



# 1 PREHISTORY AND NEAR EASTERN CIVILIZATIONS



A Western man or woman born early in the last century has seen more change in a lifetime than previous generations experienced over hundreds of years. Despite this rapid change in modern times, Western civilization stands firmly on a foundation that is almost five thousand years old, and people in the West often return to that foundation to discover their heritage and to reexamine their values. As further changes occur, the past becomes increasingly important as a guide to the future.

Before we begin to explore this heritage and what it means today, we need to discuss two important terms—*culture* and *civilization*. **Culture** usually refers to the sum of human endeavors: methods and practices for survival; political, economic, and social institutions; and values, beliefs, and the arts. **Civilization**, on the other hand, refers to the way people live in a complex political, economic, and social structure, usually in an urban setting; usually after making certain technological and artistic advances and sharing a refinement of thought, manners, and taste. Culture is passed from one generation to another by human behavior, speech, and artifacts; civilization is transmitted primarily by writing (Figure 1.1). The term *culture* can also be used to refer to the creative, artistic, and intellectual expressions of a civilization. We will use the term in both these senses. In the words of Matthew Arnold, the nineteenth-century English poet and critic, culture is “the best that has been thought and said.” To this we would add, “and done.”

◀ **Detail** *Selket*. Ca. 1325 B.C.  
Wood, overlaid with gesso  
and gilded, ht. 53<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>". Cairo  
Museum, Egypt.



**Figure 1.1** Rosetta Stone. Ca. 197–196 B.C. British Museum. Although scholars knew that Egypt had a writing system, they were unable to solve the mystery of hieroglyphics until the nineteenth century. The key was provided by the Rosetta Stone, discovered by members of Napoleon’s expedition when he invaded Egypt in 1799. On the stone the same event is described in hieroglyphics, in Egyptian cursive script, and in Greek. By comparing the Greek text with the other two, scholars were able to decipher both Egyptian scripts. This discovery marks the origin of modern Egyptology.

## PREHISTORY AND EARLY CULTURES

Where and when does the story of human culture begin? The latest evidence from paleoanthropology, the study of early human life, indicates that human beings originated in the distant past in lands far from western Europe. Human development thus begins during prehistory, long before our predecessors compiled—or could compile—written records of their cultures. The first ancestors of human beings probably appeared four to five million years ago. In comparison, life-forms appeared on earth an estimated two to three billion years ago, and the planet itself is believed to have formed some four to six billion years ago.

The periods of time involved in these processes are so vast that only metaphors can make them comprehensible. If we take the seven-day week, made familiar

by the biblical account of creation, and combine it with recent scientific estimates about when the earth and life began, then the following analogy may be made. The earth was created just after midnight on the first day, the first life appeared at about noon on the fourth day, and the early ancestors of human beings didn’t show up until about 11 P.M. on the seventh day. To complete the analogy, the birth of civilization occurred almost an hour later, in the last tenth of a second before midnight on the last day of the week.

Although the record of human evolution is obscure, sufficient evidence exists to show that hominids, the earliest primate ancestors of modern humans, probably originated in eastern Africa. From among them, about two million years ago, in the Pliocene epoch, the genus *Homo* evolved, a form marked by a larger brain and the ability to adapt somewhat to the environment. Hominids of the *Homo* genus made and used tools and developed rudimentary cultures. Anthropologists designate this earliest cultural period as the **Paleolithic**, or Old Stone Age. It corresponds to the geological period known as the Pleistocene epoch, or Ice Age, the time of extensive climate changes caused by the advance and retreat of massive glaciers (Timeline 1.1).

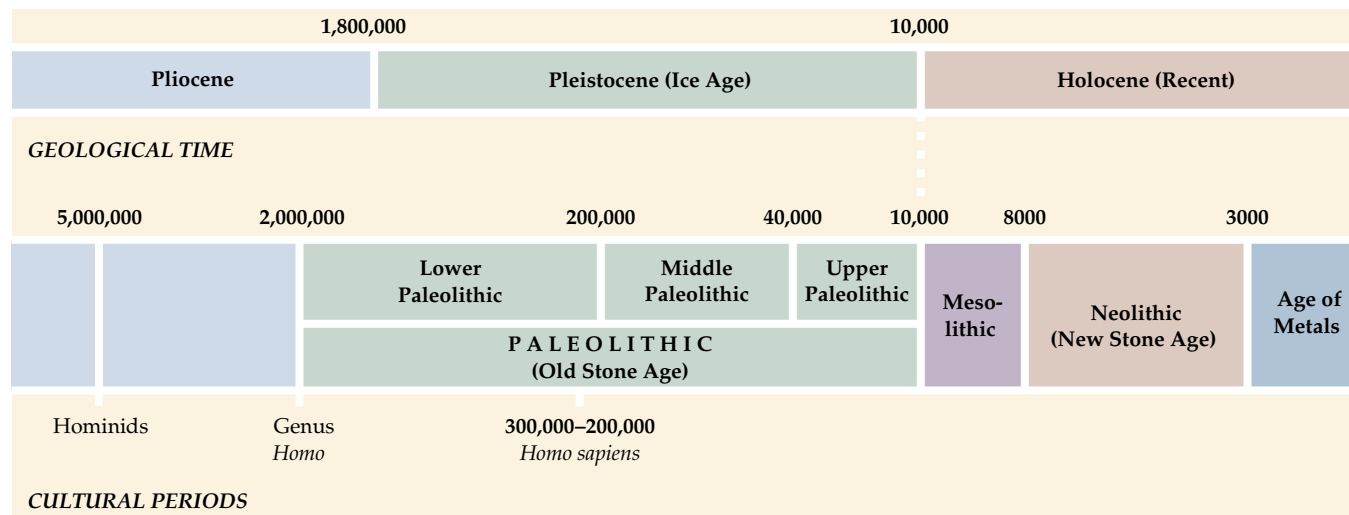
Stone Age culture spread widely over a vast area, but remains of hominid life are scarce. Evidence indicates that hominids lived in packs, followed herds of wandering animals, and ate wild seasonal fruits and vegetables. Anthropologists believe that duties and work divided along sex lines as all-male teams hunted game for meat and fur while females and children gathered plant foods, prepared meals, and tended the young. During the night, all sought shelter together in caves for safety and refuge against the elements. This way of life hinged on cooperation and food sharing among small social groups.

In the early Old Stone Age, or Lower Paleolithic, hominids invented crude stone tools, used fire, and probably developed speech—a major breakthrough that allowed them to communicate in ways denied other animals. Their first tools were simple choppers and, somewhat later, hand axes. In the Middle Paleolithic, more advanced hominids developed pointed tools and scrapers, which they chiseled with precision and care. In the Upper Paleolithic, double-faced blades became common.

By about 200,000 B.C., the species *Homo sapiens* had evolved from earlier hominids. More fully developed physically and mentally, they slowly spread throughout the Eastern Hemisphere and eventually migrated into the Western Hemisphere over the land bridge between Siberia and Alaska. Their more sophisticated tools included bows and arrows, fishhooks, and needles. They lived together cooperatively, buried their dead with rituals, and began to paint and sculpt. Especially through

Timeline 1.1 GEOLOGICAL TIME AND PREHISTORIC CULTURAL PERIODS

All dates approximate and B.C.



their cave paintings and carved figurines, our ancestors made a breakthrough to symbolic thought.

Ice Age cave paintings of reindeer, bison, rhinoceroses, lions, and horses in Altamira, Spain, and in Lascaux and the Ardèche region of France date from the Upper Paleolithic and are the earliest examples of human art (Figure 1.2). The purposes of the paintings in the recently discovered Chauvet caves in the Ardèche region remain a mystery, but those at Altamira and Lascaux were probably used as part of ceremonies and rituals before hunting. By painting numerous wild animals pierced with arrows, the artists were attempting to ensure a successful hunt.

Another type of Upper Paleolithic art is seen in the carved female figurine found at Willendorf, Austria (Figure 1.3). Made of limestone, the statue is faceless and rotund. The distended stomach and full breasts suggest that the figure may have been used as a fertility symbol and an image of a mother goddess, representing the creative power of nature. As a mythological figure, the mother goddess appeared in many ancient cultures, beginning in Paleolithic times; about thirty thousand miniature sculptures in clay, marble, bone, copper, and gold have been uncovered at about three thousand sites in southeastern Europe alone. The supremacy of the mother goddess was expressed in the earliest myths of creation, which told of the life-giving and nurturing powers of the female. This figurine from Willendorf, with its emphasized breasts, navel, and vulva, symbolic of creativity, may have been used in religious ceremonies to ensure the propagation of the tribe or to guarantee a bountiful supply of food. The statue also reveals the aesthetic interests of the sculptor, who took care to depict the goddess's hands resting on her breasts and her hair in tightly knit rows.

As the last glaciers retreated from Europe, during the Holocene (Recent) epoch of geological time, human beings were forced to adapt to new living conditions. Their stone tools became more advanced and included knives and hammers. Following the Mesolithic transitional period (about 10,000–8000 B.C.), a transformation occurred that has been called the most important event in human history: Hunters and gatherers became farmers and herders. Thus began the **Neolithic** period, or New Stone Age (about 8000 B.C.). In Southeast Asia, Central America, parts of South America, and the Near East, human beings ceased their nomadic existence and learned to domesticate wild animals. They learned to plow the earth and sow seeds, providing themselves with a much more reliable food supply, which in turn encouraged the development of permanent settlements and eventually the rise of urban centers. This agrarian pattern of life dominated the West until about two hundred years ago.

Precisely why and how the agrarian revolution came at this time is a hotly debated topic among anthropologists. Nonetheless, most agree that with the retreat of the last glaciers from Europe, methods of food gathering changed dramatically, causing either surpluses or shortages. In some areas, grain surpluses allowed populations to grow, which led to forced migrations as the number of humans outstripped the available food. In less productive lands, the people began to experiment with domesticating animals and planting grains. These innovations in marginal lands caused food production to rise, soon matching that found in more fertile areas, so that eventually a uniform agricultural economy spread to many parts of the globe. Thus, economic causes accounted for the transformation from food-gathering to food-producing cultures.



**Figure 1.2** Herd of Rhinoceroses. Ca. 32,000–30,000 B.C. Chauvet Cave, Ardèche region, France. *This naturalistic detail of a panel painting includes lions, bison, and a young mammoth (not visible here) moving across a vast expanse of the cave wall. The repeated black lines of the rhinoceroses' horns and backs create a sense of depth and give energy to the work.*

The agricultural revolution expanded across the Near East and probably into Europe and Africa. Between 6000 and 3000 B.C., human beings also learned to mine and use copper, signifying the end of the Neolithic period and ushering in the Age of Metals. In about 3000 B.C., artisans combined copper and tin to produce bronze, a strong alloy, which they used in their tools, weapons, and jewelry.

The Bronze Age, which extended from about 3000 to about 1200 B.C., gave rise to two major civilizations in the Near East. The earlier developed in Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (in present-day Iraq), and the other, probably emerging just slightly later, originated along the Nile River in Egypt. Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations shared certain characteristics: Both were ruled by kings who were in turn supported by a priestly caste;

the rulers' power was shared by a few educated elites; their economies were slave-based; their societies were stratified, with class privileges at the upper end; and palaces and religious edifices were built for ceremonial and governmental purposes. These early civilizations made deep and lasting impressions on their neighbors and successors that helped shape life in the Western world.

### **THE CIVILIZATIONS OF THE TIGRIS AND EUPHRATES RIVER VALLEY: MESOPOTAMIA**

The Tigris-Euphrates river valley forms part of what is known as the Fertile Crescent, which starts at the Persian Gulf, runs slightly northwestward through the



**Figure 1.3** Figurine from Willendorf. Ca. 25,000 B.C. Ht. 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". Museum Naturhistorisches, Vienna. *Discovered in about A.D. 1908, this female statuette measures just under 5 inches high. Carved from limestone, it still shows evidence of having been painted red. Many other statues like it have been discovered, but this one remains the most famous because of the unusual balance it strikes between symbolism and realism.*

Tigris-Euphrates valley, and then turns westerly to the Mediterranean Sea and curves south along the shoreline toward Egypt (Map 1.1). This arc of land contained some of the most arable soil in the Near East, many of the heavily traveled trade routes, and most of the early centers of civilization.

*Mesopotamia* is a Greek word meaning "land between the two rivers." The hill country and Zagros Mountains rise to the east of the Tigris-Euphrates valley, and the vast Arabian desert stretches to the west. The twin rivers course down to the Persian Gulf, draining an area approximately 600 miles long and 250 miles wide. Near the mouth of the gulf, on the river delta, human wanderers settled in about 6000 B.C., founding villages and tilling the land. Despite heat, marshes, unpredictable and violent floods, and invaders who came from both the mountains and the desert, some of these communities prospered and grew.

### The Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian Kingdoms

Three successive civilizations—Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian—flourished in Mesopotamia for nearly fifteen hundred years (Timeline 1.2). Indeed, as historian Samuel Kramer asserts, "history began at Sumer."

The rulers of Sumer created an exalted image of a just and stable society with a rich cultural life. Sumer's most inspirational king, Gilgamesh [GILL-guh-mesh], ruled during the first dynasty (about 2700 B.C.) of Ur, a state centered between the rivers. His heroic adventures and exploits were later immortalized in the poem *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. A later ruler, Urukagina, is known for reforming law codes and revitalizing the economy near the end of the Sumerian period (2350 B.C.). But Urukagina's successors were unable to maintain Sumer's power, and the cities became easy prey for the Akkadians of northern Mesopotamia.

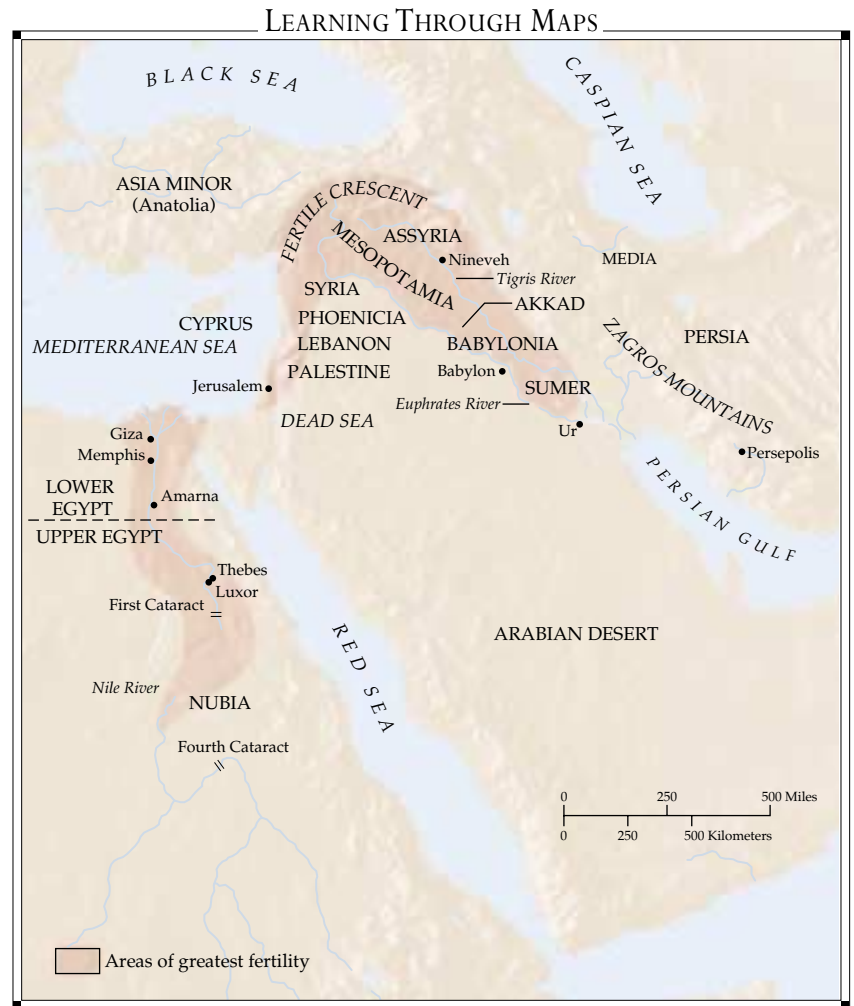
The Akkadian dynasties, lasting from about 2350 to about 2000 B.C., incorporated Sumerian culture into their own society and carried this hybrid civilization far beyond the Tigris-Euphrates valley. According to legends—which are similar to the later story of the Hebrew leader Moses—Sargon, the first and greatest Akkadian ruler, was born of lowly origins and abandoned at birth in the reed marshes; yet Sargon survived and rose to prominence at the Sumerian court. Excavated inscriptions reveal that Sargon conquered the Sumerians and founded a far-flung empire to the east and northeast. At its height, Sargon's power was felt from Egypt to India, but his successors, lacking his intelligence and skill, could not maintain the Akkadian empire. The incursions of the Gutti tribes from the Zagros Mountains brought about the final collapse of the weakened Akkadian empire and the division of southern Mesopotamia into petty kingdoms.

Babylonia was the third civilization in Mesopotamia. From northern Mesopotamia, their power base, the Babylonians governed the entire valley from about 2000 to 1600 B.C. Under their most successful military leader and renowned lawgiver, Hammurabi [ham-uh-RAHB-e] (r. 1792–1750 B.C.), the Babylonians reached their political and cultural ascendancy. However, the Hittites, centered in Asia Minor, invaded Babylon in about 1600 B.C. and toppled the dynasty of Hammurabi.

Agriculture dominated the economy of Mesopotamia. Harsh living conditions and unpredictable floods forced the inhabitants to learn to control the rivers through irrigation systems and cooperative tilling of the soil. Farmers eventually dug a complex canal system to irrigate their cultivated plots, which might have been some distance from the river. As production increased, prosperity allowed larger populations to

### Map 1.1 MESOPOTAMIA AND ANCIENT EGYPT

This map shows the two earliest civilizations of the Near East: Mesopotamia and Egypt. Notice that much of Mesopotamia is contained within the area known as the Fertile Crescent and that Egypt is settled mainly along the Nile River. Locate the cities in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Compare and contrast the role and importance of rivers in these civilizations. Why was Egypt less exposed to external influences than was Mesopotamia?



thrive. Villages soon grew into small cities—with populations ranging from 10,000 to 50,000—surrounded by hamlets and tilled fields. Trade developed with nearby areas, and wheeled vehicles—perfected by the Sumerians—and sailboats carried goods up and down Mesopotamia and eventually throughout the Fertile Crescent.

By the beginning of the Bronze Age, the family had replaced the tribe or clan as the basic unit in society. Families now owned their lands outright, and, under the general direction of the religious and secular authorities, they worked their fields and maintained the irrigation ditches. Marriages were arranged by parents, with economics an essential consideration. According to the law codes, women possessed some rights, such as holding property; however, a wife was clearly under her husband's power. Divorce was easier for men than for women, and women were punished more severely than men for breaking moral and marital laws. Recent scholarship has suggested that women's status and

roles became more limited as Mesopotamian society became more complex. In sum, Mesopotamian women were originally able to participate actively in economic, religious, and political life as long as their dependence on and obligation to male kin and husbands were observed, but they progressively lost their relative independence because rulers extended the concept of patriarchy (rule by the fathers) from family practice into public law.

The political structure reflected the order and functions of the social system. At the top stood the ruler, who was supported by an army, a bureaucracy, a judicial system, and a priesthood. The ruler usually obtained advice from prominent leaders, meeting in council, who constituted the next layer of the social order: rich landowners, wealthy merchants, priests, and military chiefs. The next group consisted of artisans, craftspeople, and petty businesspeople and traders. Below them were small landowners and tenant farmers. At the bottom of the social scale were

## Timeline 1.2 MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATIONS

All dates approximate and B

3000	2350	2000	1600
Sumerian		Akkadian	Babylonian

serfs and slaves, who either had been captured in war or had fallen into debt.

### The Cradle of Civilization

The three Mesopotamian civilizations responded to the same geography, climate, and natural resources, and their cultures reflected that shared background. The Sumerians were probably the most influential: From Sumer came writing, the lunar calendar, a mathematical computation system, medical and scientific discoveries, and architectural innovations. However, each civilization, through its religion, literature, law, and art, deeply affected other Near Eastern people.

**Writing** Thousands of clay tablets inscribed with the wedge-shaped symbols of Sumerian script have been uncovered in Mesopotamia, indicating that the Sumerians had developed a form of writing by 3000 B.C. With the invention of writing, people no longer had to rely on memory, speech, and person-to-person interactions to communicate and transmit information. Instead, they could accumulate a permanent body of knowledge and pass it on from one generation to the next. With writing came the possibility of civilization.

At first, the Sumerians needed a simple way to record agricultural and business information and the deeds and sayings of their rulers. Their earliest symbols were **pictograms**, or pictures, carefully drawn to represent particular objects. To these they added **ideograms**, pictures drawn to represent ideas or concepts. A simple drawing of a bowl, for example, could be used to mean “food.” As these pictures became more stylized, meaning began to be transferred from the represented object to the sign itself; that is, the sign began to stand for a word rather than an object.

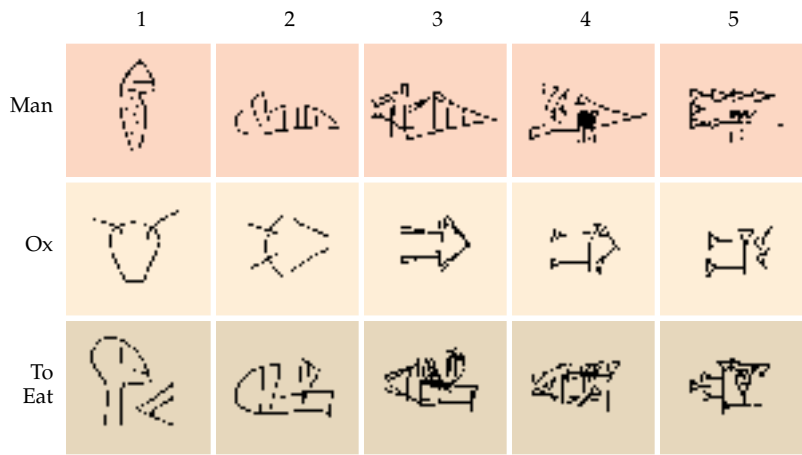
Later, Sumerian scribes and writers identified the syllabic sounds of spoken words and created **phonograms**, symbols for separate speech sounds, borrowing from and building on the earlier pictograms and ideograms. These simplified and standardized symbols eventually resulted in a phonetic writing system of syllable-based sounds that, when combined, produced words (Figure 1.4). (It was left to later civilizations to separate vowel sounds from syllables and thus create a true alphabet, based on individual speech sounds.)

The Sumerians could now express complex, abstract concepts, and their system could extend to other languages. The Akkadians and the Babylonians adopted and modified the Sumerian script to keep records and preserve their literature, including *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Code of Hammurabi. By the end of the Bronze Age (about 1200 B.C.), other written languages existed, but Akkadian-Sumerian was the language of diplomacy and trade in the Near East.

The Sumerian writing system has been labeled **cuneiform**, a term derived from the Latin word *cuneus*, which means “wedge.” Using wedge-shaped reeds or styluses, scribes pressed the symbols into wet clay tablets, and artists and craftspeople, wielding metal tools, incised the script into stone monuments or cylindrical pillars. Preserved for thousands of years in hardened clay and stone, cuneiform writing has provided invaluable insight into ancient Mesopotamian culture.

**Religion** Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian religions, despite individual differences, shared many basic attitudes and concepts that became the foundation for other Near Eastern belief systems. The underlying beliefs of Mesopotamian religion were that the gods had created human beings to serve them, that the gods were in complete control, and that powerless mortals had no choice but to obey and worship these deities. The hostile climate and unpredictable rivers made life precarious, and the gods appeared capricious. The Mesopotamians held a vague notion of a shadowy netherworld where the dead rested, but they did not believe in an afterlife as such or any rewards or punishments upon death. Happiness seldom was an earthly goal; pessimism ran as a constant theme throughout their religion and literature.

Mesopotamian religion had three important characteristics. It was **polytheistic**—many gods and goddesses existed and often competed with one another; it was **anthropomorphic**—the deities possessed human form and had their own personalities and unique traits; and it was **pantheistic**—hundreds of divinities were found everywhere, in nature and the universe. Since Mesopotamians thought of their gods in human form with all the strengths and weaknesses of mortals, they believed their deities lived in the same way as people, and they were pragmatic in approaching the supernatural powers. For example, they believed that their deities held council, made decisions, and ordered



**Figure 1.4** Sumerian Cuneiform Writing. Ca. 3000–1000 B.C. The columns illustrate the evolution of Sumerian writing from pictograms to script. Column 1 shows the pictogram: a man, an ox, and the verb “to eat” (represented by the mouth and a bowl). In column 2, the pictographic symbols have been turned 90 degrees, as the Sumerians did in their first writing. Columns 3 and 4 show how the script changed between 2500 and 1800 B.C. Column 5 is an Assyrian adaptation of the Sumerian cuneiform script.



**Figure 1.5** Gilgamesh Fighting a Lion. Ca. 2500–2000 B.C. Cylinder seal (left) and modern impression of a cylinder seal (right). British Museum. The separate scenes, rolled out on this impression from the seal, which is about 1 inch high, depict the Sumerian hero in one of his many battles against beasts. The artist heightens the intensity of the physical struggle by placing Gilgamesh, with his legs bent and arms locked around the lion, at a sharp angle under the animal to muster his brute strength against his foe.

the forces of nature to wreak havoc or to bestow plenty on mortals.

Mesopotamians divided the deities into the sky gods and the earth gods. In these two categories were the four major deities: Anu, the heaven god; Enlil, the air god; Enki, the water god; and Ninhursag, the mother goddess. Enlil emerged as the most powerful god for the Sumerians. He gave mortals the plough and the pickax, and he brought forth for humanity all the productive forces of the universe, such as trees, grains, and “whatever was needful.”

Rituals, ceremonies, and the priesthood were absolutely essential to Mesopotamian religion. Although the average Mesopotamian might participate in worship services, the priests played the central role in all religious functions. They also controlled and administered large parcels of land, which enhanced their

power in economic and political matters. Priests carefully formulated and consciously followed the procedures for rites and rituals, which were written down and stored in their temples. This cultic literature not only told the Mesopotamians how to worship but also informed them about their deities’ origins, characteristics, and deeds. Religious myths and instructions constituted a major part of Mesopotamian literature and made writing an essential part of the culture.

**Literature** Of the surviving epics, tales, and legends that offer glimpses into the Mesopotamian mind, the most famous is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. King Gilgamesh, whose reign in about 2700 B.C. is well documented, became a larger-than-life hero in Sumerian folk tales (Figure 1.5). In all probability, the Gilgamesh epic began as an oral poem and was not written on clay



## PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

### A Sumerian Father Lectures His Son

*In this Sumerian text, a father rebukes his son for leading a wayward life and admonishes him to reform. The essay was inscribed on clay tablets dating from about 1700 B.C.*

"Where did you go?"

"I did not go anywhere."

"If you did not go anywhere, why do you idle about? Go to school, stand before your 'school-father,' recite your assignment, open your schoolbag, write your tablet, let your 'big brother' write your new tablet for you. After you have finished your assignment and reported to your monitor, come to me, and do not wander about in the street. . . .

"You who wander about in the public square, would you achieve success? Then seek out the first generations. Go to school, it will be of benefit to you. My son, seek out the first generations, inquire of them.

"Perverse one over whom I stand watch—I would not be a man did I not stand watch over my son—I

spoke to my kin, compared its men, but found none like you among them. . . .

"I, never in all my life did I make you carry reeds to the canebrake. The reed rushes which the young and the little carry, you, never in your life did you carry them. I never said to you 'Follow my caravans.' I never sent you to work, to plow my field. I never sent you to work to dig up my field. I never sent you to work as a laborer. 'Go, work and support me,' I never in my life said to you.

"Others like you support their parents by working. . . .

"I, night and day am I tortured because of you. Night and day you waste in pleasures. You have accumulated much wealth, have expanded far and wide, have become fat, big, broad, powerful, and puffed. But your kin waits expectantly for your misfortune, and will rejoice at it because you looked not to your humanity."

tablets for hundreds of years. The most complete surviving version, from 600 B.C., was based on a Babylonian copy written in Akkadian and dating from about 1600 B.C. Although this poem influenced other Near Eastern writings with its characters, plot, and themes, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* stands on its own as a poetic utterance worthy of being favorably compared with later Greek and Roman epics.

Through its royal hero, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* focuses on fundamental themes that concern warriors in an aristocratic society: the need to be brave in the face of danger, the choice of death before dishonor, the conflict between companionship and sexual pleasure, the power of the gods over weak mortals, and the finality of death. Above all, it deals with human beings' vain quest for immortality. As the tale begins, the extravagant and despotic policies of Gilgamesh have led his subjects to pray for relief. In response, a goddess creates from clay a "wild man" of tremendous physical strength and sends him to kill Gilgamesh. But Enkidu, as he is called, is instead tamed by a woman's love, loses his innocence, wrestles Gilgamesh to a draw, and becomes his boon companion.

As the epic unfolds, Gilgamesh chooses friendship with Enkidu rather than the love offered by the goddess Ishtar. Gilgamesh is punished for this choice by being made to watch helplessly as Enkidu dies from an illness sent by the gods. Forced to confront the fate

awaiting all mortals, a grieving Gilgamesh begins a search for immortality.

The next section of the epic, which details Gilgamesh's search, includes the Sumerian tale of the great flood, which parallels the later Hebrew story of Noah and the ark. Although the Sumerian account of the flood was probably a later addition to the original story of Gilgamesh, the episode does fit into the narrative and reinforces one of the epic's major themes: the inescapable mortality of human beings. Gilgamesh hears the story of the flood from its sole survivor, Utnapishtim. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh how he built an ark and loaded it with animals and his family, how the waters rose, and how he released birds from the ark to discover if the waters were receding. The old man then explains how the gods, feeling sorry for the last remaining human, granted him immortality. Utnapishtim refuses to divulge the secret of eternal life to Gilgamesh, but the old man's wife blurts out where a plant may be found that will renew youth but not give immortality. Although Gilgamesh locates the plant, he loses it on his journey home. Gilgamesh, seeing the city of Uruk that he had built, realizes that the deeds humans do on earth are the measure of their immortality and that death is inevitable.

*The Epic of Gilgamesh* is essentially a secular morality tale. Gilgamesh's triumphs and failures mirror the lives of all mortals, and the Sumerians saw themselves

in Gilgamesh's change from an overly confident and powerful hero to a doubting and fearful human being. Those who, like Gilgamesh, ignore the power of the deities have to pay a heavy price for their pride.

Mesopotamia also gave the world the first known literary figure, Enheduanna (fl. 2330 B.C.), an Akkadian poet who wrote in the Sumerian language. Made priestess of temples in the Sumerian cities of Ur (see Figure 1.9) and Uruk by her father, King Sargon, she used her priestly offices and literary gifts to further his political goal of uniting the Sumerians and the Akkadians. In these posts, she composed hymns to both Sumerian and Akkadian deities, and these hymns—some of which have been identified—became models for later poets. Enheduanna was especially devoted to Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of love, and she made this deity the subject of her best-known literary work, *The Exaltation of Inanna*. In this work, Enheduanna exalted, or raised, Inanna to supremacy in the Sumerian pantheon, her tribute for what she believed was Inanna's role in Sargon's triumph over a general uprising at the end of his reign.

**Law** The Mesopotamians produced the fairest law codes before that of the Hebrews. The central theme of Sumerian law, whose first existing records date from about 2050 B.C., was justice. From the earliest times, the Sumerian kings understood justice to mean “the straight thing”—that is, dealing fairly with all their subjects and prohibiting the exploitation of the weak by the strong. This concept of equity applied especially to economic matters, such as debts, contracts, and titles to land.

The most important set of laws from Mesopotamian civilization is that of the Babylonian king Hammurabi. Dating from about 1700 B.C., the Code of Hammurabi was found preserved on a seven-foot-high black stone **stele**, or pillar. At the top, Hammurabi is depicted standing in front of Shamash, the Babylonian and Sumerian god of justice. Like other ancient lawgivers (Moses, for example), Hammurabi received the legal code from a deity. Below the two figures are carved the prologue, the collection of laws, and an epilogue (Figure 1.6). The prologue lists Hammurabi's accomplishments and sings his praises while making it clear that the gods are the source of his power to establish “law and justice.” The epilogue warns future rulers to carry out these laws or else be subject to defeat and ruin.

The laws concerning punishment for crimes are based on the judicial principle of *lex talionis*, or retaliation, which demands an “eye for an eye,” although Hammurabi's code often substitutes payments in kind for damages done. Every major area of civil and criminal law was covered in the code, including property



**Figure 1.6** Code of Hammurabi. Ca. 1700 B.C. Basalt, ht. approx. 3'. Louvre. Hammurabi stands on the left, his hand raised before his mouth in the traditional Mesopotamian gesture of devotion, and Shamash, the sun god and protector of truth and justice, sits on the right. The cult of Shamash (in Sumeria, Utu) emerged from the earliest times, and this god's representation—flames shooting from the shoulders and hands holding symbols of power—was established in the Sumerian period. The relief, with its incised folds of cloth and ceremonial chair, is carved deep enough into the hard stone stele (7' 4") to suggest a three-dimensional sculpture.

rights, sales, contracts, inheritance, adoption, prices and wages, sexual relations (much more severely restricted for women than for men), and personal rights for women, children, and slaves. Hammurabi's code, like other Mesopotamian laws, was only one part of a complex judicial system that encompassed judges, courts, trials, legal proceedings, and contracts.

**Art and Architecture** The art of Mesopotamia, like the rest of its culture, evolved from Sumerian styles to the Akkadian and Babylonian schools. Artisans worked in many forms—small seals, pottery, jewelry, vases, reliefs, and statues—and in many media—clay, stone, precious gems, gold, silver, leather, and ivory. Artifacts and crafted works from all three civilizations recorded the changing techniques of the producers as well as the shifting tastes of the consumers, whether they were rich individuals decorating their homes or officials issuing commissions for statues to adorn their

temples. The temples, usually the center of the city and set on high mounds above the other structures, were often splendidly ornamented and housed exquisitely carved statues of gods and goddesses.

A fine example of Sumerian artistry is a bull's head carved on the sound box of a lyre (Figure 1.7). Working in gold leaf and semiprecious gems, the unknown artist has captured the vigor and power of the animal in a bold and simple style. Such elegant musical instruments were played in homes and in palaces to accompany the poets and storytellers as they sang of the heroes' adventures and the deities' powers.

Mesopotamian artists carved thousands of figures, many on the walls of temples and palaces and others as freestanding statues. A notable early type of freestanding statue that became standard in Akkadian temples depicts a figure in a contemplative, worshiping pose, his hands folded and clasped in front of him. Many of these are likenesses of Gudea, a ruler who flourished about 2150 B.C. (Figure 1.8).

In contrast to the finely crafted sculpture, Mesopotamian architecture often seems uninspired, particularly the domestic architecture. Most Mesopotamian houses were square or rectangular. Even though the Mesopotamians knew about the arch, the vault, and the column, they did not employ them widely; they used primarily the basic **post-and-lintel construction** of two vertical posts capped by a horizontal lintel, or beam, for entranceways. The clay bricks used in construction limited the builders in styles and decorations, notably on the exterior. If private homes of clay bricks looked drab from the street, however, they were often attractive inside, built around an open courtyard with decorated rooms. The exteriors of temples and palaces were sometimes adorned with colored glazed bricks, mosaics, and painted cones arranged in patterns or, more rarely, with imported stone and marble.

Archeologists have not yet determined exactly how Mesopotamian cities were laid out. Urban centers were protected by walls, whose imposing and elaborately decorated gates proclaimed the city's wealth and power. The most prominent structure in each Sumerian city was the **ziggurat**, a terraced brick and mudbrick pyramid that served as the center of worship. The ziggurat resembled a hill or a stairway to the sky from which the deities could descend; or perhaps the structure was

**Figure 1.7** Restored Sumerian Lyre, from Ur. Ca. 2600 B.C. Wood with gold leaf and inlays, ht. of bull's head, approx. 12". British Museum. *The lyre's sound box, on which the bull's head is carved, is a hollow chamber that increases the resonance of the sound. Music played an important role in Mesopotamian life, and patrons often commissioned the construction of elegant instruments. Thus, even at this early stage of civilization, those with wealth influenced the arts.*





**Figure 1.8** Gudea. Ca. 2150 B.C. Diorite, ht. 17¾". Louvre. Little is known of Gudea, but more than thirty small statues of this Guti ruler have been found. The body and the head of this statuette were discovered separately and later joined together.

conceived as the gods' cosmic mountain. A temple of welcome for the gods stood on the top of the ziggurat, approached by sets of steps. Shrines, storehouses, and administrative offices were constructed around the base or on the several levels of the massive hill. In the low plain of the Tigris-Euphrates valley, the ziggurat literally and figuratively dominated the landscape. The Tower of Babel, described in the Jewish scriptures as reaching to the sky, may have been suggested by the Sumerian ziggurats, some of which had towers.

Of the numerous ziggurats and temples that have survived, the best preserved is at Ur, in southern Mesopotamia, dedicated to the moon god, Nanna (Figure 1.9). Built in about 2100 B.C., this ziggurat was

laid out to the four points of the compass. A central stairway led up to the highest platform, on which the major temple rested. Other cities constructed similar massive podiums in the hopes that they would please the gods and goddesses, that the rivers would be kind to them, and that life would continue. Thus, the central themes of Mesopotamian civilization manifested themselves in the ziggurats.

## THE CIVILIZATION OF THE NILE RIVER VALLEY: EGYPT

Another great river, the Nile, provided the setting for Egyptian civilization. Unlike the culture of the Mesopotamian valley, however, Nilotic culture evolved continuously, responding mainly to internal changes rather than to external influences. It thus achieved a unified character that lasted for about three thousand years. Isolated by deserts on either side, Egypt developed an introspective attitude that was little influenced by neighboring cultures (such as Nubia, also called Kush, which flourished between the first and fourth cataracts, or waterfalls, of the Nile River) and that led to a sense of cultural superiority. Subjected to the annual floodings of the Nile and aware of the revolutions of the sun, Egypt saw itself as part of a cyclical pattern in a timeless world.

The periodic overflowings of the Nile made civilized life possible in Egypt. Red sandy deserts stretched east and west of the waterway. Beside the Nile's banks, however, the black alluvial soil of the narrow floodplain offered rich land for planting, although the river's gifts of water and arable land were limited. Irrigation canals and ditches plus patient, backbreaking labor were required to bring the life-giving liquid into the desert.

Because the survival and prosperity of the people depended on the Nile, the river dominated and shaped the Egyptian experience. About 95 percent of the people lived on the less than 5 percent of Egyptian land that was arable and that was located along the Nile. The resulting concentration of people led to the emergence of the agricultural village, the fundamental unit of Egyptian civilization. The reward for farm labor tended to be subsistence living, yet the perennial hope that next year's flood would bring a more bountiful harvest created an optimistic outlook that contrasted with the darker Mesopotamian view.

The Nile linked the "Two Lands," Upper and Lower Egypt, two regions whose differing geography made for two distinct ways of life. Since the Nile flows northward, Lower Egypt referred to the northern lands fed by the river's spreading delta, a region made wealthy by its fertile soil. In contrast, the harsh topography and poor farming conditions of the southern lands made



**Figure 1.9** Ziggurat of Ur. Ca. 2100 B.C. Ur (Muqaiyir, Iraq). A temple to Nanna, the moon god, stood on the top of the ziggurat, which was terraced on three levels. On the first level was an entranceway approached by two sets of steps on each side and one in the front. The base, or lowest stage, which is all that remains of this “Hill of Heaven,” measures 200 by 150 feet and stands 70 feet high. In comparison, Chartres cathedral in France is 157 feet wide, with each tower over 240 feet high.

Upper Egypt an area of near subsistence living. In addition, Lower Egypt, because of its proximity to both Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures, tended to be more cosmopolitan than the provincial, isolated lands of Upper Egypt.

The earliest Neolithic settlers in the Nile valley probably arrived in about 6000 B.C. These earliest Egyptians took up an agricultural life, wresting control of the surrounding lands, taming the river, and domesticating animals. In the rich alluvial soil, they cultivated barley, wheat, and vegetables for themselves and fodder for their animals. They hunted with bows and arrows and fished with nets, thereby supplementing their simple fare. They also planted flax, from which thread was woven into linen on primitive looms. Most tools and weapons were made of stone or flint, but copper, which had to be imported, became more important after 3500 B.C. The early Egyptians lived in simply furnished, flat-topped houses built of sun-dried bricks. These basic patterns characterized peasant life throughout much of Egypt’s history.

### **Continuity and Change over Three Thousand Years**

Egypt stepped from the shadows of its illiterate past in about 3100 B.C., when Menes [MEE-neeZ] proclaimed himself king and united the upper and lower lands. His power reached from the Mediterranean to the first cataract of the Nile, making Egypt a state to be reckoned

with in the Near East. Egypt’s lengthy, complex history is conventionally divided into twenty-six dynasties, which are in turn classified into groups. The three major groups of dynasties are known as the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom. They are preceded and followed, respectively, by two dynastic groups known as the Early Dynastic Period and the Late Dynastic Period. In addition, two intermediate dynastic groupings (the First and the Second) precede and follow the Middle Kingdom (Timeline 1.3).

In the Early Dynastic Period (about 3100–2700 B.C.), the kings brought prosperity through their control of the economy and fostered political harmony through diplomacy and dynastic marriages. These rulers, claiming to be gods on earth, adopted the trappings of divinity and built royal tombs to ensure their immortality.

With the Old Kingdom (about 2700–2185 B.C.), Egypt entered a five-hundred-year period of peace and prosperity, as its political institutions matured and its language was adapted to literary uses. The most enduring accomplishment of the Old Kingdom became the pyramid—the royal tomb devised by the Fourth Dynasty kings (Figure 1.10). As the visible symbol of the kings’ power, the massive pyramids served to link the rulers with the gods and the cosmos. Yet, although the kings could impress their people with divine claims, they could neither subdue the forces of nature nor make their power last forever. For reasons not fully understood, these rulers loosened their control over the state and thus ushered in an age of political fragmentation called the First Intermediate Period.

## Timeline 1.3 EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION

All dates approximate and B.C.

6000	3100	2700	2185	2050	1800	1552	1079	525
Neolithic and Predynastic Periods	Early Dynastic Period	Old Kingdom	First Intermediate Period	Middle Kingdom	Second Intermediate Period	New Kingdom	Late Dynastic Period	Persian Conquest



**Figure 1.10** The Pyramids at Giza. Ground view from the south. Pyramid of Menkure (foreground), ca. 2525 B.C.; Pyramid of Khafre (center), ca. 2590 B.C.; Pyramid of Khufu (rear), ca. 2560 B.C. *The Fourth Dynasty was the Age of Pyramids, when this characteristic shape was standardized and became a symbol of Egyptian civilization. The Great Pyramid, in the center, was the first structure at Giza; it originally stood 480 feet high but today is only 450 feet high.*

In the First Intermediate Period (about 2185–2050 B.C.), civil war raged sporadically and starvation wiped out much of the populace. Eventually, a family from Thebes, in Upper Egypt, reunited the state and initiated the Middle Kingdom (about 2050–1800 B.C.). The new dynasty, the twelfth, fortified the southern frontier with Nubia and helped bring about a cultural renaissance, especially in literature, but unity was short-lived.

The Second Intermediate Period (about 1800–1552 B.C.) was an age of chaos provoked both by repeated failures of the Nile to flood and by a resurgence of local warlords. A weakened Lower Egypt succumbed to the Hyksos, Semitic-speaking invaders from Palestine. Backed by warriors in horse-drawn chariots, the Hyksos with their bronze weapons easily defeated the copper-armed Egyptians. The Hyksos era was crucial in Egypt's history because it ended the isolation that had fed a sense of cultural superiority. Egyptian nobility now joined aristocracies everywhere in employing the horse for war and sport, and Egyptian artisans fully entered the Bronze Age.

Ahmosé I [AH-mos], a Theban king, drove out the Hyksos and inaugurated the New Kingdom (1552–1079 B.C.), the most cosmopolitan era in Egyptian history.

Pursuing the Hyksos into Palestine, Ahmosé conquered the foreign peoples along the way, creating the first Egyptian empire. To the northeast, Egypt's kings, now called pharaohs, pursued imperial ambitions against the cities in Palestine, Phoenicia, and Syria, a move that provoked deadly warfare with the Hittites of Anatolia. Egypt finally secured its possessions by peacefully dividing up the Near East with the Hittites and the Assyrians. To the south, the pharaohs pushed Egypt's frontiers to the Nile's fourth cataract, conquering the Nubians long in residence there. As the empire grew, Egypt's society underwent the greatest changes of its entire history, including religious innovation by a ruling family, widespread material affluence, extravagant temple building, and artistic and literary experimentation.

But imperial success declined after 1200 B.C., signaled by the pharaoh's growing dependence on unreliable foreign troops. Bands of nomads, called Sea Peoples by the Egyptians, began to disrupt trade and normal social life. Over the course of a century, the invaders forced Egypt to withdraw behind its historic borders and thus ended the empire. The success of the Sea People's challenge, despite their small numbers,

lay in their new weapons, for these destructive migrants were the leading edge of the Age of Iron. Egypt's lack of iron ore probably contributed fatally to its military decline.

Egypt maintained continuity of tradition into the Late Dynastic Period (about 1079–525 B.C.). However, its independence came to an end with its successive incorporations into Nubian, Assyrian, and Persian empires.

Just as the pharaoh dominated the state, so the rulers controlled the predominantly agrarian economy, although departments of government or the priesthood of a temple often exploited the land and the king's serfs. Upper Egypt provided the bulk of farm produce that Lower Egypt exported to Mediterranean neighbors. In prosperous years, the pharaohs claimed up to half of the farm crops to support their building programs, especially funerary monuments. But in years of famine, dynasties fell and the state splintered into separate units.

Foreign trade was also a royal monopoly. The government obtained cedar from Lebanon, olive oil from Palestine, and myrrh from Punt, probably on the Somali coast. Since Egypt never developed a coinage, the pharaohs bartered for these imports with papyrus rolls (for writing), linen, weapons, and furniture. The pharaohs also exported gold from the eastern desert and copper from the Sinai peninsula. In addition, Egypt served as the carrier of tropical African goods—ebony, ivory, and animal skins—to the eastern Mediterranean.

Egyptian society was hierarchical, and at the top stood the pharaoh—the king and god incarnate. Because divine blood coursed through the ruler's veins, he could marry only within his own family. Tradition decreed that the Chief Queen, who was identified with the goddess Hathor, would produce the royal heir. If she failed to produce offspring, the successor pharaoh was selected from sons of the ruler's other wives or royal cousins. On rare occasions, when there was no suitable heir, the Chief Queen became the pharaoh, as did Hatshepsut [hat-SHEP-soot] in the New Kingdom.

Because there was no provision for a female king in Egyptian culture, the appearance of a female ruler is thought by scholars to signal a political crisis. Only four times in Egypt's three-thousand-year history was the king female; in contrast, there were more than two hundred male kings. Of the four female rulers, three appeared at the end of dynasties: Nitiqret in the Sixth Dynasty, Nefrusobk in the Twelfth, and Tausret in the Nineteenth. Hatshepsut's assumption of power was unique in that it occurred in the midst of a flourishing dynasty, though during the infancy of Thutmose III [thoot-MOH-suh], the heir apparent. Acting at first as regent to the young heir, she

soon claimed the kingship in her own right and reigned for about ten years. After her death, Thutmose III obliterated her name and image from her monuments, though the reason for their removal is unclear. He may have been expressing hatred of her, or he may have wanted to erase the memory of a woman who had seized power contrary to *maat*, the natural order of things.


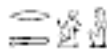

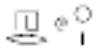

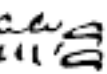



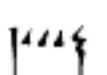

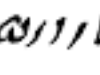
Ranked below the ruling family were the royal officials, nobles, large landowners, and priests, all generally hereditary offices. The pharaoh's word was law, but these groups were delegated powers for executing his will. On a lower level, artists and artisans worked for the pharaonic court and the nobility. Peasants and a small number of slaves formed the bulk of Egypt's population. Personal liberty took second place to the general welfare, and peasants were pressed into forced labor during natural disasters, such as floods, and at harvest time.

### A Quest for Eternal Cultural Values

Until the invasion of the Hyksos, Egypt, in its splendid isolation, forged a civilization whose serene values and timeless forms deeply mirrored the religious beliefs of the rulers and the stability of the state. But as contact with other cultures and civilizations grew, Egyptian culture changed to reflect new influences. Writers borrowed words from other languages, for example, and sculptors displayed the human figure in more natural settings and poses. Still, Egyptian culture retained its distinctive qualities, and innovations continued to express traditional ideals.

**Religion** Egypt was a **theocracy**, or a state ruled by a god. Believing that the deities had planned their country's future from the beginning, the Egyptians thought of their society as sacred. From the time that Menes first united Egypt, religious dogma taught that the king, as god on earth, embodied the state. Egyptian rulers also identified themselves with the deities. For example, Menes claimed to be the "two ladies," the goddesses who stood for Upper and Lower Egypt. Other rulers identified themselves with Ra, the sun god, and with Ra's son, Horus, the sky god, who was always depicted as having the head of a falcon. Because of the king's divinity, the resources of the state were concentrated on giving the ruler proper homage, as in the Old Kingdom's massive tombs, designed on a superhuman scale to ensure his safe passage to the next life.

Egyptian subjects worshiped the pharaoh, but the pharaoh could venerate any deity he pleased. Hence, the shifting fortunes of Egypt's many cults depended

Hieroglyphics				
Literary hieratic				
Swift hieratic				
Translation	Amen god of Memphis	rōemt mankind	per-'o Pharaoh	hru day

**Figure 1.11** Egyptian Writing. From the Old Kingdom onward, the hieroglyphs (in the top line) constituted the style of formal writing that appeared on tomb walls and in monuments. Religious and governmental scribes soon devised two distinct types of cursive script, a careful manuscript hand (in the middle line) and a more rapid hand (in the bottom line) for administrative documents and letters.

on the ruler's preference. For example, Ptah (who, like the Hebrew God in Genesis, created through speech) became the god of Memphis, which was the capital of the Old Kingdom. The kings of the Fifth Dynasty, on the other hand, called themselves sons of Ra, the sun god, and they honored this celestial deity by building him temples more impressive than their own royal tombs. Later, the Twelfth Dynasty replaced Ptah with Amen (a word meaning "hidden one"), and a series of rulers adopted his name, as in Amenemhat [AH-men-EM-het]. Royal favor to a god generally increased the wealth and influence of the god's cult and priests. Consequently, by the time of the New Kingdom, society had become top-heavy with priests and their privileged religious properties.

Egypt came close to having a national deity during the New Kingdom when Akhenaten [ahk-NAHT-uhn] (r. about 1369–1353 B.C.) reshaped the royal religion at his capital, Amarna. Elevating Aten, the god of the sun's disk, to supremacy above the other gods, Akhenaten systematically disavowed the older divinities—a heretical view in tolerant, polytheistic Egypt. This innovation aroused the opposition of conservative nobles who supported the powerful priests of the Theban god, Amen. Akhenaten ultimately failed, and later pharaohs tried to erase his name and memory from history. The Amarna revolution, however, like the religious choices of the pharaohs generally, had little effect on the ordinary Egyptian, who continued to believe that the pharaoh could intervene with the other gods for the benefit of all.

The foremost distinguishing mark of Egyptian religion was its promise of immortality—a belief that generated a more optimistic attitude toward human existence than that found in Mesopotamia. At first, in the Old Kingdom, only the kings were accorded this reward. Eventually, nobles and royal officials were buried in the vicinity of the rulers' tombs, thereby ensuring their immortality as assistants to the risen god in the afterlife. By the First Intermediate Period, the

nobles had claimed their own right to immortality by erecting tombs on which the royal funerary texts were copied. Later, immortality apparently was opened to all Egyptians, although only the wealthy minority could afford the cost of a proper burial.

**Writing and Literature** Late predynastic Egypt learned the idea of writing, but not foreign words, from Mesopotamia. The Egyptians initially drew pictographs, called **hieroglyphs**, for such words as *hoe*, *arrowhead*, and *plow*. This early hieroglyphic script could also depict abstract words for which no adequate picture was available, but because such picture writing was time-consuming and clumsy to execute, the scribes soon made the pictographs function as signs, or clusters of consonants, for other words (Figure 1.11).

Egyptian literature produced no single great work that rivals *Gilgamesh*, but the Egyptian experience was rich in its variety of literary **genres**, or types of literature. For example, pyramid texts, the writings inscribed in burial chambers, formed the chief literary genre in the Old Kingdom. As this era gave way to the First Intermediate Period, new prose genres, such as prophecies and pessimistic writings, arose that addressed the prevalent political disintegration and social upheaval. Such was the tenor of the times that writers expressed views contradicting Egypt's otherwise optimistic attitudes to death and life. *The Dispute of a Man with His Soul* describes a desperate mortal finally choosing the emptiness of death rather than life in a materialistic and violent world.

The prophecies, **hymns** (songs of praise to the gods), and prose narratives of the Middle Kingdom constitute the classical period of Egyptian letters. The most famous work of the Middle Kingdom, as well as of all Egyptian literature, is the *Story of Sinuhe*, a prose tale that celebrates the ruler Senusert I and his subject, the hero named in the title. Fleeing Egypt, Sinuhe earns fame and fortune in Lebanon yet yearns for his beloved homeland. Sinuhe's exploits smack of



**Figure 1.12** IMHOTEP. Step Pyramid of King Djoser. Ca. 2680 B.C. Sakkareh, Egypt. Though isolated from its neighbors until about 1730 B.C., Egypt was influenced by surrounding cultures, as the design for the step pyramid at Sakkareh shows. Resting on a rectangular base and rising in six progressively smaller stages, this pyramid was modeled on Mesopotamia's ziggurat. But unlike the ziggurats, which were made of dried clay bricks, it was built of cut stone, the first building to be so constructed in the world. The step pyramid has six levels on a 411- by 358-foot base and stands 204 feet high.

the folk tale, for in one episode he subdues a taunting giant of a man, much as David defeats Goliath in the Old Testament story. Eventually, a gracious Senusert writes Sinuhe, forgiving his wandering subject's unnamed crime and inviting him to return home. The travel yarn concludes with a homecoming scene in which a joyful Sinuhe is reintegrated into Egyptian court society.

The richest period in Egyptian letters occurred during the New Kingdom. In addition to songs praising the pharaoh, poets now composed lyrics telling of the pain of parted lovers, and new genres included model letters, wisdom literature, and fairy tales. Akhenaten's revolution led to unique forms of literary expression, as in the *Hymn to Aten*, which praised this universal god. Although the hymn has similarities to Psalm 104 of the Old Testament, Akhenaten's text, unlike the Jewish scriptures, was not a declaration of **monotheism**, the belief that there is only one god. Instead, the *Hymn to Aten* recognized a special link between Akhenaten and his family and the god of the solar disk while still acknowledging the worship of other deities.

**Architecture** The classic Egyptian building was the pyramid, whose shape seemed to embody a constant and eternal order. During the Old Kingdom, the pyramid became the only building deemed suitable for

a ruler-god's resting place preparatory to the afterlife. A modified version of the pyramid appeared first in about 2680 B.C. in the step pyramid of King Djoser [ZHO-ser] at Sakkareh, opposite Memphis (Figure 1.12). Later Egyptian rulers preferred the true pyramid form, and this design did not develop further.

The true pyramid appeared in the Old Kingdom when the Fourth Dynasty ruler Khufu [KOO-foo] erected the Great Pyramid at Giza, across the Nile from Cairo (see Figure 1.10). The anonymous architect executed this largest stone building in the world—6.25 million tons—with mathematical precision. Many of the tomb's two million stones were quarried on the site, although most were obtained farther upstream and ferried to Giza during the flooding of the Nile. The infinitesimally small deviation between the two sets of opposing base sides of the pyramid showed the scientific spirit already at work in this early stage of Egypt's history. Later, two of Khufu's successors, Khafre [KAF-ray] and Menkure [men-KOO-ray], added their pyramids to make the complex at Giza the symbol of the Old Kingdom and one of the wonders of the ancient world.

The pyramids eventually gave way to funerary temples when the New Kingdom pharaohs began to construct splendid monuments for themselves that reflected Egypt's new imperial status. The temple of



**Figure 1.13** SENMUT. Hatshepsut's Temple. Ca. 1490 B.C. Deir el Bahri, across from Luxor, Egypt. *Hatshepsut's temple was planned for the same purpose as the pyramids—to serve as a shrine for the royal remains. In actuality an ascending series of three colonnaded courtyards, this temple provided a spectacular approach to a hidden sanctuary carved in the steep cliffs.*

Queen Hatshepsut is perhaps the most beautiful example of this architectural development (Figure 1.13). Designed by the royal architect Senmut, the temple of Hatshepsut was carved into the face of the mountain at Deir el Bahri, across the Nile from Luxor. Senmut, adopting the post-and-lintel style of construction, gave the queen's temple two levels of pillared colonnades, each accessible by long sloping ramps. The most arresting feature of Hatshepsut's temple is its round columns, which are used alongside rectangular pillars in the **porticoes**, or covered entrances. These columns—with their plain tops and grooved surfaces—suggest the graceful columns of later Greek architecture, although some scholars dismiss this similarity as coincidental. Be that as it may, this Egyptian monument, like the later Greek temples, shows a harmonious sense of proportion throughout its impressive colonnades.

Rulers in both Egypt and Mesopotamia created zoos and botanical gardens, the first in the world, though the earliest evidence of these developments comes from Egypt. Built for pleasure and prestige and to satisfy scientific curiosity, the menageries and gardens originated before 2000 B.C.

**Sculpture, Painting, and Minor Arts** The Egyptians did not understand art as it is defined today. Indeed, they had no word for art. Rather than being art for art's sake, Egyptian painting and sculpture served as a means to a religious end, specifically to house the *ka*, or spirit of a person or deity. Art was more than mere representation; images embodied all of the subjects' qualities.

In the royal graveyard at Giza, artisans of the Old Kingdom carved from the living rock a mythical creature that stirred the imagination of most peoples in the ancient world—a sphinx, half-lion and half-man (Figure 1.14). Although this creature often inspired feelings of dread, in actuality there was little mystery to the sphinx, since its original purpose was to guard the royal tombs, perhaps to frighten away grave robbers. Indeed, this first sphinx's face was that of Khafre, the Fourth Dynasty king whose pyramid stood nearby. Today, this crumbling relic stands as a reminder of the claims to immortality of the Old Kingdom rulers.

The sheer size and mythical character of the Great Sphinx set it apart from Old Kingdom sculptures in the round, which favored human-scaled figures and realistic images. The life-size statue of King Menkure and his Chief Queen, found beneath the ruler's pyramid at



## PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

### The Instruction of Amenemope

*Egypt's wisdom literature—aphorisms about the best way to live—culminated in The Instruction of Amenemope, written in the late New Kingdom. In this work, the author stresses the ethical life rather than the amassing of personal wealth.*

Beginning of the teaching for life,  
The instructions for well-being.

.....  
If you make your life with these [words] in your heart,  
You will find it a success;  
You will find my words a storehouse for life,  
Your being will prosper upon earth.

.....  
Do not move the markers on the borders of fields,  
Nor shift the position of the measuring-cord.  
Do not be greedy for a cubit of land,  
Nor encroach on the boundaries of a widow.

.....  
Do not set your heart on wealth,  
There is no ignoring Fate and Destiny;

.....

Do not strain to seek increase,  
What you have, let it suffice you.

.....  
Do not cheat a man (through) pen on scroll,  
The god abhors it;  
Do not bear witness with false words,  
So as to brush aside a man by your tongue.

.....  
Do not laugh at a blind man,  
Nor tease a dwarf,  
Nor cause hardship for the lame.

.....  
Do not sit down in the beer-house  
In order to join one greater than you,  
Be he a youth great through his office,  
Or be he an elder through birth.  
Befriend a man of your own measure.

.....  
Do not revile one older than you,  
He has seen Re [the Sun God] before you;  
Let (him) not report you to the Aten [the god of the sun's disk] at his rising,  
Saying: "A youth has reviled an old man."



**Figure 1.14** The Great Sphinx. Ca. 2560 B.C. Sandstone, 65' high × 240' long. Giza, Egypt. *Sphinxes, creatures part lion and part human, were often depicted in Egyptian art. The most famous sphinx is the one at Giza, carved from the rock on the site. The sphinx's colossal size prevented the anonymous sculptor from rendering it with any subtle facial expressions. More significant as a monument than as a great work of art, the Great Sphinx had a practical purpose—to guard the nearby pyramid tombs.*

Giza, show this art's brilliant realism (Figure 1.15). The sculpture embodies the characteristics of what became the standard, or classical, Egyptian style: their left legs forward, the king's clenched fists, their headdresses (sacred regalia for him and wig for her), their rigid poses, their serene countenances, and the figures' angularity. Designed to be attached to a wall, the couple was intended to be viewed from the front, so the work has a two-dimensional quality.

In contrast to practices in the Old Kingdom, the wives of rulers in the New Kingdom acquired claims to divinity in their own right. A statue of Hatshepsut represents her in the clothing and with the sacred pose of pharaoh (Figure 1.16). Having first been Chief Queen to



**Figure 1.15** King Menkure and His Chief Queen. Ca. 2525 B.C. Ht. 54½". Museum expedition. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. *This life-size slate sculpture of Menkure, a Fourth Dynasty ruler, and his Chief Queen was removed from its resting place beneath the king's pyramid at Giza (see Figure 1.10). In this sculpture, the figures are represented as being of comparable size, unlike the usual depiction of husbands as much larger than their wives, indicating their greater importance. The sizes here probably reflect the royal status of the Chief Queen. The queen's subordination to the king is subtly shown in her position on his left side, thought to be inferior to the right, and her arm around his waist, an indication that her role was to encourage and support.*



**Figure 1.16** Hatshepsut. Ca. 1460 B.C. Marble, ht. 6'5". Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rogers Fund and contribution from Edward S. Harkness, 1929. (29.3.2). *This sculpture is one of more than two hundred statues of Hatshepsut intended to adorn her massive and elegant funeral temple at Deir el Bahri in the western hills of Thebes. The authoritative pose and regalia convey her pharaonic status, and she is only subtly represented as a woman.*



**Figure 1.17** *Family Scene: Pharaoh Akhenaten, Queen Nefertiti, and Their Three Daughters.* Ca. 1350 B.C. Limestone, 13" high × 15<sup>5</sup>/<sub>12</sub>" wide. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin. *The religious ideas associated with Akhenaten's reforms are expressed in the lines streaming from the sun's disk above the royal couple. Each ray of the sun ends in a tiny hand that offers a blessing to the royal family.*

Thutmose II in the New Kingdom, after his death she seized leadership, probably with the cooperation of the powerful Theban priesthood of Amen. Although more than a thousand years separated this sculpture from that of Menkure (see Figure 1.15), in its expression of dignity and authority the statue of Hatshepsut bears a strong resemblance to the earlier work, thus demonstrating the continuity of the Egyptian style.

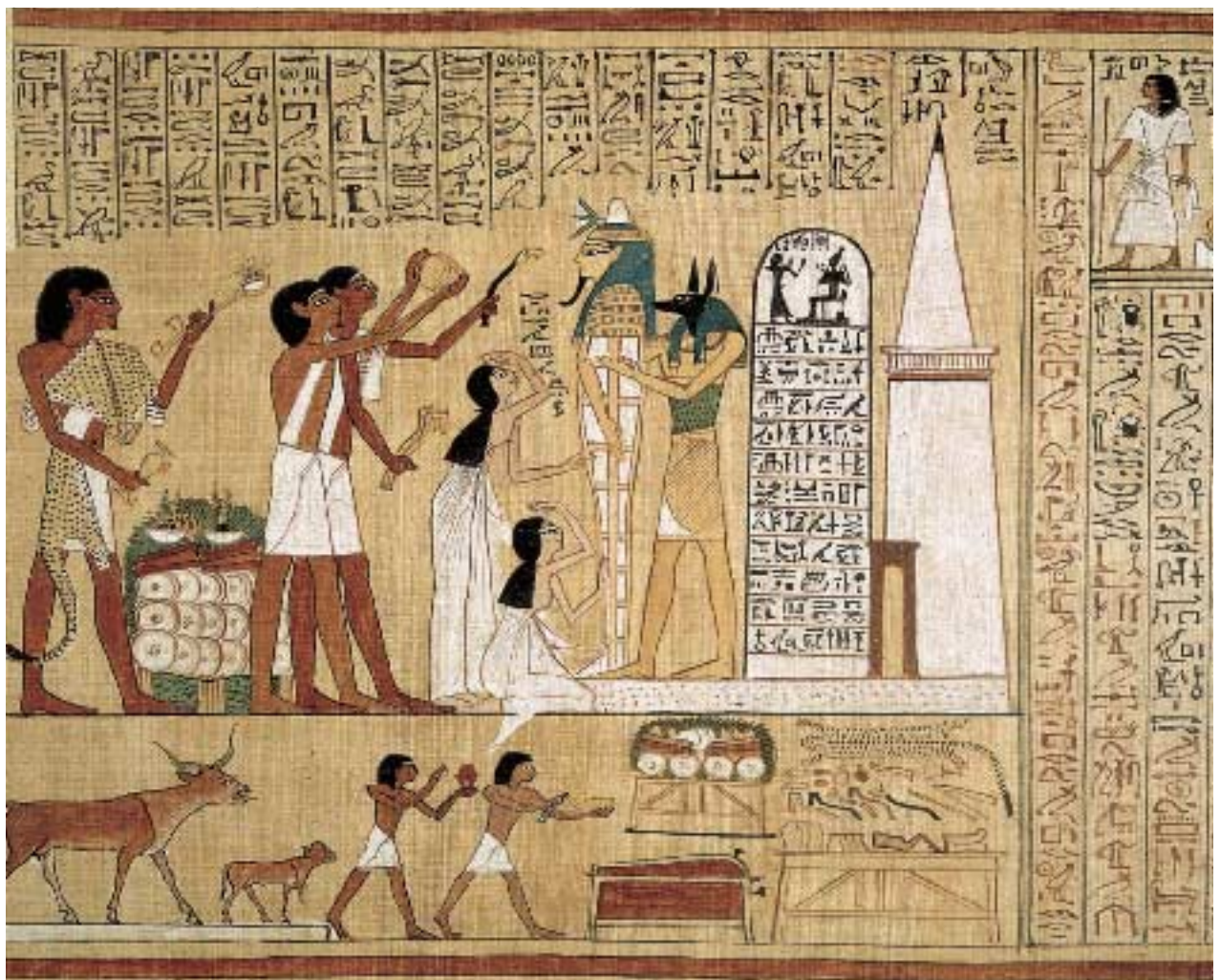
A major challenge to Egypt's traditional, austere forms occurred in Akhenaten's revolutionary reign. A low-relief sculpture of the royal family exemplifies the naturalism and fluid lines that this artistic rebellion favored (Figure 1.17). Akhenaten nuzzles one of his daughters in an intimate pose while his wife dandles another daughter on her knees and allows a third to stand on her left arm. The domesticity of this scene is quite unlike the sacred gestures of traditional Egyptian sculpture, but the religious subject of this relief remains true to that tradition, as the rays streaming from the disk of Aten onto the royal family indicate.

The most extraordinary artistic achievement of the Amarna period is the carved portrait head of Queen Nefertiti (Figure 1.18), a life-size sculpture discovered in 1912 by a team of German archeologists in the desert sands near the long-lost city founded by Akhenaten for the god Aten. This statue-head with its unfinished left eye, deliberate or accidental, is one of the most arresting images of world art. Painted in flesh tones and natural colors and imbued with the naturalism of the Amarna style, the queen has a vitality that is unsurpassed. A modern critic has called her the eternal female, ceaselessly watching.

Nefertiti's unusual headdress signifies her status as a potent force in this culture. Rising straight up from



**Figure 1.18** *Nefertiti.* Ca. 1350 B.C. Limestone, ht. 20". Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin. *This portrait head of Nefertiti is characterized by sleekness and charm, a look achieved through the sculptor's fusing of the fluid Amarna style with the formality of Egypt's traditional art. To create the image of sleekness, the sculptor has pushed Nefertiti's face forward like the prow of a ship cutting through the wind. The figure's charm emerges from the tension between the queen's dreamy, deeply hooded eyes and her lively, arched eyebrows. The artist has succeeded in representing Nefertiti as both a woman and a goddess.*



**Figure 1.19** Opening of the Mouth Scene, Funerary Papyrus of Hunefer. Ca. 1305–1195 B.C. British Museum. Egyptian painters and sculptors always depicted human subjects from the side, with the feet in profile, as in this painting on a papyrus manuscript deposited in a New Kingdom tomb. This painting's treatment of flesh tones of the human figures also typifies the Egyptian style. Egyptian men, represented here by the officiating priests, were consistently shown with red-brown, tanned skins at least partially reflective of their outdoor lives. Egyptian women, such as the mourners directly before the mummy, were usually painted with lighter complexions of yellow or pink or white skin. The Opening of the Mouth was a burial ritual, preparing the deceased to speak in the afterlife.

her forehead, this crown is decorated with the *uraeus*, the image of a cobra ready to strike. By custom, this powerful and protective symbol was part of the kingly **regalia** (tokens of royal authority) and could be worn only by rulers and their Great (principal) Queens. Modern scholars have proved that Nefertiti was the only Great, or Chief, Queen in Egypt's long history to actually share power with her husband. (Queen Hatshepsut actually ruled alone as pharaoh.) The prevalence of images of Nefertiti in so much of the art that remains from Amarna confirms this queen's importance on the political level and thus underscores her central role in the Amarna revolution.

Just as Egypt's sculpture in the round developed a rigid **canon**, or set of rules, so did two-dimensional

representations acquire a fixed formula, whether in relief sculptures or in wall paintings. The Egyptians never discovered the principles of perspective. On a flat surface, the human figures were depicted in profile, with both feet pointing sideways, as in a painting from a New Kingdom funerary papyrus (Figure 1.19). However, the artistic canon required that the eye and the shoulders be shown frontally, and both arms had to be visible along with all the fingers. The artist determined the human proportions exactly, by the use of a grid. Throughout most Egyptian art history, the human figure was conceived as being 18 squares high standing and 14 squares high seated, with each unit equivalent to the width of one "fist"; anatomical parts were made accordingly proportional. The canon of



**Figure 1.20** Banqueting Scene. Ca. 1567–1320 B.C. Fresco, 23 × 27¼". British Museum. *In a small space, the Egyptian painter has created a delightful banqueting scene, a favorite subject in tomb decoration in the New Kingdom. No one eats at this ritual meal, for the purpose is to set the stage for the tomb owner's rebirth. The female figures, especially the young seminaked girls dancing (below) and serving (above), represent the female generative principle. The naked-girl motif in tomb paintings, which appeared at this time, was probably meant to ensure the tomb owner's fertility while living and the continuity of the family while the deceased was in the tomb awaiting rebirth. The lotus flowers on the heads of the female guests and musicians reflect the rebirth theme, since the lotus was used to symbolize the promise of immortality for the dead. The frontal pose of two of the lower figures is an artistic innovation. Faces were almost always shown in profile in Egyptian art (see Figures 1.17 and 1.19).*

proportions was established by the time of the Old Kingdom, and its continued use, with slight variations, helped Egyptian art retain its unmistakable style. Wall paintings, in contrast to relief sculptures, permitted a greater sense of space to be created, but the rules regarding the human figure still had to be observed (Figure 1.20). Given those stringent conventions, the Egyptian artists who worked in two dimensions were amazingly successful in creating the image of a care-free society bubbling with life.

Royal tombs have yielded incomparable examples of Egyptian sculpture, as in the burial chamber of the New Kingdom pharaoh Tutankhamen [too-tahn-KAHM-en]. Of the thirty-four excavated royal tombs, only that of King Tut—as he is popularly known—

escaped relatively free from violation by thieves in ancient times. A freestanding, life-size sculpture of the funerary goddess Selket was one of four goddess figures placed outside the gilded shrine that contained the king's internal organs (Figure 1.21). Her arms are outstretched in a protective fashion around her royal charge's shrine. A unique feature is the turn of Selket's head, a violation of the cardinal rule of three-dimensional Egyptian art that figures face frontward (see Figures 1.15 and 1.16). Selket's pose suggests that she was looking for intruders. The sculpture's style, with its naturalism and fluid lines, reflects the art of Amarna, the revolutionary style that flourished briefly in the fourteenth century B.C. before being abandoned and replaced by Egypt's traditional formal style.



**Figure 1.21** *Selket*. Ca. 1325 B.C. Wood, overlaid with gesso and gilded, ht. 53<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>". Cairo Museum, Egypt. This statue of the goddess Selket was discovered in King Tutankhamen's tomb in 1923, one of the great archeological finds of the twentieth century. Discovered by Egyptologist Howard Carter, the tomb held thousands of royal artifacts and art objects, including the pharaoh's gold funerary mask, a solid gold coffin, a gold throne, chairs, couches, chariots, jewelry, figurines, drinking cups, clothing, weapons, and games. The fascinating story of the discovery is told in Carter's book, *The Tomb of Tutankhamen*.

## HEIRS TO THE MESOPOTAMIAN AND EGYPTIAN EMPIRES

With the decline of Mesopotamian and Egyptian empires after 1000 B.C., successor kingdoms arose in the eastern Mediterranean, notably those of the Hittites, the Assyrians (Figure 1.22), the Medes, and the Persians. If the length of their rule and the richness of their achievements failed to measure up to those of Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, they nevertheless brought law and order to numerous peoples over vast territories and offered a convincing model of civilized life.

The Hittites and the Assyrians were rival empires whose fortunes ebbed and flowed (Timeline 1.4). In 612 B.C., Nineveh, the Assyrian capital city, was sacked by the Medes, an Indo-European people from the southwest Iranian plateau, and the Assyrian empire passed under their control. Median rule, however, was shortly supplanted when their empire fell to the Persians, another nomadic Indo-European tribe, in about 550 B.C. With masterful skill, successive Persian rulers forged the strongest and largest empire that the eastern Mediterranean had seen until this time. At its height, Persian rule extended from Egypt in the south to central Russia in the north, and from Cyprus in the west to the Indus River in the east. Only Greece eluded Persia's grasp. In 327 B.C., Alexander the Great defeated the last Persian king, thus allowing the Greeks to assimilate the Persian lands.

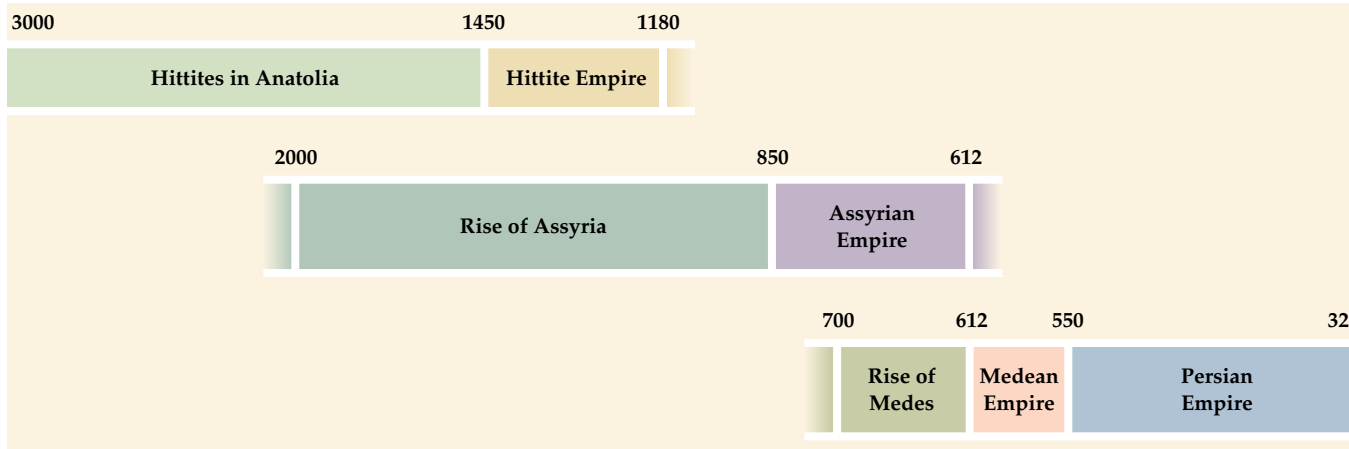
Persian culture followed in the footsteps of Assyrian culture, but Persian art lacked the savagery associated with the Assyrian style. Instead, Persian art emphasized contemplative themes with less action (Figure 1.23). Persian culture's most original and enduring contribution was the religion of Zoroaster [ZOHR-uh-was-ter], or Zarathustra [zah-ra-THUSH-trah], a prophet who lived



**Figure 1.22** *Fugitives Swimming with Water-Skins*. Ninth century B.C. Limestone, ht. 39". British Museum. Assyrian artists were masters of relief sculpture, as in this detail of a battle scene, created for the palace of King Ashurasirpal II at Nimrud. Archers pursue swimming fugitives, two of whom keep afloat with inflated animal skins (lower foreground). Despite the lack of flush bottom and unconcern for relative dimensions, the relief vividly evokes Assyria's warrior culture.

## Timeline 1.4 HEIRS TO THE MESOPOTAMIAN AND EGYPTIAN CULTURES

All dates approximate and B.C.



**Figure 1.23** Darius Giving Audience Before Two Fire Altars. Found in the Treasury, Persepolis. Ca. 512–494 B.C. Limestone, length 20'. Archeological Museum, Teheran. *This relief sculpture, carved on the walls of the Treasury at Persepolis, shows King Darius seated before two fire altars. In front of him is the master of ceremonies, with his hand raised to his lips in a gesture of devotion. Two bodyguards, holding spears, stand to the right. The Persian sculptural style is shown by the stylized hair and beards, precise folds in the clothing, and the formal poses of the figures.*

in about 600 B.C. Rejecting polytheism, Zoroaster taught a dualistic religion in which the god of light, Ahura-mazda, engaged in a universal struggle with the god of darkness, Ahriman. According to Zoroaster, those who lead puritanical lives not only gain favorable treatment

in the afterlife but also ensure the triumph of the forces of good. Key ideas of Zoroastrianism influenced other religions: Zoroaster's martyrdom, the prophet's life filled with miracles, the evil spirit as the Prince of Darkness, and the notion of a Last Judgment.

### *The Legacy of Early Near Eastern Civilizations*

Mesopotamia and Egypt provide the earliest models of civilization in the West. In both, large numbers of people were organized into societies characterized by class stratification; a division of labor; complex political, economic, and religious forms; technological advances (pottery and glass-making, the extraction and working of metals, textiles, woodworking, and building techniques); and cultural achievements. They weren't the only ancient civilizations—others developed in China, India, South America, and elsewhere—but they are the ones to which Westerners most directly trace their cultural roots.

Mesopotamia's gifts to Western civilization are impressive. In addition to writing, these societies established urbanism as a way of life in contrast to agrarian or village existence. In more practical matters, they created a mathematical system based on 60 that gave the world the 60-minute hour and the 360-degree circle. They also divided the seasons and devised a lunar calendar to mark off periods of days to aid them in their planting. Trade and commerce forced them to develop methods of counting, measuring, and weighing that became the standard procedures for other Near Eastern peoples for centuries. Mesopotamian myths, legends, and epics found their way into the folk tales and literature of other cultures.

Egypt made equally impressive contributions to the West. Egyptian bureaucrats, who wanted to predict the correct date for the rising of the Nile's waters, originated a solar calendar that is the basis of the Western calendar. The Egyptian model, which divided the year into twelve months of thirty days, each with five days of holiday at the end, was conveyed to Western culture by the Romans. In architecture, Egyptian builders devised the column with a decorated capital, which later Greek architects probably adopted. The Greek builders also borrowed the Egyptian tradition of sound engineering principles rooted in mathematics. Similarly, Greek sculptors owed a debt to Egyptian forms and poses. Indeed, the Egyptian idea of an aesthetic canon influenced both sculptors and artists in Greece.

In literature, the Egyptians explored a variety of genres—such as wisdom writing—and folk tales that influenced the Hebrews and the Greeks. In science, Egyptian physicians became renowned throughout the Near East for their medical learning and knowledge of drugs. Finally, with its priceless treasures, its mysterious pyramids, and its cult of the dead, Egypt inspired curiosity and excitement in foreigners from ancient times onward. One of the first Western tourists to visit Egypt was the Greek historian Herodotus, whose writings in the fifth century B.C. helped to create the Egyptian mystique. The world's fascination with the culture of ancient Egypt has not abated today.

#### KEY CULTURAL TERMS

culture	post-and-lintel
civilization	construction
Paleolithic	ziggurat
Neolithic	theocracy
pictogram	hieroglyphs
ideogram	genre
phonogram	hymn
cuneiform	monotheism
polytheism	portico
anthropomorphism	regalia
pantheism	canon
stele	

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

##### Primary Sources

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- KRAMER, S. N. *History Begins at Sumer*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981. A standard collection of original Sumerian sources by one of the most renowned modern Sumerian scholars.
- PRITCHARD, J. B. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969. For the serious student, a collection of the most important nonbiblical texts, including myths, histories, prayers, and other types of writing.
- SANDARS, N. K., ed. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: Penguin, 1972. The editor's informative introduction sets the tone for this famous ancient epic.

## CHAPTER 1 HIGHLIGHTS

### *Prehistory and Near Eastern Civilizations*

32,000 B.C. <b>PREHISTORY</b> 3000 B.C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.3 Herd of Rhinoceroses (ca. 32,000–30,000 B.C.)</li> <li>1.4 Figurine from Willendorf (ca. 25,000 B.C.)</li> </ul>	
3000 B.C. <b>MESOPOTAMIA</b> 1600 B.C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <i>The Exaltation of Inanna</i> (ca. 2330 B.C.)</li> <li> Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1790–1750 B.C.)</li> <li> <i>The Epic of Gilgamesh</i> (ca. 1600 B.C.)</li> <li>1.7 Sumerian Lyre (ca. 2600 B.C.)</li> <li>1.8 <i>Gudea</i> (ca. 2150 B.C.)</li> <li>1.9 Ziggurat of Ur (ca. 2100 B.C.)</li> </ul>	
3100 B.C. <b>EGYPT</b> 525 B.C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <i>Story of Sinuhe</i> (ca. 1900 B.C.)</li> <li> <i>The Dispute of a Man with His Soul</i> (ca. 1850 B.C.)</li> <li> <i>Great Hymn to the Aten</i> (ca. 1369–1353 B.C.)</li> <li>1.12 Step Pyramid of King Djoser (ca. 2680 B.C.)</li> <li>1.10 Pyramids at Giza (ca. 2590–2525 B.C.)</li> <li>1.14 Great Sphinx (ca. 2560 B.C.)</li> <li>1.15 King Menkure and His Chief Queen (ca. 2525 B.C.)</li> <li>1.20 Banqueting Scene (ca. 1567–1320 B.C.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.13 SENMUT, Hatshepsut's Temple (ca. 1490 B.C.)</li> <li>1.16 <i>Hatshepsut</i> (ca. 1460 B.C.)</li> <li>1.17 <i>Pharaoh Akhenaten, Queen Nefertiti, and Their Three Daughters</i> (ca. 1350 B.C.)</li> <li>1.18 <i>Nefertiti</i> (ca. 1350 B.C.)</li> <li>1.21 <i>Selket</i> (ca. 1325 B.C.)</li> <li>1.19 Opening of the Mouth Scene (ca. 1305–1195 B.C.)</li> <li>1.1 Rosetta Stone (ca. 197–196 B.C.)</li> </ul>
1000 B.C. <b>HEIRS</b> 327 B.C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.22 Fugitives Swimming with Water-Skins (ninth century B.C.)</li> <li>1.23 Darius Giving Audience Before Two Fire Altars (ca. 512–494 B.C.)</li> </ul>	
<p> <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #808080; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Literature &amp; Philosophy         <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #90EE90; margin-left: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Art &amp; Architecture         <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #FFDAB9; margin-left: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Music &amp; Dance       </p> <p>  Readings in the Western Humanities       </p>		

AFRICA

AMERICAS

HISTORY

*Neolithic period*, ca. 3000–1000 B.C. Pastoral culture (which had begun ca. 8000 B.C.) in the Sahara disappeared as savannas dried up. Hunters and gatherers prevailed elsewhere, though farming slowly spread southward. Three racial groups: Caucasoid peoples in the north and northeast, Khoisan peoples in the open areas from the Sahara south to the Cape, and Negroid peoples in the central forests and the west. *Nubian, or Kushan, culture*. Rule by strong chieftains (ca. 3100–2600 B.C. in Lower Nubia; ca. 2050–1550 B.C. in Upper Nubia) alternated with conquest and occupation by the Egyptians. First Nubian kingdom, Kush, established 1100 B.C.: the first known African kingdom outside Egypt. Noted for art, learning, and trade. One of the first African centers of iron making, ca. 1000 B.C. Kush's kings conquered and ruled Egypt (ca. 750–666 B.C.). Capital shifted from Napata to Meroë (592 B.C.).

Ca. 25,000 B.C. Humans may have first entered Western Hemisphere from Asia over Bering Strait land bridge. Had migrated throughout hemisphere by ca. 12,000 B.C. **Mesoamerica** Maize introduced ca. 5000 B.C. *Olmec culture*, began 1500 B.C. South coast of Gulf of Mexico. “Mother culture” of Mesoamerican civilizations invented ballcourt, pyramid, pantheon of gods, and perhaps ritual calendar and glyph writing. **Andes** *Pre-Ceramic period*, 3000–1800 B.C. Tribes and clans in villages. *Initial period*, 1800–800 B.C. Farming intensified. *Chavín culture*, began 1000 B.C. Center at Chavín de Huantar (Peru); importer of luxury goods. **Native North America** *Clovis culture*, from ca. 9500 B.C. Southwest U.S., earliest well-documented archeological remains in North America. *Mississippian culture*. Earthworks at Poverty Point, Louisiana (after 1300 B.C.).

ART

*Neolithic period*. Rock carvings and paintings of animals and people in various regions, with the majority (over 30,000) in the Sahara.



Giraffes. Ca. 5000 B.C. Rock engraving, ht. 6–7". Libya.

**Mesoamerica** *Olmec culture*. Altars and massive sculptures of heads, probably of rulers, in religious centers. **Andes** Fine textiles from ca. 10,000 B.C. *Pre-Ceramic period*. Animal-figured textiles, mosaics, mirrors, earrings, featherwork, female figurines. *Initial period*. Fired clay pottery for cooking, ca. 1800 B.C. Giant stone sculptures, painted reliefs, and wall murals in public plazas. *Chavín culture*. First unifying Andean artistic style; images of jaguars, snakes, and composites of animals and humans.

ARCHITECTURE

*Nubian culture*. Kerma, capital of Upper Nubia, was the first settlement in Africa south of Egypt that can be called a city. Kerma in its classical period (ca. 1750–1580 B.C.) reflected Nubian traditions in wood and mudbrick palaces, temples, governmental buildings, and city walls and gates. In the Kushan kingdom, Nubian culture was fully Egyptianized, especially in building styles and city planning.

**Mesoamerica** *Olmec culture*. Elaborate religious and ceremonial centers at San Lorenzo, La Venta, and Trés Zapotes, inhabited by the elite, with temple mounds, huge sculptures and altars, and a complex system of drains and lagoons. **Andes** *Pre-Ceramic period*. Monumental public architecture, the oldest in the Americas, with traditional features, such as artificial mounds, plazas, and courtyards.

RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY,  
LITERATURE

*Nubian culture*. Kings, especially in the Kushan period, adopted the Egyptian practice of divine rulers supported by hierarchical administrations.

**Mesoamerica** *Olmec culture*. A pantheon of gods identified with tropical rain-forest fauna, especially the jaguar. The key religious belief was that a shaman, or spiritual leader, could undergo a mystical transformation into a sacred creature or plant. **Andes** *Chavín culture*. The capital, Chavín, was a pilgrimage center for Andean people.



Colossal Head 1. Ca. 1200 B.C. Basalt, ht. 112½". San Lorenzo, Veracruz.

## ASIA

### China

*Neolithic period, ca. 5000–1766 B.C.* Tribes and clans living in villages in the Yellow River valley in the north, along the Chang (Yangtze) River to the south, and at remote sites in far northeastern China. Hunting, fishing, and farming; diet based on millet. *Shang Dynasty, 1766–1122 B.C.* Rise of Bronze Age culture. Kings controlled much of China with support of warrior landlords. Capital cities Ao and Anyang founded. Rulers buried in pits with equipment and regalia for afterlife. *Chou Dynasty, 1122–481 B.C.* Loose grouping of feudal vassal states; divided into Eastern and Western Chou (771).

*Neolithic period.* Much traditional Chinese culture dates from this period, such as the use of jade, wood, silk, ceremonial clay vessels, and perhaps chopsticks. *Shang Dynasty.* Unique type of gray bronze used for ritual objects for royal court. *Chou Dynasty.* Bronzes, with inscriptions and animal motifs. Exaggerated details.

*Four-Legged Vessel. Ca. 1523–1028 B.C. Bronze, ht. 15 3/4". People's Republic of China.*



*Shang Dynasty.* Timber houses with rammed earth floors, wattle and daub walls, and thatched roofs; rammed earth walls to encircle cities and to separate urban nobility from craftspeople and merchants.

*Shang Dynasty.* Writing in characters appeared soon after 1700 B.C. on inscribed bones consulted as oracles about great decisions of state. This pictographic language is the basis of Chinese writing today.

### India

*Indus, or Harappan, culture, ca. 2600–1900 B.C.* Urban civilization dominated by the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro in Indus River valley and extending over modern Pakistan and western India. Trading society; no centralized ruler or military elite. Mixed technology of stone and bronze. First literate state east of Mesopotamia. *Aryan culture, 1500–500 B.C.* Aryan peoples from Persia infiltrated and eventually conquered northern India and its resident peoples, setting up an agrarian society arranged into the Vedic caste system, with cattle as the major form of wealth. Iron introduced ca. 1000 B.C.

*Harappan culture.* Seals carved with animal and human forms, pottery, toys, and figurines of important personages.

*Bust of a Priest-King or Deity from Mohenjo-daro. Ca. 2000–1750 B.C. Steatite, ht. 6 7/8". National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi.*



*Harappan culture.* Brick-walled cities, laid out in grids and served by wells, bath-houses, and a system of wastewater drains. *Aryan culture.* No ruins survive.

*Harappan culture.* The writing has not been deciphered. *Aryan culture.* Brought Indo-European languages and Vedism, the Vedic religion centered on sacrifices to deities and presided over by priests, or brahmins, who (between the 15th and 5th centuries B.C.) composed a body of religious texts, known as the Vedic corpus or simply the Vedas. These texts were written in Sanskrit, a language derived from the ancient Indo-European, ancestor of many of today's European languages. Vedism was the starting point for the later Hindu religion.

### Japan

*Jōmon culture.* Beginning (ca. 2500 B.C.) of last phase of village culture, born ca. 11,000 B.C. Hunting, gathering, and fishing. By end of period, cultivation of yams and taro, imported from Asian mainland.

*Jōmon culture.* Jōmon, or "rope pattern," hand-thrown pottery. Also bracelets and earrings in ivory and bone.

*Jōmon culture.* Basic house was either a circular or a rectangular hut with a pit floor.

*Jōmon culture.* Simple burial rites in small pits dug near dwellings. Aspects of the burial (knees drawn up or stone clasped to chest) suggest either magical or religious practices. Perhaps a belief in fertility goddesses, as indicated by large numbers of female figurines made of clay.