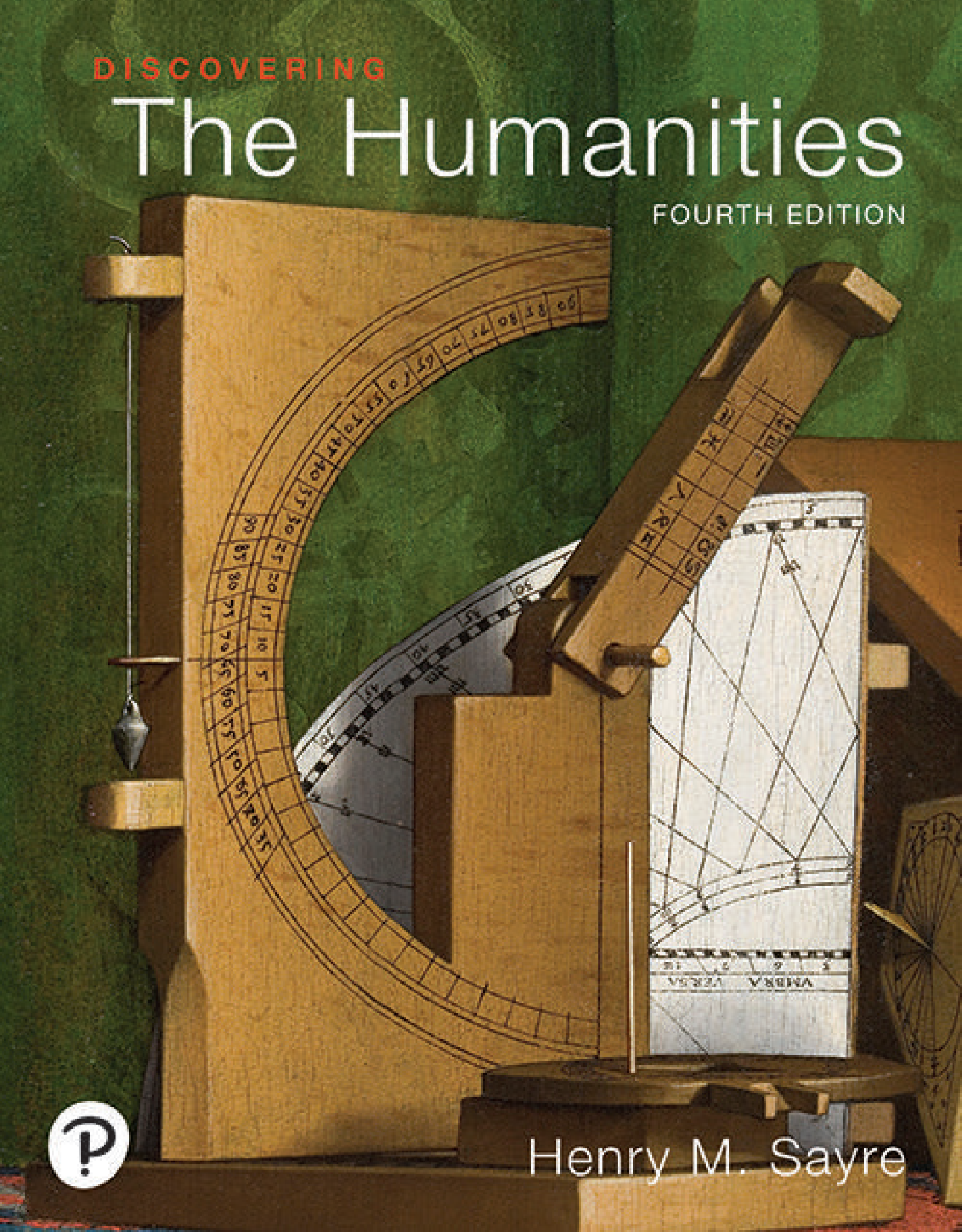
DISCOVERING

The Humanities

FOURTH EDITION



Henry M. Sayre

DISCOVERING

The Humanities

FOURTH EDITION

Henry M. Sayre

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Pearson

Portfolio Manager: Ed Parsons
Sponsoring Editor: Helen Ronan
Managing Editor: Laura Bidwa
Portfolio Manager Assistant: Andy Maldonado
Content Producer: Rob DeGeorge
Field Marketer: Wendy Albert
Product Marketer: Nicholas Bolt
Content Producer Manager: Ken Volcjak
Digital Studio Course Producer: Rich Barnes
Digital Imaging Specialist: Corin Skidds
Commissioning Editor: Kara Hattersley-Smith
Senior Editor: Chelsea Edwards
Picture Researcher: Peter Kent
Text Permissions Editor: Rachel Thorne
Front Cover Image: Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors*, 1533. The National Gallery, London/ akg images.
Cover and Page Design: Manisha Patel
Printer/Binder: LSC Communications
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color
Art Management and Manuscript Development: Laurence King Publishing, Ltd.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Sayre, Henry M., 1948- author.
Title: Discovering the humanities / Henry M. Sayre, Oregon State University.
Description: Fourth edition. | Pearson, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018018205| ISBN 9780135198223 (pbk.) | ISBN 0135198224
Subjects: LCSH: Civilization--History. | Humanities--History. | Social change--History.
Classification: LCC CB69 .S288 2019 | DDC 909--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018018205

1 19

Loose-Leaf Edition:
ISBN-10: 0-13-519822-4
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-519822-3

Rental Edition:
ISBN-10: 0-13-519837-2
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-519837-7

Revel Access Code Card:
ISBN-10: 0-13-519834-8
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-519834-6

Instructor's Review Copy:
ISBN-10: 0-13-519820-8
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-519820-9

CONTENTS

DEAR READER

It has been nearly 20 years since I first sat down to write this book, and now, with the publication of this 4th edition, I'd like to take the opportunity to reflect a moment on the humanistic enterprise as, in its new Revel edition, this book fully enters the digital age.

But first, you might well ask, what *is* the humanistic enterprise exactly? At the most superficial level, a Humanities course is designed to help you identify the significant works of art, architecture, music, theater, philosophy, and literature of distinct cultures and times, and to recognize how these different expressions of the human spirit respond to and reflect their historical contexts. More broadly, you should arrive at some understanding of the creative process and how what we—and others—have made and continue to value reflects what we all think it means to be human. But in studying other cultures—entering into what the British-born, Ghanaian-American philosopher and novelist Kwame Anthony Appiah has described as a "conversation between people from different ways of life"—we learn even more. We turn to other cultures because to empathize with others, to willingly engage in discourse with ideas strange to ourselves, is perhaps the fundamental goal of the humanities. The humanities are, above all, disciplines of openness, inclusion, and respectful interaction. What we see reflected in other cultures is usually something of ourselves, the objects of beauty that delight us, the weapons and the wars that threaten us, the melodies and harmonies that soothe us, the sometimes troubling but often penetrating thoughts that we encounter in the ether of our increasingly digital globe. Through the humanities we learn to seek common ground.

Today, digital media—epitomized by Revel—give us the means to open this world to you in ever-increasingly interactive ways. Architectural panoramas of major monuments such as Chartres Cathedral in France or Angkor Wat in Cambodia allow you to stand at multiple points in the spaces and turn around a full 360-degrees as if you were actually there. And in these spaces, you can zoom in to see details, as in fact you can with nearly every image in the book. Videos take you on detailed tours of great works of art. Recordings of the music discussed in the book are embedded in the text, usually with listening guides for those of you less than musically literate. If you'd like, you can listen to audio of the entire text (a helpful guide to pronunciation of foreign-language names), even as you study the images. And there are untold study resources, including everything from highlighting and note-taking tools, to self tests and shared writing prompts. The digital book is designed, in other words, to immerse you in the humanistic enterprise. I hope you enjoy it.

About The Author

Henry M. Sayre is Distinguished Professor of Art History Emeritus at Oregon State University. He earned his Ph.D. in American Literature from the University of Washington. He is producer and creator of the ten-part television series, *A World of Art: Works in Progress*, aired on PBS in the Fall of 1997; and author of seven books, including *A World of Art*, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970*; and an art history book for children, *Cave Paintings to Picasso*.

WHAT'S NEW

THIS NEW EDITION ENHANCES THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS:

To facilitate student learning and understanding of the humanities, this fourth edition is centered on **Learning Objectives** that introduce each chapter. These learning objectives are, tailored to the subject matter of the key chapter topics so that students will be continually reminded of the goals and objectives of study as they progress through each chapter.

The chapter learning objectives are repeated in a **Chapter Review** that poses critical-thinking questions as well as reviewing the material covered in the chapter.

NEW TO THE PRINT EDITION OF *DISCOVERING THE HUMANITIES*

- **The Continuing Presence of the Past**, a feature designed to underscore the book's emphasis on continuity and change by connecting an artwork in each chapter to a contemporary artwork, helps students understand how the art of the past remains relevant today. Included only in the digital version of the last edition, **The Continuing Presence of the Past** is now featured in each chapter on its own page in close proximity to the artwork to which it refers.

- Nearly 100 **images have been updated** whenever new and improved images were available or works of art have been cleaned or restored.

- Whenever **new scholarship** has provided us with new insights and understandings, that scholarship has been included in the text. Examples include discussion of the earliest musical instruments, continuing research at Stonehenge, medical scans of Akhenaten's mummy, and new archaeological findings at Teotihuacán.

- The discussion of **the arts beyond the West** has been greatly expanded by including in Chapter 5—formerly "Fiefdom and Monastery, Pilgrimage and Crusade: The Early Medieval World in Europe," but now retitled "Parallel Cultures: Early Medieval Europe and the Larger World"—by including discussions of the Silk Road, the Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties in China, early Buddhist and Hindu art and architecture, the Heian and Kamakura periods in Japan, and art and architecture in the Americas before contact. As a result, Chapter 9, "Encounter and Confrontation: The Impact of Increasing Global Interaction" now focuses exclusively on the post-contact world, allowing for the inclusion of much new material.

- The last half of **Chapter 15 on contemporary art** has been thoroughly reconceived, with many new images, to address issues of postcolonialism, the global marketplace and the commodification of culture, as well as the plural self in the Americas—Latino, African American, and Native American.

NEW TO THE REVEL EDITION OF *DISCOVERING THE HUMANITIES*

All of the new material cited "What's New to the Print Edition" is included in the Revel edition as well, but Revel's cross-platform digital environment allows us to offer many more aids to student learning in an interactive, engaging way.

Revel™ Education technology designed for the way today's students read, think and learn.

When students are engaged deeply, they learn more effectively and perform better in their courses. This simple fact inspired the creation of Revel. Built in collaboration with educators and students nationwide, Revel is a fully digital and highly engaging way to deliver respected Pearson content.

The **Revel Combo Card** provides an all-in-one access code and loose-leaf print reference (delivered by mail).

Revel enlivens course content with media interactives and assessments—integrated directly within the authors' narrative that provide opportunities for students to read, practice, and study in one continuous experience. This interactive educational technology boosts student engagement, which leads to better understanding of concepts and improved performance throughout the course.

- **Pan/zooms** appear with a simple click for almost all of the figures, allowing students to zoom in and examine details with stunning clarity and resolution, and then return to the overall view of the work of art, so they can relate these details to the whole.

- The pan/zooms' scale feature opens a window where works of art appear next to a scaled human figure (or for small works a scaled human hand), giving students an instant sense of the size of what they are studying.

- **3D animations of architectural and art historical techniques** depict and explain processes and methods that are difficult for students to grasp simply through narrative text.

- **Panoramas from global sites** have been integrated into the design, bringing students into the setting, both inside and out, of major buildings and monuments such as Angkor Wat, the Parthenon, the Taj Mahal, and Chartres Cathedral.

- **Each and every Closer Look and Continuing Presence of the Past** has been transformed into a Revel video presentation, where students are guided through a detailed examination of the work.

- **Listening Guides with Streaming Audio** for most of the music selections in the book are embedded in the platform, which allow students to follow along as they listen to the selection.

- The entire text is available on **streaming audio**, much of it read by the author himself.

In addition, a variety of self-tests, review features, and writing opportunities have been built into the platform. These are all designed to ensure the student's mastery of the material.

- **Multiple-choice self-tests**, at the conclusion of each major section of a chapter, allow the student to assess quickly how well they have absorbed the material at hand.

- **Interactive learning tools**, in a variety of formats, review key terms and ideas, help the student in analyzing literary works, and make use of flashcards to test student retention.

- Each chapter contains three kinds of **writing prompts**. All are keyed to specific works of visual art, literature, or music and appear in conjunction with figures that illustrate the works. **Journaling** prompts focus on building skills of visual analysis; **Shared Writing** responses relate the material in the chapter to today's world; and **Writing Space** prompts encourage students to engage in cross-cultural thinking, often across chapters.

Learn more about Revel www.pearsonhighered.com/revel

DEVELOPING THE HUMANITIES

Discovering the Humanities is the result of an extensive development process involving the contributions of over 100 instructors and their students. We are grateful to all who participated in shaping the content, clarity, and design of this text. Manuscript reviewers and focus group participants for the third edition include:

ALABAMA
Cynthia Kristan-Graham, Auburn University

CALIFORNIA
Collette Chattopadhyay, Saddleback College
Laurel Corona, San Diego City College
Cynthia D. Gobatie, Riverside Community College
John Hoskins, San Diego Mesa College
Gwenyth Mapes, Grossmont College
Bradley Nystrom, California State University-Sacramento
Joseph Pak, Saddleback College
John Provost, Monterey Peninsula College
Chad Redwing, Modesto Junior College
Stephanie Robinson, San Diego City College
Alice Taylor, West Los Angeles College
Denise Waszkowski, San Diego Mesa College

COLORADO
Renee Bragg, Arapahoe Community College
Marilyn Smith, Red Rocks Community College

CONNECTICUT
Abdellatif Hissouf, Central Connecticut State University

FLORIDA
Wesley Borucki, Palm Beach Atlantic University
Amber Brock, Tallahassee Community College
Connie Dearmin, Brevard Community College
Kimberly Felos, St. Petersburg College
Katherine Harrell, South Florida Community College
Ira Holmes, College of Central Florida
Dale Hoover, Edison State College
Theresa James, South Florida Community College
Jane Jones, State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota
Jennifer Keefe, Valencia Community College
Mansoor Khan, Brevard Community College
Connie LaMarca-Frankel, Pasco-Hernando Community College
Sandi Landis, St. Johns River Community College-Orange Park
Joe Loccisano, State College of Florida
David Luther, Edison College
James Meier, Central Florida Community College
Brandon Montgomery, State College of Florida
Pamela Wood Payne, Palm Beach Atlantic University
Elizabeth Pennington, St. Petersburg College
Gary Poe, Palm Beach Atlantic University
Frederick Smith, Florida Gateway College
Lynn Spencer, Brevard Community College
Kate Myers de Vega, Palm Beach Atlantic University
Steve Wall, Hillsborough Community College
Bill Waters, Pensacola State College

GEORGIA
Leslie Harrelson, Dalton State College
Lawrence Hetrick, Georgia Perimeter College
Priscilla Hollingsworth, Augusta State University
Jason Horn, Gordon State College
Kelley Mahoney, Dalton State College
Andrea Scott Morgan, Georgia Perimeter College

IDAHO
Jennifer Black, Boise State University
Kim Carter-Cram, Boise State University
Rick Davis, Brigham Young University-Idaho
Derek Jensen, Brigham Young University-Idaho
Christopher Williams, Brigham Young University-Idaho

ILLINOIS
Thomas Christensen, University of Chicago
Timothy J. Clifford, College of DuPage
Leslie Huntress Hopkins, College of Lake County
Judy Kaplow, Harper College
Terry McIntyre, Harper College
Victoria Neubeck O'Connor, Moraine Valley Community College
Sharon Quarcini, Moraine Valley Community College
Paul Van Heuklom, Lincoln Land Community College

INDIANA
Josephina Kiteou, University of Southern Indiana

KENTUCKY
Jonathan Austad, Eastern Kentucky University
Beth Cahaney, Elizabethtown Community and Technical College
Jeremy Killian, University of Louisville
Lynda Mercer, University of Louisville
Sara Northerner, University of Louisville
Elijah Pritchett, University of Louisville

MASSACHUSETTS
Peter R. Kalb, Brandeis University

MICHIGAN
Martha Petry, Jackson Community College
Robert Quist, Ferris State University

MINNESOTA
Mary Johnston, Minnesota State University

NEBRASKA
Michael Hoff, University of Nebraska

NEVADA
Chris Bauer, Sierra College

NEW JERSEY
Jay Braverman, Montclair State University
Sara E. Gil-Ramos, New Jersey City University

NEW MEXICO
Sarah Egelman, Central New Mexico Community College

NEW YORK
Eva Diaz, Pratt Institute
Mary Guzzy, Corning Community College
Thelma Ithier Sterling, Hostos Community College
Elizabeth C. Mansfield, New York University
Clemente Marconi, New York University

NORTH CAROLINA
Stephanie Freeman, North Carolina Central University
Melodie Galloway, University of North Carolina at Asheville
Jeanne McGlinn, University of North Carolina at Asheville
Sophie Mills, University of North Carolina at Asheville
Constance Schrader, University of North Carolina at Asheville
Ronald Sousa, University of North Carolina at Asheville
Samer Traboulsi, University of North Carolina at Asheville

NORTH DAKOTA
Robert Kibler, Minot State University

OHIO
Darlene Alberts, Columbus State Community College
Tim Davis, Columbus State Community College
Michael Mangus, The Ohio State University at Newark
Keith Pepperell, Columbus State Community College
Patrice Ross, Columbus State Community College

OKLAHOMA
Amanda H. Blackman, Tulsa Community College-Northeast Campus
Diane Boze, Northeastern State University
Jacklan J. Renee Cox, Rogers State University
Jim Ford, Rogers State University
Diana Lurz, Rogers State University
James W. Mock, University of Central Oklahoma
Gregory Thompson, Rogers State University

PENNSYLVANIA
James Boswell, Harrisburg Area Community College
Elizabeth Pilliod, Rutgers University-Camden
Douglas B. Rosentrater, Bucks County Community College
Debra Thomas, Harrisburg Area Community College

RHODE ISLAND
Mallica Kumbera Landrus, Rhode Island School of Design

TEXAS
Mindi Bailey, Collin County Community College
Peggy Brown, Collin County Community College
Marsha Lindsay, Lone Star College-North Harris
Colin Mason, Temple College
Aditi Samarth, Richland College
Anne Schultz, Baylor University
Lee Ann Westman, University of Texas at El Paso

UTAH
Matthew Ancell, Brigham Young University
Terre Burton, Dixie College
Robert Colson, Brigham Young University
Nate Kramer, Brigham Young University
Joseph D. Parry, Brigham Young University
Charlotte Stanford, Brigham Young University

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No project of this scope could ever come into being without the hard work and perseverance of many more people than its author. In fact, this author has been humbled by the teams at Pearson and Laurence King Publishing, who never wavered in their confidence in my ability to finish this fourth edition of what remains an enormous undertaking. At Laurence King, I am especially grateful to Senior Editor and project editor Chelsea Edwards for the exceptional care she has taken in moving the project forward, a task made doubly difficult by our working simultaneously in print and digital formats. I also want to thank Julia Ruxton, Picture Manager, and Peter Kent, who researched picture permissions, for their sometimes miraculous work at finding images, often providing me with a wealth of choices. Rachel Thorne has handled the always difficult task of securing literature permissions with aplomb and good humor. Emily Asquith and Rosie Lewis made this a far better book by their scrupulous copy editing, and Simon Walsh oversaw matters of production with his usual mastery. The overwhelming task of indexing the book has been borne by Vicki Robinson. Manisha Patel has patiently worked with me to get the page design as close to perfect as we could manage, and I have come to very much appreciate his eye and sense of style. Finally, all of these great people at Laurence King are overseen by the inestimable Kara Hattersley-Smith.

At Pearson, Rich Barnes has helped coordinate Revel production with the good people at Ohlinger Publishing Services and, particularly, their program manager, Laura Bidwa. For her help with the Closer Look and Continuing Presence of the Past videos, I'd like to thank Cynthia Ward. It is always a pleasure to work with her. And I have been especially pleased with Kelly Donahue-Wallace's work on the learning modules for each chapter in Revel. On the marketing side at Pearson, Wendy Albert and Nick Bolt have helped us all to understand just what students want and need. Much of what is good about this book I owe to Sarah Touborg's great editorial advice while she was at Pearson, and to the late Bud Therien, who envisioned this project and saw it through to the first edition. I am forever grateful for the support, encouragement, and, above all, friendship of both.

No one has been more important in seeing this fourth edition through to production than Helen Ronan. She has no official title, but without her negotiating the intricacies of development between Ohlinger Studio's work on the Revel edition, Laurence King's work on the print edition, and Pearson as a whole, this edition would today be mired somewhere—I hesitate to think where. With all my thanks, I hereby appoint her Liaison-in-Chief.

Finally, I want to thank, with all my love, my beautiful wife, Sandy Brooke, who has always supported this project in every way. I have said this before, but it continues to be true: She has continued to teach, paint, and write, while urging me on, listening to my struggles, humoring me when I didn't deserve it, and being a far better wife than I was a husband. She was, is, and will continue to be, I trust, the source of my strength.

THE PREHISTORIC PAST AND THE EARLIEST CIVILIZATIONS

The River Cultures of the Ancient World

1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 **Discuss the rise of culture and how developments in art and architecture reflect the growing sophistication of prehistoric cultures.**

1.2 **Describe the role of myth in prehistoric culture.**

1.3 **Distinguish among the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, and focus on how they differ from that of the Hebrews.**

1.4 **Account for the stability of Egyptian culture.**

On a cold December afternoon in 1994, Jean-Marie Chauvet and two friends were exploring the caves in the steep cliffs along the Ardèche River gorge in southern France. After descending into a series of narrow passages, they entered a large chamber. There, beams from their headlamps lit up a group of drawings that would astonish the three explorers—and the world (Fig. **1.1**).

Since the late nineteenth century, we have known that **prehistoric** peoples, peoples who lived before the time of writing and so of recorded history, drew on the walls of caves. Twenty-seven such caves had already been discovered in the cliffs along the 17 miles of the Ardèche gorge (Map **1.1**). But the cave found by Chauvet and his friends transformed our thinking about prehistoric peoples. Where previously discovered cave paintings had appeared childlike to modern eyes, this cave contained drawings comparable to those a contemporary artist might have done. We can only speculate that other comparable artworks were produced in prehistoric times but have not survived, perhaps because they were made of wood or other perishable materials. It is even possible that art may have been made earlier than 30,000 years ago, perhaps as people began to inhabit the Near East, between 90,000 and 100,000 years ago.

From almost the moment of Chauvet's discovery, scientists realized that their own presence in the cave—let alone the prospect of an enthralled public visiting the site—threatened its survival. The lesson had been learned at Lascaux Cave in the Dordogne region of southern France, to the west of the Ardèche. After its discovery in 1940, as many as 1,200 visitors a week were admitted to the site, until authorities realized that the carbon dioxide from their breath was contributing to the growth of bacteria and mold that were destroying its wall paintings. The cave was closed in 1963, and a replica of the site opened in 1983, but its paintings are largely beyond repair. To avoid just such a disaster, in 2007

Map 1.1 Major Paleolithic caves in France and Spain.

Fig. 1.1 Wall painting with horses, Chauvet Cave, Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Ardèche gorge, France, ca. 30,000 BCE. Paint on limestone, height approx. 6'. Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication. Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles de Rhône-Alpes. Service Régional de l'Archéologie. In the center of this wall are four horses, each behind the other in a startlingly realistic space. Below them, two rhinoceroses fight.
Credit: akg-images

Fig. 1.2 Chauvet Cave replica, Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Ardèche gorge, France, 2015. This full-size replica of the Chauvet Cave opened to the public in 2015, making the cave accessible to some 300,000–400,000 visitors a year.
Credit: Patrick Aventurier/Getty Images

authorities began recreating Chauvet about 3 miles from the actual cave at a cost of some $56 million (approximately $60 million) (Fig. **1.2**). Using hi-tech scans and 3D modeling, the cave's limestone walls were reproduced in concrete and its stalagmites and stalactites in resin. Digital reproductions of the original art were then projected onto the surfaces and painted with pigments mimicking the earth tones used by the original artists. The result is a stunningly realistic experience for the contemporary visitor. Even the temperature of the original cave—53.6 degrees Fahrenheit/12 degrees Celsius—is maintained.

To visit the replica of the Chauvet Cave is to come as close as we can to what it must have been like to live during the Paleolithic era, or "Old Stone Age," from the Greek *palaios*, "old," and *lithos*, "stone." The cultures of the era sustained themselves on wild plants and game (the bones of which were scattered across Chauvet's floor and are reproduced in plastic for the replica). The cultures themselves were small, scattered, and nomadic, though evidence suggests some interaction among the various groups. As the ice covering the Northern Hemisphere began to recede around 10,000 BCE, agriculture began to replace hunting and gathering, and with it, a nomadic lifestyle gave way to a more sedentary way of life. The consequences of this shift were enormous, and ushered in the Neolithic era, or "New Stone Age."

In the great river valleys of the Middle East, Egypt, and Asia (Map **1.2**), distinct centers of people involved in a common pursuit began to form more and more sophisticated civilizations. (The rise of these civilizations in India and China is discussed in Chapter 3.)

A **civilization** is a social, economic, and political entity distinguished by the ability to express itself through images and written language. Civilizations such as those found in the great river valleys developed because the environments of their respective regions were able to support large and productive populations. An increasing population in turn required increased production of food and other goods, not only to support the civilization itself, but also to trade for other commodities. Organizing this level of trade and production also required an administrative elite to form and to establish priorities. The existence of such an elite is another characteristic of civilization. Finally, as the history of cultures around the world makes abundantly clear, one of the major ways that societies have acquired the goods they want and simultaneously organized themselves is by means of war.

Before the invention of writing, sometime after 10,000 BCE, as the climate warmed and the ice receded, these cultures created myths and legends that explained their origins and relation to the world. Then, beginning about 4000 BCE, across the ancient world, the science of metallurgy developed. As people learned to separate metals from their ores and then work or treat them to create objects, the stone and bone tools and weapons of the prehistoric world were replaced by metal ones, inaugurating the era archaeologists have named the Bronze Age. This chapter traces the rise of cultures and civilizations from prehistoric times through the Bronze Age in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

1.1 The Beginnings of Culture

How do cultures arise, and how do art and architecture reflect their growing sophistication?

A **culture** encompasses the values and behaviors shared by a group of people, developed over time, and passed down from one generation to the next. Culture manifests itself in the laws, customs, ritual behavior, and artistic production common to the group. The cave paintings at Chauvet suggest that, as early as 30,000 years ago, the Ardèche gorge was *a center of culture*, a focal point of group living in which the values of a community find expression. There were others like it. In northern Spain, the first decorated cave was discovered in 1879 at Altamira. We have already mentioned Lascaux, discovered by schoolchildren in 1940 when their dog disappeared down a hole. In 1991, along the French Mediterranean coast, a diver discovered the entrance to the beautifully decorated Cosquer Cave below the waterline near Marseille. And there are many others in the region, as shown on Map 1.1.

1.1.1 Agency and Ritual: Cave Art

Ever since cave paintings were first discovered, scholars have marveled at the skill of the people who produced them, but we have been equally fascinated by their very existence. Why were these paintings made? Most scholars believe that they possessed some sort of **agency**—that is, they were created to exert some power or authority over the world of those who came into contact with them. Until recently, it was generally accepted that such works were associated with the hunt. Perhaps the hunter, seeking game in times of scarcity, hoped

Map 1.2 The great river valley civilizations, ca. 2000 BCE. Agriculture thrived in the great river valleys throughout the Neolithic era, but by the end of the period, urban life had developed there as well, and civilization as we know it had emerged.

to conjure it up by depicting it on cave walls. Or perhaps such drawings were magic charms meant to ensure a successful hunt. But at Chauvet, fully 60 percent of the animals painted on its walls were never, or rarely, hunted—such animals as lions, rhinoceroses, bears, panthers, and woolly mammoths. One drawing depicts two rhinoceroses fighting horn-to-horn beneath four horses that appear to be looking on (see Fig. **1.1**).

What role, then, did these drawings play in the daily lives of the people who created them? The caves may have served as some sort of **ritual** space. A ritual is a rite or ceremony habitually practiced by a group, often in religious or quasi-religious contexts. The caves might, for instance, be understood as gateways to the underworld and death, as symbols of the womb and birth, or as pathways to the world of dreams experienced in the dark of night, and rites connected with such passage might have been conducted in them. The general arrangement of the animals in the paintings by species or gender, often in distinct chambers of the caves, suggests to some that the paintings may have served as lunar calendars for predicting the seasonal migration of the animals. Whatever the case, surviving human footprints indicate that these caves were ritual gathering places and in some way were intended to serve the common good.

At Chauvet, the use of color suggests that the paintings served some sacred or symbolic function. For instance, almost all the paintings near the entrance to the cave are painted with natural red pigments derived from ores rich in iron oxide. Deeper inside the cave, in areas more difficult to reach, the vast majority of the animals are painted in black pigments derived from ores rich in manganese dioxide. This shift in color appears to be intentional, but we can only guess at its meaning.

The skillfully drawn images at Chauvet raise even more important questions. The artists seem to have understood and practiced a kind of illusionism—that is, they were able to convey a sense of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. In the painting reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, several horses appear to stand one behind the other (see Fig. **1.1**). The head of the top horse overlaps a black line, as if peering over a branch or the back of another animal. In no other cave art yet discovered do drawings show the use of shading, or **modeling**, so that the animal or person depicted seems to have volume and dimension. And yet these cave paintings, rendered more than 30,000 years ago, predate other cave paintings by at least 10,000 years, and in some cases by as much as 20,000 years.

One of the few cave paintings that depicts a human figure is found at Lascaux. What appears to be a male wearing a bird's-head mask lies in front of a disemboweled bison (Fig. **1.3**). Below him is a bird-headed spear thrower, a device that enabled hunters to throw a spear farther and with greater force. (Several examples of spear throwers have survived.) In the Lascaux painting, the hunter's spear has pierced the bison's hindquarters, and a rhinoceros charges off to the left. We have no way of knowing whether this was an actual event

Fig. 1.3 Wall painting with bird-headed man and bison, Lascaux Cave, Dordogne, France, ca. 15,000–13,000 BCE. Paint on limestone, length approx. 9'. We have no way of knowing whether this was an actual event or an imagined scene.
Credit: Glasshouse Images/Alamy

or an imagined scene. One of the painting's most interesting and inexplicable features is the discrepancy between the relatively naturalistic representation of the animals and the highly stylized, almost abstract realization of the human figure. Was the sticklike man added later by a different, less talented artist? Or does this image suggest that man and beast are different orders of being?

Before the discovery of Chauvet, historians divided the history of cave painting into a series of successive styles, each progressively more realistic. But Chauvet's paintings, by far the oldest known, are also the most advanced in their realism, suggesting the artists' conscious quest for visual **naturalism**, that is, for representations that imitate the actual appearance of the animals. Not only were both red and black animals outlined, but also their shapes were modeled by spreading paint, either with the hand or with a tool, in gradual gradations of color. Such modeling is extremely rare or unknown elsewhere. In addition, the artists further defined many of the animals' contours by scraping the wall behind so that the beasts seem to stand out against a deeper white ground. Three handprints in the cave were evidently made by spitting paint at a hand placed on the cave wall, resulting in a stenciled image.

Art, the Chauvet drawings suggest, does not necessarily evolve in a linear progression from awkward beginnings to more sophisticated representations. On the contrary, already in the earliest artworks, people obtained a very high degree of sophistication. Apparently, even from the earliest times, human beings could choose to represent the world naturalistically or not, and the choice not to represent the world in naturalistic terms should be attributed not necessarily to lack of skill or sophistication but rather to other, culturally driven factors.

1.1.2 Paleolithic Culture and Its Artifacts

Footprints discovered in South Africa in 2000 and fossilized remains uncovered in the forest of Ethiopia in 2001 suggest that, about 5.7 million years ago, the earliest upright humans, or hominins (as distinct from the larger classification of **hominids**, which includes great apes and chimpanzees as well as humans), roamed the continent of Africa. Ethiopian excavations further indicate that sometime around 2.5 or 2.6 million years ago, hominid populations began to make rudimentary stone tools, though long before, between 14 million and 19 million years ago, the *Kenyapithecus* ("Kenyan ape"), a hominin, made stone tools in east central Africa. Nevertheless, the earliest evidence of a culture coming into being is the stone artifacts of *Homo sapiens* (Latin for "one who knows"). *Homo sapiens* evolved about 100,000–120,000 years ago and can be distinguished from earlier hominids by the lighter build of their skeletal structure and larger brain. A 2009 study of genetic diversity among Africans found the San people of Zimbabwe to be the most diverse, suggesting that they are the most likely origin of modern humans, from which others gradually spread out of Africa, across Asia, into Europe, and finally to Australia and the Americas.

Homo sapiens were **hunter-gatherers**, whose survival depended on the animals they could kill and the foods they could gather, primarily nuts, berries, roots, and other edible plants. The tools they developed were far more sophisticated than those of their ancestors. They included cleavers, chisels, grinders, hand axes, and arrow- and spearheads made of flint, a material that also provided the spark to create an equally important tool—fire. In 2004, Israeli archaeologists working at a site on the banks of the Jordan River reported the earliest evidence yet found of controlled fire created by hominids—cracked and blackened flint chips, presumably used to light a fire, and bits of charcoal dating from 790,000 years ago. Also at the campsite were the bones of elephants, rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses, and small species, demonstrating that these early hominids cut their meat with flint tools and ate steaks and marrow. *Homo sapiens* cooked with fire, wore animal skins as clothing, and used tools as a matter of course. They buried their dead in ritual ceremonies, often laying them to rest accompanied by stone tools and weapons.

The Paleolithic era is the period of *Homo sapiens'* ascendancy. These people carved stone tools and weapons that helped them survive in an inhospitable climate. They also made music. The five-holed flute illustrated here (Fig. **1.4**) was found in the summer of 2008 in the Ach Valley of the Swabian Alps near the city of Ulm, Germany. It is made from the naturally hollow wing-bone of a griffon vulture, and its five holes produce a pentatonic scale (five notes per octave, and still the most common scale used in blues, pop, and rock music today). In 2012, a team of scientists from Oxford and Tübingen universities unearthed flutes made from mammoths' ivory and bird bones, carbon-dated to between 43,000 and 42,000 BCE, at nearby Geißenklösterle Cave. Of course, we do not know what sort of music these very ancient peoples played (just as we cannot know what any music sounded like until

Fig. 1.4 Bone flute from Hohle Fels Cave, Germany, ca. 40,000 BCE. The flute is nearly 1' long, and its mere existence points to a culture of reasonable musical sophistication.
Credit: Sascha Schuermann/AFP/Getty Images

musical notation systems were first introduced, in about 1450 CE, long after written language). However, University of Paris researchers discovered in 2008 that Chauvet's paintings are concentrated at the points of greatest resonance within the cave. Did these instruments play an important role in prehistoric ritual? We can only guess, but we can be sure that, as today, people gathered to hear them be played.

These prehistoric peoples also carved small sculptural objects, which, along with the cave paintings we have already seen, appear to be the first instances of what we have come to call "art." Among the most remarkable of these sculptural artifacts are a large number of female figures, found at various archaeological sites across Europe. The most famous of these is *Woman*, the limestone statuette of a woman found at Willendorf, in present-day Austria (Fig. **1.5**), dating from between 25,000 and 20,000 BCE and sometimes called the *Venus of Willendorf*. Markings on *Woman* and similar figures indicate that they were originally colored, but what these small sculptures meant and what they were used for remains unclear. Most are 4 to 5 inches high and fit neatly into a person's hand. This suggests that they may have had a ritual purpose. Their exaggerated breasts and bellies and their clearly delineated genitals support a connection to fertility and childbearing. These figures suggest that what was most valued about the body in prehistoric times was its ability to sustain itself for some period of time without food, and its ability to nourish a child at the same time. We know, too, that the Willendorf *Woman* was originally painted in red ocher, suggestive of menses. And, her navel is not carved; rather, it is a natural indentation in the stone. Whoever carved her seems to have recognized, in the raw stone, a connection to the origins of life. But such figures may have served other purposes as well. Archaeologist Clive Gamble has recently argued that such sculptures served as a form of nonverbal communication among groups of ancient peoples scattered widely across what is today the European continent. He suggests that, whenever groups of these hunter-gatherers met—as they must occasionally have done when tracking game—these easily portable female statues served as signs suggesting the amicability of the hunters bearing them (it is doubtful that many, if any, of these groups shared a common language). These figurines, in other words, might have been used to communicate commonly held ideas of "femaleness" across widespread groups. They therefore may have encoded a system of shared values and ideals.

Indeed, female figurines vastly outnumber representations of males in the Paleolithic era, which suggests that women played a central role in Paleolithic culture. Most likely, they had considerable religious and spiritual influence, and their preponderance in the imagery of the era suggests that Paleolithic culture may have been *matrilineal* (in which descent is determined through the female line) and *matrilocal* (in which residence is in the female's tribe or household). Such traditions exist in many primal societies today.

Fig. 1.5 *Woman* (*Venus of Willendorf*), found at Willendorf, Austria, ca. 25,000–20,000 BCE. Limestone, height 4". Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. For many years, modern scholars called this small statue the *Venus of Willendorf*. They assumed that its carvers attributed to it an ideal of female beauty comparable to the Roman ideal of beauty implied by the name Venus.
Credit: Erich Lessing/akg-images

1.1.3 The Rise of Agriculture

For 2,000 years, from 10,000 to 8000 BCE, the ice covering the Northern Hemisphere receded farther and farther northward. As temperatures warmed, life gradually changed. During this period of transition, vast areas once covered by ice and snow turned into grassy plains and abundant forests. Hunters developed the bow and arrow, which were easier to use at longer range on the open plains. They fashioned dugout boats from logs to facilitate fishing, which became a major food source. They domesticated dogs to help with the hunt as early as 11,000 BCE, and soon other animals as well—goats and cattle particularly. Perhaps most important, people began to cultivate the more edible grasses. Along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, they harvested wheat; in Asia, they cultivated millet and rice; and in the Americas, they grew squash, beans, and corn. Gradually, farming replaced hunting as the primary means of sustaining life. A culture of the fields developed—an agriculture, from the Latin *ager*, "farm," "field," or "productive land."

Agricultural production seems to have originated in about 10,000 BCE in the Fertile Crescent, an area arching from southwest Iran, across the foothills of the Taurus Mountains in southeastern Turkey, then southward into Lebanon. By about 8000 BCE, Neolithic agricultural societies began to concentrate in the great river valleys of the Middle East and Asia. Gradually, as the climate warmed, Neolithic culture spread across Europe. By about 5000 BCE, the valleys of Spain and southern France supported agriculture, but there is no evidence of farming in the northern reaches of the European continent and Britain dating back any earlier than about 4000 BCE. The Neolithic era did not end in these colder climates until about 2000 BCE, and it continued in regions such as Africa and the Americas, well into the second millennia.

Meanwhile, the great rivers of the Middle East and Asia provided a consistent and predictable source of water, and people soon developed irrigation techniques that fostered organized agriculture and animal husbandry. As production outgrew necessity, members of the community were freed to occupy themselves in other endeavors—complex food preparation (bread, cheese, and so on), construction, military affairs, and religion. Soon, permanent villages began to appear, and villages began to look more and more like cities.

1.1.4 Neolithic Çatalhöyük

Sometime around 7400 BCE, at Çatalhöyük (also known as Chatal Huyuk) in central Turkey, a permanent village began to take shape that would flourish for nearly 1,200 years. At one point or another, as many as 3,000 people lived in close proximity to one another in rectangular houses made of mud bricks held together with plaster. These houses stood side by side, one wall abutting the next, with entrances through the roof and down a ladder. There were no windows in the houses, and the only natural light in the interior came from the entryway. The roof appears to have served as the primary social space, especially in the summer months. Domed ovens were built both on the roof and in the interior.

The people of Çatalhöyük were apparently traders, principally of obsidian—a black, volcanic, glasslike stone that can be carved into sharp blades and arrowheads—which they mined at Hasan Dag, a volcano visible from the village. The rows of windowless houses that composed the village, the walls of which rose to as high as 16 feet, must have served a defensive purpose, but they also contained what archaeologists have come to view as an extraordinary sense of communal history. Their interior walls and floors were plastered and replastered, then painted and repainted with a white lime-based paint, again and again over hundreds of years. Beneath the floors of some—but not all—of the houses were burials, averaging about 6 per house, but sometimes rising to between 30 and 62 bodies. For reasons that are not entirely clear, from time to time, these bodies were exhumed, and the skulls of long-deceased ancestors were removed. The skulls were then reburied in new graves or in the foundations of new houses as they were built and rebuilt. Whatever the rationale for such ceremonies, they could not have helped creating a sense of historical continuity in the community.

Çatalhöyük was first extensively excavated from 1958 by Sir James Mellaart, who concluded that the village's culture was matrilineal, based in no small part on his discovery of a number of female figurines including a clay sculpture of a seated woman (Fig. **1.6**), who, he believed, represented a fertility or mother goddess. Found in a grain bin—evidence of the community's growing agricultural sophistication—she sits enthroned between two felines, perhaps in the process of giving birth. But Ian Hodder of Cambridge University, who took up excavations of the site in 1993, after a nearly 30-year hiatus, has recently concluded that she is something other than a fertility goddess. In 2005, he wrote:

Fig. 1.6 Woman seated between two felines, Çatalhöyük, Turkey, ca. 6850–6300 BCE. Terra cotta, height 4⅝". Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara. The woman's head in this sculpture is a modern addition.
Credit: M. Seemuller/De Agostini Picture Lib./akg-images

> As one turns the figurine around one notices that the arms are very thin, and then on the back of the figurine one sees a depiction of either a skeleton or the bones of a very thin and depleted human. The ribs and vertebrae are clear, as are the scapulae and the main pelvic bones. The figurine can be interpreted in a number of ways—as a woman turning into an ancestor, as a woman associated with death, or as death and life conjoined. … Perhaps the importance of female imagery was related to some special role of the female in relation to death as much as to the roles of mother and nurturer.

Supporting Hodder's theories is a burial of a deceased woman who holds in her arms the plastered and painted skull of a male.

Similarly, Mellaart believed that many of the rooms that contained large numbers of bodies were shrines or temples. The walls of these rooms were decorated with the skulls of cows and the heads and horns of bulls. Found under the floors of some houses were boar tusks, vulture skulls, and fox and weasel teeth. But Hodder has found evidence that these houses—he calls them "history houses"—were not shrines at all, but more or less continuously occupied, suggesting that art and decoration were integral to the daily lives of the community's residents.

Fig. 1.7 Beaker with ibex, dogs, and long-necked birds, from Susa, southwestern Iran, ca. 5000–4000 BCE. Baked clay with painted decoration, height 11¼". Musée du Louvre, Paris. The ibex was the most widely hunted game in the ancient Middle East, which probably accounts for its centrality in this design.
Credit: © RMN

1.1.5 Neolithic Pottery across Cultures

The transition from cultures based on hunting and fishing to cultures based on agriculture led to the increased use of pottery vessels. Ceramic vessels are fragile, so hunter-gatherers would not have found them practical for carrying food, but people living in the more permanent Neolithic settlements could have used them to carry and store water, and to prepare and store certain types of food.

Some of the most remarkable Neolithic painted pottery comes from Susa, on the Iranian plateau. The patterns on one particular beaker (Fig. **1.7**) from around 5000 to 4000 BCE are highly stylized animals. The largest of these is an ibex, a popular decorative feature of prehistoric ceramics from Iran. Associated with the hunt, the ibex may have been a symbol of plenty. The front and hind legs of the ibex are rendered by two triangles, the tail hangs behind it like a feather, the head is oddly disconnected from the body, and the horns rise in a large, exaggerated arc to encircle a decorative circular form. Hounds race around the band above the ibex, and wading birds form a decorative band across the beaker's top.

In Europe, the production of pottery apparently developed some time later, around 3000 BCE. By this time, however, artisans in Egypt had begun using the potter's wheel, a revolving platter for forming vessels from clay with the fingers. It allowed artisans to produce a uniformly shaped vessel in a very short time. Soon, the potter's wheel was in use in the Middle East as well as China. Because it is a machine created expressly to produce goods, it is in many ways the first mechanical and technological breakthrough in history. As skilled individuals specialized in making and decorating pottery, and traded their wares for other goods and services, the first elemental forms of manufacturing began to emerge.

1.1.6 Neolithic Ceramic Figures

It is a simple step from forming clay pots and firing them to modeling clay sculptural figures and submitting them to the same firing process. Examples of clay modeling can be found in some of the earliest Paleolithic cave sites such as at Altamira in Spain, where an artist added clay to an existing rock outcrop in order to underscore the rock's natural resemblance to an animal form. At Le Tuc d'Audoubert, south of Lascaux in France, an artist shaped two clay bison, each 2 feet long, as if they were leaning against a rocky ridge.

But these Paleolithic sculptures were never fired. Some of the most interesting examples of Neolithic fired clay figurines were the work of the so-called Nok people who lived in what is now Nigeria. We do not know what they called themselves—they are identified instead by the name of the place where their artifacts were discovered. In fact, we know almost nothing about the Nok. We do not know how their culture was organized, what their lives were like, or what they believed. But while most Neolithic peoples in Africa worked in materials that were not permanent, the Nok fired clay figures of animals and humans that were approximately life-size.

These figures were first unearthed early in the twentieth century by miners over an area of about 40 square miles. Carbon-14 and other forms of dating revealed that some of these objects had been made as early as 800 BCE and others as late as 600 CE. Little more than the hollow heads have survived intact, revealing an artistry based on abstract geometric shapes (Fig. **1.8**). In some cases, the heads are represented as ovals, and in others, as cones, cylinders, or spheres. Facial features are combinations of ovals, triangles, graceful arches,

Fig. 1.8 Nok head, ca. 500 BCE–200 CE. Terra cotta, height 14³⁄₁₆". This slightly larger-than-life-size head was probably part of a complete body, and shows the Nok people's interest in abstract geometrical representations of facial features and head shape. Holes in the eyes and nose were probably used to control temperature during firing.
Credit: Heritage Image Partnership Ltd/Alamy

Fig. 1.9 Neolithic menhir alignments at Ménec, Carnac, Brittany, France, ca. 4250–3750 BCE. According to an ancient legend, the Carnac menhirs came into being when a retreating army was driven to the sea. Finding no ships to aid their escape, they turned to face their enemy and were transformed into stone.
Credit: Hemis/Alamy

and straight lines. These heads were probably shaped with wet clay and then, after firing, finished by carving details into the hardened clay. Some scholars have argued that the technical and artistic sophistication of works by the Nok and other roughly contemporaneous groups suggests that it is likely there are older artistic traditions in West Africa that have not yet been discovered. Certainly, farther to the east, in the sub-Saharan regions of the Sudan, Egyptian culture had exerted considerable influence for centuries, and it may well be that Egyptian technological sophistication had worked its way westward.

1.1.7 The Neolithic Megaliths of Northern Europe

A distinctive kind of monumental stone architecture appears late in the Neolithic period, particularly in what is now Britain and France. Known as **megaliths**, or "big stones," these works were constructed without the use of mortar and represent the most basic form of architectural construction. Sometimes, they consisted merely of **posts**—upright stones stuck into the ground—called **menhirs**, from the Celtic words *men*, "stone," and *hir*, "long." These single stones occur in isolation or in groups. The largest of the groups is at Carnac, in Brittany (Fig. **1.9**), where some 3,000 menhirs arranged east to west in 13 straight rows, called *alignments*, cover a 2-mile stretch of plain. At the east end, the stones stand about 3 feet tall; they gradually get larger and larger until, at the west end, they attain a height of 13 feet. This east–west alignment suggests a connection to the rising and setting of the sun and to fertility rites. Scholars disagree about their significance; some speculate that the stones may have marked out a ritual procession route; others think they symbolized the body and the process of growth and maturation. But there can be no doubt that megaliths were designed to be permanent structures, whereas domestic architecture was not. Quite possibly the megaliths stood in tribute to the strength of the leaders responsible for assembling and maintaining the considerable labor force required to construct them.

Another megalithic structure, the **dolmen**, consists of two posts roofed with a capstone, or **lintel**. Because it is composed of three stones, the dolmen is a **trilithon**, from Greek *tri*, "three," and *lithos*, "rock," and it formed the basic unit of architectural structure for thousands of years. Today, we call this kind of construction **post-and-lintel**. Megaliths such as the dolmen in County Clare, Ireland (Fig. **1.10**), were probably once covered with earth to form a fully enclosed burial chamber, or **cairn**.

A third type of megalithic structure is the **cromlech**, from the Celtic *crom*, "circle," and *lech*, "place." Without doubt, the most famous megalithic structure in the world is the cromlech known as Stonehenge (Fig. **1.11**), on Salisbury Plain, about 100 miles west of present-day London. A henge is a special type of cromlech, a circle surrounded by a ditch with built-up embankments, presumably for fortification purposes.

The site at Stonehenge reflects four major building periods, extending from about 2750 to 1500 BCE. By about 2100 BCE, most of the elements visible today were in place. In the middle was a U-shaped arrangement of five post-and-lintel

Fig. 1.10 Poulnabrone Dolmen, a Neolithic dolmen on the Burren limestone plateau, County Clare, Ireland, ca. 2500 BCE. A mound of earth probably once covered this structure, an ancient burial chamber.
Credit: © Kwiatek7/Shutterstock

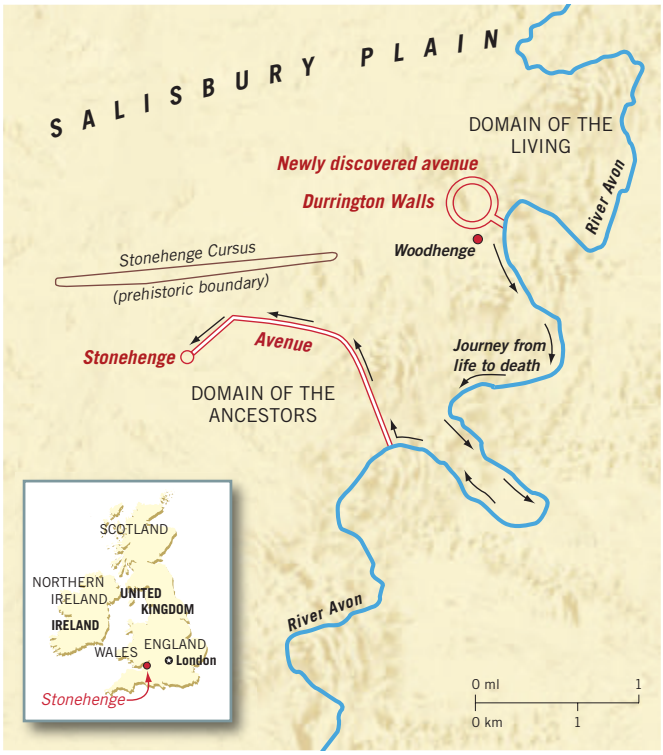
Fig. 1.11 Stonehenge, Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, England, ca. 2750–1500 BCE. Probably no Neolithic site has received, and continues to receive, more scrutiny. Yet still, its purpose remains largely a matter of speculation.
Credit: Robert Harding World Imagery/Adam Woolfitt

trilithons. The one at the bottom of the U stands taller than the rest, rising to a height of 24 feet, with a 15-foot lintel 3 feet thick. A continuous circle of sandstone posts, each weighing up to 50 tons and all standing 20 feet high, surrounded the five trilithons. Across their top was a continuous lintel 106 feet in diameter. This is the Sarsen Circle. Just inside the Sarsen Circle was once another circle, made of bluestone—a bluish dolerite found only in the mountains of southern Wales, some 120 miles away.

Recently, the Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project, headed by British archaeologist Vincent Gaffney, surveyed the area surrounding Stonehenge—some 4 square miles about which almost nothing was known—by means of GPS-guided magnetometers and ground-penetrating radar capable of detecting objects, even variations in long-buried topography, several yards below the surface. They discovered some 15 previously unknown or largely ignored Neolithic monuments—henges, burial mounds, and pits, including two very large pits, 1600 and 1200 yards respectively from the Heel Stone, and one near each end of the Cursus, the 1½-mile-long set of parallel ditches, closed at either end, that are believed to mark the northern boundary of the site. Remarkably, these pits align with the midsummer sunrise and the midsummer solstice as seen from the Heel Stone itself. In 2015, Gaffney's team discovered what they call a "super-henge," consisting of up to 90 standing stones buried beneath what had been believed to be a large bank-and-ditch enclosure surrounding nearby Durrington Walls.

Why Stonehenge, its outlying pits, and the newly discovered "super-henge" were constructed remains a mystery. Another recent discovery at Durrington Walls, however, has shed new light on the problem. Durrington Walls lies about two miles northeast of Stonehenge itself (see Map **1.3**). It consists of a circular ditch surrounding a ring of postholes out of which very large timber posts would have risen. The circle was the center of a village consisting of as many as 300 houses. The site is comparable in scale to Stonehenge itself. These discoveries—together with the ability to carbon-date the human remains found at Stonehenge with increased accuracy—suggest that Stonehenge was itself a burial ground. Archaeologist Mike Parker Pearson of the University of Sheffield speculates that villagers would have transported their dead down an avenue leading to the River Avon, then journeyed downstream in a ritual symbolizing the passage to the afterlife, finally arriving at an avenue leading up to Stonehenge from the river. "Stonehenge wasn't set in isolation," Parker Pearson says, "but was actually one-half of this monumental complex. We are looking at a pairing—one in timber to represent the transience of life, the other in stone marking the eternity of the ancestral dead."

Whatever Stonehenge's ultimate purpose, it seems clear that orientation toward the rising sun at the summer solstice connects it to planting and the harvest. Stonehenge embodies, in fact, the growing importance of agricultural production in the northern reaches of Europe. Perhaps great rituals celebrating the earth's plenty took place here. Together with



Map 1.3 Durrington Walls in relation to Stonehenge. Courtesy of National Geographic.

other megalithic structures of the era, it suggests that the late Neolithic peoples who built it were extremely social beings, capable of great cooperation. They worked together not only to find the giant stones that stand at the site, but also to quarry, transport, and raise them. In other words, theirs was a culture of some magnitude and no small skill. It was a culture capable of both solving great problems and organizing itself in the name of creating a great social center. For Stonehenge is, above all, a center of culture. Its fascination for us today lies in the fact that we know so little of the culture that left it behind.

1.2 The Role of Myth in Cultural Life

What is the function of myth in prehistoric culture?

Much of our understanding of prehistoric cultures comes from stories that have survived in cultures around the world that developed without writing—that is, **oral cultures**—such as the San cultures of Zimbabwe, and the Oceanic peoples of Tahiti in the South Pacific. These cultures have passed down their myths and histories over the centuries, from generation to generation, by word of mouth. Although, chronologically speaking, many of these cultures are contemporaneous with the medieval, Renaissance, and even modern cultures of the West, they are actually closer to the Neolithic cultures in terms of social practice and organization. Especially in terms of myths and the rituals associated with them, they can help us to understand the outlook of actual Neolithic peoples.

A **myth** is a story that a culture assumes is true. It also embodies the culture's views and beliefs about its world, often serving to explain otherwise mysterious natural phenomena. Myths stand apart from scientific explanations of the nature of reality, but as a mode of understanding and explanation, myth has been one of the most important forces driving the development of culture. Although myths are speculative, they are not pure fantasy. They are grounded in observed experience. They serve to rationalize the unknown and to explain to people the nature of the universe and their place within it.

Both nineteenth-century and more recent anthropological work among the San people suggests that their belief systems can be traced back thousands of years. As a result, the meaning of their rock art that survives in open-air caves below the overhanging stone cliffs atop the hills of what is now Matobo National Park in Zimbabwe (Fig. **1.12**), some of which dates back as far as 5,000 to 10,000 years ago, is not entirely lost. A giraffe stands above a group of smaller giraffes crossing a series of large, white, lozenge-shaped forms with brown rectangular centers, many of them overlapping one another. To the right, six humanlike figures are joined hand in hand, probably in a trance dance. For the San people, prolonged dancing activates *num*, a concept of personal energy or potency that the entire community can acquire. Led by a **shaman**, a person thought to have special ability to communicate with the spirit world, the dance encourages the *num* to heat up until it boils over and rises through the spine to explode, causing the dancers to enter a trance. Sweating and trembling, the dancers variously convulse or become rigid. They might run, jump, or fall. The San believe that in many instances, the dancer's spirit leaves the body, traveling far away, where it might battle with supernatural forces. At any event, the trance imbues the dancer with almost supernatural agency. The dancers' *num* is capable of curing illnesses, managing game, or controlling the weather.

1.2.1 Myth in the Native American Cultures of the Southwest

Seventeen thousand years ago, about the time that the hunter-gatherers at Lascaux painted its caves, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans were more than 300 feet below present-day levels, exposing a low-lying continental shelf that extended from

Fig. 1.12 Wall painting with giraffes, zebra, eland, and abstract shapes, San people, Inanke, Matobo National Park, Zimbabwe, before 1000 CE. The animals across the bottom are eland, the largest of the antelope species, resembling cattle.
Credit: Christopher and Sally Gable © Dorling Kindersley

northeastern Asia to North America. It was a landscape of grasslands and marshes, home to the woolly mammoth, the steppe bison, wild horses, caribou, and antelope. Although recent research has found evidence of migration into North America as early as 25,000 years ago, at some point around 15,000 BCE, large numbers of hunter-gatherers in northeastern Asia followed these animals across the land bridge into the Americas. By 12,000 BCE, prehistoric hunters had settled across North America and begun to move farther south, through Mesoamerica (the region extending from central Mexico to northern Central America) and on into South America, reaching the southern end of Chile no later than 11,000 BCE.

Around 9000 BCE, for reasons that are still hotly debated—perhaps a combination of overhunting and climate change—the peoples of the Americas developed agricultural societies. They domesticated animals—turkeys, guinea pigs, dogs, and llamas, though never a beast of burden, as in the rest of the world—and they cultivated a whole new range of plants, including maize (domesticated in the Valley of Mexico by 8000 BCE), beans, squash, tomatoes, avocados, potatoes, tobacco, and cacao, the source of chocolate. The wheel remained unknown to them, though they learned to adapt to almost every conceivable climate and landscape. A **creation myth**, or story of a people's origin, told by the Maidu tribe of California characterizes this early time: "For a long time everyone spoke the same language, but suddenly people began to speak in different tongues. Kulsu [the Creator], however, could speak all languages, so he called his people together and told them the names of the animals in their own language, taught them to get food, and gave them their laws and rituals. Then he sent each tribe to a different place to live."

The Anasazi and the Role of Myth The Anasazi people thrived in the American Southwest from about 900 to 1300 CE, a time roughly contemporaneous with the late Middle Ages in Europe. They left us no written record of their culture, only ruins and artifacts. As William M. Ferguson and Arthur H. Rohn, two prominent scholars of the Anasazi, have described them: "They were a Neolithic people without a beast of burden, the wheel, metal, or a written language, yet they constructed magnificent masonry housing and ceremonial structures, irrigation works, and water impoundments." At Mesa Verde, in what is today southwestern Colorado, their cliff dwellings (Fig. **1.13**) resemble many of the Neolithic cities of the Middle East, such as Ain Ghazal ("Spring of the Gazelles"), just outside what is now Amman, Jordan. Although Ain Ghazal flourished from about 7200 to 5000 BCE, thousands of years before the Mesa Verde community, both complexes were constructed with stone walls sealed with a layer of mud plaster. Their roofs were made of wooden beams cross-layered with smaller twigs and branches and sealed with mud. Like other Neolithic cultures, the Anasazi were accomplished in pottery making, decorating their creations with elaborately abstract, largely geometric shapes and patterns.

The Anasazi abandoned their communities in the late thirteenth century, perhaps because of a great drought that lasted from about 1276 to 1299. Their descendants may be the Pueblo peoples of the American Southwest today. (*Anasazi* is in fact a Navajo word meaning "enemy ancestors"—we do not know what the Anasazi called themselves.) What is remarkable about the Pueblo peoples, who, despite the fact that they speak several different languages, share a remarkably common culture, is that many aspects of their culture have survived and are practiced today much as they were in ancient times. For all Pueblo peoples, the village is not just the center of culture but the very center of the world. And the cultural center of village life is the **kiva** (Fig. **1.14**), two of which have been restored at Spruce Tree House to form the plaza visible in Fig. 1.13. They are constructed of horizontally laid logs built up to form a dome with an access hole. The roof area thus created is used as a common space. Down below, in the enclosed kiva floor, was a *sipapu*, a small, round hole symbolic of the Anasazi creation myth, which told of the emergence of the Anasazi's ancestors from the depths of

Fig. 1.13 Spruce Tree House, Mesa Verde, Colorado, Anasazi culture, ca. 1200–1300 CE. The courtyard was formed by the restoration of the roofs over two underground kivas.
Credit: © Zack Frank/Shutterstock

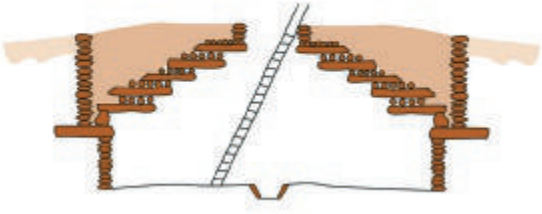


Fig. 1.14 Roof construction of a kiva. After a National Park Service pamphlet.

the earth. In the parched Southwestern desert country, it is equally true that water, like life itself, also seeps out of small fissures in the earth. Thus, it is as if the Anasazi community itself, and everything necessary to its survival, had emerged from Mother Earth.

Zuni Pueblo Emergence Tales The Pueblos have maintained the active practice of their ancient religious rites and ceremonies, which they have chosen not to share with outsiders. Most do not allow their ceremonial dances to be photographed. These dance performances tell stories that relate to the experiences of the Pueblo peoples, from planting, hunting, and fishing in daily life to the larger experiences of birth, puberty, maturity, and death. Still other stories explain the origin of the world, the emergence of a particular Pueblo people into the world, and their history. Most Pueblo people believe that they originated in the womb of Mother Earth and, like seeds sprouting from the soil in the springtime, were called out into the daylight by their Sun Father. This belief about origins is embodied in a type of narrative known as an **emergence tale**, a form of creation myth (**Reading 1.1**):

READING 1.1

Zuni emergence tale: *Talk Concerning the First Beginning*

Yes, indeed. In this world there was no one at all. Always the sun came up; always he went in. No one in the morning gave him sacred meal; no one gave him prayer sticks; it was very lonely. He said to his two children: "You will go into the fourth womb. Your fathers, your mothers, kä-eto·we, tcu-eto·we, mu-eto·we, le-eto·we, all the society priests, society pekwins, society bow priests, you will bring out yonder into the light of your sun father."

So begins this emergence tale, which embodies the fundamental principles of Zuni religious society. The Zuni, or "Sun People," are organized into groups, each responsible for a particular aspect of the community's well-being, and each group is represented by a particular *eto·we*, or fetish, connecting it to its spiritual foundation in earth's womb. The *pekwins* mentioned here are sun priests, who control the ritual calendar. Bow priests oversee warfare and social behavior. In return for corn and breath given to them by the Sun Father, the Zuni offer him cornmeal and downy feathers attached to painted prayer sticks symbolizing both clouds—the source of rain—and breath itself. Later in the tale, the two children of the Sun Father bring everyone out into the daylight for the first time:

Into the daylight of their sun father they came forth standing. Just as early dawn they came forth. After they came forth there they set down their sacred possessions in a row. The two said, "Now after a little while when your sun father comes forth standing to his sacred place you will see him face to face. Do not close your eyes." Thus he said to them. After a little while the sun came out. When he came out they looked at him. From their eyes the tears rolled down. After they had looked at him, in a little while their eyes became strong. "Alas!" Thus they said. They were covered all over with slime. With slimy tails and slimy horns, with webbed fingers, they saw one another. "Oh dear! is this what we look like?" Thus they said.

Then they could not tell which was which of their sacred possessions.

From this point on in the tale, the people and priests, led by the two children, seek to find the sacred "middle place," where things are balanced and orderly. Halona-Itiwana it is called, the sacred name of the Zuni Pueblo, "the Middle Ant Hill of the World." In the process, they are transformed from indeterminate, salamander-like creatures into their ultimate human form, and their world is transformed from chaos to order.

At the heart of the Zuni emergence tale is a moment when, to the dismay of their parents, many children are transformed into water-creatures—turtles, frogs, and the like—and the Hero Twins instruct the parents to throw these children back into the river. Here they become *kachinas* or *katcinas*, deified spirits, who explain:

May you go happily. You will tell our parents, "Do not worry." We have not perished. In order to remain thus forever we stay here. To Itiwana but one day's travel remains. Therefore we stay nearby. … Whenever the waters are exhausted and the seeds are exhausted you will send us prayer sticks. Yonder at the place of our first beginning with them we shall bend over to speak to them. Thus there will not fail to be waters. Therefore we shall stay quietly nearby.

The Pueblo believe that kachina spirits, not unlike the *num* of the San people of Africa, manifest themselves in performance and dance. Masked male dancers impersonate the kachinas, taking on their likeness as well as their supernatural character. Through these dance visits, the kachinas, although always "nearby," can exercise their powers for the good of the people. The nearly 250 kachina personalities embody clouds, rain, crops, animals, and even ideas such as growth and fertility. Although kachina figurines are made for sale as art objects, particularly by the Hopi, the actual masks worn in ceremonies are not considered art objects by the Pueblo

people. Rather, they are thought of as active agents in the transfer of power and knowledge between the gods and the men who wear them in dance. In fact, kachina dolls made for sale are considered empty of any ritual power or significance.

Pueblo emergence tales, and the ritual practices that accompany them, reflect the general beliefs of most Neolithic peoples. These include the following:

- belief that the forces of nature are inhabited by living spirits, which we call **animism**;
- belief that nature's behavior can be compared to human behavior (we call the practice of investing plants, animals, and natural phenomena with human form or attributes **anthropomorphism**), thus explaining what otherwise would remain inexplicable;
- belief that humans can communicate with the spirits of nature, and that, in return for a sacrificial offering or a prayer, the gods might intercede on their behalf.

1.2.2 Japan and the Role of Myth in the Shinto Religion

A culture's religion—that is, its understanding of the divine—is thus closely tied to and penetrated by mythical elements. Its beliefs, as embodied in its religion, stories, and myths, have always been closely tied to seasonal celebrations and agricultural production—planting and harvest in particular, as well as rain—the success of which was understood to be inextricably linked to the well-being of the community. In a fundamental sense, myths reflect the community's ideals, its history (hence the preponderance of creation myths in both ancient societies and contemporary religions), and its aspirations. Myths also tend to mirror the culture's moral and political systems, its social organization, and its most fundamental beliefs.

A profound example is the indigenous Japanese religion of Shinto. Before 200 CE, Japan was fragmented; its various regions were separated by sea and mountain, and ruled by numerous competing and often warring states. *The Records of Three Kingdoms*, a classic Chinese text dating from about 297 CE, states that in the first half of the third century CE, many or most of these states were unified under the rule of Queen Himiko. According to the *Records*: "The country formerly had a man as ruler. For some seventy or eighty years after that there were disturbances and warfare. Thereupon the people agreed upon a woman for their ruler. Her name was Himiko." After her rule, Japan was more or less united under the Yamato emperors, who modeled their rule on that of the Chinese, and whose imperial court ruled from present-day Nara Prefecture, then known as Yamato Province. Its peoples shared a mythology that was finally collected near the end of the Yamato period, in about 700 CE, in a work called the *Kojiki* or *Chronicles of Japan*. According to the *Kojiki*, the islands that constitute Japan were formed by two *kami*, or gods—Izanagi and his consort Izanami. Among their offspring was the sun goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, from whom the Japanese imperial line later claimed to have descended. In other words, Japanese emperors could claim not merely to have been put in position by the gods, but to be direct descendants of the gods, and hence divine themselves.

Amaterasu is the principal goddess of the early indigenous religious practices that came to be known as Shinto. She is housed in a shrine complex at Ise (Fig. **1.15**), a sacred site from prehistoric times. In many respects, Shinto shares much with Pueblo religions. In Shinto, trees, rocks, water, and mountains—especially Mount Fuji, the volcano just outside Tokyo that is said to look over the country as its protector—are all manifestations of the *kami*, which, like kachinas, are the spirits that are embodied in the natural world. Even the natural materials with which artists work, such as clay, wood,

Fig. 1.15 Naiku (Inner) Shrine housing Amaterasu, Ise, Japan, late 5th–early 6th century CE. Although the site has been sacred to Shinto since prehistoric times, beginning in the reign of the emperor Temmu (r. 673–86 CE), the Shinto shrine at Ise has been rebuilt by the Japanese ruling family, with some inevitable lapses, every 20 years. The most recent reconstruction occurred in 2013, and it will occur again in 2033.
Credit: age fotostock/SuperStock

and stone, are imbued with the *kami* and are to be treated with the respect and reverence due to a god. The *kami* are revered in *matsuri*, festivals that usually occur annually in which, it is believed, past and present merge into one, everyday reality fades away, and people come face to face with their gods. The *matsuri* serve to purify the territory and community associated with the *kami*, restoring them from the degradation inevitably worked upon them by the passing of time. During the festival, people partake of the original energies of the cosmos, which they will need to restore order to their world. Offerings such as fish, rice, and vegetables, as well as music and dancing, are presented to the *kami*, and the offerings of food are later eaten.

The main sanctuary, or *shoden*, at Ise consists of undecorated wooden beams and a thatched roof. Ise is exceptional in its use of these plain and simple materials, which embody not only the basic tenet of Shinto—reverence for the natural world—but also the continuity and renewal of a tradition where wood, rather than stone, has always been the principal building material. The most prominent festival at Ise is the *shikinen-sengu* ceremony, which involves the installation of the deity in a new shrine in a celebration of ritual renewal held every 20 years. The shrine buildings are rebuilt on empty ground adjacent to the older shrine, the deity is transferred to the new shrine, and the older shrine is razed, creating empty ground where the next shrine will be erected. The empty site is strewn with large white stones and is left totally bare except for a small wooden hut containing a sacred wooden pole, a practice that scholars believe dates back to very ancient times. This cycle of destruction and renewal connects the past to the present, the human community to its gods and their original energies.

The three sacred treasures of Shinto—a sword, a mirror, and a jewel necklace—were said to be given by Amaterasu to the first emperor, and they are traditionally handed down from emperor to emperor in the enthronement ceremony. The mirror is housed at Ise, the sword at the Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya, and the jewel necklace at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. These imperial regalia are not considered mere symbols of the divine but "deity-bodies" in which the powers of the gods reside, specifically wisdom in the mirror, valor in the sword, and benevolence in the jewel necklace. To this day, millions of Japanese continue to practice Shinto, and they undertake pilgrimages to Ise each year.

1.3 Mesopotamia: Power and Social Order in the Early Middle East

What characteristics distinguish the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, and how do they differ from that of the Hebrews?

In September 1922, British archaeologist C. Leonard Woolley boarded a steamer, beginning a journey that would take him to southern Iraq. There, Woolley and his team would discover one of the richest treasure troves in the history of archaeology in the ruins of the ancient city of Ur. Woolley concentrated his energies on the burial grounds surrounding the city's central **ziggurat**, a pyramidal temple structure consisting of successive platforms with outside staircases and a shrine at the top (Figs. **1.16, 1.17**).

Fig. 1.16 The ziggurat at Ur (present-day Muqaiyir, Iraq), ca. 2100 BCE. The best preserved and most fully restored of the ancient Sumerian temples, this ziggurat was the center of the city of Ur, in the lower plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.
Credit: Nik Wheeler/Getty Images

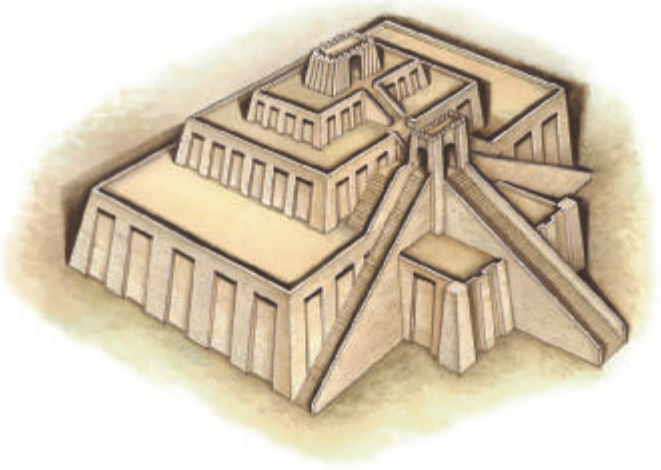


Fig. 1.17 Reconstruction drawing of the ziggurat at Ur (present-day Muqaiyir, Iraq), ca. 2100 BCE. British archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley undertook reconstruction of the ziggurat in the 1930s (see Fig. 1.16). In his reconstruction, a temple on top, which was the home of the patron deity of the city, crowned the three-tiered platform, the base of which measures 140 by 200 feet. The entire structure rose to a height of 85 feet. Woolley's reconstruction was halted before the second and third platforms had been completed.

Map 1.4 Major Mesopotamian capitals, ca. 2600–500 BCE.

Digging there in the winter of 1927, Woolley unearthed a series of tombs with several rooms, many bodies, and masses of golden objects—vessels, crowns, necklaces, statues, and weapons—as well as jewelry and lyres made of electrum and the deep-blue semiprecious stone lapis lazuli. With the same sense of excitement that was felt by Jean-Marie Chauvet and his companions when they first saw the paintings on the wall of Chauvet Cave, Woolley was careful to keep what he called the "royal tombs" secret. On January 4, 1928, he telegrammed his colleagues in Latin. Translated to English, it read:

> I found the intact tomb, stone built, and vaulted over with bricks of queen Shubad [later known as Puabi] adorned with a dress in which gems, flower crowns and animal figures are woven. Tomb magnificent with jewels and golden cups.—WOOLLEY

When the discovery was made public, it remained worldwide news for years.

Archaeologists and historians were especially excited by Woolley's discoveries because they opened a window onto the larger region we call Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Ur was one of 30 or 40 cities that arose in Sumer, the southern portion of Mesopotamia (Map **1.4**). In fact, its people abandoned the city more than 2,000 years ago, when the Euphrates changed its course away from the city.

1.3.1 Sumerian Ur

Ur is not the oldest city to occupy the southern plains of Mesopotamia, the region known as Sumer. That distinction belongs to Uruk, just to the north, which by about 3200 BCE was probably the largest settlement in the world. But the temple structure at Ur is of particular note because it is the most fully preserved and restored. It was most likely designed to evoke the mountains to the north, in Anatolia, which were the source of the water that flowed through the two rivers and, so, the source of life. Topped by a sanctuary, the ziggurat might also have symbolized a bridge between heaven and earth. Woolley, who supervised the reconstruction of the first platform and stairway of the ziggurat at Ur, speculated that the platforms of the temple were originally not paved but covered with soil and planted with trees, an idea that modern archaeologists no longer accept.

Visitors—almost certainly limited to members of the priesthood—would climb the stairs to the temple on top. They might bring an offering of food or an animal to be sacrificed to the resident god—at Ur, it was Nanna or Sin, god of the moon. Visitors often placed in the temple a statue that represented themselves in an attitude of perpetual prayer. We know this from the inscriptions on many of the statues. One, dedicated to the goddess Tarsirsir, protector of Girsu, a city-state across the Tigris and not far upstream of Ur, reads:

> To Bau, gracious lady, daughter of An, queen of the holy city, her mistress, for the life of Nammahani … has dedicated as an offering this statue of the protective goddess of Tarsirsir which she has introduced to the courtyard of Bau. May the statue, to which let my mistress turn her ear, speak my prayers.

A group of such statues, found in 1934 in the shrine room of a temple at Tell Asmar, near present-day Baghdad, includes seven men and two women (Fig. **1.18**). The men wear belted, fringed skirts. They have huge eyes, inlaid with lapis lazuli or

shell set in bitumen. The single arching eyebrow and crimped beard (only the figure at the right is beardless) are typical of Sumerian sculpture. The two women wear robes. All figures clasp their hands in front of them, suggestive of prayer when empty and of making an offering when holding a cup. Some scholars believe that the tallest man represents Abu, god of vegetation, owing to his especially large eyes, but all the figures are probably worshipers.

To the Mesopotamians, human society was merely part of the larger society of the universe governed by these gods, and a reflection of it. Anu, father of the gods, represents the authority, which the ruler emulates as lawmaker and giver. Enlil, god of the air—the calming breeze as well as the violent storm—is equally powerful, but he represents force, which the ruler emulates in his role as military leader. The active principles of fertility, birth, and agricultural plenty are those of the goddess Belitili, while water, the life force itself, the creative element, is embodied in the god Ea, or Enki, who is also god of the arts. Both Belitili and Ea are subject to the authority of Anu. Ishtar is subject to Enlil, ruled by his breezes (in the case of love) and by his storm (in the case of war). A host of lesser gods represent natural phenomena, or, in some cases, abstract ideas, such as truth and justice.

The Mesopotamian ruler, often represented as a priest-king, and often believed to possess divine attributes, acts as the intermediary between the gods and humankind. His ultimate responsibility is the behavior of the gods—whether Ea blesses the crops with rains, Ishtar his armies with victory, and so on.

The Royal Tombs of Ur Religion was central to the people of Ur, and the cemetery discovered by Woolley tells us a great deal about the nature of their beliefs. He unearthed some 1,840 graves, most dating from between 2600 and 2000 BCE. The greatest number of graves were individual burials of rich and poor alike. However, some included a built burial chamber rather than just a coffin, and contained more than one body, in some cases as many as 80. These multiple burials, and the evidence of elaborate burial rituals, suggest that members of a king or queen's court accompanied the ruler to the grave. The two richest burial sites, built one behind the other, are now identified as royal tombs, one belonging to Queen Puabi, the other to an unknown king (but it is not that of her husband, King Meskalamdug, who is buried in a different grave).

One of Woolley's most important discoveries in the Royal Cemetery was the so-called *Royal Standard of Ur* (Fig. **1.19**). The main panels of this rectangular box of unknown function are called "War" and "Peace," because they illustrate, on one side, a military victory and, on the other, the subsequent banquet celebrating the event, or perhaps a cult ritual. Each panel is composed of three **registers**, or self-contained horizontal bands, within which the figures stand on a **ground-line**, or baseline.

At the right side of the top register of the "Peace" panel (the lower half of Fig. 1.19), a musician plays a lyre, and behind him another, apparently female, sings. The king, at the left end, is recognizable because he is taller than the others and wears a tufted skirt, his head breaking the register line on top. In this convention, known as **social perspective**, or **hieratic scale** (hierarchy of scale), the most important figures are represented as larger than the others. In other registers on the "Peace" side of the *Standard*, servants bring cattle, goats, sheep, and fish to the celebration. These represent the bounty of the land and perhaps even delicacies from lands to the north. (Notice that the costumes and hairstyles of the figures carrying sacks in the lowest register are different from those in the other two.) This display of consumption and the distribution of food may have been intended to dramatize the power of the king by showing his ability to control trade routes.

Fig. 1.18 Nine of twelve dedicatory statues, from the Abu Temple, Tell Asmar, Iraq, ca. 2900–2700 BCE. Marble, alabaster, and gypsum, height of tallest figure, approx. 30". Excavated by the Iraq Expedition of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, February 13, 1934. The wide-eyed appearance of these figures is probably meant to suggest they are gazing in perpetual awe at the deity. **Credit:** Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

On the "War" side of the *Standard*, the king stands in the middle of the top register. War chariots trample the enemy on the bottom register. (Note that the chariots have solid wheels; spoked wheels were not invented until approximately 1800 BCE.) In the middle register, soldiers wearing leather cloaks and bronze helmets lead naked, bound prisoners to the king in the top register, who will presumably decide their fate. Many of the bodies found in the royal tombs were wearing similar military garments. The importance of the *Royal Standard of Ur* is not simply as documentary evidence of Sumerian life but as one of the earliest examples we have of historical narrative.

1.3.2 Akkad

At the height of the Sumerians' power in southern Mesopotamia, a people known as the Akkadians arrived from the north and settled in the area around present-day Baghdad. Their capital city, Akkad, has never been discovered and in all likelihood lies under Baghdad itself. Under Sargon I (r. ca. 2332–2279 BCE), the Akkadians conquered virtually all other cities in Mesopotamia, including those in Sumer, to become the region's most powerful city-state. Sargon named himself "King of the Four Quarters of the World" and equated himself with the gods, a status bestowed upon Akkadian rulers from Sargon's time forward. Legends about Sargon's might and power survived in the region for thousands of years. Indeed, the legend of his birth gave rise to what amounts to a **narrative genre** (a class or category of story with a universal theme) that survives to the present day: the boy from humble origins who rises to a position of might and power, the so-called rags-to-riches story.

As depicted on surviving clay tablets, Sargon was an illegitimate child whose mother deposited him in the Euphrates River in a basket. There, a man named Akki (after whom Akkad itself is named) found him while drawing water from the river, and raised him as his own son. Such stories

Fig. 1.19 ***Royal Standard of Ur*, front ("War") and back ("Peace") sides, from Tomb 779, cemetery at Ur (present-day Muqaiyir, Iraq), ca. 2600 BCE.** Shell, lapis lazuli, and red limestone, originally on a wooden framework, height 8", length 19". British Museum, London. For all its complexity of design, this object is not much bigger than a sheet of legal paper. Its function remains a mystery, though it may have served as a pillow or headrest. Woolley's designation of it as a standard was purely conjectural.
Credit: © The Trustees of The British Museum

of abandonment, orphanhood, and being a foundling raised by foster parents were to become a standard feature in the narratives of mythic heroes.

Although the Akkadian language was very different from Sumerian, through most of the third millennium BCE—that is, until Sargon's dynastic ambitions altered the balance of power in the region—the two cultures coexisted peacefully. The Akkadians adopted Sumerian culture and customs and their style of **cuneiform writing**, a script made of wedge-shaped characters, although not their language. In fact, many bilingual dictionaries and Sumerian texts with Akkadian translations survive. The Akkadian language was Semitic in origin, having more in common with other languages of the region, particularly Hebrew, Phoenician, and Arabic. It quickly became the common language of Mesopotamia, and peoples of the region spoke Akkadian, or dialects of it, throughout the second millennium BCE and well into the first.

Although Akkad was arguably the most influential of the Mesopotamian cultures, few Akkadian artifacts survive, perhaps because Akkad and other nearby Akkadian cities have disappeared under Baghdad and the alluvial soils of the Euphrates plain. Several impressive sculptural works do remain, however, among them the bronze head of an Akkadian man (Fig. **1.20**), found at Nineveh. It was once believed to be Sargon the Great himself, but many scholars now think it was part of a statue of Sargon's grandson Naramsin (ca. 2254–2218 BCE). It may be neither, but it is certainly the head of a king. Highly realistic, it depicts a man who appears both powerful and majestic. In its damaged condition, the head is all that survives of a life-size statue that was destroyed in antiquity. Its original gemstone eyes were removed, perhaps by plundering soldiers, or possibly by a political enemy who recognized the sculpture as an emblem of absolute majesty. In the fine detail surrounding the face—in the beard and elaborate coiffure, with its braid circling the head—it testifies to the Akkadian mastery of the lost-wax casting technique, which originated in Mesopotamia as early as the third millennium BCE. This technique was later perfected (especially by the Greeks), but this Akkadian head is the earliest surviving monumental work made using the lost-wax technique.

Fig. 1.20 ***Head of an Akkadian Man*, from Nineveh (present-day Kuyunjik, Iraq), ca. 2300–2200 BCE.** Copper alloy, height 14⅛". Iraq Museum, Baghdad. It seems certain that this head was intentionally mutilated in antiquity, perhaps as a political statement.
Credit: © Photo Scala, Florence

1.3.3 Babylon

The Akkadians dominated Mesopotamia for just 150 years, their rule collapsing not long after 2200 BCE. For the next 400 years, various city-states thrived locally. No one in Mesopotamia matched the Akkadians' power until the first decades of the eighteenth century BCE, when Hammurabi of Babylon (r. 1792–1750 BCE) gained control of most of the region.

The Law Code of Hammurabi Hammurabi imposed order on Babylon, where laxness and disorder, if not chaos, reigned when he assumed power. A giant stele survives, upon which is inscribed the so-called Law Code of Hammurabi (Fig. **1.21**). It is a record of decisions and decrees made by Hammurabi over the course of some 40 years of his reign, and it is also, by far, the most complete such set of laws. Although by no means the first of its kind, it is the first set of laws to have continued in force after the death of the ruler who first imposed them. The stele's purpose was to celebrate his sense of justice and the wisdom of his rule. Atop the stele, in sculptural relief, Hammurabi (left) receives the blessing of Shamash, the sun god; notice the rays of light coming from his shoulders. The god is much larger than Hammurabi; in fact, he is to Hammurabi as Hammurabi, the patriarch, is to his people. If Hammurabi is divine, he is still subservient to the greater gods. At the same time, the phallic design of the stele asserts the masculine prowess of the king.

Below the relief, 282 separate "articles" cover both sides of the diorite monument. One of the great debates of legal history is the question of whether these articles actually constitute a code of law. If by *code* we mean a comprehensive, systematic, and methodical compilation of all aspects of Mesopotamian law, then they do not. This code is instead selective, even eccentric, in the issues it addresses. Many of its articles seem to be "reforms" of existing law, and as such they define new principles of justice.

Fig. 1.21 ***Stele of Hammurabi*****, from Susa (present-day Shush, Iran), ca. 1760 BCE.** Diorite, height of stele approx. 7', height of relief 28". Musée du Louvre, Paris. Like the *Stele of Naramsin*, this stele was stolen by invading Elamites and removed to Susa, where, together with the *Stele of Naramsin*, it was excavated by the French in 1898.
Credit: © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Franck Raux

Chief among these is the principle of *talion*—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—which Hammurabi introduced to Mesopotamian law. (Sections of earlier codes from Ur compensate victims of crimes with money.) This principle punished the violence or injustice perpetuated by one free person upon another, but violence by an upper-class person on a lower-class person was penalized much less severely. Slaves (who might be either war captives or debtors) enjoyed no legal protection at all—only the protection of their owner.

The code tells us much about the daily lives of Mesopotamian peoples, including conflicts great and small. In rules governing family relations and class divisions in Mesopotamian society, inequalities are sharply drawn. Women are inferior to men, and wives, like slaves, are the personal property of their husbands (although protected from the abuse of neglectful or unjust husbands). Incest is strictly forbidden. Fathers cannot arbitrarily disinherit their sons—a son must have committed some "heavy crime" to justify such treatment. The code's strongest concern is the maintenance and protection of the family, though trade practices and property rights are also of major importance.

The following excerpts from the code, beginning with Hammurabi's assertion of his descent from the gods and his status as their favorite (Reading **1.2**), give a sense of the code's scope. But the code is, finally, and perhaps above all, the gift of a king to his people, as Hammurabi's epilogue, at the end of the excerpt, makes clear:

READING 1.2

from the Law Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1760 BCE)

When the august god Anu, king of the Anunnaku deities, and the god Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, who determines the destinies of the land, allotted supreme power over all peoples to the god Marduk, the firstborn son of the god Ea, exalted him among the Igigu deities, named the city of Babylon with its august name and made it supreme exalted within the regions of the world, and established for him within it eternal kingship whose foundations are as fixed as heaven and earth, at that time, the gods Anu and Bel, for the enhancement of the well-being of the people, named me by my name, Hammurabi, the pious prince, who venerates the gods, to make justice prevail in the land, to abolish the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, to rise like the Sun-god Shamash over all humankind, to illuminate the land. …

1. If a man accuses another man and charges him with homicide but cannot bring proof against him, his accuser shall be killed. …

8. If a man steals an ox, a sheep, a donkey, a pig, or a boat—if it belongs either to the god or to the palace, he shall give thirtyfold; if it belongs to a commoner, he shall replace it tenfold; if the thief does not have anything to give, he shall be killed. …

32. If there is either a soldier or a fisherman who is taken captive while on a royal campaign, a merchant redeems him, and helps him get back to his city—if there are sufficient in his own estate for the redeeming, he himself shall redeem himself; if there are not sufficient means in his estate to redeem him he shall be redeemed by his city's temple; if there are not sufficient means in his city's temple to redeem him, the palace shall redeem him; but his field, orchard, or house shall not be given for his redemption. …

143. If [a woman] is not circumspect, but is wayward, squanders her household possessions, and disparages her husband, they shall cast that woman into the water. …

195. If a child should strike his father, they shall cut off his hand.

196. If an *awilu* [in general, a person subject to law] should blind the eye of another *awilu*, they shall blind his eye. …

197. If he should break the bone of another *awilu*, they shall break his bone. …

229. If a builder constructs a house for a man but does not make his work sound, and the house he constructs collapses and causes the death of the householder, that builder shall be killed. …

282. If a slave should declare to his master, "You are not my master," he (the master) shall bring charge and proof against him that he is indeed his slave, and his master shall cut off his ear. …

These are the decisions which Hammurabi, the able king, has established, and thereby has directed the land along the course of truth and the correct way of life.

I am Hammurabi, noble king …

May any king who will appear in the land in the future, at any time, observe the pronouncements of justice that I have inscribed upon my stele. May he not alter the judgments that I rendered and verdicts that I gave, nor remove my engraved image. If that man has discernment, and is capable of providing just ways for his land may he heed the pronouncements I have inscribed upon my stele, may the stele reveal for him the traditions, the proper conduct, the judgments of the land that I rendered, the verdicts of the land that I gave and may he, too, provide just ways for all humankind in his care. …

I am Hammurabi, king of justice. …

Consequences of the Code Even if Hammurabi meant only to assert the idea of justice as the basis for his own divine rule, the stele established what amounted to a uniform code throughout Mesopotamia. It was repeatedly copied for over 1,000 years, long after it was removed to Susa in 1157 BCE with the *Stele of Naramsin*, and it established the rule of law in Mesopotamia for a millennium. From this point on, the authority and power of the ruler could no longer be capricious, subject to the whim, fancy, and subjective interpretation of his singular personality. The law was now, at least ostensibly, more objective and impartial. The ruler was required to follow certain prescribed procedures. But the law, so prescribed in writing, was now also much less flexible, hard to change, and much more impersonal. Exceptions to the rule were few and difficult to justify. Eventually, written law would remove justice from the discretion of the ruler and replace it with a legal establishment of learned judges charged with enacting the king's statutes.

1.3.4 The Assyrian Empire and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*

With the fall of Babylon in 1595 BCE to a sudden invasion of Hittites from Turkey, the entire Middle East appears to have undergone a period of disruption and instability. Only the Assyrians, who lived around the city of Assur in the north, managed to maintain a continuing cultural identity. Over the centuries, they became increasingly powerful until, beginning with the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (r. 883–859 BCE), they dominated the entire region.

Ashurnasirpal II built a magnificent capital at Kalhu (present-day Nimrud), on the Tigris River, surrounded by nearly 5 miles of walls, 120 feet thick and 42 feet high. A surviving inscription tells us that Ashurnasirpal invited 69,574 people to celebrate the city's dedication. The entire population of the region, of all classes, probably did not exceed 100,000, and thus many guests from throughout Mesopotamia and farther away must have been invited.

The Assyrians also used their power to preserve Mesopotamian culture. Two hundred years after the reign of Ashurnasirpal, Ashurbanipal (r. 668–627 BCE) created the great library. Its still partially intact collection today consists of 20,000 to 30,000 cuneiform tablets containing approximately 1,200 distinct texts. Each of its many rooms was dedicated to individual subjects—history and government, religion and magic, geography, science, poetry, and important government materials. It was in this library that Ashurbanipal preserved the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which, in turn, preserves the historical lineage of all Mesopotamian kings—Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian. The tale embodies their own heroic grandeur, and thus the grandeur of their peoples.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* consists of some 2,900 lines written in Akkadian cuneiform script on 11 clay tablets, none of them completely whole. It was composed sometime before Ashurbanipal's reign, possibly as early as 1200 BCE, by Sinleqqiunninni, a scholar-priest of Uruk. This would make Sinleqqiunninni the oldest known author. We know that Gilgamesh was the fourth king of Uruk, ruling sometime between 2700 and 2500 BCE. (The dates of his rule were recorded on a clay tablet, the *Sumerian King List*.) Recovered fragments of his story date back nearly to his actual reign, and the story we have, known as the Standard Version, is a compilation of these earlier versions.

The work is the first example we have of an **epic**, a long, narrative poem in elevated language that follows characters of a high position through a series of adventures, often including a visit to the world of the dead. For many literary scholars, the epic is the most exalted poetic form. The central figure is a legendary or historical figure of heroic proportion, in this case the Sumerian king Gilgamesh. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* had been considered the earliest epics, until late in the nineteenth century, when *Gilgamesh* was discovered in the great library of King Ashurbanipal at Nineveh.

The scope of an epic is large. The supernatural world of gods and goddesses usually plays a role in the story, as do battles in which the hero demonstrates his strength and courage. The poem's language is suitably dignified, often consisting of many long, formal speeches. Lists of various heroes or catalogs of their achievements are frequent. Perhaps most important, the epic illuminates the development of a nation or race. It is a national poem, describing a people's common heritage and celebrating its cultural identity.

Epics are often compilations of preexisting myths and tales handed down generation to generation, often orally, and finally unified into a whole by the epic poet. Indeed, the outline of the story is usually known to its audience. The poet's contribution is the artistry brought to the subject, demonstrated through the use of epithets, metaphors, and similes. **Epithets** are words or phrases that characterize a person (for example, "Enkidu, the protector of herdsmen," or "Enkidu, the son of the mountain"). **Metaphors** are words or phrases used in place of another to suggest a similarity between the two, as when Gilgamesh is described as a "raging flood-wave who destroys even walls of stone." **Similes** compare two unlike things by the use of the word "like" or "as" (for example, "the land shattered like a pot").

The Adventure of Gilgamesh and Enkidu At the center of the poem, in Tablet 6, Ishtar, goddess of both love and war, offers to marry Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh refuses, which unleashes Ishtar's wrath. She sends the Bull of Heaven to destroy them, but Gilgamesh and Enkidu slay it instead (**Reading 1.3a**):

READING 1.3a

from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet 6 (late 2nd millennium BCE)

A WOMAN SCORNED

… When Gilgamesh placed his crown on his head, Princess
Ishtar raised her eyes to the beauty of Gilgamesh.
"Come along, Gilgamesh, be you my husband,
to me grant your lusciousness.[1]
Be you my husband, and I will be your wife.
I will have harnessed for you a chariot of lapis
lazuli and gold,
with wheels of gold …
Bowed down beneath you will be kings, lords,
and princes.
The Lullubu people[2] will bring you the produce of the
mountains and countryside as tribute.
Your she-goats will bear triplets, your ewes twins,
your donkey under burden will overtake the mule,
your steed at the chariot will be bristling to gallop,
your ox at the yoke will have no match."
Gilgamesh addressed Princess Ishtar saying:
"Do you need oil or garments for your body?
Do you lack anything for food or drink?
I would gladly feed you food fit for a god,
I would gladly give you wine fit for a king …
[You are] a half-door that keeps out neither breeze
nor blast,
a palace that crushes down valiant warriors,
an elephant who devours its own covering,
pitch that blackens the hands of its bearer,
a waterskin that soaks its bearer through,
limestone that buckles out the stone wall,
a battering ram that attracts the enemy land,
a shoe that bites its owner's feet!
Where are your bridegrooms that you keep forever? …
You loved the supremely mighty lion,
yet you dug for him seven and again seven pits.
You loved the stallion, famed in battle,
yet you ordained for him the whip, the goad, and the lash,
ordained for him to gallop for seven and seven hours,
ordained for him drinking from muddied waters,[3]
you ordained for his mother Silili to wail continually.
You loved the Shepherd, the Master Herder,
who continually presented you with bread baked in
embers,
and who daily slaughtered for you a kid.
Yet you struck him, and turned him into a wolf,
so his own shepherds now chase him
and his own dogs snap at his shins.
You loved Ishullanu, your father's date gardener,
who continually brought you baskets of dates,
and brightened your table daily.
You raised your eyes to him, and you went to him:
'Oh my Ishullanu, let us taste of your strength, stretch
out your hand to me, and touch our "vulva."'[4]
Ishullanu said to you:
'Me? What is it you want from me? …'
As you listened to these his words
you struck him, turning him into a dwarf(?),[5] …
And now me! It is me you love, and you will ordain for
me as for them!"

HER FURY

When Ishtar heard this
in a fury she went up to the heavens,
going to Anu, her father, and crying,
going to Antum, her mother, and weeping:
"Father, Gilgamesh has insulted me over and over,
Gilgamesh has recounted despicable deeds about me,
despicable deeds and curses!"
Anu addressed Princess Ishtar, saying:
"What is the matter? Was it not you who provoked
King Gilgamesh?
So Gilgamesh recounted despicable deeds about you,
despicable deeds and curses!"
Ishtar spoke to her father, Anu, saying:
"Father, give me the Bull of Heaven,
so he can kill Gilgamesh in his dwelling.

[1] Literally "fruit."
[2] The Lullubu were a wild mountain people living in the area of present-day western Iran. The meaning is that even the wildest, least controllable of peoples will recognize Gilgamesh's rule and bring tribute.
[3] Horses put their front feet in the water when drinking, churning up mud.
[4] This line probably contains a word play on *hurdatu* as "vulva" and "date palm," the latter being said (in another unrelated text) to be "like the vulva."
[5] Or "frog"?

If you do not give me the Bull of Heaven,
I will knock down the Gates of the Netherworld,
I will smash the door posts, and leave the doors flat down,
and will let the dead go up to eat the living!
And the dead will outnumber the living!"
Anu addressed Princess Ishtar, saying:
"If you demand the Bull of Heaven from me,
there will be seven years of empty husks for the land of Uruk.
Have you collected grain for the people?
Have you made grasses grow for the animals?"
Ishtar addressed Anu, her father, saying:
"I have heaped grain in the granaries for the people,
I made grasses grow for the animals,
in order that they might eat in the seven years of empty husks.
I have collected grain for the people,
I have made grasses grow for the animals. …"
When Anu heard her words,
he placed the nose-rope of the Bull of Heaven in her hand.
Ishtar led the Bull of Heaven down to the earth.
When it reached Uruk …
It climbed down to the Euphrates …
At the snort of the Bull of Heaven a huge pit opened up,
and 100 Young Men of Uruk fell in.
At his second snort a huge pit opened up,
and 200 Young Men of Uruk fell in.
At his third snort a huge pit opened up,
and Enkidu fell in up to his waist.
Then Enkidu jumped out and seized the Bull of Heaven by its horns.
The Bull spewed his spittle in front of him,
with his thick tail he flung *his dung behind him* (?).
Enkidu addressed Gilgamesh, saying:
"My friend, we can be bold(?) …
Between the nape, the horns, and … thrust your sword."
Enkidu stalked and *hunted down* the Bull of Heaven.
He grasped it by the thick of its tail
and held onto it with both his hands (?),
while Gilgamesh, like an *expert butcher*,
boldly and *surely approached the Bull of Heaven*.
Between the nape, the horns, and … he thrust his sword. …
Ishtar went up onto the top of the Wall of Uruk-Haven,
cast herself into the pose of mourning, and hurled her woeful curse:
"Woe unto Gilgamesh who slandered me and killed the Bull of Heaven!"
When Enkidu heard this pronouncement of Ishtar,
he wrenched off the Bull's hindquarter and flung it in her face:
"If I could only get at you I would do the same to you!
I would drape his innards over your arms!" …
Gilgamesh said to the palace retainers:
"Who is the bravest of the men?
Who is the boldest of the males?
—Gilgamesh is the bravest of the men,
the boldest of the males!
She at whom we flung the hindquarter of the Bull of Heaven in anger,
Ishtar has no one that pleases her …"

But Gilgamesh and Enkidu cannot avoid the wrath of the gods altogether. One of them, the gods decide, must die, and so Enkidu suffers a long, painful death, attended by his friend, Gilgamesh, who is terrified (**Reading 1.3b**):

READING 1.3b

from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet 10 (late 2nd millennium BCE)

My friend … Enkidu, whom I love deeply, who went through every hardship with me,
the fate of mankind has overtaken him.
Six days and seven nights I mourned over him
and would not allow him to be buried
until a maggot fell out of his nose.
I was terrified by his appearance,
I began to fear death, and so roam the wilderness.
The issue of Enkidu, my friend, oppresses me,
so I have been roaming long trails through the wilderness.
How can I stay silent, how can I be still?
My friend whom I love has turned to clay.
Am I not like him? Will I lie down, never to get up again?

Gilgamesh Confronts the Idea of Death Dismayed at the prospect of his own mortality, Gilgamesh embarks on a journey to find the secret of eternal life from the only mortal known to have attained it, Utnapishtim, who tells him the story of the Great Flood. Several elements of Utnapishtim's story deserve explanation. First of all, this is the earliest known version of the flood story that occurs also in the Hebrew Bible, with Utnapishtim in the role of the biblical Noah. The motif of a single man and wife surviving a worldwide flood brought about by the gods occurs in several Middle Eastern cultures, suggesting a single origin or shared tradition. In the Sumerian version, Ea (Enki) warns Utnapishtim of the flood by speaking to the wall, thereby technically keeping the agreement among the gods not to warn mortals of their upcoming disaster. The passage in which Ea tells Utnapishtim how to explain his actions to his people without revealing the secret of the gods is one of extraordinary complexity and wit (**Reading 1.3c**). The word for "bread" is *kukku*, a pun on the word for "darkness," *kukkû*. Similarly, the word for "wheat," *kibtu*, also means "misfortune." Thus, when Ea says, "He will let loaves of bread shower down, / and in the evening a rain of wheat," he is also

telling the truth: "He will let loaves of darkness shower down, and in the evening a rain of misfortune."

READING 1.3c

from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet 11 (late 2nd millennium BCE)

Utnapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:
"I will reveal to you, Gilgamesh, a thing that is hidden,
a secret of the gods I will tell you!
Shuruppak, a city that you surely know,
situated on the banks of the Euphrates,
that city was very old, and there were gods inside it.
The hearts of the Great Gods moved them to inflict the Flood. …
Ea, the Clever Prince, was under oath with them
so he repeated their talk to the reed house:
'Reed house, reed house! Wall, wall!
Hear, O reed house! Understand, O wall!
O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubartutu:
Tear down the house and build a boat!
Abandon wealth and seek living beings!
Spurn possessions and keep alive human beings!
Make all living beings go up into the boat.
The boat which you are to build,
its dimensions must measure equal to each other:
its length must correspond to its width,
Roof it over like the Apsu.'
I understood and spoke to my lord, Ea:
'My lord, thus is your command.
I will heed and will do it.
But what shall I answer the city, the populace, and the Elders?'

Ea spoke, commanding me, his servant:
'… this is what you must say to them:
"It appears that Enlil is rejecting me
so I cannot reside in your city,
nor set foot on Enlil's earth.
I will go … to live with my lord, Ea,
and upon you he will rain down abundance,
a profusion of fowls, myriad fishes.
He will bring you a harvest of wealth,
in the morning he will let loaves of bread shower down,
and in the evening a rain of wheat."' …

I butchered oxen for the meat(?),
and day upon day I slaughtered sheep.
I gave the workmen(?) ale, beer, oil, and wine, as if it were river water,
so they could make a party like the New Year's Festival. …
The boat was finished. …
Whatever I had I loaded on it:
whatever silver I had I loaded on it,
whatever gold I had I loaded on it.
All the living beings that I had I loaded on it,
I had all my kith and kin go up into the boat,
all the beasts and animals of the field and the craftsmen I had go up. …

I watched the appearance of the weather—
the weather was frightful to behold!
I went into the boat and sealed the entry. …
Just as dawn began to glow
there arose on the horizon a black cloud.
Adad rumbled inside it. …
Stunned shock over Adad's deeds overtook the heavens,
and turned to blackness all that had been light.
The … land shattered like a … pot.

All day long the South Wind blew …,
blowing fast, submerging the mountain in water,
overwhelming the people like an attack.
No one could see his fellow,
they could not recognize each other in the torrent.
The gods were frightened by the Flood,
and retreated, ascending to the heaven of Anu.
The gods were cowering like dogs, crouching by the outer wall.
Ishtar shrieked like a woman in childbirth. …
Six days and seven nights
came the wind and flood, the storm flattening the land.
When the seventh day arrived, the storm was pounding,
the flood was a war—struggling with itself like a woman writhing (in labor).
The sea calmed, fell still, the whirlwind (and) flood stopped up.
I looked around all day long—quiet had set in
and all the human beings had turned to clay!
The terrain was flat as a roof.
I opened a vent and fresh air (daylight?) fell upon the side of my nose.

I fell to my knees and sat weeping,
tears streaming down the side of my nose.
I looked around for coastlines in the expanse of the sea,
and at twelve leagues there emerged a region (of land).
On Mt. Nimush the boat lodged firm,
Mt. Nimush held the boat, allowing no sway."

When the gods discover Utnapishtim alive, smelling his incense offering, they are outraged. They did not want a single living being to escape. But since he has, they grant him immortality and allow him to live forever in the Faraway. As a reward for Gilgamesh's own efforts, Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh of a secret plant that will give him perpetual youth. "I will eat it," he tells the boatman who is returning him home, "and I will return to what I was in my youth." But when they

stop for the night, Gilgamesh decides to bathe in a cool pool, where the scent of the plant attracts a snake who steals it away, an echo of the biblical story of Adam and Eve, whose own immortality is stolen away by the wiles of a serpent—and their own carelessness. Broken-hearted, Gilgamesh returns home empty-handed.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the first known literary work to confront the idea of death, which is, in many ways, the very embodiment of the unknown. Although the hero goes to the very ends of the earth in his quest, he ultimately leaves with nothing to show for his efforts except an understanding of his own, very human, limitations. He is the first hero in Western literature to yearn for what he can never attain, to seek to understand what must always remain a mystery. And, of course, until the death of his friend Enkidu, Gilgamesh had seemed, in his self-confident confrontation with Ishtar and in the defeat of the Bull of Heaven, as near to a god as a mortal might be. In short, he embodied the Mesopotamian hero-king. Even as the poem asserts the hero-king's divinity—Gilgamesh is, remember, two parts god—it emphasizes his humanity and the mortality that accompanies it. By making literal the first words of the *Sumerian King List*—"After the kingship had descended from heaven"—the *Epic of Gilgamesh* acknowledges what many Mesopotamian kings were unwilling to admit, at least publicly: their own, very human, limitations, and their own powerlessness in the face of the ultimate unknown—death.

1.3.5 The Hebrews

The Hebrews (from *Habiru*, "outcast" or "nomad") were a people forced out of their homeland in the Mesopotamian basin in about 2000 BCE. According to their tradition, it was in the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was there that Noah survived the same great flood that Utnapishtim survived in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. And it was out of there that Abraham of Ur led his people into Canaan, in order to escape the warlike Akkadians and the increasingly powerful Babylonians. There is no actual historical evidence to support these stories. We know them only from the Hebrew Bible—a word that derives from the Greek, *biblia*, "books"—a compilation of hymns, prophecies, and laws transcribed by its authors between 800 and 400 BCE, some 1,000 years after the events the Hebrew Bible describes. Although the archaeological record in the Near East confirms some of what these scribes and priests wrote, especially about more contemporaneous events, the stories themselves were edited and collated into the stories we know today. They recount the Assyrian conquest of Israel, the Jews' later exile to Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II in 587 BCE, and their eventual return to Jerusalem after the Persians conquered the Babylonians in 538 BCE. The stories represent the Hebrews' attempt to maintain their sense of their own history and destiny. But it would be a mistake to succumb to the temptation to read the Hebrew Bible as an accurate account of the historical record. Like all ancient histories, passed down orally through generation upon generation, it contains its fair share of mythologizing.

The Hebrews differed from other Near Eastern cultures in that their religion was **monotheistic**—they worshiped a single god, whereas others in the region tended to have gods for their clans and cities, among other things. According to Hebrew tradition, God made an agreement with the Hebrews, first with Noah after the flood, later renewed with Abraham and each of the subsequent **patriarchs** (scriptural fathers of the Hebrew people): "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you" (Genesis 35:11–12). In return for this promise, the Hebrews, the "chosen people," agreed to obey God's will. "Chosen people" means that the Jews were chosen to set an example of a higher moral standard (a light unto the nations), not chosen in the sense of favored, which is a common misunderstanding of the term.

Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible, tells the story of the creation of the world out of a "formless void." It describes God's creation of the world and all its creatures, including Adam and Eve, and his continuing interest in the workings of the world, an interest that would lead, in the story of Noah, to God's near-destruction of all things. It also posits humankind as easily tempted by evil. It documents the moment of the introduction of sin (and shame) into the cosmos, associating these with the single characteristic separating humans from animals—knowledge. And it shows, in the example of Noah, the reward for having "walked with God," which would later become the basis of the covenant.

Moses and the Ten Commandments The biblical story of Moses and the Ten Commandments embodies the centrality of the written word to Jewish culture. The Hebrew Bible claims that in about 1600 BCE, drought forced the Hebrew people to leave Canaan for Egypt, where they prospered until the Egyptians enslaved them in about 1300 BCE. Defying the rule of the pharaohs, the Jewish patriarch Moses led his people out of Egypt. According to tradition, Moses led the Jews across the Red Sea (which miraculously parted to facilitate the escape) and into the desert of the Sinai peninsula. (The story became the basis for the book of Exodus.) Most likely, they crossed a large tidal flat, called the Sea of Reeds; subsequently, that body of water was misidentified as the Red Sea. Unable to return to Canaan, which was now occupied by local tribes of considerable military strength, the Jews settled in an arid region of the Sinai desert near the Dead Sea for a period of 40 years, which archaeologists date to sometime between 1300 and 1150 BCE.

In the Sinai desert, the Hebrews forged the principal tenets of a new religion that would eventually be based on the worship of a single god. There, too, the Hebrew god supposedly revealed a new name for himself—YHWH, a name so sacred that it could be neither spoken nor written. The name is not known and YHWH is a cipher for it. There are, however, many

other names for God in the Hebrew Bible, among them Elohim, which is plural in Hebrew, meaning "gods, deities"; Adonai ("Lord"); and El Shaddai, literally "God of the Fields" but usually translated "God Almighty." Some scholars believe that this demonstrates the multiple authorship of the Bible. Others argue that the Hebrews originally worshiped many gods, like other Near Eastern peoples. Still other scholars suggest that God has been given different names to reflect different aspects of his divinity, or the different roles he might assume—the guardian of the flocks in the fields, or the powerful master of all. Translated into Latin as "Jehovah" in the Middle Ages, the name is now rendered in English as "Yahweh." This God also gave Moses the Ten Commandments, carved onto stone tablets, as recorded in Deuteronomy 5:6–21. Subsequently, the Hebrews carried the commandments in a sacred chest, called the Ark of the Covenant, which was lit by seven-branched candelabras known as *menorahs*. The centrality to Hebrew culture of these written words is even more apparent in the words of God that follow the commandments (**Reading 1.4**):

READING 1.4

from the Hebrew Bible, Deuteronomy 6:6–9

6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.
7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.
8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead,
9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Whenever the Hebrews talked, wherever they looked, wherever they went, they focused on the commandments of their God. Their monotheistic religion was thus also an ethical and moral system derived from an omnipotent God. The Ten Commandments were the centerpiece of the Torah, or Law (literally "instructions"), consisting of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. (Christians would later incorporate these books into their Bible as the first five books of the Old Testament.) The Hebrews considered these five books divinely inspired and attributed their original authorship to Moses himself, although, as we have noted, the texts as we know them were written much later.

The body of laws outlined in the Torah is quite different from the code of Hammurabi. The code was essentially a list of punishments for offenses; it is not an *ethical* code (see Fig. 1.21 and Reading 1.2). Hebraic and Mesopotamian laws are distinctly different. Perhaps because the Hebrews were once themselves aliens and slaves, their law treats the lowest members of society as human beings. As Yahweh declares in Exodus 23:6: "You will not cheat the poor among you of their rights at law." At least under the law, class distinctions, except as they applied to slaves, did not exist in Hebrew society, and punishment was levied equally. Above all else, rich and poor alike were united for the common good in a common enterprise, to follow the instructions for living as God provided.

After 40 years in the Sinai had passed, it is believed that the patriarch Joshua led the Jews back to Canaan, the Promised Land, as Yahweh had pledged in the covenant. Over the next 200 years, they gradually gained control of the region through a protracted series of wars described in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings in the Bible, which together make up a theological history of the early Jewish peoples. The Jews named themselves the Israelites, after Israel, the name that was given by God to Jacob. The nation consisted of 12 tribes, each descending from one of Jacob's 12 sons. By about 1000 BCE, Saul had established himself as King of Israel, followed by David, who as a boy rescued the Israelites from the Philistines by killing the giant Goliath with a stone thrown from a sling, as described in First Samuel, and later united Israel and Judah into a single state.

Kings David and Solomon, the Prophets, and the Diaspora

King David reigned until 961 BCE. It was he who captured Jerusalem from the Canaanites and made it the capital of Israel (Map **1.5**). As represented in the books of Samuel, David is one of the most complex and interesting individuals in

Map 1.5 The United Monarchy of Israel under David, Solomon, and Saul, ca. 1100 BCE.

ancient literature. A poet and musician, he is author of some of the Psalms. Although he was capable of the most deceitful treachery—sending one of his soldiers, Uriah, to certain death in battle so that he could marry his widow, Bathsheba—he also suffered the greatest sorrow, being forced to endure the betrayal and death of his son Absalom. David was succeeded by his other son, Solomon, famous for his fairness in meting out justice, who ruled until 933 BCE.

Solomon undertook to complete the building campaign begun by his father, and by the end of his reign, Jerusalem was, by all reports, one of the most beautiful cities in the Near East. A magnificent palace and, most especially, a splendid temple dominated the city. First Kings claims that Yahweh himself saw the temple and approved of it.

The rule of the Hebrew kings was based on the model of the scriptural covenant between God and the Hebrews. This covenant was the model for the relationship between the king and his people. The king provided protection in return for obedience and fidelity. The same relationship existed between the family patriarch and his household. His wife and children were his possessions, whom he protected in return for their unerring faith in him.

After Solomon's death, the United Monarchy of Israel split into two separate states. To the north was Israel, with its capital in Samaria, and to the south, Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem. In this era of the two kingdoms, Hebrew culture was dominated by **prophets**, men who were prophetic not in the sense of foretelling the future, but rather in the sense of serving as mouthpieces and interpreters of Yahweh's purposes, which they claimed to understand through visions. The prophets instructed the people in the ways of living according to the laws of the Torah, and they more or less freely confronted anyone guilty of wrongful actions, even the Hebrew kings. They attacked, particularly, the wealthy Hebrews whose commercial ventures had brought them unprecedented material comfort and who were inclined to stray from monotheism and worship Canaanite fertility gods and goddesses. The moral laxity of these wealthy Hebrews troubled the prophets, who urged the Hebrew nation to reform spiritually.

In 722 BCE, Assyrians attacked the northern kingdom of Israel and scattered its people, who were thereafter known as the Lost Tribes of Israel. The southern kingdom of Judah survived another 140 years, until Nebuchadnezzar II and the Babylonians overwhelmed it in 587 BCE, destroying the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and deporting the Hebrews to Babylon. Not only had the Hebrews lost their homeland and their temple, but the Ark of the Covenant itself had also disappeared. For more than 60 years, the Hebrews endured what is known as the Babylonian Captivity. As recorded in Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea we wept, when we remembered Zion."

Finally, invading Persians, whom they believed had been sent by Yahweh, freed them from the Babylonians in 520 BCE. They returned to Judah, known now, for the first time, as the Jews (after the name of their homeland). They rebuilt a Second Temple of Jerusalem, with an empty chamber at its center, meant for the Ark of the Covenant should it ever return. And they welcomed back other Jews from around the Mediterranean, including many whose families had left the northern kingdom almost 200 years earlier. Many others, however, were by now permanently settled elsewhere, and they became known as the Jews of the Diaspora, or the "dispersion."

Hebrew culture would have a profound impact on Western civilization. The Jews provided the essential ethical and moral foundation for religion in the West, including Christianity and Islam, both of which incorporate Jewish teachings into their own thought and practice. In the Torah, we find the basis of the law as we understand and practice it today. So moving and universal are the stories recorded in the Torah that over the centuries they have inspired—and continue to inspire—countless works of art, music, and literature. Most important, the Hebrews introduced to the world the concept of ethical monotheism, the idea that there is only one God, and that God demands that humans behave in a certain way, and rewards and punishes accordingly. Few, if any, concepts have had a more far-reaching effect on history and culture.

Fig. 1.22 ***Darius and Xerxes Receiving Tribute*****, detail of a relief from a stairway leading to the Hall of One Hundred Columns, ceremonial complex, Persepolis, Iran, 491–486 BCE.** Limestone, height 8'4". Iranbastan Museum, Teheran. This panel was originally painted in blue, scarlet, green, purple, and turquoise. Objects such as Darius' necklace and crown were covered in gold.
Credit: © Livius.Org

1.3.6 The Persian Empire

In 520 BCE, the Persians, formerly a minor nomadic tribe that occupied the plateau of Iran, defeated the Babylonians and freed the Jews. Their imperial adventuring had begun in 559 BCE with the ascension of Cyrus II (called the Great, r. 559–530 BCE), the first ruler of the Achaemenid dynasty, named after Achaemenes, a warrior-king whom Persian legend says ruled on the Iranian plateau around 700 BCE. By the time of Cyrus's death, the Persians had taken control of the Greek cities in Ionia on the west coast of Anatolia. Under King Darius (r. 522–486 BCE), they soon ruled a vast empire that stretched from Egypt in the south, around Asia Minor, to the Ukraine in the north. The capital of the Empire was Parsa, which the Greeks called Persepolis, or city of the Persians, in the Zagros highlands of present-day Iran. Built by artisans and workers from all over the Persian Empire, including Greeks from Ionia, it reflected Darius' multicultural ambitions. If he was, as he said, "King of Kings, King of countries, King of the earth," his palace should reflect the diversity of his peoples.

Rulers are depicted in relief sculptures with Assyrian beards and headdresses (Fig. **1.22**). In typical Mesopotamian fashion, they are larger than other people in the works. These decorations further reflect the Persians' sense that all the peoples of the region owed them allegiance. The relief from the stairway to the audience hall, where Darius and his son Xerxes received visitors, is covered with images of their subjects bringing gifts to the palace—23 subject nations in all, including Ionian, Babylonian, Syrian, and Susian, each culture recognizable by its beards and costumes. Darius can be seen receiving tribute as Xerxes stands behind him, as if waiting to take his place as the Persian ruler. These are the same two Persian leaders who, in the first decades of the fifth century BCE, would invade Greece, the son destroying, as we will see in the next chapter, the city of Athens, but in his destruction of the Greek capital, ushering in the great building campaign that was the hallmark of the Greek Golden Age.

1.4 The Stability of Ancient Egypt: Flood and Sun

What accounts for the stability of Egyptian culture?

Civilization in Mesopotamia developed across the last three millennia BCE almost simultaneously with civilization in Egypt. The two civilizations have much in common. Both formed around river systems—the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia; the Nile in Egypt. Both were agrarian societies that depended on irrigation, and their economies were hostage to the sometimes fickle, sometimes violent flow of their respective river systems. As in Mesopotamia, Egyptians learned to control the river's flow by constructing dams and irrigation canals, and it was probably the need to cooperate with one another in such endeavors that helped Mesopotamia to thrive and Egypt to create the civilization that would eventually arise in the Nile Valley.

The Mesopotamians and the Egyptians built massive architectural structures dedicated to their gods—the ziggurats in Mesopotamia (see Fig. 1.16) and the pyramids in Egypt (Fig. **1.23**). Though the former appears to be dedicated, at least in part, to water and the latter to the sun, both unite earth

Fig. 1.23 The pyramids of Menkaure (ca. 2470 BCE), Khafre (ca. 2500 BCE), and Khufu (ca. 2530 BCE). Giza was an elaborate complex of ritual temples, shrines, and ceremonial causeways, all leading to one or another of the three giant pyramids.
Credit: © WitR/Shutterstock

Map 1.6 Nile River basin with archaeological sites in relation to present-day Cairo. The broad expanse of the lower Nile Delta was crisscrossed by canals, allowing easy transport of produce and supplies.

and sky in a single architectural form. Indeed, the earliest Egyptian pyramids were stepped structures on the model of the Mesopotamian ziggurat. Both cultures developed forms of writing, although the cuneiform script of Mesopotamian culture and the hieroglyphic script of Egyptian society were very different. There is ample evidence that the two civilizations traded with each other, and to a certain degree influenced each other.

What most distinguishes Egyptian from Mesopotamian culture, however, is the relative stability of the former. Mesopotamia was rarely, if ever, united as a single entity. Whenever it was united, it was through force, the power of an army, not the free will of a people striving for the common good. In contrast, political transition in Egypt was dynastic—that is, rule was inherited by members of the same family, sometimes for generations. As in Mesopotamia, however, the ruler's authority was cemented by his association with divine authority. He was, indeed, the manifestation of the gods on earth. In fact, there is clear reason to believe that the sculptural image of a ruler was believed to be, in some sense, the ruler himself.

1.4.1 The Nile and Its Culture

Like the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia, the Nile could be said to have made Egypt possible. The river begins in central eastern Africa, one tributary in the mountains of Ethiopia and another at Lake Victoria in Uganda, from which it flows north for nearly 4,000 miles. Egyptian civilization developed along the last 750 miles of the river's banks, extending from the granite cliffs at Aswan, north to the Mediterranean Sea (see Map **1.6**).

Nearly every year, torrential rains fell far upriver in Ethiopia and the East African Highlands. These rains caused the river to rise dramatically downstream. Most years, from July to November, the Egyptians could count on the Nile flooding their land. When the river receded, deep deposits of fertile silt covered the valley floor. Fields would then be tilled,

Fig. 1.24 ***Nebamun Hunting Birds*, from the tomb of Nebamun, Thebes, Dynasty 18, ca. 1400 BCE.** Fresco on dry plaster, height approx. 2'8". British Museum, London. The fish and the birds, and the cat, are completely realistic, but this is not a realistic scene. It is a conventional representation of the deceased, in this case Nebamun, spearing fish or hunting fowl, almost obligatory for the decoration of a tomb. The pigments were applied directly to a dry wall, a technique that has come to be known as ***fresco secco***, dry fresco. Such paintings are extremely fragile and susceptible to moisture damage, but Egypt's arid climate has preserved them.
Credit: © The Trustees of The British Museum

and crops planted and tended. If the flooding was either too great or too minor, especially over a period of years, famine could result. The cycle of flood and sun made Egypt one of the most productive cultures in the ancient world and one of the most stable. For 3,000 years, from 3100 BCE until the defeat of Mark Antony and Cleopatra by the Roman general Octavian in 31 BCE, Egypt's institutions and culture remained remarkably unchanged.

As a result of the Nile's annual floods, Egypt called itself Kemet, meaning "Black Land." In Upper Egypt, from Aswan to the Delta, the black, fertile deposits of the river covered an extremely narrow strip of land. Surrounding the river's alluvial plain was the "Red Land," the desert environment that could not support life, but where rich deposits of minerals and stone could be mined and quarried. Lower Egypt consists of the Delta itself, which today begins some 13 miles north of Giza, the site of the largest pyramids, across the river from what is present-day Cairo. But in ancient times, it began 18 miles south of Giza, near the city of Memphis.

In this land of plenty, great farms flourished, and wildlife abounded in the marshes. In fact, the Egyptians linked the marsh to the creation of the world and represented it that way in the famous hunting scene that decorates the tomb of Nebamun at Thebes (Fig. **1.24**). Nebamun is about to hurl a snake-shaped throwing stick into a flock of birds as his wife and daughter look on. The painting is a sort of visual pun, referring directly to sexual procreation. The verb "to launch a throwing stick" also means "to ejaculate," and the word for "throwing stick" itself, to "create." The hieroglyphs written between Nebamun and his wife translate as "enjoying oneself, viewing the beautiful, … at the place of constant renewal of life."

Scholars divide Egyptian history into three main periods. Almost all the conventions of Egyptian art were established during the first period, the *Old Kingdom*. During the *Middle Kingdom*, the "classical" literary language that would survive through the remainder of Egyptian history was first produced. The *New Kingdom* was a period of prosperity in which interest in art and architecture was renewed. During each of these periods, successive dynasties—or royal houses—brought peace and stability to the country. Between them were "Intermediate Periods" of relative instability.

Egypt's continuous cultural tradition—lasting more than 3,000 years—is history's clearest example of how peace and prosperity go hand in hand with cultural stability. As opposed to the warring cultures of Mesopotamia, where city-state vied with city-state and empire with successive empire, Egyptian culture was predicated on unity. It was a **theocracy**, a state ruled by a god or by the god's representative—in this case a king (and very occasionally a queen), who ruled as the living representative of the sun god, Re. Egypt's government was indistinguishable from its religion, and its religion manifested itself in nature, in the flow of the Nile, in the heat of the sun, and in the journey of the sun through the day and night and through the seasons. In the last judgment of the soul after death, Egyptians believed that the heart was weighed to determine whether it was "found true by trial of the Great Balance." Balance in all things—in nature, in social life, in art,

and in rule—was the constant aim of the individual, the state, and, Egyptians believed, the gods.

Whereas in Mesopotamia the flood was largely a destructive force (recall the flood in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*), in Egypt it had a more complex meaning. It could, indeed, be destructive, sometimes rising so high that great devastation resulted. But without it, the Egyptians knew, their culture could not endure. So, in Egyptian art and culture, a more complex way of thinking about nature, and about life itself, developed. Every aspect of Egyptian life is countered by an opposite and equal force, which contradicts and negates it, and every act of negation gives rise to its opposite again. As a result, events are cyclical, as abundance is born of devastation and devastation closely follows abundance. Likewise, just as the floods brought the Nile Valley back to life each year, the Egyptians believed that rebirth necessarily followed death. So their religion, which played a large part in their lives, reflected the cycle of the river itself. This sense of cyclical recurrence would inspire contemporary artist Andy Goldsworthy to install a river of sand in the British Museum in 1994 (see *The Continuing Presence of the Past*, page 31):

1.4.2 Egyptian Religion: Cyclical Harmony

The religion of ancient Egypt, like that of Mesopotamia, was *polytheistic*, consisting of many gods and goddesses who were associated with natural forces and realms (see page 32). When represented, gods and goddesses have human bodies and human or animal heads, and wear crowns or other headgear that identifies them by their attributes. The religion reflected an ordered universe in which the stars and planets, the various gods, and basic human activities were thought to be part of a grand and harmonious design. A person who did not disrupt this harmony did not fear death because his or her spirit would live on forever.

At the heart of this religion were creation stories that explained how the gods and the world came into being. Chief among the Egyptian gods was Re, god of the sun. According to these stories, at the beginning of time, the Nile created a great mound of silt, out of which Re was born. It was understood that Re had a close personal relationship with the king, who was considered the son of Re. But the king could also identify closely with other gods. The king was simultaneously believed to be the personification of the sky god, Horus, and was identified with deities associated with places like Thebes or Memphis when his power resided in those cities. Though not a full-fledged god, the king was *netjer nefer*, literally, a "junior god." That made him the representative of the people to the gods, whom he contacted through statues of divine beings placed in all temples. Through these statues, Egyptians believed, the gods manifested themselves on earth. Not only did the orderly functioning of social and political events depend upon the king's successful communication with the gods, but so did events of nature—the ebb and flow of the river chief among them.

Like the king, all the other Egyptian gods descend from Re, as if part of a family. As we have said, many can be traced back to local deities of predynastic times who later assumed greater significance at a given place—at Thebes, for instance, the trinity of Osiris, Horus, and Isis gained special significance. Osiris, ruler of the underworld and god of the dead, was at first a local deity in the eastern Delta. According to myth, he was murdered by his wicked brother Seth, god of storms and violence, who chopped his brother into pieces and threw them into the Nile. But Osiris's wife and sister, Isis, the goddess of fertility, collected what parts she could find, put the god back together, and restored him to life. Osiris was therefore identified with the Nile itself, with its annual flood and renewal. The child of Osiris and Isis was Horus, who defeated Seth and became the mythical first king of Egypt. The actual, living king was considered the earthly manifestation of Horus (as well as the son of Re). When the living king died, he became Osiris, and his son took the throne as Horus. Thus, even the kingship was cyclical.

At Memphis, the triad of Ptah, Sakhmet, and Nefertum held sway. A stone inscription at Memphis describes Ptah as the supreme artisan and creator of all things (**Reading 1.5**):

READING 1.5

from Memphis, "This It Is Said of Ptah" (ca. 2300 BCE)

This it is said of Ptah: "He who made all and created the gods." And he is Ta-tenen, who gave birth to the gods, and from whom every thing came forth, foods, provisions, divine offerings, all good things. This it is recognized and understood that he is the mightiest of the gods. Thus Ptah was satisfied after he had made all things and all divine words.

He gave birth to the gods, He made the towns,
He established the nomes [provinces],
He placed the gods in their shrines,
He settled their offerings,
He established their shrines,
He made their bodies according to their wishes,
Thus the gods entered into their bodies,
Of every wood, every stone, every clay,
Every thing that grows upon him
In which they came to be.

Sekhmet is Ptah's female companion. Depicted as a lioness, she served as protector of the king in peace and war. She is also the mother of Nefertum, a beautiful young man whose name means "perfection"; small statues of him were often carried by Egyptians for good luck.

The cyclical movement through opposing forces, embodied in stories such as that of Osiris and Isis, is one of the earliest instances of a system of religious and philosophic thought that survives even in contemporary thought. Life

The CONTINUING PRESENCE *of the* PAST

Andy Goldsworthy's *Sandwork, Sand Sculpture, Time Machine*

Andy Goldsworthy, *Sandwork, Sand Sculpture, Time Machine,* 1994. Temporary installation at the British Museum.
Credit: © Andy Goldsworthy. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York. Photo by Julian Calder

In 1994, Scottish artist Andy Goldsworthy contributed to an exhibition at the British Museum in London called "Time Machine: Ancient Egypt and Contemporary Art." Goldsworthy specializes in sculptural works that are made entirely out of natural materials—leaves stitched together with grass stalks, stones piled in conical formations or shaped into lines through the landscape, or snow and ice molded into abstract patterns in the landscape. Most of his works are impermanent, surviving only as long as the fragile materials of their composition can endure. They are metaphors for the relatively short duration of human life itself, for humans' fleeting presence in the long scope of historical time.

Goldsworthy proposed a sculpture of sand. "Sand," he says, "is somewhere between stone and earth. It can be compressed hard and yet it can become fluid. It has a sense of strength, fragility, and movement." For Goldsworthy, sand was the very stuff of Egypt, ultimately the source of the stones and mud bricks used to build the pyramids. It was the very substance of the desert environment, the so-called "Red Land" surrounding the Nile's alluvial plain.

Goldsworthy envisioned the work as flowing through the exhibition space, "touching," he says, "the sculptures and incorporating them into its form to give a feeling of the underlying geological and cultural energies that flow through the sculptures." It would flow through the gallery, in other words, like the Nile itself, a winding river of sand.

Goldsworthy's proposal was initially rejected "because it would restrict access to the room." Then, as Goldsworthy relates the story, James Putnam, the curator of the British Museum exhibition, "suggested that we make the work for a day, photograph it, then remove it, to be represented in the exhibitions as a memory. I found this a fascinating idea and one that would make the work stronger."

In making his work so temporary and fleeting, Goldsworthy tapped into the ancient Egyptian obsession with the cyclical nature of all things: the diurnal cycle of day and night, the annual floods that brought the Nile River Valley back to life each year, even the Egyptian creation story in which, at the beginning of time, the Nile created a mound of silt out of which Re, the god of the sun, was born.

and death, flood and sun, even desert and oasis were part of a larger harmony of nature, one that was predictable in both the diurnal cycle of day and night and its seasonal patterns of repetition. A good deity like Osiris was necessarily balanced by a bad deity like Seth. The fertile Nile Valley was balanced by the harsh desert surrounding it. The narrow reaches of the upper Nile were balanced by the broad marshes of the Delta. All things were predicated upon the return of their opposite, which negates them, but which in the process completes the whole and regenerates the cycle of being and becoming once again.

1.4.3 Pictorial Formulas in Egyptian Art

This sense of duality, of opposites, informs even the earliest Egyptian artifacts, such as the *Palette of Narmer*, found at Hierakonpolis, in Upper Egypt (see *Closer Look*, pages 34–35). A palette is technically an everyday object used for grinding pigments and making body- or eye-paint. The scenes on the *Palette of Narmer* are in low relief. Like those on the *Royal Standard of Ur* (see Fig. 1.19), they are arranged in registers that provide a ground line upon which the figures stand (the two lion-tamers are an exception). The figures typically face to the right, although often, as is the case here, the design is balanced left and right. The artist represents the various parts of the human figure in what the Egyptians thought was their most characteristic view. So, the face, arms, legs, and feet are in profile, with the left foot advanced in front of the right. The eye and shoulders are in front view. The mouth, navel and hips, and knees are in three-quarter view. As a result, the viewer sees each person in a **composite view**, the integration of multiple perspectives into a single unified image.

In Egyptian art, not only the figures but also the scenes themselves unite two contradictory points of view into a single image. In the *Palette of Narmer*, the king approaches his dead enemies from the side, but they lie beheaded on the ground before him as seen from above. Egyptian art often represents architecture in the same terms. At the top middle of the *Palette of Narmer*, the external facade of the palace is depicted simultaneously from above, in a kind of ground plan, with its niched facade at the bottom. The design contains Narmer's Horus-name, consisting of a catfish and a chisel. The hieroglyphic signs for Narmer could not be interpreted until the nineteenth century, but we are still not sure whether it is to be read "Narmer," which are the later phonetic values of the signs. In fact, later meanings of these signs suggest that it might be read "sick catfish," which seems rather unlikely.

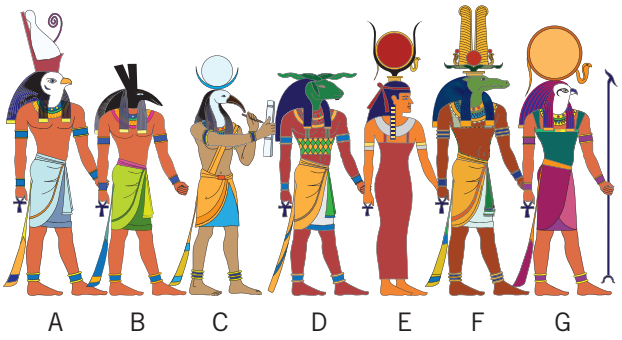
1.4.4 The Old Kingdom

Although the *Palette of Narmer* probably commemorates an event in life, as a votive object it is devoted, like most surviving Egyptian art and architecture, to burial and the afterlife. The Egyptians buried their dead on the west side of the Nile, where the sun sets, a symbolic reference to death and rebirth, since the sun always rises again. The pyramid was the first monumental royal tomb. A massive physical manifestation of the reality of the king's death, it was also the symbolic embodiment of his eternal life. It would endure for generations, as, Egyptians believed, would the king's ***ka***. This idea is comparable to an enduring "soul" or "life force," a concept found in many other religions. The *ka*, which all persons possessed, was created at the same time as the physical body, itself essential for the person's existence since it provided the *ka* with an individual identity in which its personality, or ***ba***, might also manifest itself. This meant that it was necessary to preserve the body after death so that the *ba* and *ka* might still recognize it for eternity. All the necessities of the afterlife, from food to furniture to entertainment, were placed in the pyramid's burial chamber with the king's body.

Monumental royal sculpture was designed to embody the enduring nature of the royal *ka*. The word for sculpture in Egyptian is, in fact, the same as for giving birth, and funerary sculpture served the same purpose as the pyramids themselves—to preserve and guarantee the king's existence after death, thereby providing a kind of rebirth. Although there

Some of the Principal Egyptian Gods

A Horus, son of Osiris, a sky god closely linked with the king; pictured as a hawk, or hawk-headed man.
B Seth, enemy of Horus and Osiris, god of storms; pictured as an unidentifiable creature (some believe a wild donkey), or a man with this animal's head.
C Thoth, a moon deity and god of writing, counting, and wisdom; pictured as an ibis, or ibis-headed man, often with a crescent moon on his head.
D Khnum, originally the god of the source of the Nile, pictured as a bull who shaped men out of clay on his potter's wheel; later, god of pottery.
E Hathor, goddess of love, birth, and death; pictured as a woman with cow horns and a sun disk on her head.
F Sobek, the crocodile god, associated both with the fertility of the Nile, and, because of the ferocity of the crocodile, with the army's power and strength.
G Re, the sun god in his many forms; pictured as a hawk-headed man with a sun disk on his head.



are thousands of limestone and not a few sandstone funerary monuments, the materials of choice were diorite, schist, and granite, stones as durable and enduring as the *ka* itself. These stones can also take on a high polish and, because they are not prone to fracture, can be finely detailed when carved. Most Egyptian statues were *monolithic*, or carved out of a single piece of stone, even those depicting more than a single figure, such as the statue of Menkaure with a woman—perhaps his queen, his mother, or even a goddess—that was found at his valley temple at Giza (Fig. **1.25**). Here, the deep space created by carving away the side of the stone to expose fully the king's right side seems to free him from the stone. He stands with one foot ahead of the other in the second traditional pose, the conventional depiction of a standing figure. He is not walking. Both feet are planted firmly on the ground (and so his left leg is, of necessity, slightly longer than his right). His back is firmly implanted in the stone panel behind him, but he seems to have emerged farther from it than has the female figure who accompanies him, as if to underscore his power and might. Although the woman is almost the same size as the man, her stride is markedly shorter than his. She embraces him, her arm reaching round his back, in a gesture that reminds us of Horus's protective embrace of Khafre, but suggests also the simple marital affection of husband and wife. The ultimate effect of both of these sculptures—their solidity and unity, their sense of resolution—testifies finally to their purpose, which was to endure for eternity.

Fig. 1.25 Menkaure with a Queen, probably Khamerernebty, from the valley temple of Menkaure, Giza, Dynasty 4, ca. 2460 BCE. Schist, height 54¼". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Note that the woman's close-fitting attire is nearly transparent, indicating a very fine weave of linen.
Credit: Erich Lessing/akg-Images

1.4.5 The New Kingdom and Its Moment of Change

Throughout the Middle Kingdom and well into the New Kingdom, Egyptian artistic and religious traditions remained intact. But toward the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Egypt experienced one of the few real crises of its entire history when, in 1353 BCE, Amenhotep IV (r. 1353–1337 BCE) assumed the throne of his father, Amenhotep III (r. 1391–1353 BCE).

Although previous Egyptian kings may have associated themselves with a single god, whom they represented in human form, Egyptian religion supported a large number of gods. Even the Nile was worshiped as a god. Amenhotep IV abolished the pantheon of Egyptian gods and established a religion in which the sun disk Aten was worshiped exclusively. Other gods were still acknowledged, but they were considered to be too inferior to Aten to be worth worshiping. Whether Amenhotep's religion was *henotheistic*—based on the belief and worship of a single god while accepting that other deities might also exist and be worshiped—or truly monotheistic is a matter of some debate.

Amenhotep IV believed the sun was the creator of all life, and he was so dedicated to Aten that he changed his own name to Akhenaten ("The Shining Spirit of Aten") and moved the capital of Egypt from Thebes to a site many miles north that he named Akhetaten (present-day Tell el-Amarna). This move transformed Egypt's political and cultural as well as religious life. At this new capital he presided over the worship of Aten as a divine priest with his queen as a divine priestess. Temples to Aten were open courtyards, where the altar received the sun's direct rays.

Why would Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten have substituted monotheism for Egypt's traditional polytheistic religion? Many Egyptologists argue that the switch had to do with enhancing the power of the pharaoh. With the pharaoh representing the one god who mattered, all religious justification for the power held by a priesthood dedicated to the traditional gods was gone. As we have seen, the pharaoh was traditionally

CLOSER LOOK

The Egyptians created a style of writing very different from that of their northern **neighbors** in Mesopotamia. It consists of hieroglyphs, "writing of the gods," from the Greek *hieros*, meaning "holy," and *gluphein*, "to engrave." Although the number of signs increased over the centuries from about 700 to nearly 5,000, the system of symbolic communication underwent almost no major changes from its advent in the fourth millennium BCE until 30 CE, when Egypt was conquered by the Roman Empire. It consists of three kinds of signs: **pictograms**, or stylized drawings that represent objects or beings, which can be combined to express ideas; **phonograms**, which are pictograms used to represent sounds; and **determinatives**, signs used to indicate which category of objects or beings is in question. The *Palette of Narmer* is an early example of the then-developing hieroglyphic style. It consists largely of pictograms, though in the top center of each side, Narmer's name is represented as a phonogram.

The circle formed by the two elongated lions' necks intertwined on the *recto*, or front, of the palette is a bowl for mixing pigments. The palette celebrates the defeat by Narmer (r. ca. 3000 BCE) of his enemies and his unification of both Upper and Lower Egypt, which before this time had been at odds. So on the *recto* side, Narmer wears the red cobra crown of Lower Egypt, associated with the cobra goddess Wadjit

Flanking the top of each side of the palette is a goddess wearing cow's horns; such headdresses represent the divine attributes of the figure. Later, **Hathor**, the sky mother, a goddess embodying all female qualities, would possess these attributes, but this early image probably represents the cow-goddess, **Bat**.

The **mace** was the chief weapon used by the king to strike down enemies, and the scene here is emblematic of his power.

As on the other side of the palette, the king is here accompanied by his sandal-bearer, who stands on his own ground line. He carries the king's sandals to indicate that the king, who is barefoot, stands on sacred ground, and that his acts are themselves sacred.

Narmer, wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt, strikes down his enemy, probably the embodiment of **Lower Egypt** itself, especially since he is, in size, comparable to Narmer himself, suggesting he is likewise a leader.

Two more figures represent the defeated enemy. Behind the one on the left is a small aerial view of a **fortified city**; behind the one on the right, a **gazelle trap**. Perhaps together they represent Narmer's victory over both city and countryside.

The hawk is a symbolic representation of the god **Horus**. The king was regarded as the earthly embodiment of Horus. Here, Horus has a human hand with which he holds a rope tied to a symbolic representation of a conquered land and people.

A human head grows from the same ground as six **papyrus** blossoms, possibly the symbol of Lower Egypt.

This hieroglyph identifies the man that Narmer is about to kill, a name otherwise unknown.

***Palette of Narmer*, *verso side*, from Hierakonpolis, Dynasty 1, ca. 3000 BCE.** Schist, height 25¼". Egyptian Museum, Cairo
Credit: © Werner Forman Archive

Reading the *Palette of Narmer*

of Buto in the Delta, and on the *verso*, or back, he wears the white crown of Upper Egypt, associated with Wadjit's sister, the vulture goddess Nekhbet of Nekheb in southern Egypt—representing his ability (and duty) to harmonize antagonistic elements.

Narmer's Palette was not meant for actual use. Rather, it is a **votive**, or ritual object, a gift to a god or goddess that was placed in a temple to ensure that the king, or perhaps some temple official, would have access to a palette throughout eternity. It may or may not register actual historical events, although, in fact, Egypt marks its beginnings with the unification of its Upper and Lower territories. Subsequent kings, at any rate, presented themselves in almost identical terms, as triumphing over their enemies, mace in hand, even though they had no role in a similar military campaign. It is even possible that by the time of Narmer such conventions were already in place, although our system of numbering Egyptian dynasties begins with him. Whether the scene depicted is symbolic, the **pictorial formulas**, or conventions of representation, that Egyptian culture used for the rest of its history are fully developed in this piece.

These are two instances of the hieroglyphic sign for **Narmer**, consisting of a catfish above a chisel. Each individual hieroglyph is a pictogram but is utilized here for its phonetic sound. **Nar** is the word for "catfish," and **mer** is the word for "chisel" (or, perhaps, "sickly")—hence "Narmer." In the lower instance, the hieroglyph identifies the king. In the instance at the top, the king's name is inside a depiction of his palace seen simultaneously from above, as a ground plan, and from the front, as a facade. This device, called a **serekh**, is traditionally used to hold the king's name.

We are able to identify **Narmer** not only from his hieroglyphic name, next to him, but by his relative size. As befits the king, he is larger than anyone else.

Similarly positioned on the other side of the palette and identified by the accompanying hieroglyph, this is the king's **sandal-bearer**.

The **bull** here strikes down his victim and is another representation of the king's might and power. Note that in the depictions of Narmer striking down his victim and in procession, a bull's tail hangs from his waistband.

The defeated **dead** lie in two rows, their decapitated heads between their feet. Narmer in sacred procession reviews them, while above them, a tiny Horus (the hawk) looks on.

This is the **mixing bowl** of the palette. The lions may represent competing forces brought under control by the king. Each is held in check by one of the king's **lion-tamers**, figures that in some sense represent state authority.

This is a representation of a **fortified city** as seen both from above, as a floor plan, and from the front, as a facade. It is meant to represent the actual site of Narmer's victory.

***Palette of Narmer*, *recto side*, from Hierakonpolis, Dynasty 1, ca. 3000 BCE.** Schist, height 25¼".
Egyptian Museum, Cairo
Credit: © Werner Forman Archive

Fig. 1.26 ***Akhenaten and His Family*, from Akhetaten (present-day Tell el-Amarna), Dynasty 18, ca. 1345 BCE.** Painted limestone relief, 12¾" x 14⅞". Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ägyptisches Museum. Between Akhenaten and his queen Nefertiti, the sun disk Aten shines down beneficently. Its rays end in small hands, which hold the *ankh* symbol for life before both the king and queen.
Credit: © Photo Scala, Florence/BPK Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin

associated with the sun god Re. Now in the form of the sun disk Aten, Re was the supreme deity, embodying the characteristics of all the other gods, therefore rendering them superfluous. By analogy, Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten was now supreme priest, rendering all other priests superfluous as well. Simultaneously, the temples dedicated to the other gods lost prestige and influence. These changes also converted the priests into dissidents.

A New Art: The Amarna Style Such significant changes had a powerful effect on the visual arts as well. Previously, Egyptian art had been remarkably stable because its principles were considered a gift of the gods—thus perfect and eternal. But now, the perfection of the gods was in question, and the principles of art were open to re-examination as well. A new art replaced the traditional canon of proportion—the familiar poses of king and queen—with realism, and a sense of immediacy, even intimacy. So Akhenaten allowed himself and his family to be portrayed with startling realism, in what has become known, from the modern name for the new capital, as the Amarna style.

An example is a small relief from Akhenaten's new capital: The king is depicted with a skinny, weak upper body, his belly protruding over his skirt; his skull is elongated behind an extremely long, narrow facial structure; and he sits in a slumped, almost casual position (Fig. **1.26**). One theory holds that Akhenaten had Marfan syndrome, a genetic disorder that leads to skeletal abnormalities, but in 2014, medical scans of his mummy—known only as mummy KV55 until DNA tests allowed it to be identified—revealed no physical abnormalities. This suggests that in his role as Aten, Akhenaten was assumed to embody all people, both male and female, and thus artists depicted him so. His likeness contrasts sharply with the idealized depictions of the pharaohs in earlier periods. Akhenaten is remarkably engaged in family life, suggesting his role as father of all—he holds one of his children in his arms and seems to have just kissed her. His two other children sit with the queen across from him, one turning to speak with her mother, the other touching the queen's cheek. The queen herself, Nefertiti, sits only slightly below her husband and appears to share his position and authority. In fact, one of the most striking features of the Amarna style is Nefertiti's prominence in the decoration of the king's temples. In one, for example, she is shown slaughtering prisoners, an image traditionally reserved for the king himself. It is likely that her prominence was part of Akhenaten's attempt to substitute the veneration of his own family (who, after all, represented Aten on earth).

In a house in the southern part of Akhenaten's new city at Amarna, the famous bust of Queen Nefertiti was discovered along with drawings and sculptures of the royal family (Fig. **1.27**). This was the workshop of Thutmose, one of the king's

Fig. 1.27 ***Nefertiti*****, from Akhetaten (modern Tell el-Amarna), Dynasty 18, ca. 1348–1336 BCE.** Painted limestone relief, 19". Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ägyptisches Museum. Some scholars theorize that Nefertiti's long neck may not be so much her own as a reflection of the king's—so that the reality of the king takes precedence over her own.
Credit: tkachuk/Shutterstock

royal artists. It seems likely that many other sculptures and reliefs were modeled on the bust of Nefertiti. At any rate, the queen's beauty cannot be denied, and this image of her has become famous worldwide. Even in her own time, she was known by such epitaphs as "Fair of Face" and "Great in Love."

The Return to Thebes and to Tradition Akhenaten's revolution was short-lived. Upon his death, Tutankhaten (r. 1336–1327 BCE) assumed the throne and changed his name to Tutankhamun (indicating a return to the more traditional gods, in this case Amun). The new king abandoned Tell el-Amarna, moved the royal family to Memphis in the north, and reaffirmed Thebes as the nation's religious center. He died shortly after and was buried on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes, near the tomb of Hatshepsut.

Tutankhamun's is the only royal tomb in Egypt to have escaped the total pillaging of looters. When Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon discovered it under the tomb of the Twentieth Dynasty king Ramses VI in the valley of the Kings near Deir el-Bahri, they found a coffin consisting of three separate coffins placed one inside the other (Fig. **1.28**). These were in turn encased in a quartzite sarcophagus, a rectangular stone coffin that was encased in four gilded, boxlike wooden shrines, also placed one inside the other. In their rigid formality, the coffins within, each depicting the king, hark back to the traditional Egyptian art of the Middle Kingdom.

The elaborate burial process was not meant solely to guarantee survival of the king's *ka* and *ba*. It also prepared him for a "last judgment," a belief that would find expression in the Hebrew faith as well. In this two-part ritual, deities first questioned the deceased about their behavior in life. Then their hearts, the seat of the *ka*, were weighed against an ostrich feather, symbol of Maat, the goddess of truth, justice, and order. Egyptians believed the heart contained all the emotions, intellect, and character of the individual, and so represented both the good and bad aspects of a person's life. If the heart did not balance with the feather, then the dead person was condemned to nonexistence, to be eaten by a creature called Ammit, the vile "Eater of the Dead," part crocodile, part lion, and part hippopotamus. Osiris, wrapped in his mummy robes, oversaw this moment of judgment. Tutankhamun himself, depicted on his sarcophagus with his crossed arms holding crook and flail, was clearly identified with Osiris.

Fig. 1.28 Funerary mask of Tutankhamun, Dynasty 18, ca. 1327 BCE. Gold inlaid with glass and semiprecious stones, height 21¼". Egyptian Museum, Cairo. This death mask was placed over the upper body of the mummified king, which rested inside the three nested coffins, the innermost of which was made of solid gold.
Credit: © Dieter Hawlan/Fotolia

CHAPTER REVIEW

1.1 Discuss the rise of culture and how developments in art and architecture reflect the growing sophistication of prehistoric cultures.

The widespread use of stone tools and weapons by *Homo sapiens*, the hominid species that evolved around 120,000–100,000 years ago, gives rise to the name of the earliest era of human development, the Paleolithic era. Carvers fashioned stone figures, both in the round and in relief. In cave paintings, such as those discovered at Chauvet Cave, the artists' great skill in rendering animals helps us to understand that the ability to represent the world with naturalistic fidelity is an inherent human skill, unrelated to cultural sophistication. If *culture* can be defined as a way of living—religious, social, and/or political—formed by a group of people and passed on from one generation to the next, what can the earliest art tell us about the first human cultures? What do the dwellings at Çatalhöyük suggest about the growing sophistication of Neolithic peoples? What questions remain a mystery?

1.2 Describe the role of myth in prehistoric culture.

Much of our understanding of the role of myth in prehistoric cultures derives from the traditions of contemporary Native American tribes, which still survive in tribes such as the Hopi and Zuni, who are the direct descendants of the Anasazi. Their legends encapsulate the fundamental religious principles of the culture. Such stories, and the ritual practices that accompany them, reflect the general beliefs of most Neolithic peoples. Can you describe some of these beliefs? What role do sacred sites play, such as those at Ise in Japan?

1.3 Distinguish among the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, and focus on how they differ from that of the Hebrews.

The royal tombs at the Sumerian city of Ur reveal a highly developed Bronze Age culture, based on the social order of the city-state, which was ruled by a priest-king acting as the intermediary between the gods and the people. The rulers also established laws and encouraged record keeping, which in turn required the development of a system of writing known as cuneiform script. In Sumer and subsequent Mesopotamian cultures, monumental structures such as ziggurats were dedicated to the gods, and in each city-state one of the gods rose to prominence as the city's protector. How would you characterize the general relationship between Mesopotamian rulers and the gods? The Hebrews practiced a monotheistic religion. They considered themselves the "chosen people" of God, whom they called Yahweh. The written word is central to their culture, and it is embodied in a body of law, the Torah. What does the Torah have in common with the Law Code of Hammurabi? How does it differ? How do the stories in Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible, compare to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*?

1.4 Account for the stability of Egyptian culture.

The annual cycle of flood and sun, the inundation of the Nile River Valley that annually deposited deep layers of silt, followed by months of sun in which crops could grow in the fertile soil, helped to define Egyptian culture. This predictable cycle helped to create a cultural belief in the stability and balance of all things that lasted for over 3,000 years. Can you describe this belief in terms of cyclical harmony? How does the Egyptian religion reflect this belief system? Most surviving Egyptian art and architecture was devoted to burial and the afterlife, the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. In what way do the statues of Egyptian kings and queens reflect this?

Egyptian and Greek Sculpture

Freestanding Greek sculpture of the Archaic period—that is, sculpture dating from about 600 to 480 BCE—is notable for its stylistic connections to 2,000 years of Egyptian tradition. The Late Period statue of *Mentuemhet* (Fig. **1.29**), from Thebes, dating from around 660 BCE, differs hardly at all from Old Kingdom sculpture at Giza (see Fig. 1.25), and even though the *Anavysos Kouros* (Fig. **1.30**), from a cemetery near Athens, represents a significant advance in relative naturalism over the Greek sculpture of just a few years before, it still resembles its Egyptian ancestors. Remarkably, since it follows the *Anavysos Kouros* by only 75 years, the *Doryphoros* (*Spear Bearer*) (Fig. **1.31**) is significantly more naturalistic. Although this is a Roman copy of a lost fifth-century BCE bronze Greek statue, we can assume it reflects the original's naturalism, since the sculptor of the original, Polykleitos, was renowned for his ability to render the human body realistically. But this advance, characteristic of Golden Age Athens, represents more than just a cultural taste for naturalism. It also represents a heightened cultural sensitivity to the worth of the individual, a belief that as much as we value what we have in common with one another—the bond that creates the city-state—our *individual* contributions are at least of equal value. By the fifth century BCE, the Greeks clearly understood that individual genius and achievement could be a matter of civic pride. ■

Fig. 1.29 ***Mentuemhet*, from Karnak, Thebes, Egypt, ca. 660 BCE.** Granite, height 54". Egyptian Museum, Cairo.
Credit: © Photo Scala, Florence

Fig. 1.30 ***Anavysos Kouros*, from a cemetery at Anavysos, near Athens, ca. 525 BCE.** Marble with remnants of paint, height 6'4". National Archaeological Museum, Athens.
Credit: Craig & Marie Mauzy, Athens mauzy@otenet.gr

Fig. 1.31 ***Doryphoros* (*Spear Bearer*), Roman copy after the original bronze by Polykleitos of ca. 450–440 BCE.** Marble, height 6'6". Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples.
Credit: G. Dagli Orti/De Agostini Picture Lib./akg-images