merchants took a leading role in developing new trade routes. These professional merchants paid taxes to the state, supporting further consolidation of power by the pharaohs and also infrastructural improvements like irrigation. During the Middle Kingdom, the pharaohs focused less on the building of massive pyramids and more on administrative reorganization, military expeditions, and the state's infrastructural repair.

Disputes over succession and ineffectual rulers led into the Second Intermediate Period. Most notably, Egypt was invaded from both the north and the south during this period. The Hyksos invaded from the north in 1670 BCE. They brought bronze and horse-drawn chariots, which allowed them to conquer parts of Lower Egypt and establish their own kingdom, one lasting about 100 years in the Nile Delta region. From the south, the Kingdom of Kush, based in Nubia, invaded and temporarily established control over Upper Egypt to Aswan. Thus, foreign rulers dominated much of Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period.

The **New Kingdom** of reunified Egypt that began in 1530 BCE saw an era of Egyptian imperialism, changes in the burial practices of pharaohs, and the emergence of a brief period of state-sponsored monotheism under the Pharaoh Akhenaten. In 1530 BCE, the pharaoh who became known as Ahmose the Liberator (Ahmose I) defeated the Hyksos and continued sweeping up along the Eastern Mediterranean. By 1500 BCE, the Egyptian army had also pushed into Nubia, taking Kush southward to the fourth cataract of the Nile River (see Map 2.8). As pharaohs following Ahmose I continued Egypt's expansion, the Imperial Egyptian army ran successful campaigns in

Palestine and Syria, along the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, by expanding into Kush, Egypt controlled trade routes into Sub-Saharan Africa. Adopting the Hyksos' chariot military and metal technologies contributed to the Egyptian ability to strengthen its military. Egypt maintained a large standing army and built an expansive empire during the New Kingdom.

Map 2.8 | Egypt during its Imperialistic New Kingdom, c. 1400 BCE
Author: Jeff Dahl
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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Egyptsawmanyotherdevelopments during the New Kingdom, especially when it came to burial practices and religion. During the New Kingdom, pharaohs and Egyptian elites used the **Valley of Kings**, located across the Nile River from Thebes, as their preferred burial site. They desired tombs that were hidden away and safe from tomb robbers. Therefore, instead of pyramids, they favored huge stone tombs built into the mountains of the Valley of the Kings. Nearly all of the tombs in the Valley of Kings were raided, so the fears of the pharaohs were well founded. Tomb raiding was even common during dynastic Egypt. King Tutankhamen's tomb has become one familiar exception. His tomb fared unusually well over the millennia, and King Tutankhamen's image is well known to us because his tomb was found mostly intact in 1922.

Throughout dynastic Egypt, much continuity existed in religious beliefs, causing scholars to characterize Egyptian society as conservative, meaning that Egyptians shied away from change. In general, Egyptian religious beliefs emphasized unity and harmony. Throughout the dynastic period, Egyptians thought that the soul contained distinct parts. They believed that one part, the *ka,* was a person's lifeforce and that it separated from the body after death. The Egyptians carried out their elaborate preservation of mummies and made small tomb statues to house their *ka* after death. The *ba,* another part of the soul, was the unique character of the individual, which could move between the worlds of the living and the dead. They believed that after death, if rituals were carried out correctly, their ka and ba would reunite to reanimate their *akh,* or spirit. If they observed the proper rituals and successfully passed through Final Judgment (where they recited the 42 "Negative Confessions" and the god Osiris weighed their hearts against a feather), Egyptians believed that their resurrected spirit, their *akh*, would enter the afterlife. In contrast to Mesopotamian society,

Egyptians conceptualized the afterlife as pleasant. In the afterlife, they expected to find a place with blue skies, agreeable weather, and familiar objects and people. They also expected to complete many of the everyday tasks, such as farming, and enjoy many of the same recognizable pastimes. Throughout the centuries, the Egyptians conceptualized the afterlife as a comfortable mirror image of life.

One change that occurred over time was the "democratization of the afterlife." As time progressed through the Middle Kingdom and into the New Kingdom, more and more people aspired to an afterlife. No longer was an afterlife seen as possible for only the pharaoh and the elite of society. Instead, just about all sectors of society expected access, as evident in the increased use of funeral texts, like the *Book of the Dead*. People of varying means would slip papyrus with spells or prayers from the *Book of the Dead* (or a similar text) into coffins and burial chambers. They intended these spells to help their deceased loved ones make it safely through the underworld into the pleasant afterlife. Conceptualizations of the afterlife consistently emphasized its familiarity and beauty, while more people looked forward to this continued existence after their earthly deaths.

Figure 2.10 | Tombs at the Valley of the Kings
Author: User "Karmosin"
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Figure 2.11 | Golden Mask of Tutankhamun | Because his tomb was found mostly intact in 1922, King Tutankhamen (or King Tut) has become one of our most familiar images from dynastic Egypt.
Author: Carsten Frenzl
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC BY 2.0

As they developed religious doctrine and came into contact with new deities, Egyptians integrated new gods and goddesses into their religious beliefs. Like ancient Mesopotamians, Egyptians were polytheistic. Some of the roles and back-stories of the deities did change over time; nevertheless, over the millennia they remained quite consistent. For example, Re, Osiris, Horus, and Isis, just to name a few deities in the Egyptian pantheon, stayed significant throughout dynastic Egypt. Re was the

sun god, Osiris was the god of the afterworld, who also controlled nature's cycles (like the all important flooding of the Nile), Horus became a god of war and protection, and Isis was a goddess associated with healing and motherhood. During the Middle Kingdom, Amun, initially a patron saint of the city of Thebes and later recognized as the father of the pharaoh, was combined with Re, the sun god, to become Amun-Re the supreme god of the Egyptian pantheon. Amun-Re retained this place at the top of the Egyptian pantheon through most of the New Kingdom. One major exception occurred during the reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten.

Pharaoh Akhenaten started what is known as the **Amarna Period**. The Amarna Period, which lasted from approximately 1350 to 1325 BCE, stands out for its state-sponsored monotheism. Akhenaten introduced radical changes to Egyptian society, moving the capital to Tell el Amarna, a new settlement in the middle of the desert that was devoted to the worship of Aten and the recognition of the pharaoh's superiority over everyone else. **Aten**, who had been one of many deities worshipped during the Middle Kingdom, was elevated to the creator god associated with sunlight, the foundation of all life. The "Great Hymn to Aten" explains the god Aten's association with the sun as, like the sun, his "rays embraced the lands" of Egypt.[8] Akhenaten had the Great Temple of Aten built in the middle of the new capital, and, unlike previous temples, this one had no roof and was open to sunlight. Akhenaten further modified Egyptian religious doctrine to identify himself as the son of Aten. According to the new religious ideology, Akhenaten alone was able to ensure access to the afterlife and communicate with Aten, the sole god. To reinforce Aten's singularity, Akhenaten withdrew financial support from temples dedicated to other deities and defaced the temples dedicated to Amun, who had previously been the most dominant Egyptian deity. The prominence of Aten and Akhenaten's exclusive access to him define the Amarna Period.

Why did Akhenaten introduce these radical changes? At least in part, Akhenaten wanted to break with the priests in Thebes who controlled the temples dedicated to Amun because he believed that these priests had become too powerful. Additionally, by taking on the role of the son of Aten and regulating entry into the afterlife, Akhenaten certainly attempted to reformulate beliefs to emphasize his own importance.

Akhenaten's radical changes were likely troubling for most of the Egyptian population. They had previously found comfort in their access to deities and their regular religious rituals. The worship of Aten as the only Egyptian god did not last more than a couple of decades, floundering after the death of Akhenaten. Pharaohs who ruled from 1323 BCE onward tried not only to erase the religious legacies of the Amarna Period, but also to destroy the capital at Tell el Amarna and remove Akhenaten from the historical record. Archaeologists have not found Akhenaten's tomb or burial place. Scholars continue a long-standing debate about how this brief period of Egyptian monotheism relates (if at all) to the monotheism of the Israelites. Despite such uncertainties, study of the Amarna period does indicate that Egyptians in the fourteenth century BCE saw the fleeting appearance of religious ideology that identified Aten as the singular god.

Some of the strongest rulers of the New Kingdom, including Ramses I and Ramses II, came to power after the Amarna Period. These pharaohs expanded Egypt's centralized administration and its

8 "The Great Hymn to Aten." http://web.archive.org/web/19990221040703/http://puffin.creighton.edu/theo/simkins/tx/Aten.html

control over foreign territories. However, by the twelfth century BCE, weaker rulers, foreign invasions, and the loss of territory in Nubia and Palestine indicated the imminent collapse of the New Kingdom. In the Late Period that followed (c. 1040 to 332 BCE), the Kingdom of Kush, based in Nubia, invaded and briefly ruled Egypt until the Assyrians conquered Thebes, establishing their own rule over Lower Egypt. Egyptian internal revolts and the conquest by Nubia and the Assyrian Empire left Egypt susceptible to invasion by the Persians and then eventually the 332 BCE invasion of Alexander the Great.

The ancient Egyptians made numerous contributions to World History. We remember them for mummification, their pharaohs, and the pyramids. Certainly, in this era, Egypt stands out for its ability to produce agricultural surpluses that supported the elites, priests, and skilled craftspeople. While we tend to focus on the bureaucratic, religious, and artistic contributions of these classes, all Egyptians played crucial roles in creating and maintaining this sophisticated civilization. Additionally, the innovations of Egyptians, such as their stone-carving techniques, hieroglyphics, the use of papyrus, their knowledge of the length of a solar year, and their construction methods, influenced the ancient world and still inspire awe. Overall, the ancient Egyptians created a vibrant civilization, while they also found comfort in the familiar and traditional.

Figure 2.11 | Panel with adoration Scene of Aten | Pharaoh Akhenaten with his wife and children making offerings to Aten, the divine incarnation of the sun during the monotheistic Amarna Period.
Author: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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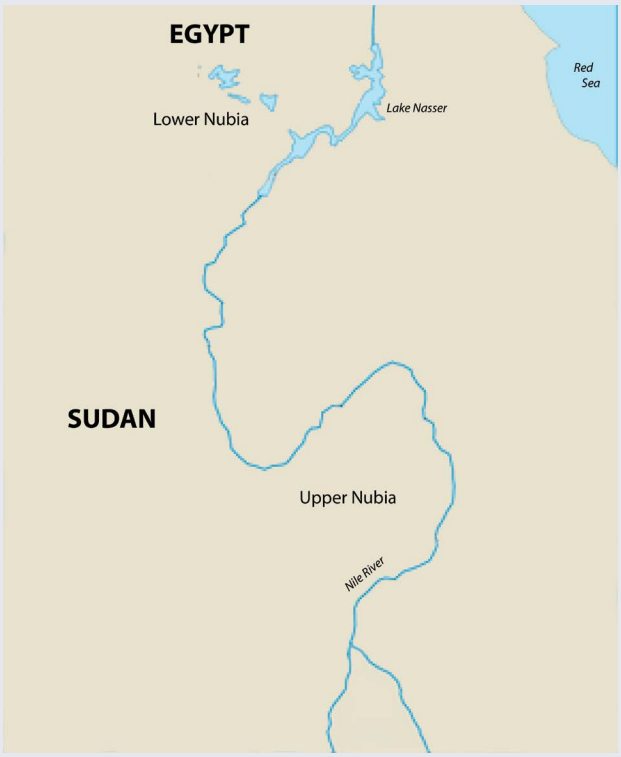
2.15 NUBIA: THE KINGDOMS OF KERMA AND KUSH

The region south of Aswan, at the first cataract of the Nile River, is commonly called **Nubia**. Nubia is notable for its long-term, dynamic relationship with ancient Egypt. Just as importantly, Nubia was also the site of an early civilization. The kingdoms of Kerma (c. 2400 BCE to 1500 BCE) and Kush (c. 1000 BCE to 300 CE) emerged along the Nile River. These kingdoms prospered especially due to their productive agriculture and the region's copious natural resources. At certain points, both Kerma and Kush were strong enough to successfully invade Egypt. These

kingdoms in Nubia also developed their own religious and cultural traditions, including a written script, Meroitic. While the people of this region, known collectively as Nubians, borrowed heavily from the Egyptians, Nubians also had distinctive practices that set their civilization apart from that of their northern neighbors.

Scholars generally link the origins of ancient Kerma (in present-day Sudan) back to the desiccation of the Sahara Desert and the rise of dynastic Egypt. Similarly to ancient Egypt, the drying out of the region encouraged people to move closer to the Nile River in the years between 5,000 and 4,000 BCE. Rock paintings, showing cattle in areas that have been desert for thousands of years, attest to the environmental changes in Nubia and also the development of a cattle culture that dates back to at least the fourth millennium BCE. Just as in Egypt, the desiccation of the Sahara desert drew together people from all directions. As people settled closer to the Nile River in Nubia, they brought their cattle, their agricultural traditions, and their languages, building settlements with higher population densities.



Map 2.9 | A map of ancient Nubia
Author: Mark Dingemanse and Corey Parson
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC BY 2.5

Additionally, Egyptian elites desired ivory, animal skins, incense, and other luxury goods prompting trade between Nubia and Egypt that pre-dated the unification of Egypt. With increased demand for luxury goods as social stratification grew, the Egyptians even ran military forays into Nubia. After unification, the Egyptians continued to invade Nubia to trade and raid for slaves and cattle. Likely, Nubian desires to control trade and protect themselves from Egyptian raids further compelled state formation in Nubia. Without Nubian records from the third millennium BCE, it is difficult to identify additional reasons why the state arose. However, archeological evidence does clearly indicate that by about 2400 BCE, Nubians had formed the Kingdom of Kerma between the third and fourth cataracts of the Nile River.

2.15.1 Kerma (c. 2400 BCE to c. 1500 BCE)

Kerma endured in Upper Nubia for almost a thousand years. The kingdom is named after its capital city at Kerma at the third cataract, but excavations at other sites (where similar pottery styles and burial sites have been found) suggest that at its height Kerma's reach may

have extended more than 200 miles southward past the fifth cataract of the Nile River. So far, archaeological evidence indicates that, with the exception of the capital and perhaps one or two other cities, most of the people in Kerma lived in smaller villages. They grew crops like barley, and kept goats, sheep, and cattle, sending tribute to their capital. The people of Kerma also developed industries, especially in mining, metalworking, and pottery. Kerma was linked inter-regionally through trade to its tributary villages, to dynastic Egypt, and to sub-Saharan Africa. Egyptian pharaohs and elites wanted the gold, copper, slaves, ivory, exotic animals, and more that they obtained from Kerma.

The people of Kerma also made use of their location on the Nile and proximity to Egypt as they imported textiles, jewelry, and other manufactured goods. Presumably, one reason that Nubian leaders built their ancient capital at Kerma was to oversee river trade. At the impassable cataract, boat owners unloaded their cargo and took it overland past the shallows and rocks before again proceeding on the water. This location at the cataract gave the leaders at Kerma the chance to tax, divert, and register goods being transported between Kerma and Egypt.

Agricultural surpluses and other tributary payments supported the rulers and elites of the capital. Archaeologists have shown that the capital had defenses, including ditches, ramparts, and massive walls with towers. There were also palaces within the city and on its outskirts. However, the most famous structure is the **Western Deffufa** (Figure 2.13) made of mud-bricks, which likely served as a temple. Two other deffufa, large mud-brick structures with spaces for rituals on top, have been at least partially excavated within the vicinity of Kerma. Another notable archaeological find is the Eastern Cemetery, which lies a couple of miles to the east of the city. It served as the burial site for Kerma's rulers for almost a thousand years and contains over 30,000 tombs. Some of the tombs were covered with large mounds. Demonstrating the cattle culture of the region, dozens of cattle skulls encircle a number of the tombs. Tombs also contain the remains of human sacrifices and other symbols of wealth and status, like jewelry made of gold and silver. The largest tomb found to date is 300 feet in diameter and covered with black granite, white quartz pebbles, and a marble top. Its interior burial suite contains semi-precious stones, bronze weapons, and lavish furniture. In the corridor leading into the underground burial site,

Figure 2.13 | The Western Deffufa at Kerma
Author: Walter Callens
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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archaeologists unearthed the remains of horses, dogs, and about 400 human sacrificial victims. The cattle skulls, mounds, and the remains of human sacrifices have led scholars to suggest that the Kerma elite had their own styles for monumental structures like the Western Deffufa and their tombs, even though they sometimes employed Egyptian artisans to complete the construction of these grand projects.

It appears that Kerma was strongest when neighboring Egypt was weak. As a case in point, during Egypt's Second Intermediate Period, Kerma, at the height of its power, successfully invaded parts of Upper Egypt and established diplomatic relations with the occupying Hyksos. Once reunified during the New Kingdom, Egypt retaliated by conquering Kerma to the fourth cataract. Then, Egypt occupied Kerma for the next 500 years. During the Egyptian occupation, the elite classes of Kerma adopted many elements of Egyptian culture, including Egyptian gods, styles of dress, Hieroglyphics, and the Egyptian language. However, scholars believe that the Nubian masses retained their own distinctive identity with their local language and customs.

2.15.2 The Kingdom of Kush

As Egypt entered its Third Intermediate Period, Nubians gradually established their independence, eventually creating a new state, the Kingdom of **Kush** in the eighth century BCE. The initial capital of the Kingdom of Kush was Napata (c. 750 BCE to 593 BCE). From Napata, the Nubians took control of Upper Egypt, establishing the "Ethiopian Dynasty," which ruled for 60 years from Thebes. Assyrian invasions destabilized the Nubian rulers in Thebes, causing the last pharaoh of the Ethiopian Dynasty to flee to Napata. Then, once strengthened, the Egyptians pushed back. The Egyptian army sacked Napata in 593 BCE and, in response, the Nubian rulers moved their capital farther south to Meroe. (See Map 2.9.) At this southern location, they further developed their civilization, which lasted until the fourth century CE.

With the new capital at **Meroe**, a location with well-watered farmland and some distance between it and Egypt, the Kingdom of Kush flourished. Meroe got more rainfall than Napata and was not as dependent on the Nile floods. Nubians were able to extend the areas under cultivation and grow a wider variety of crops, like cotton, sorghum, and millet. They were also able to easily graze their livestock and, as a result, during this period cattle became even more important as a symbol of their culture and wealth.

After moving the capital to Meroe, the culture of Kush showed more independence from Egypt as well. Particularly as Egypt's power declined, the people of Kush put more emphasis on their own deities and pushed Egyptian gods to the background. For example, temples devoted to a Nubian war god, Apedamak, "the Lion of the South," received more support and even used live lions for rituals. Gold had long been mined in the region and remained important while the people of Kush continued to develop additional industries. The area was rich in iron ore and the hardwoods used to make charcoal, which encouraged the growth of a booming iron industry. They made iron weapons and tools that they used for defense and to increase their crop yields. They were able to trade their agricultural surpluses, iron, cattle, and exotic things like elephants from sub-Saharan Africa, with Egypt, Greece, Rome, and India, bringing great wealth and

Figure 2.14 | Pyramids at Meroe
Author: B. N. Chagny
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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prestige to Meroe. Also, the rulers of Meroe commissioned pyramids but had them built in a local style. As evident in Figure 2.14, their pyramids were smaller and had a unique shape. Kush burial practices were different than those used in dynastic Egypt, as corpses were not always mummified and were buried in the fetal position. Finally, a new locally-created written script, **Meroitic**, replaced the use of Egyptian Hieroglyphics by 300 BCE. Modern scholars have not yet translated Meroitic, and students of their culture will surely learn even more about the Kingdom of Kush once scholars have done so. As for now, we know that very productive agriculture, local rituals and burial practices, the growth of industries, social stratification facilitated by Meroe's wealth and extensive trade networks, and the written script Meroitic, were some of the distinctive elements of the civilization at Kush.

While the Greeks and Romans occasionally sent raiding parties into Nubia, for a while, Meroe's southern location helped isolate it from conquest. Legends also emphasize the strength of Meroe's army and the physical prowess of its soldiers. Environmental changes, internal rivalries, and the rise of Axum (a new state to the East) likely all contributed to the fairly abrupt collapse of Meroe in the fourth century CE.

Egyptian sources were generally very derogatory in their portrayal of Nubians and even a few early twentieth century archaeologists carelessly (and incorrectly) identified these Nubian kingdoms as slave colonies of the Egyptians. However, the kingdoms of Kerma and Kush were known in the ancient world for their wealth and industries. The wealth garnered through productive agriculture and trade supported a ruling class, great artists, and monumental architecture. Egyptian culture was influential, but Nubians adapted Egyptian practices to meet their own needs and sensibilities. Often entangled with Egypt and sometimes defending themselves from other invaders as well, these two kingdoms persisted for hundreds of years, creating an independent civilization along the southern stretches of the Nile River.

2.16 SUMMARY

Between about 4000 and 3000 BCE, civilizations emerged in the fertile river valleys of Mesopotamia and Northeast Africa. These civilizations had common elements, including

food surpluses, higher population densities, social stratification, systems of taxation, labor specialization, regular trade, and written scripts.

In areas adjacent to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, Mesopotamians built city-states by 3500 BCE. While Sumerian traditions influenced developments throughout the region, other cities emerged and refined their own institutions and beliefs. Archaeological finds and records in the *cuneiform* script show the significance of the temple complex and religious leaders throughout Mesopotamia. Kingship, with hereditary rulers who claimed control over multiple city-states and special relationships with the gods, was just one significant political innovation in the region. History credits Sargon of Akkad with founding the first empire in Mesopotamia. Thereafter, a succession of empires rose and fell, demonstrating the dynamic nature of Mesopotamian societies.

According to Hebrew Tradition, Abraham led his followers from the city of Ur in Mesopotamia and they eventually settled in the Levant. Several generations later, according to Hebrew Tradition, the Israelites went to Egypt where they suffered persecution and enslavement, until Moses liberated them. Upon their return to Canaan, the Israelites built kingdoms just prior to 1000 BCE. Their kingdoms formed complex administrations and were unified by powerful kings, such as the well-known King Solomon. Historians also recognize countless other contributions made by the Israelites, especially as regards monotheistic religious traditions and western understandings of justice.

The unification of Egypt in approximately 3100 BCE evidenced the emergence of one civilization in Northeast Africa. In Nubia to the south of Egypt, Africans built another civilization with the kingdoms of Kerma and Kush. The people in each of these civilizations made good use of the agriculturally productive floodplains of the Nile River. Egypt and the kingdoms in Nubia influenced one another; they traded and intermittently claimed control over each other's territory. While we may be more familiar with the pharaohs, pyramids, and religious beliefs of ancient Egypt, Nubians made their own contributions, like the Merotic script and unique architectural styles, to World History.

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