

## CHAPTER-4

# PROMINENT CIVILIZATIONS OF THE WORLD



### After studying this chapter you learn :

- The great civilizations of the world - Egypt, Mesopotamia and China.
- Art, architecture and life style of different civilizations.
- The development of Greek civilization and their contributions to world culture.
- The development of Roman civilization and their contributions.
- Ancient columbian civilization in America Maya, Aztecs and Inca.

Many other civilizations flourished in various parts of the world at the time of Indus Valley Civilization. We can see the Egyptian civilization, Mesopotamian civilization and Chinese civilization in Asia and Africa.

### The Egyptian Civilization

Generally all civilizations have originated in river valleys. The Egyptian civilization could take birth due to the presence of the river Nile. The relics obtained here reveal the grandeur of Egypt. Huge pyramids, sculptures, temples and the inscriptions in these temples tell us a lot about Egyptian culture and history.

### The Contribution of Egyptians

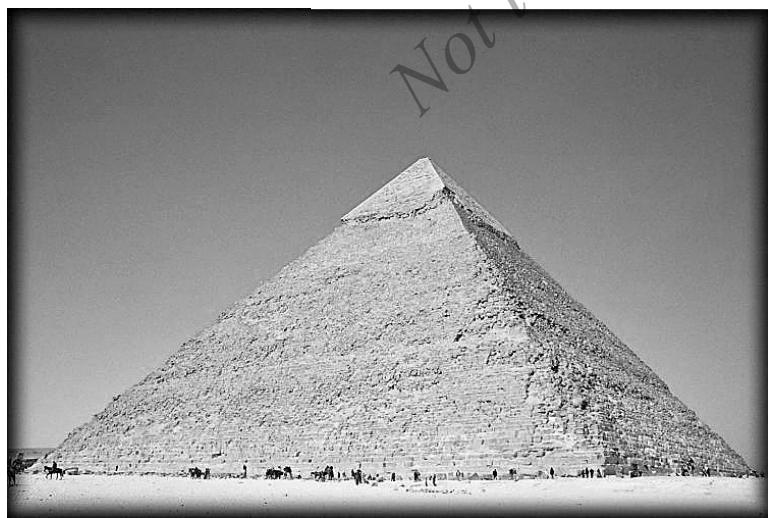
The Egyptians were expert farmers. They knew a lot about irrigation. They had built temples. They invented the calendar which has helped us to measure time. More than anything else, they had mastered the art of writing. It was a symbolic language. It consists of small drawings and has been called hieroglyphics (sacred writings).

### The Nile Valley

Every rainy season, the Nile river would transform the Nile valley into a huge lake. After the valley dried up in summer, a fertile layer of clay soil would form the grazing field and adjacent agricultural lands.

The work that would need the labour of hundreds of people, was being done by the kind river all alone. This fertile land provided food for the population of the first town in the area. Not all agricultural regions were within the valley. Hence it was through small canals and wells that they were responsible for the development of a complex system of irrigation through out the land.

The prosperous, wealthy Egyptian peasants and citizens in their leisure engaged themselves in the creation of artistic works. The role of priest was created to interpret nature and explain it. The priests were scholars and shouldered the responsibility of protecting written documents. They believed in life after death. They believed that man had to give an account of his deeds on earth to Osiris, the most powerful God of Life after Death. The priests considered that life on earth was temporary and was needed only to prepare for the next life. Thus the whole of the Nile valley was reserved for the dead. The dead body would be smeared with various chemicals and wrapped with a thin cloth. The entire body was in this way preserved. The body protected thus was called 'mummy'. It would be kept in a specially designed coffin. The grave was considered the true 'place' for an Egyptian. Hence all around the dead body, items needed for daily use and small dolls of a cook and barber would be kept to fulfil all future needs.



**Pyramid**

In the beginning, graves were created by carving into boulders on the hills. As the Egyptians moved north, they had to construct graves in the desert itself. Tall towers were built on these graves using huge blocks of stone in order to protect the eternal sleep of the dead. Kings and wealthy

people vied with each other to build taller and taller towers.

The Greeks called these structures 'Pyramids'. The kings of Egypt were called 'Pharaohs'. 'Pharaoh' means 'a person who lives in a palatial house'. The peasants who had accepted the rule of powerful Osiris, now accepted the rule of Pharaohs too.

After an independent, prosperous life for twenty centuries, Egypt was ruled over by an Arabian shepherd tribe called Hyksos which attacked it and after defeating it, ruled for 500 years. They looted the wealth of the natives, and hence did not become popular. The Jews who came wandering through the deserts in search of shelter were also hated by the people of Egypt. By cooperating with the foreign rule the Jews even assisted them in collecting taxes and in administration.

In 1700 B.C.E. the people of Thebes rose in revolt against the foreigners. After a prolonged conflict, they succeeded in driving Hyksos out of their country. Egypt became free once again. After a thousand years, it came under the rule of Sardanapalus of Assyria.

The Persian Emperor Cambyses occupied Egypt in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. Alexander occupied Persia in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. Egypt became a province of Macedonia. One of Alexander's military generals declared himself the King of Egypt and established the dynasty of the Ptolemies. He founded the city of Alexandria. At last came the Romans in 39 B.C.E. The last Egyptian queen, Cleopatra, tried her best to save her country. It was said that the Romans feared her beauty more than her troops. However, in 30 B.C.E., Caesar's successor, his relative, Augustus, did not succumb to her beauty like his uncle, but defeated her army, though he spared her life. When he planned to carry her away along with the other spoils of the battle, Cleopatra consumed poison and ended her life. From then onwards, Egypt became a province of Rome.

### **The Mesopotamian Civilization**

Mesopotamia is an area which lies in a valley between two rivers. Many of the places described in the Old Testament can be seen here. The land which inspires awe and fascination is called the 'Land between the rivers' or 'Mesopotamia' by the Greeks. The two rivers, Euphrates and Tigris, have made this West Asian barren land very fertile. It was the fertility of this area that attracted the people to it.

Since food crops could be grown with little effort, the northern hilly tribes and the southern nomadic tribes of the desert tried to establish control over this area. The rivalry between these tribes led to number of endless conflicts. However, in the midst of these conflicts, there emerged a civilization of strong and brave race. The Sumerians were the first ones to evolve a system of writing in Mesopotamia. For 30 centuries all those who entered the fertile valley – Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians and Chaldeans – used this system of writing, which was called Cuneiform.

The most important area of this civilization was the southern part of the valley between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. From olden times, this area had been referred to as Babylonia. The northern part of Babylonia was called Akhad and the southern part Sumer. The northern part of Mesopotamia was known as Assyria.

### **The Hanging Gardens of Babylonia**

The legendary Hanging Gardens were created on the banks of the river Euphrates around 7th Century B.C.E. This was one of the seven wonders of the Old World. But it is surprising to note that the Babylonian cuneiform records which make a mention of the city, its palaces and its walls, are totally silent about the Hanging Gardens. Most of the scholars are of the view that King Nebuchadnezzar II was the one who created the gardens.

Nebuchadnezzar's wife Amitis was from Mead. It is said that Nebuchadnezzar got the gardens built in order to console his wife who was missing the beautiful environment of hills, trees and flowers of her motherland. Some scholars Opine that the gardens were created by Assyrian queen Sammu-Ramat. In reality, the gardens did not hang in the air. The trees and bushes were grown at different levels (or terraced land) of the ziggurats. When the branches hung at different levels and swayed, they gave the onlooker an impression of being a hanging garden. The Euphrates provided the water for these gardens.

The history of Mesopotamia is a story of end less hatred and conflict. The Sumerians, the hilly tribe from the north, were the first to come

here. They who used to worship their gods on top of the hills, after coming to the plains, built artificial hills and established their places of worship there. These were called Ziggurat. The Jews called these the Towers of Babel.



**Ziggurat**

### **The Law Codes of Hammurabi**

The main source of the law codes of Hammurabi are the rock edicts found in 1901. Today this has been kept in 'The Louvre' museum of Paris. Hammurabi's law enforced the logic of 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. Hammurabi's Law Codes are one among the most ancient of the codes available to us. They were probably written to protect the rights of all sections of Babylonian society, especially women and slaves.

The Sumerians had entered Mesopotamia in 4000 B.C.E. Later they were overpowered by the Akkadians, one of the tribes of the Arabian desert. These are known as Semites. After a thousand years, these Akkadians came to be ruled over by the Amorites, another Semitic tribe. The most famous king of the Amorites was Hammurabi. He got built a fabulous palace for himself in Babylonia. He framed the codes of justice and made Babylonia to be considered the best-administered kingdom in the whole of the Old World. The Hittites who came later, occupied the valley and destroyed all that they could not carry away. These Hittites were defeated by the Assyrians who were the followers of 'Ashura', the desert God. The Assyrians occupied

the whole of West Asia and Egypt till about 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E., and collected taxes from all the people there. Another Semitic tribe, the Chaldeans, re-established Babylonia in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. and developed it into a prominent capital of that time. Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest king among them. He encouraged the study of science. But the Chaldeans came under the attack of the Persians in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. Two hundred years later, Alexander transformed this place of the Semitic peoples into a Greek province. After the rulers of the Romans and Turks who followed Alexander, this civilization declined and turned into a wilderness.

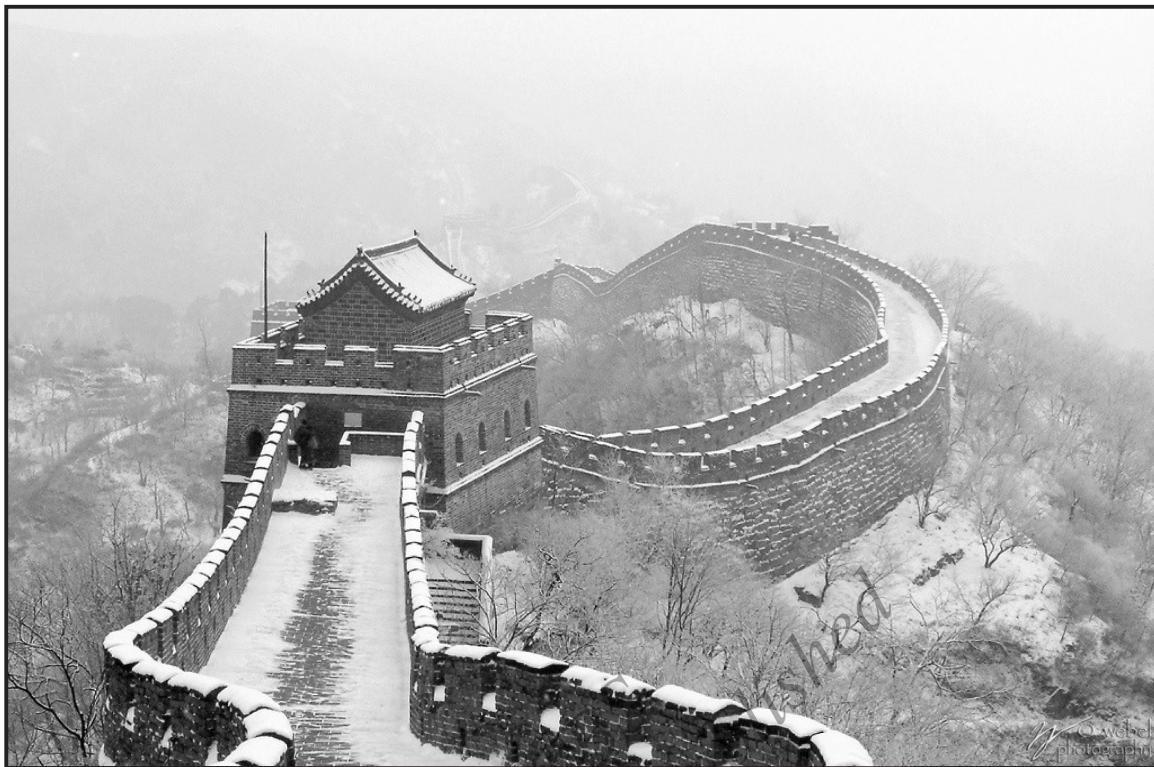
### **The Chinese Civilization**

It is a special feature of all ancient civilizations that they were established on river valleys. The Chinese civilization was no exception to this. But the river which led to the establishment of the Chinese civilization was known as 'China's Sorrow'. This was the Hwang Ho river. During the floods this river changed its course in an unpredictable manner and inundated houses and agricultural lands. It would render all the canals useless. This was the reason the people of that area referred to it as the 'Symbol of Sorrow'.

According to excavations, the first ruling family of the Chinese civilization was the Shang dynasty. It ruled in the period between the 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. and the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Under the rule of this dynasty, the people had developed a wonderful culture by the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. The Shang dynasty was overpowered by the neighbouring Chau dynasty. The Chau dynasty continued the good traditions of the Shang culture and ruled till 250 B.C.E.

In the Chou dynasty there was a section of officials below the kings. The king allotted portions of land to the officials. In return for that, the officials supported the king during battles. In the social stratification, the communities in the next level were the merchants and craftsmen. Apart from them we can find a great majority of peasants as well. In the lowest strata of social hierarchy were the slaves. The prisoners of war were made slaves by the kings.

## The Great Wall of China



*The Chinese Empire consisted of many small provinces. Seven big states were created bringing these smaller provinces under them. Every state that was created thus, constructed a wall along its boundary for protection. Emperor Qin Shihuangti ordered that the walls of the northern chinese states be connected. This enabled the northern walls to ward off the attacks of invaders from the north. The construction of the great wall began in the 7th century B.C.E. and continued till the 16th century. The worn-out parts were repaired and strengthened. When the work was completed it stretched to more than 5000 kilometers. It is one of the seven wonders of the world.*

The Shang kings spent quite an amount of time in conquests and battles. Hence the army was in prominence. The soldier enjoyed a dignified place in society. Soldiers wore bronze helmets and metal armours. The bronze daggers, axes, bows and iron-tipped arrows which they used have been found. The people of the Shang dynasty depended on agriculture. They had a well-organized system of irrigation. They used to grow plenty of rice.

## **Porcelain**

It is believed that porcelain originated in China. Semi-porcelain objects were in use from 1600 B.C.E. By the time of the reign of the Han dynasty (200 B.C.E.), glazed porcelain had been developed. It had developed into an exotic art. The ancient Chinese used to bury their dead along with porcelain pots, animals and the objects loved most during their lives.

The Chinese used to wear thin cotton dresses. They used silk too, and engaged in silkworm-rearing. Silk-manufacturing was a prominent industry. The Chinese used to make excellent pots, and had learnt to make various objects from porcelain. It was a custom of the Chinese to worship their ancestors. They believed that a dead man became a spirit and that the spirit had special powers. The dead body was buried along with various wooden articles, pots, bronze vessels and other objects. The tombs of kings used to be quite large. The Chinese tradition of writing began with pictures and got transformed into an ideographic script. Writing on silk and bamboo slips. Porcelain and the Great Wall are the exceptional contributions of this culture.

## **Greek Civilization**

The Greeks came from the north to the region of the Aegean sea. These tribals who were mainly shepherds, came in search of grasslands. Every group which came in this manner had a distinctive name: the Acheans, the Ionians and the Dorians. These people called themselves Hellenese or the Greeks. The Greeks originally belonged to tribes. There used to be a king looking after many tribes. The people used to engage in agriculture and animal-husbandry. They also used to engage in making pots, swords and ornaments. Trade was through barter system. Battles and conquests formed adventurous activities of their lives. The Greeks believed that their Gods lived on Mount Olympus. They prayed for good harvests and success in their various activities. There were no priests among the Greeks. The king prayed on behalf of all the people.

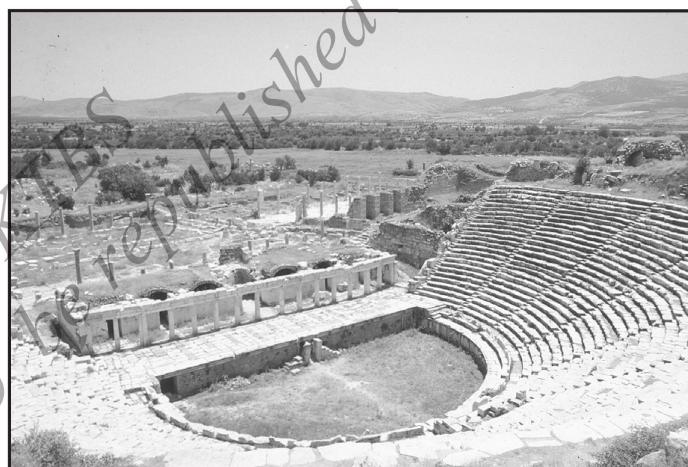
## Alexander

He was the king of Macedonia in Greece. In his short lived life, he set out to conquer the whole world. He was successful in building a huge empire. He defeated the Persian army and advanced towards India. Aristotle, one of the greatest scholars of Greece, was his teacher. After fighting on the Indian borders while on his return to Greece, Alexander died at Babylon in 323 B.C.E.

Slavery was practised in Greece. This enabled the Greeks to enjoy leisure time and engage in various arts and luxury. Their Olympic Games were popular games played once every four years. Importance was given to different arts in Greece.

## Roman Civilization

We can see the relics of ancient Roman civilization in present-day Italy. The original inhabitants of Italy were the people of North Africa, Spain and France. They migrated to Italy around 4000 years ago. After some time, the Greeks and Etruscans came and settled here. The Italians are the descendants of these people. The Italians learnt the language, religious beliefs and art from the Greeks.



**Amphitheatre**

Rome was under the rule of a monarchy. The Romans had 'Assembly' and a 'Senate', as two political advisory institutions. The Assembly was made up of all middle-aged men, whereas the Senate was an elite institution which was very influential. The Senate had the power to reject the proposals of the Assembly and the king. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., monarchy was abolished and a republic was established. Around 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. the administration of the whole of Italy came under the republican states. Even under the Roman republic, the Senate and the Assembly continued as advisory

institutions. The members of these institutions headed the armies during war. They enforced the law and dispensed justice.

There were two classes in the Roman society: the Patricians and the Plebians. The Patricians were the elite in society. They were land-owners and formed the upper class. It is they who controlled the Senate. The Plebians were the common people. They were the ordinary workers, small land-owners, artisans, small traders and soldiers. Their rights were limited. They were meant to pay taxes, and to undergo punishment. The decisions taken by the Council and the Senate regarding the Plebians could be rejected by the Tribunes. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century B. C. the Plebians rebelled against this system. As a result, the Patricians granted them some concessions. Thus the Plebians got the right to choose the members of the Tribunes. It was around this time that a rule-based on 'Roman law' was established. This provided awareness over their rights and learnt to oppose the violation of their rights.

A desire for expansion exposed the Romans into newer conflicts. Hence they battled with Carthage, a coastal town in North Africa. Sicily was a fertile area. The Romans fought for control of this area for 118 years. These wars are referred to as the 'Punic Wars'. The Carthagens were defeated in this war. By early 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E., the Romans had conquered Greece, parts of Asia and Egypt.

### **Gladiator**

The wrestlers of ancient Rome were called Gladiators. There were both expert and amateur wrestlers among them. The fights were organised to entertain the 'civilized' spectators. These fights which were fought between human beings, and sometimes between human beings and animals, ended in gruesome deaths of the participants. The place where the combat between the gladiators were fought was called 'Amphitheatre' and 'Colosseum'. Criminals, slaves and prisoners-of-war who had lost their citizenship rights were taken as gladiators. Gladiators on acquiring fame and wealth were sometimes given freedom. Recently, a film titled 'Gladiator' has become famous world-wide.

Conquests and victories had enabled Rome to acquire vast wealth and riches. Rome won over a lot of gold and innumerable slaves. Rome not only had Patricians and Plebians but also had slaves. The slaves did not have the rights of citizenship. They were the private property of their owners. Slaves were also sold. There were instances when the slaves secured their freedom under special conditions. The Romans who had immersed themselves in status egos used the slaves as gladiators. They were amused at the combat of the gladiators from the amphitheatre. A majority of the slaves and prisoners lost their lives in such games.

Over a period of time the chaos engulfed the Roman state. Now rebellions and assassinations took place. Bribery and corruption during elections became the order of the day. At this juncture, around 60,000 poor and exploited slaves rose in rebellion under the leadership of Spartacus. One year after their struggle they were ruthlessly suppressed. Around 60,000 people were crucified at this time.

The Generals on account of continual wars reduced the authority of the senate to insignificance. Pompey and Julius Ceasar are prominent among the hundreds of such military generals. These two vied with each other and finally Caesar emerged victorious against Pompey and tried to become a dictator. The result was that Brutus and his associates assassinated Caesar in the premises of the Senate. Later on, the authority was passed on to Julius Caesar's nephew, Octavius. He took revenge against those who conspired in the killing of Caesar. With Octavius, the republican form of government came to an end. Octavius ruled under the title Augustus. He called himself 'Princep' too. 'Princep' meant 'The First Citizen of the State'. He introduced many reforms and ruled for 44 years. The kings who came after Augustus were dictators. The Senate lost all its power. The king assumed supreme power and became a tyrant. From here onwards, we see the deterioration of Rome.

Each culture is responsible for the development of its language. The Roman reign was responsible for the development of the Latin language and literature. Rome also gave rise to distinct architecture. The Pantheon is a temple, whereas the Colosseum is an auditorium. Roman sculpture has been inspired by the Greeks, and is full of life. On account of the birth of Jesus Christ and the religion that he preached Rome acquired prominence.

## **The American Civilizations**

Maya, Aztec and Inca are the ancient Columbian civilizations of America. They represent the culture of the Indian aborigines of America.

The commemorative idols depict leaders and kings. These are called Olmec. The evidences and the excavations found here reveal a centralized society with an hierarchical system.

### **Maya Civilization**

The American-Indian aborigines of Yucutan area of Mexico are called the Mayas. Their language is called Yucutec. The Mayas were the most advanced among the ancient American Indians. The ruins of cities built of stone have been obtained in Yucutan of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras.

#### **The life of the Mayas**

Around a large site named Tikal, pyramids, ‘palaces’ and courtyards have been found all around stretching one square mile.

In all ceremonial centres and on either side of the courtyards, there used to be pyramids. Beneath them were buildings with many rooms. In front of these, there used to be mammoth stone pillars, of which a few were plain pillars. Usually depictions of gods, priests, important leaders in administration and hieroglyphic writing would be carved on these pillars.

There is no evidence of the use of metal among the Mayas. Even in early 16<sup>th</sup> century, copper and gold were rare.

## **The Aztecs**

Texcoco is a lake in Mexico. The Aztecs built their city on an island in this lake.

When the Spanish army entered the Mexican valley in 1519, they spotted the beautiful city on the island in a lake. That city was Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztecs, which had grown to symbolize their wealth and power. As the Spanish stepped into the city, they saw three wide roads. One of them led to the palace, the second led to the ornate temple and the third led to the pyramids. All these came under the Spanish conquest.

The Aztecs were worshippers of Nature. They tried to please God in many ways, one of them was human sacrifice. As the Aztec empire grew, they sacrificed more and more human beings to please the gods. It is believed that when the temple-pyramid of Tenochtitlan was dedicated, around 20,000 prisoners were sacrificed. The Spanish army which advanced under the leadership of Hernando Cortez in 1517 is said to have caused its cultural defeat too.

## **Inca**

The Inca empire which flourished during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries spread in the areas of Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Argentina.

The talent of the Incas can be seen more in their organizational ability than in their artistic interests.

The palace on the island in Lake Titicaca and the Moon Temple are two famous buildings of the Incas.

The Incas had developed new ways of making pots, cloth and in working with metals. Creation of gold jewellery had progressed very well in parts of North Peru.

The Sun God was the most important deity of the Incas. This was the reason that there was a Sun Temple in all Inca centres. They worshipped objects of nature like the Moon, the Stars and lightning, and prayed to other natural phenomena.

## **EXERCISES**

### **I Complete the following sentences by using suitable words in the blanks :**

- 1 Hieroglyphics are called \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2 The kings who ruled Egypt are called \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 The Greeks referred to Mesopotamia as \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 The most famous king of the Amorites is \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5 'Princep' means \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6 The language of the Romans is \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7 Texcoco is a \_\_\_\_\_ in Mexico.
- 8 The ruling deity of the Incas was \_\_\_\_\_.

### **II Match the following :**

<b>A</b>		<b>B</b>
9 Hwang River		a Mesopotamia
10 Cuneiform		b King of the Amorites
11 Cleopatra		c Shang
12 Hammurabi		d China
13 Chinese dynasty		e the last Egyptian queen

### **III Answer in brief the following questions :**

- 14 Which are the civilizations of ancient Columbia?
- 15 Who are the 'Mayas'?
- 16 How are 'mummies' preserved?
- 17 Write a paragraph on the Pyramids.
- 18 How was 'Hwangho River' China's sorrow?

#### **IV Activities :**

- 19 Learn about the life history of the Greek philosophers from your teacher.
- 20 Study and watch Shakesphere's drama Julius Ceasar.
- 21 Collect information about the Nile river.

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