2

Complex Societies in Southwest Asia and the Nile Valley

3800–500 B.C.E.

Louvre, Paris, France/Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Persian Archers

In this colorful decorative frieze made of glazed brick, men wearing long Persian robes and laced ankle boots carry spears, bows, and quivers. This reconstruction in the Louvre Museum in Paris was made from material found in the palace of King Darius I of Persia in Susa, built about 510 B.C.E. Enough bricks were found there to suggest that there were originally many archers, perhaps representing Darius's royal guards or symbolizing the entire Persian people.

Five thousand years ago, humans were living in most parts of the planet. They had designed technologies to meet the challenges presented by deep forests and jungles, steep mountains, and blistering deserts. As the climate changed, they adapted, building boats to cross channels created by melting glaciers and finding new sources of food when old sources were no longer plentiful. In some places the new sources included domesticated plants and animals, which allowed people to live in much closer proximity to one another than they had as foragers.

That proximity created opportunities, as larger groups of people pooled their knowledge to deal with life's challenges, but it also created problems. Human history from that point on can be seen as a response to these opportunities, challenges, and conflicts. As small villages grew into cities, people continued to develop technologies and systems to handle new issues. To control their more complex societies, people created governments, militaries, and taxation systems. In some places they invented writing to record taxes, inventories, and payments, and they later put writing to other uses. The first places where these new technologies and systems were introduced were the Tigris and Euphrates River Valleys of southwest Asia and the Nile Valley of northeast Africa, areas whose histories became linked through trade, military conquests, and migrations.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

WRITING, CITIES, AND STATES
How does writing shape what we can know about the past, and how did writing develop to meet the needs of cities and states?

MESOPOTAMIA FROM SUMER TO BABYLON
How did the peoples of Mesopotamia form states and develop new technologies and institutions?

THE EGYPTIANS
How did the Egyptians create a prosperous and long-lasting society?

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How did the Assyrians and the Persians consolidate their power and control the subjects of their empires?

Writing, Cities, and States

How does writing shape what we can know about the past, and how did writing develop to meet the needs of cities and states?

The remains of buildings, burial sites, weapons, tools, artwork, and other handmade objects provide our only evidence of how people lived, thought, felt, and died during most of the human past. Beginning about 5,000 years ago, however, people in some parts of the world developed a new technology, writing. Writing developed to meet the needs of more complex urban societies that are often referred to as "civilizations." In particular, writing met the needs of the state, a new political form that developed during the time covered in this chapter.

Written Sources and the Human Past

Historians who study human societies that developed systems of writing continue to use many of the same types of physical evidence as do those who study societies without writing. For some cultures, the writing or record-keeping systems have not yet been deciphered, so our knowledge of these people also depends largely on physical evidence. Scholars can read the writing of a great many societies, however, adding greatly to what we can learn about them.

Much ancient writing survives only because it was copied and recopied, sometimes years after it was first produced. The survival of a work means that someone from a later period — and often a long chain of someones — judged it worthy of the time, effort, and resources needed to produce copies. The copies may not be completely accurate. Historians studying ancient works thus often try to find as many early copies as they can and compare them to arrive at the version they think is closest to the original.

The works considered worthy of copying tend to be those that are about the political and military events involving major powers, those that record religious traditions, or those that come from authors who were later regarded as important. By contrast, written sources dealing with the daily life of ordinary men and women were few to begin with and were rarely saved or copied because they were not considered significant.

Clay Letter Written in Cuneiform and Its Envelope, ca. 1850 B.C.E. In this letter from a city in Anatolia, located on the northern edge of the Fertile Crescent in what is now southern Turkey, a Mesopotamian merchant complains to his brother at home, hundreds of miles away, that life is hard and comments on the trade in silver, gold, tin, and textiles. Correspondents often enclosed letters in clay envelopes and sealed them by rolling a cylinder seal across the clay, leaving the impression of a scene, just as you might use a stamped wax seal today. Here the very faint impression of the sender's seal at the bottom shows a person, probably the owner of the seal, being led in a procession toward a king or god.

Some early written texts survive in their original form because people inscribed them in stone, shells, bone, or other hard materials, intending them to be permanent. Stones with inscriptions were often erected in the open in public places for all to see, so they include text that leaders felt had enduring importance, such as laws, religious proclamations, decrees, and treaties. (The names etched in granite on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., are perhaps the best-known modern example, but inscriptions can be found on nearly every major public building.) Sometimes this permanence was accidental: in ancient Mesopotamia (in the area of modern Iraq), all writing was initially made up of indentations on soft clay tablets, which then hardened. Hundreds of thousands of these tablets have survived, the oldest written in cuneiform (see "Writing, Mathematics, and Poetry") and dating to about 3200 B.C.E. From these written records historians have learned about many aspects of everyday life. By contrast, writing in Egypt at the same time was often done in ink on papyrus sheets, made from a plant that grows abundantly in Egypt. Some of these papyrus sheets have survived, but papyrus is much more

fragile than hardened clay, so most have disintegrated. In China, the oldest surviving writing is on bones and turtle shells from about 1200 B.C.E., but it is clear that writing was done much earlier on less permanent materials such as silk and bamboo. (For more on the origins of Chinese writing, see "The Development of Writing" in Chapter 4.)

Cities and the Idea of Civilization

Along with writing, the growth of cities has often been a way that scholars mark the increasing complexity of human societies. In the ancient world, residents of cities generally viewed themselves as more advanced and sophisticated than rural folk — a judgment still made today by urban dwellers. They saw themselves as more "civilized," a word that comes from the Latin adjective *civilis*, which refers to either a citizen of a town or of a larger political unit such as an empire.

This depiction of people as either civilized or uncivilized was gradually extended to whole societies. Beginning in the eighteenth century European scholars described those societies in which political, economic, and social organizations operated on a large scale as "civilizations." Civilizations had cities; laws that governed human relationships; codes of manners and social conduct that regulated how people were to behave; and scientific, philosophical, and theological ideas that explained the larger world. Generally only societies that used writing were judged to be civilizations.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, historians often referred to the earliest places where writing and cities developed as the "cradles of civilization," proposing a model of development for all humanity patterned on that of an individual person. However, the idea that all human societies developed (or should develop) in a uniform process from a "cradle" to a "mature" civilization has now been largely discredited, and some world historians choose not to use the word *civilization* at all because it could imply that some societies are superior to others. But they have not rejected the idea that about 5,000 years ago a new form of human society appeared.

The Rise of States, Laws, and Social Hierarchies

Cities concentrated people and power, and they required more elaborate mechanisms to make them work than had small agricultural villages and foraging groups. These mechanisms were part of what political scientists call "the state," an organization in which a share of the population is able to coerce resources out of everyone else in order to gain and then maintain power. In the earliest states, the interest that gained power was often one

particular family or kin group, a set of religious leaders, or even a charismatic or talented individual able to handle the problems of dense urban communities. These same types of states continue to today as monarchies, theocracies, and dictatorships, joined by types of states that developed more recently, such as democracies, in which power is understood to reside in "the people."

However they were and are established, states coerce people through violence, or the threat of violence, and develop armies and police forces for this purpose; even in democracies, people can be forced to do things they do not want to do with the threat of imprisonment or other punishment. Using armed force to gain resources is not very efficient, however, so states developed other ways to do this, such as bureaucracies and systems of taxation. States also need to keep track of people and goods, so they sometimes developed systems of recording information and accounting, usually through writing, though not always. In the Inca Empire of the Andes, for example, information about money, goods, and people was recorded on collections of colored knotted strings called *khipus* (see "Societies of the Americas in a Global Context" in Chapter 11). These systems allowed for the creation of more elaborate rules of behavior, often written down in the form of law codes, which facilitated further growth in state power, or in the form of religious traditions, which specified what sort of behavior is pleasing to the gods or other supernatural forces and thus convinced people to act in certain ways.

Written laws and traditions generally create more elaborate social hierarchies, in which divisions between elite groups and common people are established more firmly. They also generally heighten gender hierarchies. Those who gain power in states are most often men, so they tend to establish laws and norms that favor males in marriage, property rights, and other areas.

Whether we choose to call the process "the birth of civilization," or "the development of complex society," or "the growth of the state," in the fourth millennium B.C.E. Neolithic agricultural villages expanded into cities that depended largely on food produced by the surrounding countryside while people living in cities carried out other tasks. The organization of a more complex division of labor was undertaken by an elite group, which enforced its will through laws, taxes, and bureaucracies backed up by armed force or the threat of it. Social and gender hierarchies became more complex and rigid. All this happened first in Mesopotamia, then in Egypt, and then in India and China.

Mesopotamia from Sumer to Babylon

How did the peoples of Mesopotamia form states and develop new technologies and institutions?

States first developed in Mesopotamia, where sustained agriculture reliant on irrigation from the Euphrates (you-FRAY-teez) and Tigris Rivers resulted in larger populations, a division of labor, and the growth of cities. Priests and rulers developed ways to control and organize these complex societies. Conquerors from the north unified Mesopotamian city-states into larger empires and spread Mesopotamian culture over a large area.

Environmental Challenges, Irrigation, and Religion

Mesopotamia was part of the Fertile Crescent, where settled agriculture first developed (see "The Development of Horticulture" in Chapter 1). The earliest agricultural villages in Mesopotamia were in the northern, hilly parts of the river valleys, where there is abundant rainfall for crops. Farmers had brought techniques of crop raising southward by about 5000 B.C.E., to the southern part of Mesopotamia known as Sumer (SOO-mer). In this arid climate farmers developed large-scale irrigation, which required organized group effort but allowed the population to grow. By about 3800 B.C.E. one of these agricultural villages, Uruk (OO-rook), had expanded significantly, becoming what many historians view as the world's first city. Over the next thousand years, other cities emerged in Sumer, trading with one another and creating massive hydraulic projects including reservoirs, dams, and dikes to prevent major floods. These cities built defensive walls, marketplaces, and large public buildings; each came to dominate the surrounding countryside, becoming city-states independent from one another, though not very far apart.

The city-states of Sumer relied on irrigation systems that required cooperation and at least some level of social and political cohesion. The authority to run this system was, it seems, initially assumed by Sumerian priests. Encouraged and directed by their religious leaders, people built temples on tall platforms in the center of their cities. Temples grew into elaborate complexes of buildings with storage space for grain and other products and housing for animals. (Much later, by about 2100 B.C.E., some of the major temple complexes were embellished with a huge stepped pyramid, called a ziggurat, with a shrine on the top.) Surrounding the temple and other large buildings were the houses of ordinary citizens, each constructed around a central courtyard.

Louvre, Paris, France/Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Sumerian Harpist This small clay tablet, carved between 2000 B.C.E. and 1500 B.C.E., shows a seated woman playing a harp. Her fashionable dress and hat suggest that she is playing for wealthy people, perhaps at the royal court. Images of musicians are common in Mesopotamian art, which indicates that music was important in Mesopotamian culture and social life.

To Sumerians, and to later peoples in Mesopotamia as well, many different gods and goddesses controlled the world, a religious idea later scholars called **polytheism**. Each deity represented cosmic forces such as the sun, moon, water, and storms. The gods judged good and evil and would punish humans who lied or cheated. People believed that humans had been created to serve the gods and generally anticipated being well treated by the gods if they honored them through rituals and temples.

polytheism The worship of many gods and goddesses.

Sumerian Politics and Society

Exactly how kings emerged in Sumerian society is not clear. Scholars have suggested that during times of crisis a chief priest or sometimes a military leader assumed what was supposed to be temporary authority over a city. He established an army, trained it, and led it into battle. Temporary power gradually became permanent kingship, and kings in some Sumerian city-states began to hand down the kingship to their sons, establishing patriarchal hereditary dynasties in which power was handed down through the male line. The symbol of royal status was the palace, which came to

rival the temple in its grandeur.

Kings made alliances with other powerful individuals, often through marriage. Royal family members were responsible for many aspects of government. Kings worked closely with religious authorities and relied on ideas about their connections with the gods, as well as the kings' military might, for their power. Royal children, both sons and daughters, were sometimes priests and priestesses in major temples. Acting together, priests, nobles, and kings in Sumerian cities used force, persuasion, and threats of higher taxes to maintain order, keep the irrigation systems working, and keep food and other goods flowing.

The king and the nobles held extensive tracts of land, as did the temple; these lands were worked by the palace's or the temple's clients — free men and women who were dependent on the palace or the temple. They received crops and other goods in return for their labor. Although this arrangement assured the clients of a livelihood, the land they worked remained the possession of the palace or the temple. Some individuals and families owned land outright and paid their taxes in the form of agricultural products or items they made. At the bottom rung of society were slaves. Like animals, slaves were a source of physical power for their owners, providing them an opportunity to amass more wealth and influence.

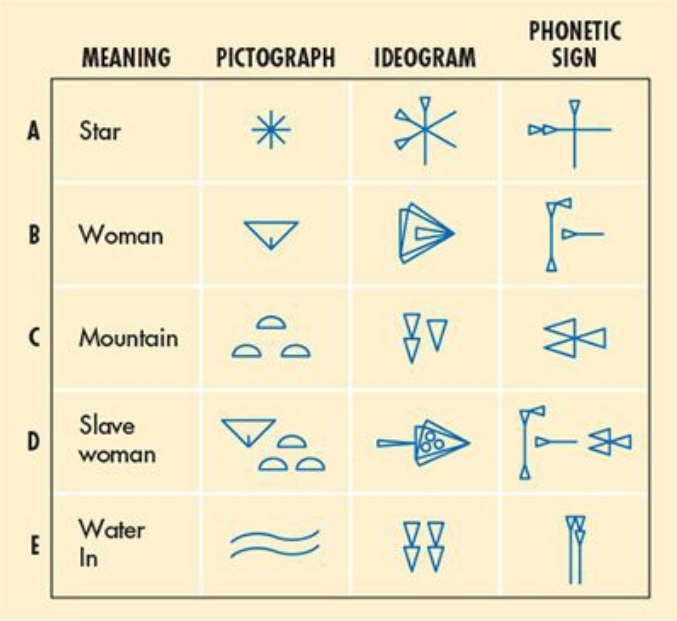
Each of these social categories included both men and women, but their experiences were not the same, for Sumerian society made distinctions based on gender. Most elite landowners were male, but women who held positions as priestesses or as queens ran their own estates independently of their husbands and fathers. Some women owned businesses and took care of their own accounts. They could own property and distribute it to their offspring. Sons and daughters inherited from their parents, although a daughter received her inheritance in the form of a dowry, which technically remained hers but was managed by her husband or husband's family after marriage. The Sumerians established the basic social, economic, and intellectual patterns of Mesopotamia and influenced their neighbors to the north and east.

Writing, Mathematics, and Poetry

The origins of writing probably date back to the ninth millennium B.C.E., when people in southwest Asia used clay tokens as counters for record keeping. By the fourth millennium people had realized that impressing the tokens on soft clay, or drawing pictures of the tokens on clay, was simpler than making tokens. This breakthrough in turn suggested that more information could be conveyed by adding pictures of other objects, and

slowly the new technology of writing developed. The result was a complex system of pictographs in which each sign pictured an object, such as “star” (line A of Figure 2.1). These pictographs were the forerunners of the Sumerian form of writing known as **cuneiform** (kyou-NEE-uh-form), for which the first surviving examples date from about 3200 B.C.E.

cuneiform Sumerian form of writing; the term describes the wedge-shaped marks made by a stylus.



Source: Information from S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963]

Figure 2.1 Sumerian Writing

Pictographs were initially limited in that they could not represent abstract ideas, but the development of ideograms — signs that represented ideas — made writing more versatile. Thus the sign for “star” could also be used to indicate “heaven,” “sky,” or even “god.” The real breakthrough came when scribes started using signs to represent sounds. For instance, the symbol for “water” (two parallel wavy lines) could also be used to indicate “in,” which sounded the same as the spoken word for “water” in Sumerian.

The development of the Sumerian system of writing was piecemeal, with scribes making changes and additions as they were needed. The system became so complicated that the Sumerians established scribal schools, which by 2500 B.C.E. flourished throughout the region. Students

at the schools were all male, and most came from families in the middle range of urban society. Scribal schools were primarily intended to produce individuals who could keep records of the property of temple officials, kings, and nobles. Thus writing first developed as a way to enhance the growing power of elites, not to record speech.

Sumerians wrote numbers as well as words on clay tablets, and some surviving tablets show multiplication and division problems. The Sumerians and later Mesopotamians made significant advances in mathematics using a numerical system based on units of sixty, ten, and six, from which we derive our division of hours into sixty minutes and minutes into sixty seconds. They also developed the concept of place value — that the value of a number depends on where it stands in relation to other numbers.

Written texts were not an important part of Sumerian religious life, nor were they central to the religious practices of most of the other peoples in this region. Stories about the gods circulated orally and traveled with people when they moved up and down the rivers. Sumerians also told stories about heroes and kings, many of which were eventually reworked into the world's first **epic poem**, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (GIL-guh-mesh), which was later written down. (See "Analyzing the Evidence: Gilgamesh's Quest for Immortality,".)

epic poem An oral or written narration of the achievements and sometimes the failures of heroes that embodies peoples' ideas about themselves.

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

Gilgamesh's Quest for Immortality

The human desire to escape the grip of death appears in many cultures. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is perhaps the earliest recorded treatment of this topic. The oldest elements of the epic go back to stories told in the third millennium B.C.E. According to tradition, Gilgamesh was a king of the Sumerian city of Uruk. In the story, Gilgamesh is not fulfilling his duties as the king very well and sets out with his friend Enkidu to perform wondrous feats against fearsome agents of the gods. Together they kill several supernatural beings, and the gods decide that Enkidu must die. He foresees his own death in a dream.

- Listen again, my friend [Gilgamesh]! I had a dream in the night.

The sky called out, the earth replied,
I was standing in between them.
There was a young man, whose face was obscured.
His face was like that of an Anzu-bird.
He had the paws of a lion, he had the claws of an eagle.
He seized me by my locks, using great force against me….
He seized me, drove me down to the dark house, dwelling of Erkalla's god [the underworld], …
On the road where travelling is one way only,
To the house where those who stay are deprived of light….

[Enkidu sickens and dies. Gilgamesh is distraught and determined to become immortal. He decides to journey to Ut-napishtim and his wife, the only humans who have eternal life. Everyone he meets along the way asks him about his appearance, and Gilgamesh always answers with the same words.]

How could my cheeks not be wasted, nor my face dejected,
Nor my heart wretched, nor my appearance worn out,
Nor grief in my innermost being,
Nor my face like that of a long-distance traveller,
Nor my face weathered by wind and heat
Nor roaming open country clad only in a lionskin?
My friend was the hunted mule, wild ass of the mountain, leopard of open country,
Enkidu my friend was the hunted mule, wild ass of the mountain, leopard of open country.
We who met, and scaled the mountain,
Seized the Bull of Heaven [the sacred bull of the goddess Ishtar] and slew it,
Demolished Humbaba [the ogre who guards the forest of the gods] who dwelt in the Pine Forest,
Killed lions in the passes of the mountains,

My friend whom I love so much, who experienced every hardship with me,
Enkidu my friend whom I love so much, who experienced every hardship with me —
The fate of mortals conquered him!
For six days and seven nights I wept over him: I did not allow him to be buried
Until a worm fell out of his nose.
I was frightened and
I am afraid of Death, and so I roam open country.
The words of my friend weigh upon me….
I roam open country on long journeys.
How, O how could I stay silent, how, O how could I keep quiet?
My friend whom I love has turned to clay: Enkidu my friend whom I love has turned to clay.
Am I not like him? Must I lie down too,
Never to rise, ever again?

[Gilgamesh finally reaches Ut-napishtim, to whom he tells his story, and who says to him:]

Why do you prolong grief, Gilgamesh?
Since [the gods made you] from the flesh of gods and mankind,
Since [the gods] made you like your father and mother
[Death is inevitable] …,
Nobody sees the face of Death,
Nobody hears the voice of Death.
Savage Death just cuts mankind down.
Sometimes we build a house, sometimes we make a nest,
But then brothers divide it upon inheritance.
Sometimes there is hostility in [the land],
But then the river rises and brings flood-water….
The Anunnaki, the great gods, assembled;
Mammitum [the great mother goddess] who creates fate decreed destinies with them.
They appointed death and life.
They did not mark out days for death,
But they did so for life.

[Gilgamesh asks Ut-napishtim how he and his wife can be immortal like the gods, if death is inevitable. Ut-napishtim tells him the story of how they survived a flood sent by the gods and the chief god Enlil blessed them with eternal life. Gilgamesh wants this as well, but fails two opportunities Ut-napishtim provides for him to achieve it. At the end of the epic, he simply returns to Uruk with the boatman Ur-shanabi, to whom he points out the glories of the city.]

Go up on to the wall of Uruk, Ur-shanabi, and walk around,

Inspect the foundation platform and scrutinize the brickwork! Testify that its bricks are baked bricks,
And that the Seven Counsellors must have laid its foundations!
One square mile is city, one square mile is orchards, one square mile is claypits, as well as the open ground of Ishtar's temple.
Three square miles and the open ground comprise Uruk.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What does the *Epic of Gilgamesh* reveal about attitudes toward friendship in ancient Mesopotamia?
2. What does the epic tell us about views of the nature of human life? Where do human beings fit into the cosmic world?
3. Although Gilgamesh did not achieve personal immortality at the end of his quest, how can his final words to Ur-shanabi be seen as a tribute to long-lasting human endeavors?

Source: *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, trans. Stephanie Dalley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 88–89, 103–104, 107, 108–109, 120. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.

Empires in Mesopotamia

The wealth of Sumerian cities also attracted conquerors from the north. Around 2300 B.C.E. Sargon, the king of a region to the north of Sumer, conquered a number of Sumerian cities with what was probably the world's first permanent army and created a large state. The symbol of his triumph was a new capital, the city of Akkad (AH-kahd). Sargon also expanded the newly established Akkadian empire westward to northern Syria, which became the breadbasket of the empire. He encouraged trading networks that brought in goods from as far away as the Indus River in South Asia and what is now Turkey (Map 2.1). Sargon spoke a different language than did the Sumerians, one of the many languages that scholars identify as belonging to the Semitic language family, which includes modern-day Hebrew and Arabic. Akkadians adapted cuneiform writing to their own language, and Akkadian became the diplomatic language used over a wide area.

MAP 2.1 Spread of Cultures in Southwest Asia and the Nile Valley, ca. 3000–1640 B.C.E. This map illustrates the spread of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures through the semicircular stretch of land often called the Fertile Crescent. From this area, the knowledge and use of agriculture spread throughout western Asia, northern Africa, and Europe.

Sargon tore down the defensive walls of Sumerian cities and appointed his own sons as their rulers to help him cement his power. He also

appointed his daughter, Enheduana (en-hoo-DWANN-ah) (2285–2250 B.C.E.), as high priestess in the city of Ur. Here she wrote a number of hymns, becoming the world's first author to put her name to a literary composition. (See "Thinking Like a Historian: Addressing the Gods," page 40.)

Sargon's dynasty appears to have ruled Mesopotamia for about 150 years, and then collapsed, in part because of a period of extended drought. Various city-states then rose to power, one of which was centered on the city of Babylon. Babylon was in an excellent position to dominate trade on both the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, and it was fortunate in having a very able ruler in Hammurabi (hahm-moo-RAH-bee) (r. 1792–1750 B.C.E.). Initially a typical king of his era, he unified Mesopotamia later in his reign by using military force, strategic alliances with the rulers of smaller territories, and religious ideas. As had earlier rulers, Hammurabi linked his success with the will of the gods. He connected himself with the sun-god Shamash, the god of law and justice, and encouraged the spread of myths that explained how Marduk, the primary god of Babylon, had been elected king of the gods by the other deities in Mesopotamia. Babylonian ideas and beliefs thus became part of the cultural mixture of Mesopotamia, which spread far beyond the Tigris and Euphrates Valleys to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Harappan cities of the Indus River Valley (see "The Land and Its First Settlers, ca. 3000–1500 B.C.E." in Chapter 3).

Louvre, Paris, France/Bridgeman Images

Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, King of Akkad On this victory stele carved from sandstone about 2320 B.C.E., King Naram-Sin, Sargon's grandson, climbs a mountain above his soldiers and defeated enemies. Naram-Sin, under whose rule Akkad reached its largest size, is shown here as a god-king in a horned helmet, twice the size of the other men.

Life Under Hammurabi

Hammurabi's most memorable accomplishment was the proclamation of an extensive law code, introduced about 1755 B.C.E. **Hammurabi's law code** set a variety of punishments for breaking the law, including fines and physical punishment such as mutilation, whipping, and burning. It demanded that the punishment fit the crime, calling for "an eye for an eye

and a tooth for a tooth," at least among social equals, although higher-ranking people could pay a fine to lower-ranking victims instead of having an arm broken or losing an eye.

Hammurabi's law code A proclamation issued by Babylonian king Hammurabi to establish laws regulating many aspects of life.

Louvre, Paris, France/© RMN–Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

Law Code of Hammurabi Hammurabi ordered his code to be inscribed on stone pillars and set up in public throughout the Babylonian empire. At the top of the pillar Hammurabi (left) is depicted receiving the rod and ring of authority from Shamash, the god of law and justice.

Hammurabi's code provides a wealth of information about daily life in Mesopotamia, although, like all law codes, it prescribes what the lawgivers

hope will be the situation rather than providing a description of real life. We cannot know if its laws were enforced, but we can use it to see what was significant to people in Hammurabi's society. Because of farming's fundamental importance, the code dealt extensively with agriculture. Tenants faced severe penalties for neglecting the land or not working it at all. The code also regulated other trades, and artisans had to guarantee the quality of their goods and services to consumers. Hammurabi gave careful attention to marriage and the family. As elsewhere in the area, marriage had aspects of a business agreement. The groom or his father offered the prospective bride's father a gift, and if this was acceptable, the bride's father provided his daughter with a dowry, which technically remained hers. A father could not disinherit a son without just cause, and the code ordered the courts to forgive a son for his first offense. On family matters and other issues, Hammurabi's code influenced other law codes, including those later written down in Hebrew Scripture (see "The Jewish Religion").

The Egyptians

How did the Egyptians create a prosperous and long-lasting society?

At about the same time that Sumerian city-states expanded and fought with one another in the Tigris and Euphrates Valleys, a more cohesive state under a single ruler grew in the valley of the Nile River in North Africa. This was Egypt, which for long stretches of history was prosperous and secure. At various times groups invaded and conquered Egypt or migrated into Egypt seeking better lives. Often these newcomers adopted aspects of Egyptian culture, and Egyptians also carried their traditions with them when they established an empire and engaged in trade.

The Nile and the God-King

No other single geographical factor had such a fundamental and profound impact on Egyptian life, society, and history as the Nile River (see Map 2.2). The Nile flooded once a year for a period of several months, bringing fertile soil and moisture for farming. Through the fertility of the Nile and their own hard work, Egyptians produced an annual agricultural surplus, which in turn sustained a growing and prosperous population. The Nile also unified Egypt, serving as a highway that promoted easy communication.

PERIODS OF EGYPTIAN HISTORY

PERIOD	DATES	SIGNIFICANT EVENTS
Archaic	3100–2660 B.C.E.	Unification of Egypt
Old Kingdom	2660–2180 B.C.E.	Construction of the pyramids
First Intermediate	2180–2080 B.C.E.	Political chaos
Middle Kingdom	2080–1640 B.C.E.	Recovery and political stability
Second Intermediate	1640–1570 B.C.E.	Instability resulting from struggles for power and Hyksos migrations
New Kingdom	1570–1070 B.C.E.	Creation of an Egyptian empire; growth in wealth
Third	1100–653	Political fragmentation and conquest by

The political power structures that developed in Egypt came to be linked with the Nile. Somehow the idea developed that a single individual, a king, was responsible for the rise and fall of the Nile. The king came to be viewed as a descendant of the gods and thus a god himself. This belief came about before the development of writing in Egypt, so the precise details of its origins have been lost. Political unification most likely proceeded slowly, but stories told about early kings highlighted one who had united Upper Egypt (the upstream valley in the south) and Lower Egypt (the delta area of the Nile that empties into the Mediterranean Sea) into a single kingdom around 3100 B.C.E. Historians later divided Egyptian history into dynasties, or families, of kings, and more recently into periods with distinctive characteristics (see the chronology "Periods of Egyptian History"). The political unification of Egypt in the Archaic Period (3100–2660 B.C.E.) ushered in the period known as the Old Kingdom (2660–2180 B.C.E.).

The focal point of religious and political life in the Old Kingdom was the king, who commanded the wealth, resources, and people of Egypt. The king's surroundings had to be worthy of a god, and only a magnificent palace was suitable for his home; in fact, the word **pharaoh**, which during the New Kingdom (1570–1070 B.C.E.) came to be used for the king, originally meant "great house." Just as the kings occupied a great house in life, so they reposed in great pyramids after death. Built during the Old Kingdom, these massive stone tombs contained all the things needed by the king in his afterlife and also symbolized the king's power and his connection with the sun-god.

pharaoh The title given to the king of Egypt in the New Kingdom, from a word that meant "great house."

Like the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians were polytheistic, worshipping many gods of all types, some mightier than others. They developed complex ideas of their gods that reflected the world around them, and these views changed over the many centuries of Egyptian history as gods took on new attributes and often merged with one another. During the Old Kingdom, Egyptians considered the sun-god Ra the creator of life. Much later, during the New Kingdom (see "Migrations, Revivals, and Collapse"), the pharaohs of a new dynasty favored the worship of a

different sun-god, Amon. As his cult grew, Amon came to be identified with Ra, and eventually the Egyptians combined them into one sun-god, Amon-Ra.

The Egyptians likewise developed views of an afterlife that reflected the world around them and that changed over time. During the later part of the Old Kingdom, the walls of kings' tombs were carved with religious texts that provided spells that would bring the king back to life and help him ascend to heaven. (See "Thinking Like a Historian: Addressing the Gods," page 40.) Toward the end of the Old Kingdom, the tombs of powerful nobles also contained such inscriptions, an indication that more people expected to gain everlasting life. In the Middle Kingdom (2080–1640 B.C.E.), new types of spells appeared on the coffins of even more people, a further expansion in admissions to the afterlife. During the New Kingdom, a time when Egypt came into greater contact with the cultures of the Fertile Crescent, Egyptians developed even more complex ideas about the afterlife, recording these in written funerary manuscripts that have come to be known as the *Book of the Dead*. These texts explained that the soul left the body to become part of the divine after death and told of the god Osiris (oh-SIGH-ruhs), who died each year and was then brought back to life by his wife Isis (IGH-suhs) when the Nile flooded. Osiris eventually became king of the dead, weighing dead humans' hearts to determine whether they had lived justly enough to deserve everlasting life. Egyptians also believed that proper funeral rituals, in which the physical body was mummified, were essential for life after death, so Osiris was assisted by Anubis, the jackal-headed god of mummification.

To ancient Egyptians, the king embodied justice and order — harmony among people, nature, and the divine. Kings did not always live up to this ideal, of course. The two parts of Egypt were difficult to hold together, and several times in Egypt's long history there were periods of civil war and political fragmentation, which scholars term the First (2180–2080 B.C.E.) and Second (1640–1570 B.C.E.) Intermediate Periods. Yet the monarchy survived, and in each period a strong warrior-king arose to restore order and expand Egyptian power.

THINKING LIKE A HISTORIAN

Addressing the Gods

Hymns and incantations to the gods are among the earliest written texts in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and sculpture and paintings also often show people addressing the gods. The sources here are examples of such works. What ideas about the gods and the way humans should address them are shared in all these sources, and how do ideas in Egypt differ from those in Mesopotamia?

1 **Enheduana's "Exaltation of Inanna."** Enheduana (2285–2250 B.C.E.), the daughter of Sargon of Akkad, was appointed by her father as high priestess in the Sumerian city of Ur, where she wrote a number of literary and religious works that were frequently recopied long after her death, including this hymn to the goddess Inanna.

Your divinity shines in the pure heavens…. Your torch lights up the corners of heaven, turning darkness into light. The men and women form a row for you and each one's daily status hangs down before you. Your numerous people pass before you, as before Utu [the sun-god], for their inspection. No one can lay a hand on your precious divine powers; all your divine powers…. You exercise full ladyship over heaven and earth; you hold everything in your hand. Mistress, you are magnificent, no one can walk before you. You dwell with great An [the god of the heavens] in the holy resting-place. Which god is like you in gathering together … in heaven and earth? You are magnificent, your name is praised, you alone are magnificent!

I am En-hedu-ana, the high priestess of the moon god …. Mercy, compassion, care, lenience and homage are yours, and to cause flood storms, to open hard ground and to turn darkness into light. My lady, let me proclaim your magnificence in all lands, and your glory! Let me praise your ways and greatness! Who rivals you in divinity? Who can compare with your divine rites? … An and Enlil [the chief god of Sumer] have determined a great destiny for you throughout the entire universe. They have bestowed upon you ladyship in the assembly chamber. Being fitted for ladyship, you determine the destiny of noble ladies. Mistress, you are magnificent, you are great! Inanna, you are magnificent, you are great! My lady, your magnificence is resplendent. May your heart be restored for my sake! Your great deeds are unparalleled, your magnificence is praised! Young woman, Inanna, your praise is sweet!

2 **Babylonian cylinder seal showing a man addressing the deities.** Dating from the Old Babylonian period (1800–1600 B.C.E.), this seal shows a man (left) addressing two deities, the one on the right holding the rod and ring, symbols of authority. The cuneiform inscription reads, "Ibni-Amurru, son of Ilima-ahi, servant of the god Amurru."

British Museum, London, UK/Werner Forman Archive/Bridgeman Images

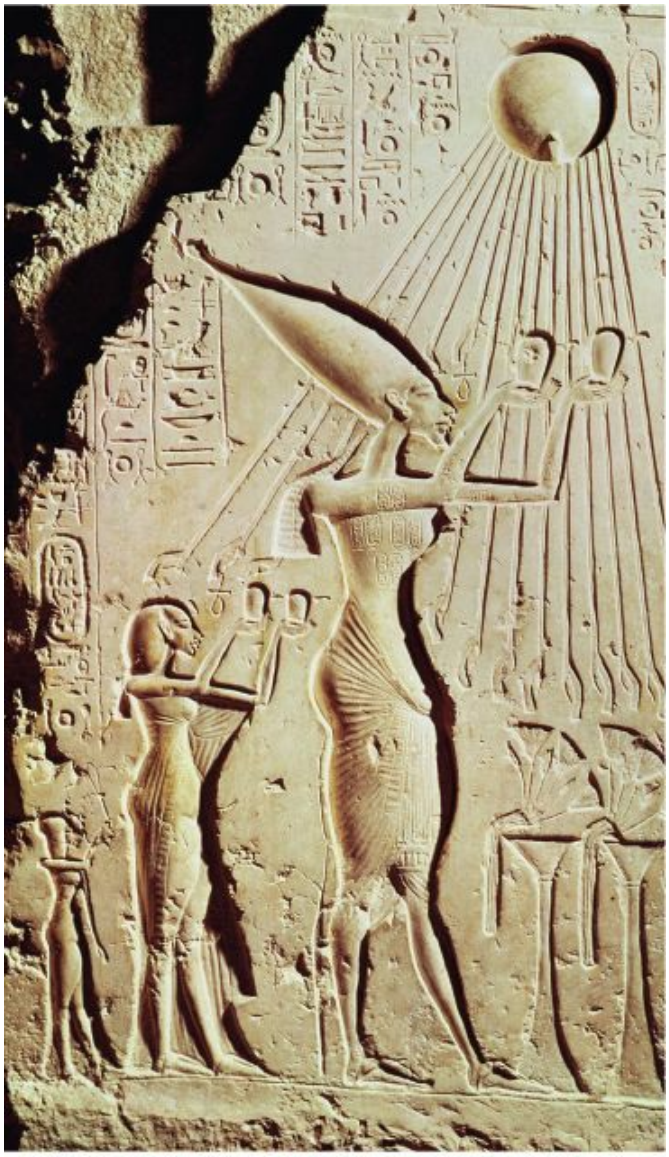
3 **Pyramid text of King Unas.** This incantation, designed to assist the king's ascent to the heavens after his death, was inscribed on a wall of the royal burial chambers in the pyramid of the Egyptian king Unas (r. 2375–2345 B.C.E.) at Saqqara, a burial ground near the Nile.

Re-Atum [the sun-god], this Unas comes to you,
A spirit indestructible
Who lays claim to the place of the four pillars!
Your son comes to you, this Unas comes to you
May you cross the sky united in the dark,
May you rise in lightland, the place in which you shine!
Osiris, Isis, go proclaim to Lower Egypt's gods
And their spirits:
"This Unas comes, a spirit indestructible,
Like the morning star above Hapy [the god of the flooding of the Nile],
Whom the water-spirits worship;
Whom he wishes to live will live,
Whom he wishes to die will die!"
…
Thoth [the god of law and science], go proclaim to the gods of the west
And their spirits:
"This Unas comes, a spirit indestructible,
Decked above the neck as Anubis
Lord of the western height
He will count hearts, he will claim hearts,
Whom he wishes to live will live,
Whom he wishes to die will die!"

4 **Hymn to Aton.** When the pharaoh Akhenaton (r. 1351–1334 B.C.E.) promoted the worship of the sun-god Aton instead of older Egyptian gods, new hymns were written for the pharaoh to sing in honor of the god.

Thou appearest beautifully on the horizon of heaven
Thou living Aton, the beginning of life!
When thou art risen on the eastern horizon,
Thou hast filled every land with thy beauty.
Thou art gracious, great, glistening, and high over every land;
Thy rays encompass the lands to the limit of all that thou hast made
…
Thy rays suckle every meadow.
When thou risest, they live, they grow for thee.
Thou makest the seasons in order to rear all that thou hast made,
The winter to cool them,
And the heat that they may taste thee.
Thou hast made the distant sky in order to rise therein,
In order to see all that thou dost make.
While thou wert alone,
Rising in thy form as the living Aton,
Appearing, shining, withdrawing or approaching,
Thou madest millions of forms of thyself alone.
Cities, towns, fields, road, and river —
Every eye beholds thee over against them,
For thou art the Aton of the day over the earth …
Thou art in my heart,
And there is no other that knows thee
Save thy son Nefer-kheperu-Re Wa-en-Re [Akhenaton],
For thou hast made him well versed in thy plans and in thy strength …
Since thou didst found the earth
And raise them up for thy son
Who came forth from thy body:
The king of Upper and lower Egypt, … Akhenaton … and the Chief Wife of the King … Nefertiti, living and youthful forever and ever.

5 **Relief depicting Akhenaton, Nefertiti, and their daughter, Meritaton, making an offering to Aton.** This carved alabaster relief comes from the royal palace at Tell el-Amarna.



Egyptian National Museum, Cairo, Egypt/Bridgeman Images

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

1. In Source 1 from Mesopotamia, what powers and qualities of the goddess Inanna does Enheduana praise? In Source 2, what qualities do the deities in the cylinder seal exhibit?
2. In Sources 3–5 from Egypt, what powers and qualities does the sun-god exhibit?
3. What common features do you see across all the sources in the powers ascribed to the gods, and the proper attitude of humans in addressing them?
4. Continuing to think about similarities, bear in mind that Enheduana was a member of the ruling dynasty of Akkad, and Unas and Akhenaton were kings of Egypt. How did their social position shape their relationship to the gods?
5. Thinking about differences, how is the relationship of Unas and Akhenaton to the sun-god distinctive?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Using the sources above, along with what you have learned in class and in this chapter,

write a short essay that compares ideas about the gods in Mesopotamia and Egypt. How do these reflect the physical environment in which these two cultures developed, and how do they reflect their social and political structures?

Sources: (1) J. A. Black et al., *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/), Oxford 1998–2006, http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.07.3#. Used by permission of Oxford University, ETCSL Project; (3) Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, vol. 1, *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 31. © 2006 by the Regents of the University of California. Published by the University of California Press. Used by permission; (4) John A. Wilson, trans., in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament — Third Edition with Supplement*, pp. 370–371. Reproduced with permission of PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, in the format Book via Copyright Clearance Center.

Egyptian Society and Work

Egyptian society reflected the pyramids that it built. At the top stood the pharaoh, who relied on a circle of nobles, officials, and priests to administer his kingdom. All of them were assisted by scribes, who used a writing system perhaps adapted from Mesopotamia or perhaps developed independently. Egyptian scribes actually created two writing systems: one called hieroglyphics for engraving important religious or political texts on stone or writing them on papyrus made from reeds growing in the Nile Delta, and a much simpler system called hieratic that allowed scribes to write more quickly and was used for the documents of daily life. The cities of the Nile Valley were also home to artisans of all types, along with merchants and other tradespeople. A large group of farmers made up the broad base of the social pyramid.

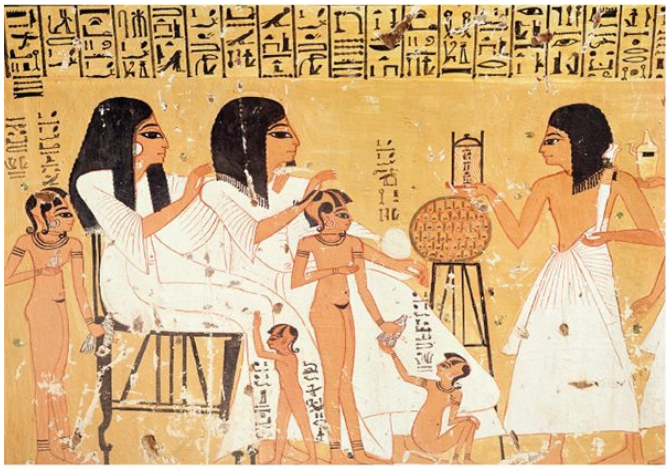
For Egyptians, the Nile formed an essential part of daily life. During the flooding season — from June to October — farmers worked on the pharaoh's building programs and other tasks away from their fields. When the water began to recede, they diverted some of it into ponds for future irrigation and began planting wheat and barley, using plows pulled by oxen or people. From October to February farmers planted and tended crops, and from February until the next flood they harvested them. As in Mesopotamia, common people paid their obligations to their superiors in products and in labor. People's labor obligations in the Old Kingdom may have included forced work on the pyramids and canals, although recent research suggests that most people who built the pyramids were paid for their work. Some young men were drafted into the pharaoh's army, which served as both a fighting force and a labor corps.

The lives of all Egyptians centered around the family. Just as in Mesopotamia, marriage was a business arrangement. A couple's parents arranged the marriage, which seems to have taken place at a young age. Once couples were married, having children, especially sons, was a high priority, as indicated by surviving charms to promote fertility and prayers for successful childbirth. Boys continued the family line, and only they could perform the proper burial rites for their father.

Most Egyptian men had only one wife, but among the wealthy some had several wives or concubines. Ordinary women were expected to obey their fathers, husbands, and other men, but they possessed considerable economic and legal rights. They could own land in their own names, operate businesses, and testify in court. Literature and art depict a world in which ordinary husbands and wives enjoyed each other's company. (See "Analyzing the Evidence: Egyptian Families," page 45.)

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

Egyptian Families



Deir el-Medina, Thebes, Egypt/Bridgeman Images

This painting from the tomb of the Egyptian official Inherkau, who lived and worked during the reign of Ramesses III (r. 1184–1153), toward the end of the New Kingdom, shows the deceased and his wife Wabet (left) receiving offerings from their two sons (only one of whom is fully visible in this image),while their grandchildren play around their feet. The children, several holding birds or bird toys, have partly shaved heads and what scholars of Egypt term the "sidelock of youth," a long braided lock of hair common in Egyptian paintings of children that indicates the child was an heir of the god Osiris. Inherkau oversaw artisans and workers on the royal tombs at Thebes, as had his father and grandfather before him, for which they all carried the splendid title "Foreman of the Lord of the Two Lands in the Place of Truth." In contrast to Hollywood portrayals of gangs of slaves forced at the end of a lash to build tombs for pharaohs, those who worked on the tombs at Thebes lived in a town nearby with their families and were paid for their work in grain, fish, vegetables, water, wood, meat, beer, and other necessities. Along with constructing the royal tombs, they often made and sold furniture and funerary equipment such as coffins, boxes, statuary, and pottery, adding to their income.

Written records on papyrus and on large pieces of limestone provide evidence about marriage, divorce, land transfers, inheritance, and religious life, and suggest that women carried out many rituals and economic activities independent of a male legal guardian. Corrupt officials sometimes were slow in paying workers, and the reign of Ramesses III saw several strikes by workers for more regular pay. Many craftsmen and officials such as Inherkau built their own underground tombs near Thebes, with burial chambers with vaulted ceilings and wall decorations. Inherkau's richly decorated burial chamber shows several dozen scenes in addition to this one, which depict gods, the afterlife, mythological events, and the deceased and his family engaged in everyday or religious activities.

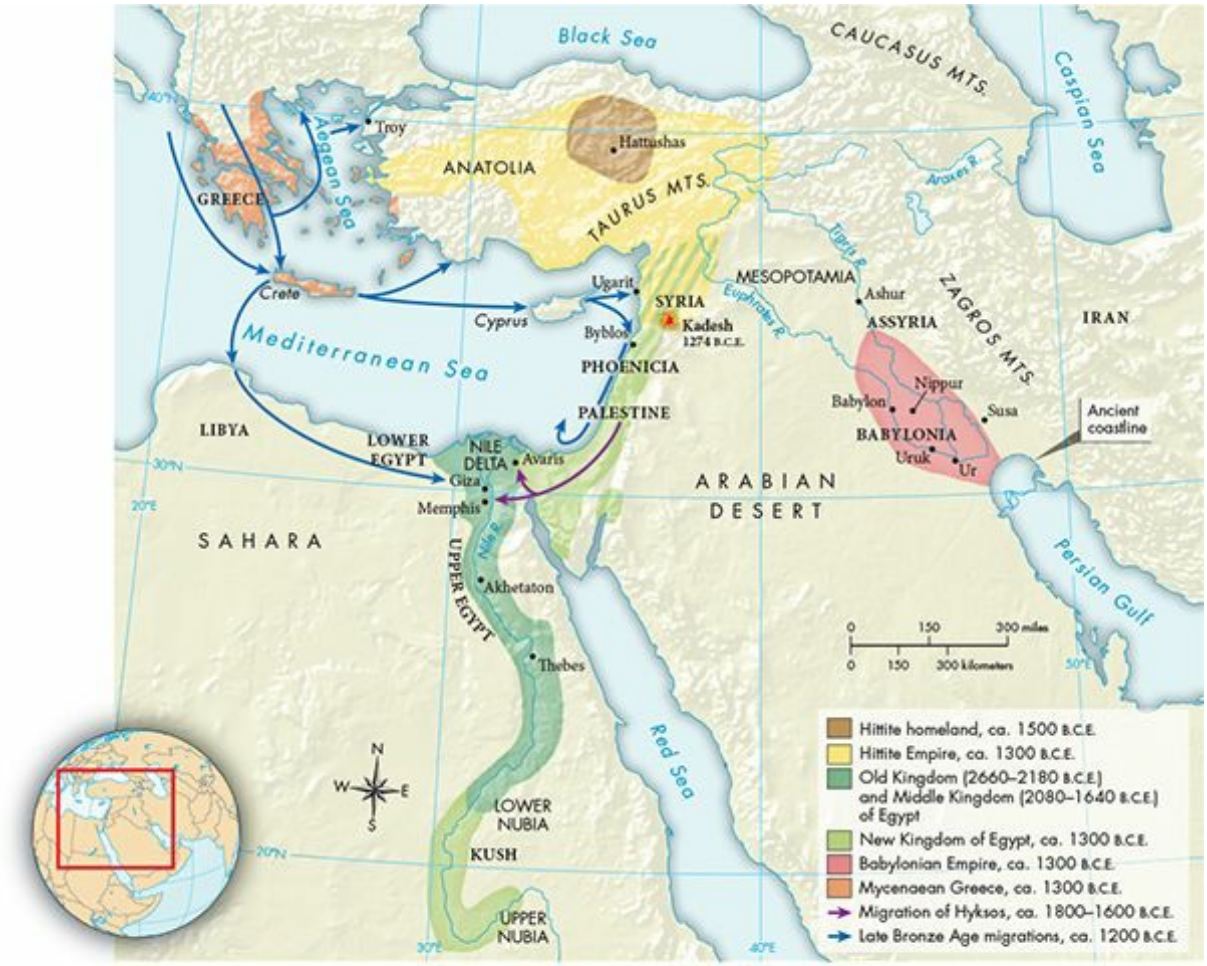
QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. How does the artist use the size of figures to indicate their status in the family? To suggest that Inherkau's wife Wabet was important in the household?

2. What message about Egyptian family life does the artist seem to be conveying here, with the combination of children's play and religious rituals?
3. Both tomb building and showing children with the "sidelock of youth" are practices that began in the Old Kingdom with the pharaoh and his household, but by the New Kingdom had spread to fairly ordinary people such as Inherkau. What does this suggest about Egyptian society?

Migrations, Revivals, and Collapse

While Egyptian civilization flourished in the Nile Valley, various groups migrated throughout the Fertile Crescent and then accommodated themselves to local cultures (Map 2.2). Some settled in the Nile Delta, including a group the Egyptians called Hyksos. Although they were later portrayed as a conquering horde, the Hyksos were actually migrants looking for good land, and their entry into the delta, which began around 1800 B.C.E., was probably gradual and generally peaceful. The newcomers began to worship Egyptian deities and modeled their political structures on those of the Egyptians.



Wiesner-Hanks et al., *A History of World Societies*, 11e, © 2018 Bedford/St. Martin's

Mapping the Past

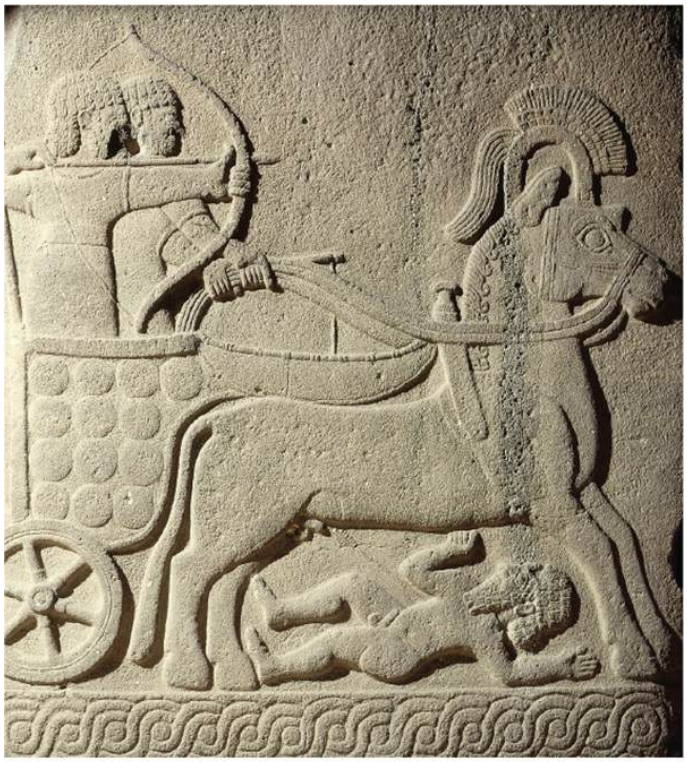
MAP 2.2 Empires and Migrations in the Eastern Mediterranean The rise and fall of empires in the eastern Mediterranean were shaped by internal developments, military conflicts, and the migration of peoples to new areas.

ANALYZING THE MAP At what point was the Egyptian empire at its largest? The Hittite Empire? What were the other major powers in the eastern Mediterranean at this time?

CONNECTIONS What were the major effects of the migrations of the Hyksos? Of the late Bronze Age migrations? What clues does the map provide as to why the late Bronze Age migrations had a more powerful impact than those of the Hyksos?

The Hyksos brought with them methods of making bronze that had become common in the eastern Mediterranean by about 2500 B.C.E. (see "Trade and Cross-Cultural Connections" in Chapter 1) and techniques for casting it into weapons that became standard in Egypt. They thereby brought Egypt fully into the Bronze Age culture of the Mediterranean world. The Hyksos also introduced horse-drawn chariots and the composite bow, made of multiple materials for greater strength, which along with bronze weaponry revolutionized Egyptian warfare. The migration of the Hyksos, combined with a series of famines and internal struggles for power, led Egypt to fragment politically in what later came to be known as the Second Intermediate Period.

In about 1570 B.C.E. a new dynasty of pharaohs arose, pushing the Hyksos out of the delta and conquering territory to the south and northeast. These warrior-pharaohs inaugurated what scholars refer to as the New Kingdom, a period characterized not only by enormous wealth and conscious imperialism but also by a greater sense of insecurity because of new contacts and military engagements. By expanding Egyptian power beyond the Nile Valley, the pharaohs created the first Egyptian empire, and they celebrated their triumphs with giant statues and rich tombs on a scale unparalleled since the pyramids of the Old Kingdom.



Dagli Orti/REX/Shutterstock

Hittite Archer in a Chariot In this stylized stone carving made about 1000 B.C.E. in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), a Hittite archer driven in a chariot shoots toward his foes, while a victim of an earlier shot is trampled beneath the horse's hooves. The arrows might have been tipped with iron, which was becoming a more common material for weapons and tools.

The New Kingdom pharaohs include a number of remarkable figures. Among these was Hatshepsut (haht-SHEP-soot) (r. ca. 1479–ca. 1458 B.C.E.), one of the few female pharaohs in Egypt's long history. (See "Individuals in Society: Hatshepsut and Nefertiti," page 46.) Amenhotep III (ah-men-HOE-tep) (r. ca. 1388–ca. 1350 B.C.E.) corresponded with other powerful kings in Babylonia and other kingdoms in the Fertile Crescent. Amenhotep III was succeeded by his son, who took the name Akhenaton (ah-keh-NAH-tuhn) (r. 1351–1334 B.C.E.). He renamed himself as a mark of his changing religious ideas, choosing to worship a new sun-god, Aton, instead of the traditional Amon or Ra. Akhenaton's wife Nefertiti (nehf-uhr-TEE-tee) supported his religious ideas, but this new religion, imposed from above, failed to find a place among the people, and after his death traditional religious practices returned.

One of the key challenges facing the pharaohs after Akhenaton was the expansion of the kingdom of the Hittites. At about the same time that the Sumerians were establishing city-states, speakers of **Indo-European**

languages migrated into Anatolia, modern-day Turkey. Indo-European is a large family of languages that includes English, most of the languages of modern Europe, ancient Greek, Latin, Persian, Hindi, Bengali, and Sanskrit (for more on Sanskrit, see "The Aryans During the Vedic Age, ca. 1500–500 B.C.E." in Chapter 3). It also includes Hittite, the language of one of the peoples who migrated into this area. Information about the Hittites comes from archaeological sources and also from written cuneiform tablets that provide details about politics and economic life. These records indicate that beginning about 1600 B.C.E. Hittite kings began to conquer more territory (see Map 2.2). As the Hittites expanded southward, they came into conflict with the Egyptians, who were establishing their own larger empire. There were a number of battles, but both sides seem to have recognized the impossibility of defeating the other, and in 1258 B.C.E. the Egyptian king Ramesses II (r. ca. 1290–1224 B.C.E.) and the Hittite king Hattusili III (hah-too-SEE-lee) (r. ca. 1267–1237 B.C.E.) concluded a peace treaty.

Indo-European languages A large family of languages that includes English, most of the languages of modern Europe, ancient Greek, Latin, Persian, Hindi, Bengali, and Sanskrit.

The treaty brought peace between the Egyptians and the Hittites for a time, but this stability did not last. Within several decades of the treaty, groups of seafaring peoples whom the Egyptians called "Sea Peoples" raided, migrated, and marauded in the eastern Mediterranean, disrupting trade and in some cases looting and destroying cities. These raids, combined with the expansion of the Assyrians (see "Assyria, the Military Monarchy"), led to the collapse of the Hittite Empire and the fragmentation of the Egyptian empire. There is evidence of drought, and some scholars have suggested that a major volcanic explosion in Iceland cooled the climate for several years, leading to a series of poor harvests. All of these developments are part of a general "Bronze Age Collapse" in the period around 1200 B.C.E. that historians see as a major turning point.

The political and military story of battles, waves of migrations, and the rise and fall of empires can mask striking continuities in the history of Egypt and its neighbors. Disrupted peoples and newcomers shared practical concepts of agriculture and metallurgy with one another, and wheeled vehicles allowed merchants to transact business over long distances. Merchants, migrants, and conquerors carried their gods and

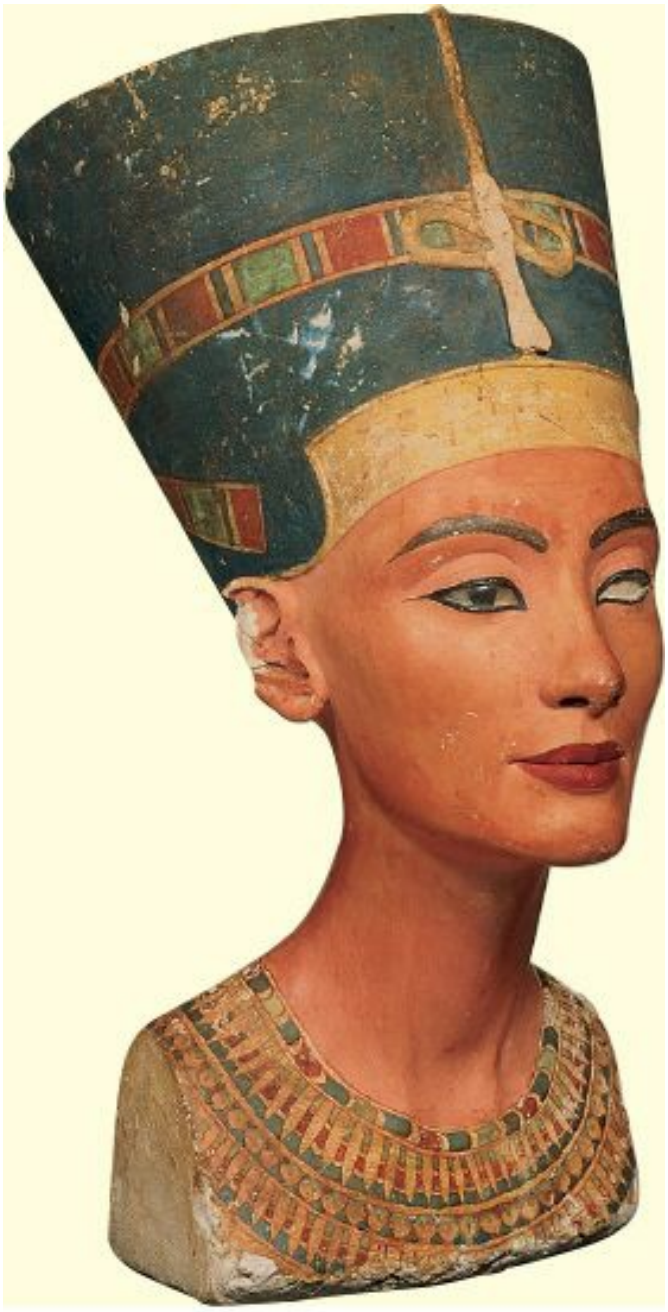
goddesses with them, and religious beliefs and practices blended and changed. Cuneiform tablets, wall inscriptions, and paintings testify to commercial exchanges and cultural accommodation, adoption, and adaptation, as well as war and conquest.

INDIVIDUALS IN SOCIETY

Hatshepsut and Nefertiti

bpk Bildagentur/Aegyptisches Museum und Paprussammkung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany/Photo: Margarete Büsing/Art Resource, NY

Granite head of Hatshepsut.



bpk Bildagentur/Aegyptisches Museum und Paprussammkung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany/Photo: Margarete Büsing/Art Resource, NY

Painted limestone bust of Nefertiti.

EGYPTIANS UNDERSTOOD THE PHARAOH TO BE the living embodiment of the god Horus, the source of law and morality, and the mediator between gods and humans. The pharaoh's siblings and children were also viewed as in some ways divine. Because of this, a pharaoh often took his sister or half-sister as one of his wives, a practice that imitated the behavior of the gods in Egyptian mythology. This concentrated divine blood set the

pharaonic family apart from other Egyptians (who did not marry close relatives). A pharaoh chose one of his wives to be the "Great Royal Wife," or principal queen. Often this was a relative, though sometimes it was one of the foreign princesses who married pharaohs to establish political alliances.

The familial connection with the divine allowed a handful of women to rule in their own right in Egypt's long history. We know the names of four female pharaohs, of whom the most famous was Hatshepsut. She was the sister and wife of Thutmose II and, after he died, served as regent — as adviser and co-ruler — for her young stepson Thutmose III, who was the son of another woman. Hatshepsut sent trading expeditions and sponsored artists and architects, ushering in a period of artistic creativity and economic prosperity. She built one of the world's great buildings, an elaborate terraced temple at Deir el Bahri, which eventually served as her tomb. Hatshepsut's status as a powerful female ruler was difficult for Egyptians to conceptualize, and she is often depicted in male dress or with a false beard, thus looking more like the male rulers who were the norm. After her death, Thutmose III tried to destroy all evidence that she had ever ruled, smashing statues and scratching her name off inscriptions, perhaps because of personal animosity and perhaps because he wanted to erase the fact that a woman had once been pharaoh.

Though female pharaohs were very rare, many royal women had power through their position as Great Royal Wives. The most famous was Nefertiti (ca. 1370–1330 B.C.E.), the wife of Akhenaton. Her name means "the perfect (or beautiful) woman has come." Nefertiti used her position to spread the new religion of the sun-god Aton. Together she and Akhenaton built a new palace at Akhetaten, the present-day Amarna, away from the old centers of power. There they developed the cult of Aton to the exclusion of the traditional deities. Nearly the only literary survivor of their religious belief is the "Hymn to Aton," which declares Aton to be the only god. It describes Nefertiti as "the great royal consort whom he, Akhenaton, loves. The mistress of the Two Lands, Upper and Lower Egypt."

Nefertiti is often shown as being the same size as her husband, and in some inscriptions she is performing religious rituals that would normally have been carried out only by the pharaoh. The exact details of her power are hard to determine, however. An older theory held that her husband removed her from power, though there is also speculation that she may have ruled secretly in her own right after his death. Her tomb has long since disappeared, though some scholars believe that an unidentified mummy discovered in 2003 in Egypt's Valley of the Kings may be

Nefertiti’s.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Why might it have been difficult for Egyptians to accept a female ruler?
2. What opportunities do hereditary monarchies such as that of ancient Egypt provide for women? How does this fit with gender hierarchies in which men are understood as superior?

Iron and the Emergence of New States

The Bronze Age Collapse was a time of massive political and economic disruption, but it was also a period of the spread of new technologies, especially iron. Iron is the most common element in the earth, but most iron on or near the earth's surface occurs in the form of ore, which must be smelted at high temperatures to extract the metal. This process was invented independently during the second millennium B.C.E. in several parts of the world, including Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), Nigeria, and most likely southern India. Early iron was too brittle to be of much use, but ironworkers continued to experiment and improve their products, and iron weapons gradually became stronger and cheaper than their bronze counterparts. Thus, in the schema of dividing history into periods according to the main material out of which tools are made (see "Understanding the Early Human Past" in Chapter 1), the **Iron Age** began in about 1100 B.C.E. Iron weapons became important items of trade around the Mediterranean and throughout the Tigris and Euphrates Valleys, and the technology for making them traveled as well.

Iron Age Period beginning about 1100 B.C.E. when iron became the most important material for weapons and tools in some parts of the world.

Cylinder sheath of Amani–natake–lebte, Napatan Period, reign of King Amani–natake–lebte, 538–519 B.C. [gilded silver & colored paste), Nubian/Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA/ Bridgeman Images

Nubian Cylinder Sheath

This small silver sheath made about 520 B.C.E., perhaps for holding rolled papyrus, shows a winged goddess on one side and the Egyptian god Amon-

Ra (not visible in this photograph) on the other. It and others like it were found in the tombs of the king of Kush and suggest ways that Egyptian artistic styles and religious ideas influenced cultures farther up the Nile.

The decline of Egypt allowed new powers to emerge. South of Egypt along the Nile was a region called Nubia, which as early as 2000 B.C.E. served as a conduit of trade through which a variety of products flowed north from sub-Saharan Africa. As Egypt expanded during the New Kingdom, it took over northern Nubia, incorporating it into the growing Egyptian empire. The Nubians adopted many features of Egyptian culture, including Egyptian gods, the use of hieroglyphs, and the building of pyramids. Many Nubians became officials in the Egyptian bureaucracy and officers in the army, and there was significant intermarriage between the two groups.

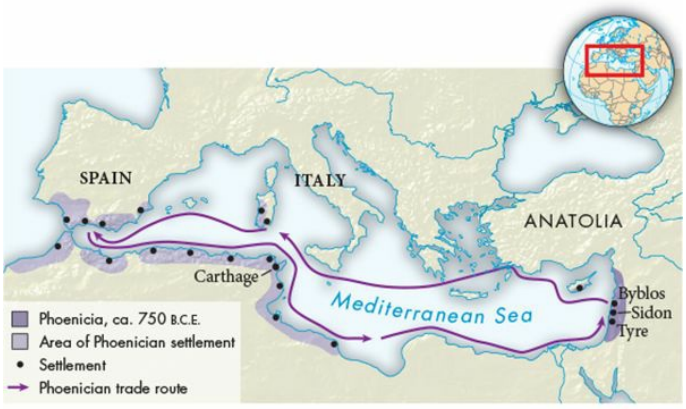
With the contraction of the Egyptian empire, an independent kingdom, Kush, rose to power in Nubia, with its capital at Napata in what is now Sudan. The Kushites conquered southern Egypt, and in 727 B.C.E. the Kushite king Piye (PIGH) (r. ca. 747–716 B.C.E.) swept through the entire Nile Valley to the delta in the north. United once again, Egypt enjoyed a brief period of peace during which the Egyptian culture continued to influence that of its conquerors. In the seventh century B.C.E. invading Assyrians pushed the Kushites out of Egypt, and the Kushite rulers moved their capital farther up the Nile to Meroë (MER-oh-ee), where they built hundreds of pyramids. Meroë became a center of iron production, exporting iron goods to much of Africa and across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to India. Gold and cotton textiles also provided wealth to the Kushite kingdom, which in the third century B.C.E. developed its own alphabet.

While Kush expanded in the southern Nile Valley, another group rose to prominence along the Mediterranean coast of modern Lebanon. These people established the prosperous commercial centers of Tyre (TIRE), Sidon, and Byblos. They were master shipbuilders, and from about 1100 B.C.E. to 700 B.C.E. many of the residents of these cities became the seaborne merchants of the Mediterranean. Their most valued products were purple and blue textiles, from which originated their Greek name, **Phoenicians** (fih-NEE-shuhns), meaning “Purple People.” They also worked bronze and iron, which they shipped processed or as ore, and made and traded glass products, gold, ivory, and other types of rare goods.

Phoenician ships often carried hundreds of jars of wine, and the Phoenicians introduced grape growing to new regions around the Mediterranean, dramatically increasing the amount of wine available for consumption and trade.

Phoenicians People of the prosperous city-states in what is now Lebanon who traded and founded colonies throughout the Mediterranean and spread the phonetic alphabet.

The variety and quality of the Phoenicians' trade goods generally made them welcome visitors. They established colonies and trading posts throughout the Mediterranean and as far west as the Atlantic coast of modern-day Portugal. The Phoenicians' voyages brought them into contact with the Greeks, to whom they introduced many aspects of the older and more urbanized cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt.

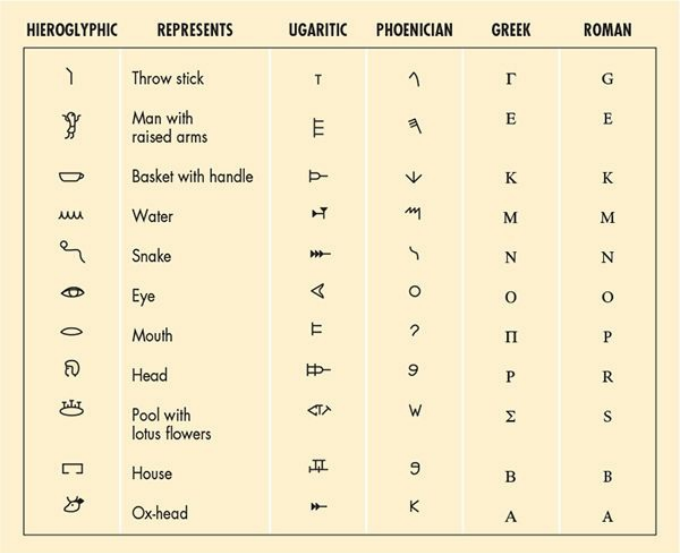


Wiesner-Hanks et al., *A History of World Societies*, 11e, © 2018 Bedford/St. Martin's

Phoenician Settlements in the Mediterranean

The Phoenicians' overwhelming cultural achievement was the spread of a completely phonetic system of writing — that is, an alphabet (Figure 2.2). Writers of cuneiform and hieroglyphics had developed signs that were used to represent sounds, but these were always used with a much larger number of ideograms. Sometime around 1800 B.C.E. workers in the Sinai Peninsula, which was under Egyptian control, began to use only phonetic signs to write, with each sign designating one sound. This system vastly simplified writing and reading and spread among common people as a practical means of record keeping and communication. Egyptian scribes and officials continued to use hieroglyphics, but the Phoenicians adapted the simpler system for their own language and spread it around the Mediterranean. The Greeks modified this alphabet for their own language,

and the Romans later based their alphabet — the script we use to write English today — on Greek. Alphabets based on the Phoenician alphabet were also created in the Persian Empire and formed the basis of Hebrew, Arabic, and various alphabets of South and Central Asia.



HIEROGLYPHIC	REPRESENTS	UGARITIC	PHOENICIAN	GREEK	ROMAN
	Throw stick			Γ	G
	Man with raised arms			E	E
	Basket with handle			K	K
	Water			M	M
	Snake			N	N
	Eye			O	O
	Mouth			Π	P
	Head			P	R
	Pool with lotus flowers			Σ	S
	House			B	B
	Ox-head			A	A

Source: A. B. Knapp, *The History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt*. Reproduced with permission of Wadsworth Publishing Company in the format Educational/Instructional Program via Copyright Clearance Center.

Figure 2.2 Origins of the Alphabet List of hieroglyphic, Ugaritic, Phoenician, Greek, and Roman sign forms.

The Hebrews

How did the Hebrews create an enduring written religious tradition?

The legacy of another people who took advantage of Egypt's collapse to found an independent state may have been even more far-reaching than that of the Phoenicians. For a period of several centuries, the Hebrews controlled first one and then two small states on the western end of the Fertile Crescent. The Hebrews created a new form of religious belief, a monotheism based on the worship of an all-powerful god they called **Yahweh** (YAH-way). Beginning in the late seventh century B.C.E. the Hebrews began to write down their religious ideas, traditions, laws, advice literature, prayers, hymns, history, and prophecies in a series of books. These were gathered together centuries later to form the Hebrew Bible, which Christians later adopted and termed the "Old Testament" to parallel specific Christian writings in the "New Testament." The Hebrew Bible later became the core of the Hebrews' religion, Judaism, named after Judah, the southern of the two Hebrew kingdoms. Jews today revere these texts, as do many Christians, and Muslims respect them, all of which gives them particular importance.

Yahweh All-powerful god of the Hebrew people and the basis for the enduring religious traditions of Judaism.

The Hebrews were nomadic pastoralists who may have migrated into the Nile Delta from the east seeking good land for their herds of sheep and goats. According to the Hebrew Bible, they were enslaved by the Egyptians but were led out of Egypt by a charismatic leader named Moses. The Hebrews settled in the area between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River known as Canaan and were organized into tribes, each tribe consisting of numerous families who thought of themselves as related to one another. They slowly adopted agriculture and, not surprisingly, at times worshipped the agricultural gods of their neighbors. In this they followed the common historical pattern of newcomers by adapting the culture of an older, well-established people.

The Hebrew State

The Hebrews were nomadic pastoralists who may have migrated into the Nile Delta from the east seeking good land for their herds of sheep and

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The Hebrew Exodus and State, ca. 1250–800 B.C.E.

The Bible reports that the greatest danger to the Hebrews came from a group known as the Philistines (FIH-luh-steenz), who migrated to and established a kingdom in Canaan. The Hebrews found a leader in Saul, who with his men fought the Philistines. Saul subsequently established a monarchy over the Hebrew tribes, an event conventionally dated to about 1025 B.C.E. Saul's work was carried on by David of Bethlehem, who captured the city of Jerusalem, which he made the religious and political center of the realm. David's son Solomon (r. ca. 965–925 B.C.E.) launched a building program that the biblical narrative describes as including cities, palaces, fortresses, and roads. The most symbolic of these projects was the Temple of Jerusalem. The Temple of Jerusalem was intended to be the religious heart of the kingdom, a symbol of Hebrew unity and of Yahweh's approval of the Hebrew state.

This state did not last long. At Solomon's death his kingdom broke into political halves. The northern part became Israel, with its capital at Samaria, and the southern half was Judah, with Jerusalem remaining its

center. War broke out between the northern and southern halves, and the Assyrians wiped out the northern kingdom in 722 B.C.E. Judah survived numerous invasions until the Babylonians crushed it in 587 B.C.E. The survivors were sent into exile in Babylonia, a period commonly known as the Babylonian Captivity. In 538 B.C.E. the Persian king Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonians and permitted some forty thousand exiles to return to Jerusalem (see "The Rise and Expansion of the Persian Empire" and "Global Viewpoints: Rulers and Divine Favor for Babylonians and Hebrews," page 54). They rebuilt the temple, although politically the area was simply part of the Persian Empire.

GLOBAL VIEWPOINTS

Rulers and Divine Favor for Babylonians and Hebrews

In the ancient world, individuals who established large empires through conquest often subsequently proclaimed that their triumph was the result of divine favor, and they honored the gods of the regions they conquered. King Cyrus the Great of Persia appears to have followed this tradition in at least some of his conquests. A text written in cuneiform on a sixth-century-B.C.E. Babylonian clay cylinder presents Cyrus describing the way in which the main Babylonian god, Marduk, selected him to conquer Babylon and restore proper government and worship. Cyrus is also portrayed as divinely chosen in the book of Isaiah in Hebrew Scripture, probably written sometime in the late sixth century B.C.E., after Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Here it is mainly the Hebrew god Yahweh who speaks, explaining why he has made Cyrus victorious even though Cyrus is not a Jew.

The Cyrus Cylinder

■ I am Cyrus, king of the universe, the great king, the powerful king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters of the world….

When I went as harbinger of peace i[nt]o Babylon I founded my sovereign residence within the palace amid celebration and rejoicing. Marduk, the great lord, bestowed on me as my destiny the great magnanimity of one who loves Babylon, and I every day sought him out in awe. My vast troops marched peaceably in Babylon, and the whole of [Sumer] and Akkad had nothing to fear. I sought the welfare of the city of Babylon and all its sanctuaries. As for the population of Babylon, … [w]ho as if without div[ine intention] had endured a yoke not decreed for them, I soothed their weariness, I freed them from their bond…. Marduk, the great lord, rejoiced at [my good] deeds, and he pronounced a sweet blessing over me, Cyrus, the king who fears him, and over Cambyses, the son [my] issue, [and over] all my troops, that we might proceed further at his exalted command.

The Book of Isaiah, Chapter 45

■ Thus said the Lord to Cyrus, His anointed one — whose right hand He has grasped, Treading down nations before him, Ungirding the loins of kings, Opening doors before him, and letting no gate stay shut: I will march before you, and level the hills that loom up; I will shatter doors of bronze and cut down iron bars. I will give you treasures concealed in the dark and secret hoards — So that you may know that it is I the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by name. For the sake of My servant

Jacob, Israel My chosen one, I call you by name, I hail you by title, though you have not known Me. I am the LORD, and there is none else; beside Me, there is no God. I engird you, though you have not known Me….

It was I who roused him [that is, Cyrus] for victory, and who level all roads for him. He shall rebuild My city, and let My exiled people go, without price and without payment — said the LORD of hosts.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. How would you compare the portrayal of Cyrus and the balance between divine and human actions in the two texts?
2. The Babylonians were polytheistic, and the Hebrews were monotheistic. How does this shape the way divine actions and favor are portrayed in the texts?
3. Both of these texts have been very influential in establishing the largely positive historical view of Cyrus. What limitations might there be in using these as historical sources?

Sources: Cylinder inscription translation by Irving Finkel, curator of Cuneiform Collections at the British Museum, www.britishmuseum.org. "The Book of Isaiah" in *Tanakh: A New Translation of The Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*.

The Jewish Religion

During and especially after the Babylonian Captivity, the most important Hebrew texts of history, law, and ethics were edited and brought together in the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Fundamental to an understanding of the Jewish religion is the concept of the Covenant, an agreement that people believed to exist between themselves and Yahweh. According to the Bible, Yahweh appeared to the tribal leader Abraham, promising him that he would be blessed, as would his descendants, if they followed Yahweh. (Because Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all regard this event as foundational, they are referred to as the "Abrahamic religions.") Yahweh next appeared to Moses when he was leading the Hebrews out of Egypt, and Yahweh made a covenant with the Hebrews: if they worshipped Yahweh as their only god, he would consider them his chosen people and protect them from their enemies. Individuals such as Abraham and Moses who acted as intermediaries between Yahweh and the Hebrew people were known as "prophets." Much of the Hebrew Bible consists of writings in the prophets' voices, understood as messages from Yahweh to the Hebrews.

Worship was embodied in a series of rules of behavior, the Ten Commandments, which Yahweh gave to Moses; these required certain kinds of religious observances and forbade the Hebrews to steal, kill, lie, or commit adultery, thus creating a system of ethical absolutes. From the Ten Commandments a complex system of rules of conduct was created and later written down as Hebrew law. The later prophets such as Isaiah created a system of ethical monotheism, in which goodness was understood to come from a single transcendent god whom the Hebrews were to worship, and in which religious obligations included fair and just behavior toward other people as well as rituals.

Bible Land Pictures, www.BibleLandPictures/akg-images

Hebrew Seal Archaeologists found this stone seal in 2012 while unearthing an ancient drainage channel in central Jerusalem. Dating from the seventh or sixth century B.C.E., the tiny seal would have been set in a ring and used for signing letters. The inscription reads, "Belonging to Matanyahu …, " a name that is found in Hebrew Scripture and is very close to the name of the current prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Like Mesopotamian deities, Yahweh punished people, but the Hebrews also believed he would protect them all, not simply kings and powerful priests, and make them prosper if they obeyed his commandments. The religion of the Hebrews was thus addressed to not only the elites but also the individual. Because kings or other political leaders were not essential to its practice, the rise or fall of a kingdom was not crucial to the religion's continued existence. Religious leaders were important in Judaism, but personally following the instructions of Yahweh was the central task for observant Jews in the ancient world.

Hebrew Society

The Hebrews were originally nomadic, but they adopted settled agriculture in Canaan, and some lived in cities. Over time, communal use of land gave way to family or private ownership, and devotions to the traditions of

Judaism replaced tribal identity.

Family relationships reflected evolving circumstances. Marriage and the family were fundamentally important in Jewish life. Celibacy was frowned upon, and almost all major Jewish thinkers and priests were married. As in Mesopotamia and Egypt, marriage was a family matter, too important to be left solely to the whims of young people. The bearing of children was seen in some ways as a religious function. Sons were especially desired because they maintained the family bloodline while keeping ancestral property in the family. A firstborn son became the head of the household upon his father's death. Mothers oversaw the early education of the children, but as boys grew older, their fathers provided more of their education.

The development of urban life among Jews created new economic opportunities, especially in crafts and trade. People specialized in certain occupations, and, as in most ancient societies, these crafts were family trades.

The Assyrians and the Persians

How did the Assyrians and the Persians consolidate their power and control the subjects of their empires?

Small kingdoms like those of the Phoenicians and the Jews could exist only in the absence of a major power. In the ninth century B.C.E. one major power arose in the form of the Assyrians, who starting in northern Mesopotamia created an empire through often-brutal military conquests. And from a base in what is now southern Iran, the Persians established an even larger empire, developing effective institutions of government.

Assyria, the Military Monarchy

Starting from a base in northern Mesopotamia around 900 B.C.E., the Assyrians began a campaign of expansion and domination, conquering, exacting tribute, and building new fortified towns, palaces, and temples. By means of almost constant warfare, the Assyrians created an empire that stretched from their capital of Nineveh on the Tigris River to central Egypt. Revolt against the Assyrians inevitably promised the rebels bloody battles and cruel sieges followed by surrender, accompanied by systematic torture and slaughter, and sometimes deportations.

British Museum, London, UK/© 2004 Werner Forman/TopFoto/The Image Works

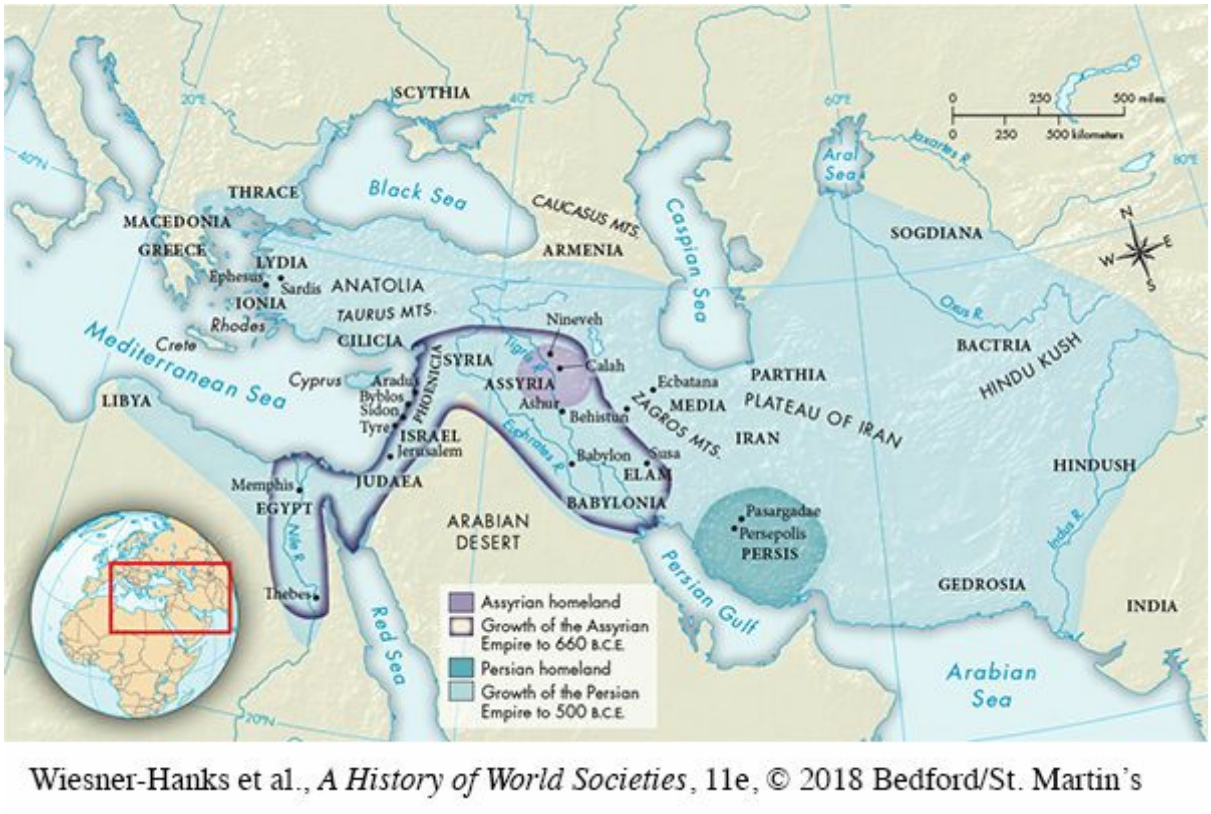
Assyrian Warriors Attack a City In this Assyrian carving from a royal throne room made about 865 B.C.E., warriors cross a river on inflated skins, which both support them and provide air for breathing underwater. Such innovative techniques, combined with a large army and effective military organization, allowed the Assyrians to establish a large empire.

Assyrian methods were certainly harsh, but in practical terms Assyria's success was due primarily to the size of its army and to the army's sophisticated and effective military organization. In addition, the Assyrians developed a wide variety of siege machinery and techniques, including excavations to undermine city walls and battering rams to knock down walls and gates. Never before in this area had anyone applied such technical knowledge to warfare. The Assyrians also knew how to coordinate their efforts, both in open battle and in siege warfare. Not only did the Assyrians know how to win battles, but they also knew how to take advantage of their victories. As early as the eighth century B.C.E., the Assyrian kings began to organize their conquered territories into an empire. The lands closest to Assyria became provinces governed directly by Assyrian officials. Kingdoms beyond the provinces were not annexed but became dependent states.

By the seventh century B.C.E. Assyrian power seemed firmly established. Yet the downfall of Assyria was swift and complete. Babylon won its independence in 626 B.C.E. and joined forces with a new group, the Medes, an Indo-European-speaking people from Persia. Together the Babylonians and the Medes destroyed the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C.E., paving the way for the rise of the Persians.

The Rise and Expansion of the Persian Empire

As we have seen, Assyria rose to power from a base in the Tigris and Euphrates River Valleys of Mesopotamia, which had seen many earlier empires. The Assyrians were defeated by a coalition that included not only a Mesopotamian power — Babylon — but also a people with a base of power in a part of the world that had not been the site of earlier urbanized states: Persia (modern-day Iran) (Map 2.3).



MAP 2.3 The Assyrian and Persian Empires, ca. 1000–500 B.C.E. The Assyrian Empire at its height around 650 B.C.E. included almost all of the old centers of power in the ancient Near East. By 500 B.C.E., however, the Persian Empire was far larger, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus River.

Iran's geographical position and topography explain its traditional role as the highway between western and eastern Asia. Nomadic peoples migrating south from the broad steppes of Russia and Central Asia have streamed into Iran throughout much of history. (For an in-depth discussion of these groups, see Chapter 12.) Confronting the uncrossable salt deserts, most have turned either westward or eastward, moving on until they reached the advanced and wealthy urban centers of Mesopotamia and India. Cities did emerge along these routes, however, and Iran became the area where nomads met urban dwellers.

Among these nomads were Indo-European-speaking peoples who migrated into this area about 1000 B.C.E. with their flocks and herds. They were also horse breeders, and the horse gave them a decisive military advantage over those who already lived in the area. One of these groups was the Medes, who settled in northern Iran. With the rise of the Medes, the balance of power in western Asia shifted east of Mesopotamia for the first time.

In 550 B.C.E. Cyrus the Great (r. 559–530 B.C.E.), king of the Persians (another Indo-European-speaking group) and one of the most remarkable statesmen of antiquity, conquered the Medes. Cyrus then set out to win

control of the shore of the Mediterranean and thus of the terminal ports of the great trade routes that crossed Iran and Anatolia and to secure eastern Iran from the threats of nomadic invasions. In a series of major campaigns Cyrus achieved both goals, thereby consolidating the Persian Empire, though he ultimately died on the battlefield in eastern Iran.

After his victories, Cyrus made sure the Persians were portrayed as liberators, and in some cases he was more benevolent than most conquerors. According to his own account, he freed all the captive peoples, including the Hebrews, who were living in forced exile in Babylon. He returned the Hebrews' sacred objects to them and allowed those who wanted to do so to return to Jerusalem, where he paid for the rebuilding of their temple. (See "Global Viewpoints: Rulers and Divine Favor for Babylonians and Hebrews," page 54.)

Cyrus's successors continued the Persian conquests, creating the largest empire the world had yet seen. Darius (r. 521–486 B.C.E.) conquered Scythia in Central Asia, along with much of Thrace and Macedonia, areas north of the Aegean Sea (see Map 2.3). Darius began to call himself "King of Kings." Invasions of Greece by Darius and his son Xerxes were unsuccessful, but the Persian Empire lasted another two hundred years, until it became part of the empire of Alexander the Great (see "From Polis to Monarchy, 404–200 B.C.E." in Chapter 5).

The Persians also knew how to preserve the peace they had won on the battlefield. To govern the empire, they created an efficient administrative system based in their newly built capital city of Persepolis. Under Darius, they divided the empire into districts and appointed either Persian or local nobles as administrators called satraps to head each one. The satrap controlled local government, collected taxes, heard legal cases, and maintained order. He was assisted by a council and also by officials and army leaders sent from Persepolis who made sure that he knew the will of the king and that the king knew what was going on in the provinces. The Persians allowed the peoples they conquered to maintain their own customs and beliefs as long as they paid the proper amount of taxes and did not rebel, thus creating a culture that blended older and newer religious traditions and ways of seeing the world. Because Persian art depicted both Persians and non-Persians realistically, it is an excellent source of information about the weapons, tools, clothing, and even hairstyles of many peoples of the area.

Communication and trade were eased by a sophisticated system of roads linking the empire from the coast of Asia Minor to the valley of the Indus River. These roads meant that the king was usually in close touch with officials and subjects, and they simplified the defense of the empire

by making it easier to move Persian armies. The roads also aided the flow of trade, which Persian rulers further encouraged by building canals, including one that linked the Red Sea and the Nile.

De Agostini Picture Library/Bridgeman Images

Gold Model of Horse-Drawn Chariot Two men dressed in the style of the Medes drive a four-horse chariot in this small model made entirely of gold. In the nineteenth century a huge collection of silver and gold objects from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. was found on the banks of the Oxus River in what is now Tajikistan. Most likely, the spot had been a ferry crossing and the objects had been buried long ago.

The Religion of Zoroaster

Persian religion was originally polytheistic and tied to nature, with Ahuramazda (ah-HOOR-uh-MAZ-duh) as the chief god. Around 600 B.C.E. the ideas of Zoroaster (zoh-roh-ASS-tuhr), a thinker and preacher whose dates are uncertain, began to gain prominence. Zoroaster is regarded as the author of key religious texts, which were later gathered together in a collection of sacred texts called the Avesta. He introduced new spiritual concepts, stressing devotion to Ahuramazda alone and emphasizing the individual's responsibility to choose between the forces of creation, truth, and order and those of nothingness, chaos, falsehood,

and disorder. Zoroaster taught that people possessed free will and that they must rely on their own consciences to guide them through an active life in which they focused on “good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.” Their decisions were crucial, he warned, for there would come a time of reckoning. At the end of time, the forces of order would win, and the victorious Ahuramazda, like the Egyptian god Osiris, would preside over a last judgment to determine each person’s eternal fate.

Zoroaster’s writings were communicated by teachers, and King Darius began to use Zoroastrian language and images. Under the protection of the Persian kings, Zoroastrian ideas spread throughout Iran and the rest of the Persian Empire, and then into central China. **Zoroastrianism** survived the fall of the Persian Empire to influence Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, largely because of its belief in a just life on earth and a happy afterlife. Good behavior in the world, even though unrecognized at the time, would receive ample reward in the hereafter. Evil, no matter how powerful a person had been in life, would be punished after death. In some form or another, Zoroastrian concepts still pervade many modern religions, and Zoroastrianism still exists as a religion.

Zoroastrianism Religion based on the teachings of Zoroaster that emphasized the individual’s responsibility to choose between good and evil.

Chapter Summary

Beginning about 5,000 years ago, people in some parts of the world invented writing, in large part to meet the needs of the state. States first developed in the southern part of Mesopotamia known as Sumer, where priests and rulers invented ways to control and organize people who lived in cities reliant on irrigation. Conquerors from the north unified Mesopotamian city-states into larger empires and spread Mesopotamian culture over a large area.

During the third millennium B.C.E. Egypt grew into a cohesive state under a single ruler. For long stretches of history, Egypt was prosperous and secure in the Nile Valley, although at times various groups migrated into or invaded and conquered this kingdom. During the period known as the New Kingdom, warrior-kings created a large Egyptian empire. After the collapse of the New Kingdom, the Nubian rulers of Kush conquered Egypt, and another group, the Phoenicians, came to dominate trade in the Mediterranean, spreading a letter alphabet. Another group, the Hebrews, created a new form of religious belief based on the worship of a single all-powerful god.

In the ninth century B.C.E. the Assyrians used a huge army and sophisticated military tactics to create an empire from a base in northern Mesopotamia. The Persians established an even larger empire, developing effective institutions of government and building roads. The Persians generally allowed their subjects to continue their own customs, traditions, and religions. Around 600 B.C.E. a new religion grew in Persia based on the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster.

CONNECTIONS

"History is written by the victors" goes a common saying often incorrectly attributed to British prime minister Winston Churchill, who led Britain during World War II. This is not always true; people who have been vanquished in wars or devastated by oppression have certainly made their stories known. But in other ways it is always true, for writing created records and therefore was the origin of what many people understand as history. Writing was invented to serve the needs of people who lived close to one another in cities and states, and almost everyone who could write lived in states. Because most written history, including this book, concentrates on areas with states and complex societies, the next two chapters examine the societies that were developing in India and China during the period

discussed in this chapter. In Chapter 5 we pick up on developments in the Mediterranean that link to those in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Persia discussed in this chapter.

It is important to remember that, as was the spread of agriculture, the growth of the state was a slow process. States became the most powerful and most densely populated forms of human society, and today almost everyone on the planet is at least hypothetically a citizen of a state or, as we now call them, nation (or sometimes of more than one, if he or she has dual citizenship). Just three hundred years ago, however, only about a third of the world was governed by states; in the rest of the world, people lived in bands of foragers, villages led by kin leaders, family groups of pastoralists, chiefdoms, confederations of tribes, or other forms of social organization. In 500 B.C.E. perhaps only a little over 5 percent of the world's population lived in states.

The first inquiries into the past in the West were written at just about this time, by the Greek writer Herodotus (heh-ROD-duh-tuhs) (ca. 484–ca. 425 B.C.E.), who used the word *historia* to describe them, from which we get the word *history*. In his histories, Herodotus pays primary attention to the Persians and the Greeks, both of whom had writing and states, but he also discusses many peoples who had neither. In their attempts to provide a balanced account of all the world's peoples, not just those who lived in places where writing developed, historians today are also looking beyond written sources. Those sources invariably present only part of the story, as Winston Churchill — a historian as well as a political leader — noted in something he actually *did* say: "History will bear me out, particularly as I shall write that history myself."