GLORIA K. FIERO

LANDMARKS IN HUMANITIES

FIFTH EDITION

Mc Graw Hill

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Frontispiece
Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (detail), ca. 1614–1620. Oil on canvas, 6 ft. 6⅓ in. × 5 ft. 4 in. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Photo © Scala/Art Resource, NY.

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LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

When we travel to parts of the world we have never before visited, we face the exciting challenge of deciding what to see and do in the brief time we are there. Usually, we find a guidebook that directs us to the most notable sights: the **landmarks**. As a "traveler" in the discipline called "Humanities" we need an equally effective guide.

LANDMARKS in Humanities serves as that guide: it takes readers on a chronological journey through the landscape of cultural history. Focusing on key works of art, literature, and music from prehistory to the present, *LANDMARKS* sets these artifacts in the context of their time and place, emphasizing the key ideas, issues, and styles that have dominated and shaped the world's cultures. The landmarks we examine are sources of inspiration, enlightenment, and pleasure. Transmitted from generation to generation, they are the guideposts for our own intellectual journey.

LANDMARKS is unique in several ways:

- It is ***interdisciplinary***: it explores the interrelationship of various modes of expression—art, music, literature—as they work to create, define, and reflect the unique culture of a given time and place.

- It is ***thematic***: each chapter advances a key idea, presented in the chapter title and explained in the introductory paragraph. The key idea offers a context for individual landmarks as they unfold chronologically. For instance, Chapter 1 ("Origins: The First Civilizations") surveys our earliest cultures, emphasizing human strategies for survival and communal life; Chapter 14 ("Modernism: The Assault on Tradition") considers the radical rejection of conventional values and styles that revolutionized early twentieth-century culture.

- It is ***selective***: some landmarks have been chosen for their universality, some for their singular beauty, and some for their iconic or symbolic value. Certain landmarks—the Statue of Liberty, the *Mona Lisa*, the sonnets of Shakespeare—meet more than one of these criteria. The author's choice of landmarks may differ from those of other individuals, and readers may wish to add landmarks of their own.

Special Features

A First Look Each chapter opens with an artwork that illustrates the key idea of the chapter and exemplifies the chapter's main theme. The opening figure is discussed as a landmark in its own time as well as in ours.

Ideas and Issues This feature examines a unique cultural or historical point of view, an issue or idea that has been or still is the subject of debate or opinion. Quotations from *primary sources* (works original to their time) allow readers to hear the "voices" of those whose ideas shaped cultural history. Questions are added in order to provoke critical thinking and discussion.

Making Connections This feature focuses on the relationship between two or more images or ideas, or between written text and image. Each connection illuminates the universality or continuity of a theme or motif, or it may highlight the treatment of that specific theme or motif in different times and places. Attention is focused on the role of tradition and the impact of various landmarks on our daily lives. Questions are added in order to provoke critical thinking and discussion.

Beyond the West This feature highlights the significant non-Western cultural landmarks and cross-cultural influences of various eras.

Key Topics and Timelines A summary of important topics and an illustrated timeline are found at the end of each chapter.

Glossary Difficult or unfamiliar terms appear in bold in the text, and are defined in the Glossary at the end of the book.

New to the 5th Edition

Added to the following chapters: **Chapter 1**: Discussion of two recently excavated archeological sites: the Neolithic stone circles at Göbekli Tepe in southeastern Turkey, and the ancient Chinese grave goods of the upper Yangzi region. **Chapter 2**: the Victory of Samothrace; **Chapter 3**: Han poetry; **Chapter 4**: Buddhism's Eightfold Path; **Chapter 7**: Female Humanists; **Chapter 11**: the Enlightenment beyond Europe; **Chapter 12**: the Romantic Sublime; **Chapter 14**: the nonobjective art of Hilma af Klint; **Chapter 15**: Black Theater, Women Composers, a John Ashbery poem; artworks by Kehinde Wiley, Keith Haring, Ai Weiwei, Nick Cave, and others illustrating contemporary Art Activism and the major issues of the early twenty-first century. Captions to the figures and the Glossary have been expanded.

Acknowledgments As with previous editions, I am greatly indebted to James Hunter Dormon, who continues to serve as my intellectual sounding board and critic. In computer crises, I depended greatly and gratefully on my digital support assistant, Jason Colony Fiero. Invaluable assistance in the execution of the e-book manuscript was provided by Danielle Bennett, Product Development Coordinator. As with previous editions, it is my pleasure to work with the wise, good-humored, and eagle-eyed Donald Dinwiddie, Senior Editor at Laurence King Publishing. Special thanks go to Sarah Remington and Mary Ellen Curley at McGraw-Hill Higher Education, and to Kara Hattersley-Smith, Louise Thomas (Picture Research), Melanie Walker, and the excellent editorial and production staff at LKP.

A Note to Instructors Following the publication of my two-volume textbook *The Humanistic Tradition*, colleagues voiced the need for a similar text appropriate to a single-semester (fifteen-week) humanities course. Rather than abridge and transform the larger survey into a bewilderingly detailed narrative, I resolved to treat content selectively and conceptually, while retaining the chronological framework. Since my students seem to do better when large amounts of information—art, literature, philosophy, music—are introduced in a specific context, I reassembled the content of the larger textbook by way of *fifteen key topics*. The result was *LANDMARKS in Humanities*. In the course of five editions, a number of special features, such as **Making Connections**, **Ideas and Issues**, and **A First Look**, have been added. These focus on the universal concerns and enduring traditions that lie at the heart of Humanities education. I hope that instructors and students continue to find *LANDMARKS*' unique approach to learning both enjoyable and enlightening.

Gloria K. Fiero

LANDMARKS—A PERSONALIZED LEARNING AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN GLOBAL HUMANITIES

All travelers appreciate a personal guide. For humanities students, *LANDMARKS* provides a chronological journey through the history of culture in one semester. Focusing on prominent landmarks from prehistory to the present, *LANDMARKS* introduces students to the creative endeavors of the human imagination and to the prominent ideas and issues that have shaped the course and character of the world's cultures. The landmarks that mark this journey are the great works of their place and time; they have been transmitted from generation to generation as a living legacy.

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Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (detail), ca. 1614–1620. Oil on canvas, 6 ft. 6⅓ in. × 5 ft. 4 in.
Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Photo © Scala/Art Resource, NY.

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Figure 1.1 Great Sphinx at Gizeh, Egypt, ca. 2540–2514 B.C.E. Limestone, length 240 ft., height 65 ft. In the background is the pyramid of Khufu, ca. 2650 B.C.E. (See also page 19).

CHAPTER 1

Origins:

THE FIRST CIVILIZATIONS

ca. 25,000–330 B.C.E.

How and why did life originate? What is our purpose on Earth? How might human beings survive the onset of flood, fire, drought, and other natural threats? How might they bring order to collective and communal life? Even before the dawn of writing—during the era known as "prehistory"—the earliest inhabitants of our planet must have asked such questions, for we know they made vigorous efforts to assert control over their environment and to protect the members of their small and thriving communities. Just as in our own time, prehistoric men and women devised technologies for survival and strategies to secure communal well-being. Their answers and solutions come to us in the form of the artifacts they left behind: their tools and weapons, cave paintings, burial mounds, and stone sanctuaries.

More sophisticated evidence comes to us from humankind's first civilizations. Born in the river valleys of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China, ancient cities left written records of trade contracts, law codes, and religious hymns and prayers, as well as cast bronze artifacts and monumental tombs and temples. Recently excavated sites in the Americas reveal some, but not all, of the hallmarks of these early civilizations. The remains of early urban dwellers throughout the world present a complex picture of the ways in which our ancestors lived and died, how they dealt with one another in peace and war, and how they confronted the universal realities of natural disaster, illness, birth, and death.

A First Look

On the outskirts of modern-day Cairo, at the ancient Egyptian funeral complex of Gizeh, stands the monumental figure of the Great Sphinx (Figure **1.1**). A hybrid creature with the body of a crouching lion and the head of a human being, the Great Sphinx remains the largest monolithic statue in the world. It is crowned with the headdress of ancient Egypt's royal ruler, who bore the title of "pharaoh." The huge scale of the Great Sphinx expresses Egyptian belief in the pharaoh's superhuman power as an agent of the gods, mediating their influence over such natural occurrences as drought or a good harvest. Regal and serene, the Great Sphinx looks eternally to the east: the place of renewal and rebirth associated with the rising sun, deified by the Egyptians as the major natural force in their lives. A sphinx is generally regarded as a guardian figure that protects the entranceway to ancient tombs and temples. But scholars continue to dispute when and by whom this particular sphinx was built. Some suggest it embodies a tradition of sun-worship that goes back thousands of years before the rise of Egyptian civilization. The Great Sphinx reminds us that the study of our origins raises as many questions as it answers; as such, it is an appropriate landmark for this chapter.

PREHISTORY

The study of human development prior to the advent of written records helps us to understand our origins. During the late phases of prehistory, our earliest ancestors fashioned stone and bone tools and weapons to hunt, gather, and provide the means for their survival. Some communities left signs and symbols deep inside caves; others constructed stone sanctuaries and burial sites. The sum total of those things created and transmitted by humankind we call **culture**.

Not all phases of prehistoric culture developed at the same time; some persisted longer than others in certain parts of the globe. A few lasted well into the twentieth century, giving modern scholars a glimpse into the past. As food producing slowly came to replace food gathering, and hunters became farmers, communities of a very different sort emerged: Urban societies developed systems of writing, the technology of metallurgy, and complex forms of civic life.

Paleolithic Culture

The landmark event of Paleolithic culture was the making of tools and weapons. Toolmaking represents the beginning of culture, which, in its most basic sense, proceeds from the manipulation of nature. The making of tools—humankind's earliest technology—was prehistoric peoples' primary act of extending control over nature and a fundamental example of problem-solving behavior. The earliest Paleolithic tools and weapons, found in Africa and East Asia, included cleavers, chisels, spears, harpoons, hand-axes, and a wide variety of choppers. This hunting technology evolved during a period of climatic change called the Ice Age, which occurred between roughly three million and 10,000 years ago. In the face of glacial advances that covered the area north of the equator, Paleolithic people were forced either to migrate (following their prey) or to adapt to changing conditions. By the end of the Ice Age, hunter-gatherers used fire to provide safety, warmth, and a means of preparing food.

The burial of the dead among some of our human ancestors and the practice of including tools, weapons, and other personal effects in the graves of the dead are evidence of a self-conscious population with memory and foresight. Their ritual preparation of the deceased suggests fear of the dead or anticipation of life after death. While toolmaking constitutes the landmark technology of Paleolithic culture, cave painting represents an enterprise whose meaning and function remain the subject of wide debate.

Figure 1.2 Hall of Bulls, left wall, Lascaux caves, Dordogne, France, ca. 15,000–10,000 B.C.E. Paint on limestone rock, length of individual bulls 13–16 ft. Executed in polychrome mineral pigments and shaded with bitumen and burned coal, realistically depicted bison, horses, reindeer, and a host of other creatures are shown standing or running, many wounded by spears and lances.

PREHISTORIC CULTURE

Paleolithic ("Old Stone") ca. 3 million to 10,000 B.C.E.
tribal hunters and gatherers
crude stone and bone tools and weapons
cave painting and sculpture

Mesolithic ("Transitional Stone") ca. 10,000 to 8000 B.C.E.
domestication of plants and animals
stone circles and shrines

Neolithic ("New Stone") ca. 8000 to 2000 B.C.E.
farming and food production
polished stone and bone tools and weapons
architecture
pottery and weaving

During the past seventy years, archeologists have discovered thousands of paintings and carvings on the walls of caves and the surfaces of rocks at Paleolithic sites in Europe, Africa, Australia, Indonesia, and North America. More than one hundred cave dwellings in southwestern France, and still others discovered as recently as 1996 in southeastern France, contain mysterious markings and lifelike images of animals (bears, bison, elk, lions, and zebras, among others), birds, fish, and sea creatures. Executed between 10,000 and 40,000 years ago, Paleolithic wall-paintings provide a visual record of such long-extinct animals as the hairy mammoth and the woolly rhinoceros (Figure **1.2**). They also reveal extraordinary technical sophistication and a high degree of **naturalism** (fidelity to nature).

What were the purpose and function of these vivid images? It is unlikely that they were intended as decorations or even as records of the hunt, given that they were located in the most inaccessible regions of the caves and frequently drawn one over another, with no apparent regard for clarity of composition. Scholars have long debated the meaning of so-called cave art. Some hold that it served as part of a virtual hunting ritual in which the image of the animal was symbolically killed prior to the hunt itself. Others contend that the creatures pictured on cave walls may be **totems** (heraldic tribal emblems) or symbols of male and female forces. Still others read certain abstract markings as lunar calendars, notational devices used to predict seasonal changes and the migration of animals.

Long associated with the procreative womb and cosmic underworld, the cave may have served as a ceremonial chamber or shrine in which rituals were orchestrated by a **shaman**; that is, a mediator between the natural and the spiritual worlds. On the other hand, it seems possible that cave paintings—like tools and weapons—served a vital function: The depiction of the animal—its "capture" on the cave wall—may have been essential to the hunt itself. Well into the twentieth century, hunting tribes such as the Pygmies of the African Congo enacted the hunt prior to the actual event. They drew and then symbolically "killed" the animal by shooting arrows into the drawing. Such rituals of "sympathetic magic," virtual hunts that included chant, mime, and dance, were believed to ensure the success of the hunt. Might Paleolithic cave art have served a similar function?

Whatever purpose cave art served, it is evident that in the ancient world "art" was not intended primarily as decoration or entertainment as it is today. Rather, the arts held a sacred function related to communal well-being. Just as tools and weapons empowered our earliest ancestors in their manipulation of nature, so visual images, songs, and dance acted as powerful agents for petitioning superhuman forces and for shaping destiny.

Mesolithic and Neolithic Cultures

The evolution of human culture is difficult to date with any precision, especially because the technologies of survival varied from region to region over a long period of time. Following the end of the Ice Age, however, hunters and gatherers in some parts of the world began to domesticate plants and animals. At some point during this transitional (Mesolithic) culture, the practice of farming or food producing emerged. Food production freed people from a nomadic way of life. Neolithic farmers gradually settled in permanent communities, raising high-protein crops such as wheat and barley in Asia, rice in China, and maize and beans in the Americas. They raised goats, pigs, cattle, and sheep that provided regular sources of food and valuable by-products such as wool and leather. The transition from the hunting-gathering phase of human subsistence to the agricultural-herding phase was a revolutionary development in human social organization, because it marked the shift from a nomadic to a sedentary way of life.

Neolithic sites excavated in Southwest Asia (a region also known as "the Near East" or "the Middle East," which includes Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq), East Asia (China and Japan), and (as late as 1000 B.C.E.) Meso-America center on villages consisting of a number of mud- and limestone-faced huts—humankind's earliest architecture. At Jericho, in present-day Israel, massive defense walls surrounded the town, while tombs held the ornamented remains of local villagers. At Jarmo, in northern Iraq, a community of more than 150 people harvested wheat with stone sickles. Polished stone tools, some designed

Ideas and Issues

KEEPING TRACK OF TIME

All dating systems are culture-bound: The Christian calendar fixes the year 1 with the birth of Jesus (see page 101); thus "A.D." abbreviates the Latin *anno domini nostri Jesu Christi* (the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ) and "B.C." stands for "before Christ." However, the Hebrew calendar begins at the supposed date of creation, while the Muslim one starts with the year of Muhammad's flight to Medina (the Christian year 622). In an effort to find language for tracking time that might be acceptable to all faiths, historians have devised the designations "B.C.E." for "before the common era" and "C.E." for the "common era." While the actual dates of the Christian calendar are retained, the new wording offers an alternative to the Eurocentric and sectarian terminology of the older system.

Making Connections

MOTHER EARTH

In her role as childbearer, the female assures the continuity of humankind. Hence, in the prehistoric community, where survival was fragile, she assumed special importance. Perceived as life-giver, and identified with the mysterious powers of procreation, she was exalted as Mother Earth (Figure **1.3**). Her importance in the ancient world is confirmed by the great number of female statuettes uncovered by archeologists throughout the world. Many of these objects show the female nude with pendulous breasts, large buttocks, and a swollen abdomen, suggesting pregnancy. In the last century, the feminist movement inspired a revival of the imagery of Mother Earth. The twentieth-century sculptor Niki de Saint Phalle called her gigantic female figures "Nanas." These brightly painted polyester images (Figure **1.4**) are exuberant versions of the eternal Earth Mother.

Q Why might the "Venus" of Willendorf be considered a landmark and an inspiration to modern feminists?

Figure 1.3 (above) "Venus" of Willendorf, from Lower Austria, ca. 25,000–20,000 B.C.E. Limestone, height 4⅜ in.
Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna. Photo © Lutz Braun/BPK Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY.

Figure 1.4 Niki de Saint Phalle, *Femme Assise-Nana*, 1968. Painted polyester, 32 × 25 × 30 in.
Photo © Patti McConville/Alamy Stock Photo. © 2019 Niki Charitable Art Foundation. All rights reserved/ARS, New York / ADAGP, Paris.

especially for farming, replaced the cruder tools of Paleolithic people. Ancient Japanese communities seem to have produced the world's oldest known pottery—handcoiled and fired clay vessels. But it is in Southwest Asia that some of the finest examples of painted pottery have come to light.

Agricultural life stimulated a new awareness of seasonal change and a profound respect for those life-giving powers, such as sun and rain, that were essential to the success of the harvest. The earth's fertility and the seasonal cycle were the principal concerns of farming culture.

The overwhelming evidence of female statuettes found in many Neolithic graves suggests that the cult of the Earth Mother may have become important in the transition from food gathering to food production, when fertility and agricultural abundance were vital to the life of the community.

Nevertheless, as with cave art, the exact meaning and function of the so-called mother goddesses remain a matter of speculation: They may have played a role in the performance of rites celebrating seasonal regeneration, or they may have been associated with fertility cults that ensured successful childbirth. The symbolic association between the womb and Mother Earth played an important part in almost all ancient religions. In myth as well, female deities governed the earth, while male deities ruled the sky. From culture to culture, the fertility goddess herself took many different forms. In contrast with the Paleolithic "Venus" of Willendorf (see Figure 1.3), for instance, whose sexual characteristics are boldly exaggerated, the marble statuettes produced in great number on the Cyclades (the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea) are as streamlined and highly stylized as some modern sculptures (Figure **1.5**). Although lacking the pronounced sexual characteristics of the "Venus," the Cycladic figure probably played a similar role in rituals that sought the blessings of Mother Earth.

To farming peoples, the seasonal cycle—a primary fact of subsistence—was associated with birth, death, and regeneration. The dead, whose return to the earth put them in closer touch with the forces of nature, received careful burial. Almost all early cultures regarded the dead as messengers between the world of the living

Figure 1.5 Female figure, early Cycladic II, Late Spedos type, ca. 2600–2400 B.C.E. Marble, height 24¾ in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Photo © Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Christos G. Bastis, 1968 (68.148).

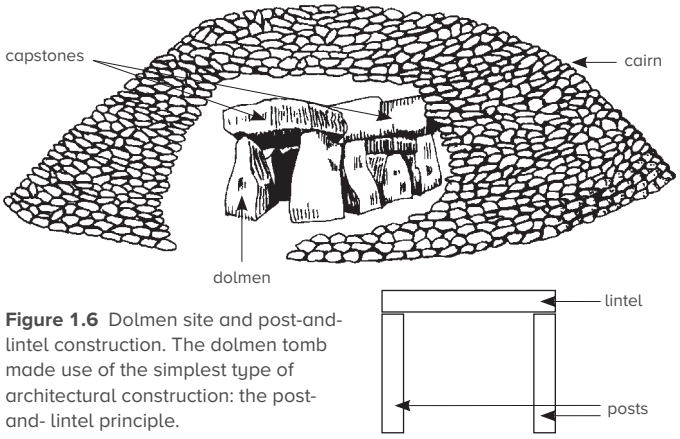


Figure 1.6 Dolmen site and post-and-lintel construction. The dolmen tomb made use of the simplest type of architectural construction: the post-and- lintel principle.

and the spirit world. Neolithic folk marked graves with **megaliths** ("great stones"), upright stone slabs roofed by a capstone to form a stone tomb or **dolmen** (Figure **1.6**). At some sites, the tomb was covered over with dirt and rubble to form a mound, symbolic of the sacred mountain (the abode of the gods) and the procreative womb (the source of regenerative life). This distinctive shape prevails in sacred architecture that ranges from the Meso-American temple (see Figure 1.19) to the Buddhist shrine (see Figure 4.25).

Stone Circles

Recently, at a site called Göbekli Tepe ("Pot-belly hill") in southeastern Turkey, archeologists uncovered a 22-acre complex consisting of some twenty stone circles (Figure **1.7**) that have been dated to 9000 B.C.E., some 6500 years older than the Egyptian pyramids. The T-shaped limestone megaliths at the center of these circles, weighing some 30 to 50 tons and ranging from 10 to 23 feet high, are surrounded by smaller pillars carved with low and high relief images: lions, bulls, scorpions, foxes, snakes, spiders, vultures, and a number of archaic birds, as well as body parts and abstract symbols. Human arms carved into the sides of some of the pillars prompt speculation that these stones may represent ancestors, rulers, or gods (Figure **1.8**). While only five percent of the complex has been excavated, no tombs or graves have yet been found. However, animal bones are numerous, and, in 2017, incised human skulls were uncovered, suggesting that this extraordinary complex may have served as a sanctuary or ritual space devoted to the dead.

The mystery of Göbekli Tepe–the world's oldest religious site–is compounded by the fact that the immediate area lacks both water and the farm-based villages traditionally associated with Neolithic culture. But the location of Göbekli Tepe, at the upper reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (see Map 1.2), suggests that the construction of elaborate open-air shrines may have preceded the more complex agricultural communities traditionally associated with the so-called Neolithic revolution.

Figure 1.7 Stone pillars, Göbekli Tepe ("Pot-belly Hill"), southeastern Turkey, ca. 9000 B.C.E.
Photo © Halil Fidan/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images.

Figure 1.8 Stone pillar, Göbekli Tepe ("Pot-belly Hill"), southeastern Turkey, ca. 9000 B.C.E. Humanoid elements appear on some pillars, while others show animals, birds, snakes, and obscure symbols. Most of the animals represented are predatory and visibly male, and may have served as totems. Some scholars have linked the ubiquitous snake and aviary imagery with that of ancient rock art and shamanic rituals of Australian Aboriginal societies.
Photo © Vincent J. Musi/National Geographic Image Collection.

Making Connections

STONE CIRCLES

Over a period of some 8000 years, stone circles were erected in various parts of the world, ranging from the Outer Hebrides (off the west coast of Scotland) to China. These monumental landmarks may have served as cosmogonic maps of the universe, celestial observatories, religious shrines, or sanctuaries for the dead. Reviving the mysterious presence of such Neolithic shrines as Stonehenge (Figure **1.9**), the American sculptor and environmentalist Nancy Holt (b. 1938) designed the contemporary concentric stone circle known as *Stone Enclosure* (Figure **1.10**). This earthwork is pierced by four arches that run north and south, calculated from the North Star used by celestial navigators. The circular holes in the rings are aligned with the points of the compass. Although modern societies no longer depend on earthworks to predict celestial events, Environmental artists like Holt reassert the human role in reconfiguring space to reflect universal invariables.

Q Are there any monuments or sites in your area that reflect the human fascination with the circle as a sacred symbol?

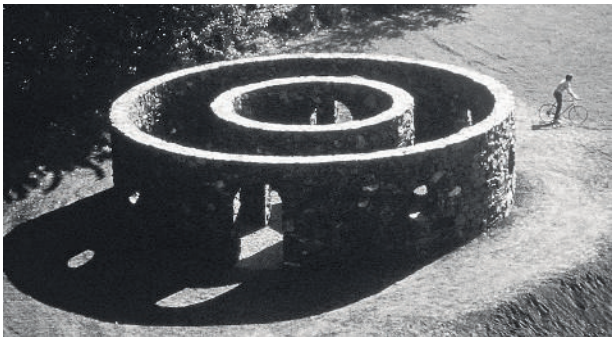


Figure 1.9 Stonehenge, Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, England, ca. 3000–1800 B.C.E. Stone, diameter of circle 97 ft., tallest upright 22 ft.
Photo © Heritage Image Partnership Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo.

Figure 1.10 Nancy Holt, *Stone Enclosure: Rock Rings*, 1977–1978. Brown Mountain stone, diameter of outer ring 40 ft., diameter of inner ring 20 ft., height of ring walls 10 ft.
Western Washington University, funding from the Virginia Wright Fund, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington State Arts Commission, Western Washington University Art Fund and the artist's contributions. Collection of Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington. © 2019 Holt/Smithson Foundation/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Similar megalithic complexes are found at ceremonial and burial sites throughout the world. Placed in multiple rows or in concentric circles (see Making Connections, above), the huge upright stones are often capped by horizontal slabs. A landmark example is the sanctuary at Stonehenge in southern England, where an elaborate group of stone circles, constructed in stages over a period of 2000 years, forms one of the most mysterious and impressive spaces of the prehistoric world (see Figure 1.9).

To this windswept site, 20-foot-high megaliths, some weighing 25 to 50 tons each, were dragged from a quarry some 20 miles away, then shaped and assembled without metal tools to form a huge outer circle and an inner horseshoe of post-and-lintel stones. The smaller stones, originating in southwest Wales, were probably transported on wooden rollers and on water—a journey of some 200 miles. A 35-ton **stele** (upright stone slab) that stands apart from the complex of stone circles marks the point—visible from the exact center of the inner circle—at which the sun rises at the midsummer solstice (the longest day of the year). It is probable that Stonehenge served as a celestial observatory predicting the movements of the sun and moon, clocking the seasonal cycle, and thus providing information that would have been essential to an agricultural society.

Recent excavations of fifty-six pits encircling the henge revealed cremated human remains, suggesting that Stonehenge may have functioned as the site of funerary rituals. Dating from ca. 2600 B.C.E., a huge settlement at nearby Durrington Walls includes hundreds of houses and a ceremonial complex of concentric stone rings. Along a wide avenue that connects Durrington with Stonehenge are dwellings thought by archeologists to have housed religious shrines. Continuing excavation will no doubt unlock more of the mysteries of this Neolithic landmark.

THE BIRTH OF CIVILIZATION

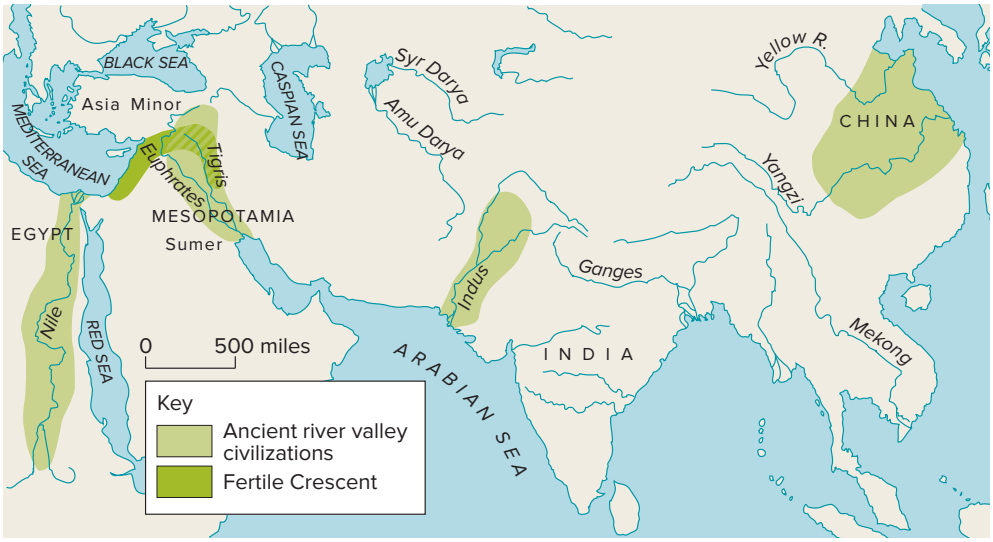
The birth of civilization (the word relates to the Latin *civitas*, or "city") marked the shift from rural to urban culture: the transition from the Neolithic village to the more complex form of social, economic, and political organization associated with urban life. In the ancient cities of Sumer in Mesopotamia, and along the Nile River (Map **1.1**), Neolithic villages had grown in population and productivity to become the bustling cities of a new era. Surplus amounts of food and goods were now traded with neighboring communities. Advances in technology, such as the wheel, the plow, the solar calendar, and bronze-casting, enhanced economic efficiency. Wheeled carts transported people and goods overland, while sailboats used the natural resources of wind and water for travel. Large-scale farming required seasonal labor and artificial systems of irrigation, which, in turn, demanded more complex kinds of communal cooperation and organization.

By comparison with the self-sustaining Neolithic village, the early city reached outward. Specialization and the division of labor raised productivity and encouraged trade, which, in turn, enhanced the growth of the urban economy. Activities related to the production and distribution of goods could no longer be committed entirely to memory; they required an efficient system of accounting and record-keeping.

From Counting to Writing

The landmark event of the first civilizations was the invention of writing. Writing made it possible to record and preserve information. More a process than an invention, writing evolved from counting. As early as 7500 B.C.E., merchants used tokens—pieces of clay molded into the shapes of objects—to represent specific commodities: a cone for a unit of grain, an egg shape for a unit of oil, and so on. Tokens were placed in hollow clay balls that accompanied shipments of goods. Upon arrival at their destination, the balls were broken open and the tokens—the "record" of the shipment—were counted. Eventually, traders began to stamp the tokens into wet clay to indicate the nature and amounts of the actual goods.

By 3100 B.C.E., pictorial symbols, or **pictographs**, had replaced the tokens. Using a stylus cut from a reed, scribes incised the pictographs on wet clay tablets. These marks assumed more angular and wedged shapes: **Cuneiform** (from *cuneus*, the Latin word for "wedge") became the type of writing used throughout the Near East for well over 3000 years. Thousands of inscribed clay tablets have survived; the earliest of them come from Sumer in Mesopotamia. Most bear notations concerning production and trade; others are inventories and business accounts, records of historical events, myths, prayers, and genealogies of local rulers.



RIVER VALLEY CIVILIZATIONS

ca. 4000–2000 B.C.E.

urban life
political institutions
specialization and division of labor
trade and large-scale farming
wheeled vehicles and sailboats
metallurgy/bronze tools and weapons
writing and record-keeping
solar calendar

Map 1.1 Ancient river valley civilizations. The first civilization of the ancient world emerged in Mesopotamia, a fertile area that lay between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers of the Southwest Asian land mass. Mesopotamia formed the eastern arc of the Fertile Crescent, which stretched westward to the Nile delta. At the southeastern perimeter of the Fertile Crescent, about a dozen cities collectively constituted Sumer, the very earliest civilization known to history. Shortly after the rise of Sumer, around 3500 B.C.E., Egyptian civilization emerged along the Nile River in northeast Africa. In India, the earliest urban centers appeared in the valley of the Indus River that runs through the northwest portion of the Indian subcontinent. Chinese civilization was born in the northern part of China's vast central plain, watered by the Yellow River. The appearance of these four river valley civilizations was not simultaneous—fully a thousand years separates the birth of civilization in Sumer from the rise of cities in China.

Making Connections

THE INVENTION OF WRITING

The first example, written in Egyptian **hieroglyphs** ("sacred writing"), is a student writing board with the teacher's corrections in red (Figure **1.11**). The tablet from Sumer, written in cuneiform, is a record of accounts listing the sale of animals and such commodities as bread and beer (Figure **1.12**). The Chinese oracle bone bears a calligraphic inscription that asks whether there will be a disaster in the week to come (Figure **1.13**). A later inscription notes that there was indeed a disaster, in the form of a military invasion.

Q How did each of these texts serve the practical concerns of the community?

Figure 1.12 Cuneiform: Reverse side of pictographic clay tablet from Jamdat Nasr, near Kish, Iraq, ca. 3000 B.C.E. Height 4⅜ in.
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Photo © Bridgeman Images.

Figure 1.11 Egyptian hieroglyphs: Gessoed writing board for school exercises from Upper Egypt, Thebes or Northern Upper Egypt, Akhmim, Middle Kingdom, ca. 1981–1802 B.C.E. Wood, gesso, paint, 16¹⁵⁄₁₆ × 7½ in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo © Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Edward S. Harkness, 1928 (28.9.4).

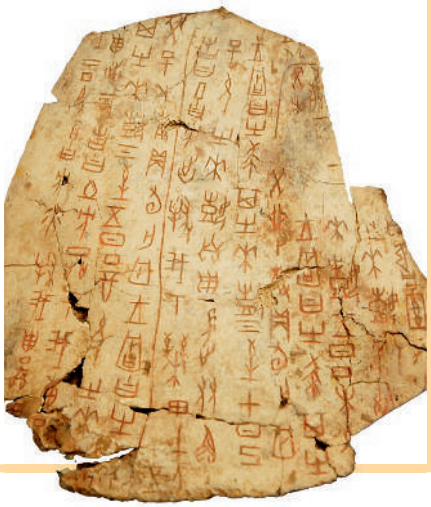


Figure 1.13 Oracle bone script on oracle bone from Bronze Age China.
Photo © Zens Photo/ Getty Images.

Metallurgy: The Bronze Age

Along with writing, a landmark change in technology marked the birth of civilization: Metal began to replace stone and bone. **Metallurgy**, first practiced in Asia Minor shortly after 4000 B.C.E., afforded individuals greater control over nature by providing harder, more efficient tools and weapons. At the outset, copper ore was extracted from surface deposits, but eventually metalsmiths mined and smelted a variety of ores to produce bronze—an alloy of copper and tin that proved far superior to stone or bone in strength and durability. Since copper and tin ores were often located far apart, travel and trade were essential to Bronze Age cultures. The technology of bronze-casting, which required a high degree of specialization, spread from Mesopotamia throughout the ancient world. In India, complex metalwork techniques were used for the production of jewelry, musical instruments, horse fittings, and toys. The master metallurgists of the ancient world were the Chinese, who used sectional clay molds to cast separate parts of bronze vessels, which they then soldered together. These bronze-cast vessels are among the most engaging landmarks of the ancient world (Figure **1.14**).

Figure 1.14 Ceremonial vessel with a cover, late Shang dynasty, China, ca. 1000 B.C.E. Bronze, height 20⅛ in. From Chinese graves come bronze bells used in rituals and bronze vessels designed to hold food and drink for the deceased. The surfaces of these objects—a linear complex of dragons, birds, and zoomorphic motifs—reflect the Chinese view of a cosmos animated by natural spirits.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (F1930.26AB). Photo © Bridgeman Images.

MESOPOTAMIA

"Land Between the Rivers"

Sumer, humankind's earliest civilization, came to flourish around 3500 B.C.E. Located in present-day Iraq, where the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers empty into the Persian Gulf (Map **1.2**), Sumer enjoyed the rich soil that made possible agricultural life and the rise of urban culture. The Fertile Crescent formed by the two rivers, an area known as Mesopotamia—literally "land between the rivers"—was also at the mercy of these rivers. They overflowed unpredictably, often devastating whole villages. Sumer consisted of a loosely knit group of city-states; that is, urban centers that governed the neighboring countryside. Sumer was the home of our earliest bronze technology, the first wheeled vehicles, and the cuneiform script used for the first written records; therefore one might say that history began at Sumer.

Community life in Sumer demanded collective effort in matters of production and distribution, as well as in the irrigation of fields and the construction of roads, temples, palaces, and military defenses. The specialization of labor encouraged the development of social classes with different types of training, and various levels of authority. The priest who prepared the ritual wine, the soldier who protected the city, and the farmer who cultivated the field represented distinct classes of people with unique duties and responsibilities to society as a whole.

Visual evidence of the social order and division of labor that prevailed in Mesopotamia around 2700 B.C.E. is provided by the "Standard of Ur" (Figure **1.15**), a double-sided wooden box ornamented in **mosaic** (a medium by which small pieces of glass or stone are embedded in wet cement). The function of this object, found in the royal tombs excavated at the Sumerian city of Ur (see Map 1.2), is still debated. Nevertheless, this landmark in the history of visual narrative clearly commemorates a Sumerian victory. The lowest register on the side of the panel generally called "War" records a battle in which four-wheeled chariots trample the enemy; in the middle register, prisoners are stripped of their clothes by soldiers wearing leather cloaks and bronze helmets; in the uppermost register, captives are paraded before the ruler and his officials. The top register of the second panel, known as "Peace," depicts a victory banquet at which the seated ruler and six of his officials holding goblets are entertained by a harpist and a singer. The middle register shows a procession of servants herding animals that might serve as culinary fare or as sacrificial tribute; on the bottom register, laborers or foreigners (probably prisoners of war) carry bundles on their backs.

The city-states of Sumer were disunited and frequently rivalrous, and thus vulnerable to invasion from tribal nomads who threatened Sumer from the mountainous regions to the north of the Fertile Crescent. Around 2350 B.C.E., the warrior Sargon of Akkad (Figure **1.16**) conquered the Sumerian city-states, uniting them under his command. But by 2000 B.C.E., Sargon's empire had fallen in turn to the attacks of a new group of invaders, who—establishing a pattern that dominated Mesopotamian history for 3000 years—would build a new civilization on the soil and the achievements of the very lands they conquered.

Map 1.2 Southwest Asia (Near and Middle East).

Figure 1.15 The Standard of Ur, ca. 2700 B.C.E. Double-sided panel (reconstructed as a shallow wooden box) inlaid with shell, **lapis lazuli** (a semiprecious blue stone), and red limestone, height 8½ in., length 20 in., width 4½ in. (end base), width 2¼ in. (end top). Leonard Woolley, the early twentieth-century British archeologist who excavated Ur in 1928, imagined that the object was carried on a pole as a battle standard. More recently, scholars have suggested that the panels belong to the soundbox of a musical instrument.
British Museum, London. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, London/Art Resource, NY.

Myths, Gods, and Goddesses

Like their prehistoric ancestors, the people of Mesopotamia lived in intimate association with nature. They looked upon the forces of nature—sun, wind, and rain—as vital and alive; inhabited by living spirits, even, in a belief known as **animism**. Just as they devised tools to manipulate the natural environment, so they devised strategies by which to explain and control that environment. Myths—that is, stories that describe the workings of nature—were part of the ritual fabric of everyday life. In legends and myths, the living spirits of nature assumed human (and heroic) status: Deities of the wind and storm, sun and moon might be vengeful or beneficent, ugly or beautiful, fickle or reliable. Ultimately, they became a family of superhumans—gods and goddesses who very much resembled humans in their physical features and personalities, but whose superior strength and intelligence far exceeded that of human beings. The gods were also immortal, which made them the envy of ordinary human beings. Ritual sacrifice, prayer, and the enactment of myths honoring one or more of the gods accompanied seasonal celebrations, rites of passage, and almost every other significant communal event. In the early history of civilization, goddesses seem to have outnumbered gods, and local deities reigned supreme within their own districts.

Mesopotamian **polytheism** (belief in many gods) was closely linked to nature and its forces. Much like the unstable climate of the Fertile Crescent, its gods were fierce and capricious and its

Figure 1.16 Head of the Akkadian ruler Sargon I, from Nineveh, Iraq, ca. 2350 B.C.E. Bronze, height 12 in. Some scholars identify this portrait as Sargon's grandson. As with most ancient figural sculptures, the eyes, which once contained precious or semiprecious gemstones, were vandalized by thieves or destroyed by the ruler's enemies. Despite this, the finely detailed bronze image remains a landmark example of the lost-wax method of metal-casting, which originated in Mesopotamia.
Iraq Museum, Baghdad. Photo © Scala/Art Resource, NY.

mythology filled with physical and spiritual woe, reflecting a **cosmology** (a view of the origin and structure of the universe) based on the themes of chaos and conflict. *The Babylonian Creation* (ca. early second millennium B.C.E.), humankind's earliest cosmological myth, illustrates all these conditions. Recited during the festival of the New Year, the poem celebrates the birth of the gods and the order of creation. A Mesopotamian predecessor of the Hebrew Genesis, it describes a universe that originated by means of spontaneous generation: At a moment when there was neither heaven nor earth, the sweet and bitter waters "mingled" to produce the first family of gods. As the story unfolds, chaos and discord dominate the reign of Tiamat, the Great Mother of the primeval waters, until Marduk, hero-god and offspring of Wisdom, takes matters in hand. He destroys the Great Mother and proceeds to establish a new order, bringing to an end the long and ancient tradition of matriarchy:

> Then Marduk made a bow and strung it to be his own weapon, he set the arrow against the bow-string, in his right hand he grasped the mace and lifted it up, bow and quiver hung at his side, lightnings played in front of him, he was altogether an incandescence.
>
> He netted a net, a snare for Tiamat; the winds from their quarters held it, south wind, north, east wind, west, and no part of Tiamat could escape....
>
> He turned back to where Tiamat lay bound, he straddled the legs and smashed her skull (for the mace was merciless), he severed the arteries and the blood streamed down the north wind to the unknown ends of the world.
>
> When the gods saw all this they laughed out loud, and they sent him presents. They sent him their thankful tributes.
>
> The lord rested; he gazed at the huge body, pondering how to use it, what to create from the dead carcass. He split it apart like a cockle-shell; with the upper half he constructed the arc of sky, he pulled down the bar and set a watch on the waters, so they should never escape....

Finally, Marduk founds the holy city of Babylon (literally, "home of the gods") and creates human beings, whose purpose it is to serve heaven's squabbling divinities.

Mesopotamia's Ziggurats

The **ziggurat**, a massive terraced tower made of rubble and brick, was the spiritual center of the Mesopotamian city-state. Serving as both a shrine and a temple (and possibly also a funerary site), it symbolized the sacred mountain that linked

Figure 1.17 Statuettes from the Abu Temple, Tel Asmar, Iraq, ca. 2900–2600 B.C.E. Marble, tallest figure ca. 30 in. The enlarged eyes, inlaid with shell and black limestone, convey the impression of dread and awe—visual testimony to the sense of human apprehension in the face of divine power.
Iraq Museum, Baghdad. Photo © Heritage Image Partnership Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo.

Making Connections

TEMPLE TOWERS

There are striking similarities between the mud-brick ziggurats of Mesopotamia (Figure **1.18**) and the stepped platform pyramids of the ancient Americas (Figure **1.19**). Erected atop rubble mounds, the temples of the Americas functioned as solar observatories, religious sanctuaries, and grave sites. Whether or not any historical link exists between the temple towers of these remote cultures remains among the many mysteries of ancient history.

Q How do these structures compare in function and size?

Figure 1.18 Ziggurat at Ur (partially reconstructed), third dynasty of Ur, Iraq, ca. 2150–2050 B.C.E. Base 210 × 150 ft., height ca. 100 ft. Located on the banks of the Euphrates River, the ziggurat was dedicated to the moon god Nanna, the patron deity of the city.
Photo © Silvio Fiore/SuperStock.

Figure 1.19 Pyramid of the Sun, Teotihuacán, Mexico, begun before 150 C.E. Length of each side of base 768 ft., height 210 ft.
Photo © f9photos/Getty Images.

heaven and earth (see Figure 1.18). Ascended by a steep stairway, it provided a platform for sanctuaries dedicated to the local deities honored by priests and priestesses.

Shrine rooms located some 250 feet atop the ziggurat stored clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform records of the city's economic activities, its religious customs, and its rites. The shrine room of the ziggurat at Tel Asmar in Sumer also housed a remarkable group of statues representing men and women of various sizes, with large, staring eyes and hands clasped across their chests (Figure **1.17**). Carved out of soft stone, these cult images may represent the gods, but it is more likely that they are votive (devotional) figures that represent the townspeople of Tel Asmar in the act of worshiping their local deities. The larger figures may be priests, and the smaller figures laypersons. Rigid and attentive, they stand as if in perpetual prayer.

Gilgamesh: The First Epic

Mesopotamia produced the world's first literary **epic**: the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2300 B.C.E.). An epic is a long narrative poem that recounts the deeds of a hero, one who undertakes some great quest or mission. Epics are usually tales of adventure that reflect the ideas and values of the community in which they originate. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* was recited orally for centuries before it was written down at Sumer in the late third millennium B.C.E. As literature, it precedes the Hebrew Bible and all the other major writings of antiquity. Its hero is a semihistorical figure who probably ruled the ancient Sumerian city of Uruk around 2800 B.C.E. Described as two-thirds god and one-third man, Gilgamesh is blessed by the gods with beauty and courage. But when he spurns the affections of the Queen of Heaven, Ishtar (a fertility goddess not unlike the Egyptian Isis), he is

punished with the loss of his dearest companion, Enkidu. Despairing over Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh undertakes a long and hazardous quest in search of everlasting life. Among his numerous adventures is his encounter with Utnapishtim, a mortal who (like Noah of the Hebrew Bible) saved humankind from a great and devastating flood. As his reward for this deed, the gods have granted Utnapishtim eternal life. Gilgamesh begs him to disclose the secret of life everlasting:

> "Oh, father Utnapishtim, you who have entered the assembly of the gods, I wish to question you concerning the living and the dead, how shall I find the life for which I am searching?"
>
> Utnapishtim said, "There is no permanence. Do we build a house to stand for ever, do we seal a contract to hold for all time? Do brothers divide an inheritance to keep for ever, does the flood-time of rivers endure? It is only the nymph of the dragon-fly who sheds her larva and sees the sun in his glory. From the days of old there is no permanence. The sleeping and the dead, how alike they are, they are like a painted death. What is there between the master and the servant when both have fulfilled their doom?"

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is important not only as the world's first epic poem, but also as the earliest known literary work that tries to come to terms with death, or nonbeing. It reflects the profound human need for an immortality ideology—a body of beliefs that anticipates the survival of some aspect of the self in a life hereafter. Lamenting the brevity of life, Utnapishtim teaches Gilgamesh that all classes of people—the master and the servant—are equal in death. However, he generously guides Gilgamesh to the plant that miraculously restores lost youth. Although Gilgamesh retrieves the plant, he guards it poorly: While he sleeps, it is snatched by a serpent (a creature whose capacity for shedding its skin made it an ancient symbol of rebirth). Gilgamesh is left with the haunting vision of death as "a house of dust," and a destiny of inescapable sadness. The mythic hero has discovered his human limits, but he has failed to secure everlasting life.

Figure 1.20 Stele of Hammurabi, first Babylonian dynasty, ca. 1750 B.C.E. Basalt, entire stele 88½ × 25½ in. At the top of this stele, carved in low relief, is the image of the sun god Shamash. Wearing a conical crown topped with bull's horns, and discharging flames from his shoulders, Shamash is enthroned atop a sacred mountain, symbolized by triangular markings beneath his feet. Like Moses on Mount Sinai, Hammurabi receives the law—here in the form of a staff—from the supreme deity. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo © Christian Larrieu/RMN-Grand Palais/ Art Resource, NY.

Babylon: Hammurabi's Law Code

Shortly after 2000 B.C.E., the rulers of the city-state of Babylon unified the neighboring territories of Sumer to establish the first Babylonian empire. In an effort to unite these regions politically and provide them with effective leadership, Babylon's sixth ruler, Hammurabi, called for a systematic codification of existing legal practices. He sent out envoys to collect the local statutes and had them consolidated into a single body of law. Hammurabi's Code (ca. 1750 B.C.E.)—a collection of 282 clauses engraved on a 7-foot-high stele—is our most valuable index to life in ancient Mesopotamia (Figure **1.20**). The Code is not the first example of recorded law among the Babylonian rulers; it is, however, the most extensive and comprehensive set of laws to survive from ancient times. Although Hammurabi's Code addressed primarily secular matters, it bore the force of divine decree. This fact is indicated in the prologue to the Code, in which Hammurabi claims descent from the gods.

Written law represents a landmark advance in the development of human rights in that it protected the individual from the capricious decisions of the **monarch**. Unwritten law was subject to the hazards of memory and the eccentricities of the powerful. Written law, on the other hand, permitted a more impersonal (if more objective and impartial) kind of justice than did oral law. It replaced the flexibility of the spoken word with the rigidity of the written word. It did not usually recognize exceptions and was not easily or quickly changed. Ultimately, recorded law shifted the burden of judgment from the individual ruler to the legal establishment. Although written law necessarily restricted individual freedom, it safeguarded the basic values of the community.

Hammurabi's Code covers a broad spectrum of moral, social, and commercial obligations. Its civil and criminal statutes specify penalties for murder, theft, incest, adultery, kidnapping, assault and battery, and many other crimes. More importantly for our understanding of ancient culture, it is a storehouse of information concerning the nature of class divisions, family relations, and human rights.

Under Babylonian law, individuals were not regarded as equals. Human worth was defined in terms of a person's wealth and status in society. Violence committed by one free person upon another was punished reciprocally (clause 196), but the same violence committed upon a lower-class individual drew considerably lighter punishment (clause 198), and penalties were reduced even further if the victim was a slave (clause 199). Slaves, whether captives of war or victims of debt, had no civil rights under law and enjoyed only the protection of the household to which they belonged.

In Babylonian society, women were considered intellectually and physically inferior to men and—much like slaves—were regarded as the personal property of the male head of the household. A woman went from her father's house to that of her husband, where she was expected to bear children (clause 138). Nevertheless, as indicated by the Code, women enjoyed considerable legal protection (see clauses 134, 138, 141, and 142); their value as both childbearers and housekeepers was clearly acknowledged.

Ideas and Issues

FROM HAMMURABI'S CODE

134 If a man has been taken prisoner, and there is no food in his house, and his wife enters the house of another; then that woman bears no blame.
138 If a man divorces his spouse who has not borne him children, he shall give to her all the silver of the bride-price, and restore to her the dowry which she brought from the house of her father; and so he shall divorce her.
141 If a man's wife, dwelling in a man's house, has set her face to leave, has been guilty of dissipation, has wasted her house, and has neglected her husband; then she shall be prosecuted. If her husband says she is divorced, he shall let her go her way; he shall give her nothing for divorce. If her husband says she is not divorced, her husband may espouse another woman, and that woman shall remain a slave in the house of her husband.
142 If a woman hate her husband, and says 'Thou shalt not possess me,' the reason for her dislike shall be inquired into. If she is careful and has no fault, but her husband takes himself away and neglects her; then that woman is not to blame. She shall take her dowry and go back to her father's house.
196 If a man has destroyed the eye of a free man, his own eye shall be destroyed.
198 If he has destroyed the eye of a plebeian, or broken the bone of a plebeian, he shall pay one mina of silver [approximately one pound of silver].
199 If he has destroyed the eye of a man's slave, or broken the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay half his value.

Q What limits to human equality are suggested in these laws?
Q **How would you evaluate the rights of women?**

Iron Technology

During the course of the second millennium B.C.E., all of Mesopotamia felt the effects of a new technology: Iron was introduced into Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) by the Hittites, tribal nomads who built an empire that lasted until ca. 1200 B.C.E. Cheaper to produce and more durable than bronze, iron represented new, superior technology. In addition to their iron weapons, the Hittites made active use of horse-drawn war chariots, which provided increased speed and mobility in battle. The combination of war chariots and iron weapons gave the Hittites clear military superiority over all of Mesopotamia.

As iron technology spread slowly throughout the Near East, it transformed the ancient world. Iron tools contributed to increased agricultural production, which in turn supported an increased population. In the wake of the Iron Age, numerous small states and vast **empires** came to flower.

Landmarks of the Iron Age

Cheaper and stronger weapons also meant larger, more efficient armies. By the first millennium B.C.E., war was no longer the monopoly of the elite. Iron technology encouraged the rapid rise of large and powerful empires: Equipped with iron weapons, the Assyrians (ca. 750–600 B.C.E.; Figure **1.21**), the Chaldeans (ca. 600–540 B.C.E.), and the Persians (ca. 550–330 B.C.E.) followed one another in conquering vast portions of Mesopotamia.

Under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar (ca. 634–562 B.C.E.), the Chaldeans (or Neo-Babylonians) rebuilt the ancient city of Babylon (see Map 1.2). A huge ziggurat commissioned by Nebuchadnezzar is believed to be the "Tower of Babel" referred to in the Hebrew Bible. An equally famous landmark, the Ishtar Gate, one of Babylon's eight monumental portals, spanned the north entrance route into the city (Figure **1.22**). Faced with deep blue glazed bricks and adorned with rows of dragons and bulls, it is history's earliest round **arch** employed on a colossal scale. The Chaldean empire would play a major role in the history of the Hebrew people (see page 98); however, all three of the iron-wielding empires grew in size and authority by imposing military control over territories outside their own natural boundaries—a practice known as *imperialism*.

While iron itself represents a landmark in the technology of the ancient world, each of the era's small states would generate lasting cultural innovations. By 1500 B.C.E., the Phoenicians—an energetic seafaring people located on the Mediterranean Sea (see Map 1.2)—developed a nonpictographic alphabet of twenty-two signs, which, like Hebrew and Arabic, consisted only of consonants. Traveling widely as merchants, the Phoenicians spread this alphabetic script throughout the Mediterranean area.

In Asia Minor, the successors of the Hittites—a people known as Lydians—began the practice of minting coins. Easier to trade than bars of gold or silver, coin currency facilitated commercial ventures. The third of the small states, the Hebrew, would leave the world an equally significant but more intangible landmark: a religious tradition founded on ethical **monotheism** (the belief in one and only one god; see page 96).

Figure 1.21 King Ashurnasirpal II Killing Lions, from Palace of King Ashurnasirpal II, Nimrud, ca. 883–859 B.C.E. Alabaster relief, 3 ft. 3 in. × 8 ft. 4 in. The Assyrians were the most militant of the iron-wielding Mesopotamian empires. On the walls of their citadels at Nimrud and Nineveh, they carved low-relief depictions of hunting and war, two closely related subjects that displayed the ruler's courage and physical might. The lion, a traditional symbol of power, falls to the king in this splendid scene of combat.
British Museum, London. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, London/Art Resource, NY.

The Persian Empire

Among the Mesopotamian empires that rose to power during the first millennium B.C.E., Persia (modern-day Iran) was the largest. Swallowing up the region's small states, at its height it reached from the shores of the Mediterranean to India's Indus valley (see Map 1.1). Its linguistic and ethnic diversity made it the first multicultural civilization of the ancient world. At the ceremonial center of Persepolis, the Persians built a huge palace of elaborately carved stone. Persian craftsmen brought to perfection the art of metalworking: Their utensils and jewelry display some of the most intricate goldworking techniques in the history of this medium.

Persia's powerful monarchs, aided by efficient administrators, oversaw a vast network of roads that assisted in the operation of an imperial postal system. Across some 1600 miles of terrain, fresh horses (located at post stations 14 miles apart) carried couriers hindered "neither by snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness from accomplishing their appointed course with all speed," according to the Greek historian Herodotus, who (unwittingly) provided the motto for the United States Postal Service.

The Persians devised a monotheistic religion based on the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster (ca. 628–ca. 551 B.C.E.). Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra) saw the universe as the product of two warring forces: Good and Evil. The Good, associated with light and with a place of ultimate reward known as Paradise, opposed Evil and darkness, represented by a powerful satanic spirit. By their freedom to make choices, human beings took part in this cosmic struggle; their choices determined their fate at the end of time. Zoroastrian beliefs, including the anticipation of last judgment and resurrection, would come to influence the evolution of three great world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (see Chapter 4).

Figure 1.22 Ishtar Gate (reconstructed), from Babylon, ca. 575 B.C.E. Glazed brick. Staatliche Museen, Berlin. The gate was dedicated to Ishtar, the Akkadian goddess of love, fertility, and war (see page 12); dragons and bulls were sacred to the god Marduk (see page 11).
Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Photo © Olaf M. Tessner/bpk Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY.

AFRICA: ANCIENT EGYPT

Ancient Egyptian civilization emerged along the banks of the Nile River in northeast Africa. From the heart of Africa, the thin blue thread of the Nile flowed some 4000 miles to its fan-shaped delta at the Mediterranean Sea. Along this river, agricultural villages thrived, coming under the authority of a sole ruler around 3150 B.C.E. Surrounded by sea and desert, Egypt was relatively invulnerable to foreign invasion (Map **1.3**), a condition that lent stability to Egyptian history. Unlike Mesopotamia, home to many different civilizations, ancient Egypt enjoyed a fairly uniform religious, political, and cultural life that lasted for almost 3000 years. Its population shared a common language and a common world view.

Local rulers governed the Neolithic villages along the Nile until roughly 3150 B.C.E., when they were united under the authority of Narmer (or Menes), Egypt's first monarch, or pharaoh (literally "great house"). This landmark event—the union of Upper and Lower Egypt and the establishment of the first Egyptian **dynasty** (a sequence of rulers from the same family)—is commemorated on a 2-foot-high artifact known as the Palette of King Narmer (Figure **1.23**). For some 2500 years to follow, ancient Egypt was ruled by a succession of dynasties, the history of which was divided into chronological periods by an Egyptian priest of the third century B.C.E. (see box below).

The Palette of King Narmer, uncovered in 1898 at the ancient Temple of Horus in Nekhen, may have functioned as a surface on which to grind paints for the adornment of temple sculptures, but it was more likely a ritual or ceremonial object that celebrated the military authority of the pharaoh. One side of the slate palette shows the triumphant Narmer, wielding the royal mace and seizing a fallen enemy by the hair. Below his feet lie the bodies of the vanquished. To his left, a slave (represented smaller in size than Narmer) dutifully carries his master's sandals. At the upper right is the victorious falcon, symbol of the god Horus. Horus/Narmer holds by the leash the now-subdued lands of Lower Egypt, symbolized by a severed head and **papyrus**, the reedlike plants that grow along the Nile. On the reverse, the top register bears a victory procession flanked by rows of defeated soldiers, who stand with their decapitated heads between their legs.

EGYPT	MESOPOTAMIA
Early Dynastic (Dynasties I–II) ca. 3100–2700 B.C.E.	Early Dynastic (Sumerian) ca. 3500–2350 B.C.E.
Old Kingdom (Dynasties III–VI) ca. 2700–2150 B.C.E.	Sargon's Empire (Akkadian) ca. 2350–2230 B.C.E.
Middle Kingdom (Dynasties XI–XII) ca. 2050–1785 B.C.E.	Babylonian Empire ca. 2000–1600 B.C.E. Hammurabi rules ca. 1790–1750 B.C.E.
New Kingdom (Dynasties XVIII–XX) ca. 1575–1085 B.C.E. Akhenaten rules ca. 1353–1336 B.C.E	Hittite Empire ca. 1450–1200 B.C.E.

Map 1.3 Ancient Egypt.

Figure 1.23 The Palette of King Narmer (back and front), ca. 3100 B.C.E. Slate, height 25 in.
Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Photo © Werner Forman Archive/Art Resource, NY.

The Gods of Ancient Egypt

In the hot, arid climate of northeast Africa, where ample sunlight made possible the cultivation of crops, the sun god held the place of honor. Variously called Amon, Re (Ra), or Aten, this god was considered greater than any other deity in the Egyptian pantheon. His cult dominated the polytheistic belief system of ancient Egypt for three millennia. Equally important to Egyptian life was the Nile, the world's longest river. Egypt, called by Herodotus "the gift of the Nile," depended on the annual overflow of the river, which left fertile layers of rich silt along its banks. The 365-day cycle of the river's inundation became the basis of the solar calendar. In the regularity of the sun's daily cycle and the Nile's annual deluge, ancient Egyptians found security and a deep sense of order. From the natural elements—the sun, the Nile, and the mountainless topography of North Africa—they conceived Egypt's cosmological myth, which described the earth as a flat platter floating on the waters of the underworld. According to Egyptian mythology, at the beginning of time the Nile's primordial waters brought forth a mound of silt, out of which emerged the self-generating sun god; from that god, the rest of Egypt's gods were born.

Ancient Egyptians viewed the sun's daily ascent in the east as symbolic of the god's "rebirth"; his daily resurrection signified the victory of the forces of day, light, purity, goodness, and life over those of night, darkness, ignorance, evil, and death. In the cyclical regularity of nature evidenced by the daily rising and setting of the sun, the ancient Egyptians perceived both the inevitability of death and the promise of birth.

Second only to the sun as the major natural force in Egyptian life was the Nile River. Ancient Egyptians identified the Nile with Osiris, ruler of the underworld and god of the dead. According to Egyptian myth, Osiris was slain by his evil brother, Set, who chopped his body into pieces and threw them into the Nile. But Osiris' loyal wife, Isis, Queen of Heaven, gathered the fragments and restored Osiris to life. The union of Isis and the resurrected Osiris produced a son, Horus, who ultimately avenged his father by overthrowing Set and becoming ruler of Egypt. The Osiris myth vividly describes the idea of resurrection that was central to the ancient Egyptian belief system. Although the cult of the sun in his various aspects dominated the official religion of Egypt, local gods and goddesses—more than 2000 of them—made up the Egyptian pantheon. These deities, most of whom

held multiple powers, played protective roles in the daily lives of the ancient Egyptians. The following invocation to Isis, however, found inscribed on a sculpture of the goddess, suggests her central role among the female deities of Egypt:

> Praise to you, Isis, the Great One
> God's Mother, Lady of Heaven,
> Mistress and Queen of the Gods.

A painted papyrus scroll called the *Book of the Dead*, a collection of funerary prayers (see page 97), illustrates the last judgment: The enthroned Osiris, god of the underworld (far right) and his wife, Isis (far left), oversee the ceremony in which the heart of the deceased Princess Entiu-ny is weighed against the figure of Truth (Figure **1.24**). Having made her testimony, the princess watches as the jackal-headed god of death, Anubis, prepares her heart for the ordeal. "Grant thou," reads the prayer to Osiris, "that I may have my being among the living, and that I may sail up and down the river among those who are in thy following." If the heart is not "found true by trial of the Great Balance," it will be devoured by the monster Ament, thus meeting a second death. If pure, it might sail with the sun "up and down the river," or flourish in a realm where wheat grows high and the living souls of the dead enjoy feasting and singing.

Figure 1.24 Scene from a funerary papyrus, *Book of the Dead*. Height 11¾ in. Princess Entiu-ny stands to the left of a set of scales on which Anubis, the jackal-headed god, weighs her heart against the figure of Truth, while Osiris, Lord of the Dead, judges from his throne. His wife, Isis, stands behind the princess.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo © Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.3.31).

Theocracy and the Cult of the Dead

From earliest times, political power was linked with spiritual power and superhuman might. The Egyptians held that divine power flowed from the gods to their royal agents. In this **theocracy** (rule by god or god's representative), the pharaoh represented heaven's will on earth.

Ancient Egyptians venerated the pharaoh as the living representative of the sun god. They believed that on his death, the pharaoh would join with the sun to govern Egypt eternally. His body was prepared for burial by means of a special ten-week embalming procedure that involved removing all his internal organs (with the exception of his heart) and filling his body cavity with preservatives. His intestines, stomach, lungs, and liver were all embalmed separately; the brain was removed and discarded. The king's corpse was then wrapped in fine linen and placed in an elaborately ornamented coffin, which was floated down the Nile on a royal barge to a burial site at Gizeh, near the southern tip of the Nile delta (see Map 1.3). Guarding the entrance to the funerary complex at Gizeh was the Great Sphinx (see Figure 1.1), a recumbent creature bearing what scholars believe to be the portrait head of the Old Kingdom pharaoh Khafre (ca. 2600 B.C.E.) and the body of a lion, king of beasts. This hybrid symbol of superhuman power and authority is antiquity's earliest and largest surviving colossal sculpture. It is carved from a single outcropping of sandstone left from quarrying the surrounding rock.

Khafre and other fourth-dynasty pharaohs built tombs in the shape of a pyramid representing the mound of silt in the marshland of the Nile from which the primordial sun god arose. Constructed between 2600 and 2500 B.C.E., the pyramids are

Making Connections

PYRAMIDS ANCIENT AND MODERN

The Great Pyramid of Khufu, which stands as part of a large walled burial complex at Gizeh (Figure **1.25**), consists of more than two million stone blocks rising to a height of approximately 480 feet and covering a base area of 13 acres. It inspired the Chinese-born architect I. M. Pei for his commission in the mid-1980s to provide a monumental entrance for the Louvre Museum in Paris. The angle of the slope of Pei's glass structure (Figure **1.26**) is almost identical to that of the Pyramid of Khufu.

Q How does the transposition of materials (from stone to glass) affect the visual impact of Pei's modern Pyramid?

Figure 1.25 Great Pyramids of Gizeh: from left to right, Menkaure, ca. 2575 B.C.E., Khufu, ca. 2650 B.C.E., Khafre, ca. 2600 B.C.E.
Photo © Dan Breckwoldt/Shutterstock.

Figure 1.26 I. M. Pei & Associates, Louvre Pyramid, Paris, 1988.
Photo © John Harper/Corbis/Getty Images.

technological wonders, as well as symbols of ancient Egypt's endurance through time (see Figure 1.25). A workforce of some 50,000 men (divided into gangs of twenty-five) labored for almost thirty years to raise the Great Pyramid of Khufu. According to recent DNA analysis of the workers found buried at Gizeh, the pyramid builders were Egyptians, not foreign slaves, as was previously assumed. This native workforce quarried, transported, and assembled thousands of mammoth stone blocks, most weighing between 2 and 50 tons. These they lifted from tier to tier by means of levers—although some historians speculate that they were slid into place on inclined ramps of sand and rubble. Finally, the laborers faced the surfaces of the great tombs with finely polished limestone. All these feats were achieved with copper saws and chisels, and without pulleys or mortar.

The royal burial vault, hidden within a series of chambers connected to the exterior by tunnels, was prepared as a home for eternity—a tribute to communal faith in the eternal benevolence of the pharaoh. Its chambers were filled with his most cherished

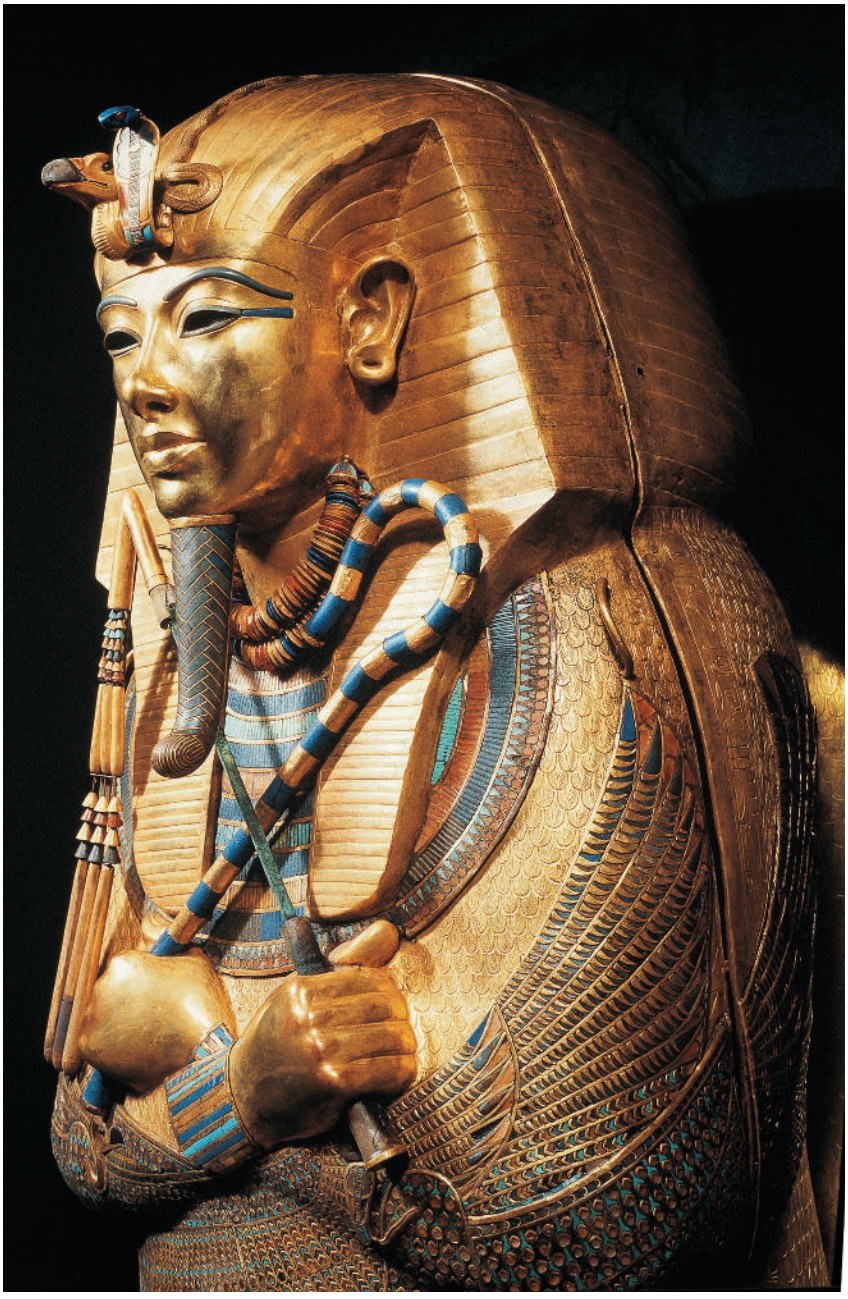


Figure 1.27 Egyptian cover of the coffin of Tutankhamen (portion), from the Valley of the Kings, ca. 1323 B.C.E. Gold with inlay of enamel, carnelian, lapis lazuli, and turquoise, height 6 ft. The body of Tutankhamen was enclosed in the innermost of three nested coffins. This innermost coffin, the most elaborate of the three, consisted of several hundred pounds of solid gold. Its surface is incised with hieroglyphic prayers and embellished with enamelwork and gemstones. Like Osiris in Figure 1.24, the pharaoh holds the traditional symbols of authority: the crook (a shepherd's staff signifying leadership) and the flail (a threshing instrument that doubles as a whip).

Facial reconstructions based on computer tomography (CT) scans of Tutankhamen's remains undertaken in 2005 show indisputable similarities to the ancient portraits of the pharaoh, including that seen on this gold coffin. Modern science thus confirms that despite its abstract qualities, Egyptian art was grounded in keen observation of the natural world.

Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Photo © J. Paul Getty Trust. Wim Swaan Photograph Collection (96.P.21). The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

possessions: priceless treasures of jewelry, weapons, and furniture, all of which he might require in the life to come. The chamber walls were painted in **fresco** (a method of painting on walls or ceilings surfaced with fresh, moist lime) and carved in relief with images recreating everyday life on earth (see Figure 1.29). Hieroglyphs formed an essential component of pictorial illustration, narrating the achievements of Egypt's rulers, listing the grave goods, offering perpetual prayers for the deceased, and issuing curses against tomb robbers (see also Figure 1.11). Carved and painted figures carrying provisions—loaves of bread, fowl, beer, and fresh linens—accompanied the pharaoh to the afterlife. Additionally, death masks or "reserve" portrait heads of the pharaoh might be placed in the tomb to provide the king's *ka* (life force or soul) with safe and familiar dwelling places.

Intended primarily as homes for the dead, the pyramids were built to assure the ruler's comfort in the afterlife. However, in the centuries after their construction, grave robbers greedily despoiled them, and their contents were largely plundered and lost. Middle and Late Kingdom pharaohs turned to other methods of burial, including interment in the rock cliffs along the Nile and in unmarked graves in the Valley of the Kings west of Thebes. In time, these too were pillaged. One of the few royal graves to have escaped vandalism was that of a minor fourteenth-century-B.C.E. ruler named Tutankhamen (ca. 1341–1323 B.C.E.). Uncovered by the British archeologist Howard Carter in 1922, the tomb housed riches of astonishing variety, including the pharaoh's solid-gold coffin, inlaid with semiprecious carnelian and lapis lazuli (Figure **1.27**).

Akhenaten's Reform

Throughout the dynastic history of Egypt, the central authority of the pharaoh was repeatedly contested by local temple priests, each of whom held religious and political sway in their own regions along the Nile. Perhaps in an effort to consolidate his authority against such encroachment, the New Kingdom pharaoh Amenhotep IV (ca. 1385–1336 B.C.E.) defied the tradition of polytheism by elevating Aten (God of the Sun Disk) to a position of supremacy over all other gods. Changing his own name to Akhenaten ("Shining Spirit of Aten"), the pharaoh abandoned the political capital at Memphis and the religious center at

Thebes to build a new palace midway between the two at a site at Tell el-Amarna on the east bank of the Nile. It was called Akhetaten ("Place of the Sun Disk's Power") (see Map 1.3). Akhenaten's famous "Hymn to the Aten," which drew on earlier Egyptian songs of praise, exalts the sun as the source of light and heat, and as the proactive life force:

> You who have placed seed in woman
> and have made sperm into man,
> who feeds the son in the womb of his mother,
> who quiets him with something to stop his crying;
> you are the nurse in the womb,
> giving breath to nourish all that has been begotten. . . .

Akhenaten's chief wife, Queen Nefertiti, along with her mother-in-law, assisted in organizing the affairs of state. The mother of six daughters, Nefertiti is often pictured as Isis, the goddess from whom all Egyptian queens were said to have descended. The great number of portraits immortalizing the queen suggests either that she played a major role in the political life of her time or that she was regarded as an exceptional beauty. Some of these sculpted likenesses are striking in their blend of **realism** and abstraction (Figure **1.28**).

Akhenaten's monotheistic reform lasted only as long as his reign. After his death, Egypt's conservative priests and rulers, including Akhenaten's successor, Tutankhamen, returned to the polytheism of their forebears.

Figure 1.28 Portrait of head of Queen Nefertiti, ca. 1355 B.C.E. New Kingdom, eighteenth dynasty. Painted limestone, height 20 in. This painted limestone portrait bust is perhaps the most famous icon in the history of Egyptian art. Nefertiti's conical crown and swanlike neck contribute to her regal elegance. At the same time, her half-closed eyes and musing smile convey a mood of contemplative introspection. Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Photo © Margarete Büsing/BPK, Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY.

Egyptian Women

Throughout their long history, ancient Egyptians viewed the land as sacred. It was owned by the gods, ruled by the pharaohs, and farmed by the peasants with the assistance of slaves. By divine decree, the fruits of each harvest were shared according to the needs of the community. This type of *theocratic socialism* provided Egypt with an abundance of food and a surplus that encouraged widespread trade. The land itself, however, passed from generation to generation not through the male line but through the female—that is, from the king's daughter to the man she married. For the pharaoh's son to come to the throne, he would have to marry his own sister or half-sister (hence the numerous brother–sister marriages in Egyptian dynastic history). This tradition, probably related to the practice of tracing parentage to the childbearer, lasted longer in Egypt than anywhere else in the ancient world.

Possibly because all property was inherited through the female line, Egyptian women seem to have enjoyed a large degree of economic independence, as well as civil rights and privileges. Women who could write and calculate might go into business. Women of the pharaoh's harem oversaw textile production, while others found positions as shopkeepers, midwives, musicians, and dancers.

While Egypt's rulers were traditionally male, women came to the throne three times. The most notable of all female pharaohs, Hatshepsut (ca. 1500–1447 B.C.E.), governed Egypt for twenty-two years. She is often pictured in male attire, wearing the royal wig and false beard, and carrying the crook and the flail—traditional symbols of rulership.

Egyptian Art

Egyptian art—at least that with which we are most familiar—comes almost exclusively from tombs and graves. Such art was not intended as decoration; rather, it was created to replicate the living world for the benefit of the dead and the lands they continued to protect.

Stylistically, Egyptian art mirrors the deep sense of order and regularity that dominated ancient Egyptian life. Over a period of 3000 years, Egyptian artists followed a set of stylistic conventions that dictated the manner in which subjects should be depicted. In representations of everyday life, figures are usually sized according to a strict hierarchy, or graded order: Upper-class individuals are shown larger than lower-class ones, and males usually outsize females and servants. Heads and legs are shown in profile, eyes and shoulders in frontal view: a conceptual composite that integrated multiple perspectives (Figure **1.29**).

Figure 1.29 Scene of Fowling, from the tomb of Neb-amon at Thebes, Egypt, ca. 1400 B.C.E. Fragment of a **fresco secco** (a variant fresco technique in which paint is applied to wet plaster), height 32¼ in. Egyptian artists adhered to a set of guidelines by which they might "capture" the most characteristic and essential aspects of the subject matter: In depicting the human figure the upper torso is shown from the front, while the lower is shown from the side; the head is depicted in profile, while the eye and eyebrow are frontal. This method of representation is *conceptual*—that is, based on ideas—rather than *perceptual*—that is, based on visual evidence. In contrast with the human figures, however, the tawny cat, birds, fish, and tiger butterflies are based on close observation.
British Museum, London. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, London/Art Resource, NY.

The Egyptian painter's approach to space was also conceptual. Spatial depth is indicated by placing one figure above (rather than behind) the next, often in horizontal registers, or rows. Cast in this timeless matrix, Egyptian figures shared the symbolic resonance of the hieroglyphs by which they are framed. Nowhere else in the ancient world do we see such an intimate and intelligible conjunction of images and words—a union designed to immortalize ideas rather than imitate reality. This is not to say that Egyptian artists ignored the world of the senses. Their love for realistic detail is evident, for example, in the hunting scene from the tomb of Neb-amon at Thebes, where fish and fowl are depicted with such extraordinary accuracy that individual species of each can be identified (see Figure 1.29). It is in the union of the particular and the general that Egyptian art achieves its defining quality.

Some of ancient Egypt's most memorable artworks take the form of monumental sculpture. Carved from stone or wood, these figures—usually portraits of Egypt's political and religious leaders—reflect a sensitive balance between gentle, lifelike realism and powerful stylization. In the freestanding sculpture of the Old Kingdom pharaoh Menkaure, the queen stands proudly at his side, one arm around his waist and the other gently touching his arm (Figure **1.30**). A sense of shared purpose is conveyed by their lifted chins and confident demeanor.

Figure 1.30 Pair Statue of Menkaure and Queen Khamerernebty II, Gizeh, fourth dynasty, ca. 2490–2472 B.C.E. Slate schist, height 4 ft. 6½ in. (complete statue). In monumental sculptures of Egyptian royalty, the chief wife of the pharaoh is usually shown the same size as her husband.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Harvard University–MFA Expedition (11.1738). Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston/Bridgeman Images.

New Kingdom Temples

Temples were built by the Egyptians from earliest times, but most of those that have survived date from the New Kingdom. The basic plan of the temple mirrored the central features of the Egyptian cosmos: The **pylons** (two truncated pyramids that made up the gateway) symbolized the mountains that rimmed the world, while the progress from the open courtyard through the **hypostyle** hall (a hall whose roof is supported by columns) into the dark inner sanctuary housing the cult statue represented a voyage from light to darkness (and back) symbolic of the sun's cyclical journey. Oriented on an east–west axis, the temple received the sun's morning rays, which reached through the sequence of hallways into the sanctuary.

The Great Temple of Amon-Ra at Karnak was the heart of a 5-acre religious complex that included a sacred lake, a sphinx-lined causeway, and numerous **obelisks** (commemorative stone pillars). The temple's hypostyle hall is adorned with painted reliefs that cover the walls and the surfaces of its 134 massive columns are shaped like budding and flowering papyrus—these plants were identified with the watery marsh from which the sun god emerged (Figure **1.31**). Decorated with stars and other celestial images, the ceiling of the hall symbolized the heavens. Such sacred precincts were not intended for communal assembly—in fact, commoners were forbidden to enter. Rather, Egyptian temples were sanctuaries in which priests performed daily rituals of cosmic renewal on behalf of the pharaoh and the people. Temple rituals were celebrations of the solar cycle, associated not only with the birth of the sun god but also with the regeneration of the ruler upon whom universal order depended.

Figure 1.31 Hypostyle Hall, Great Temple of Amon-Ra, Karnak, ca. 1220 B.C.E.
Photo © Juergen Ritterbach/Alamy Stock Photo.

Literature and Music

Ancient Egypt did not produce any literary masterpieces comparable to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Nevertheless, from tomb and temple walls, and from papyrus rolls, come prayers and songs, royal decrees and letters, prose tales, and texts that served to educate the young. These offer valuable glimpses of everyday life. One school text, which reflects the fragile relationship between oral and written traditions, reads, "Man decays, his corpse is dust,/All his kin have perished;/But a book makes him remembered,/Through the mouth of its reciter." The so-called wisdom literature of Egypt, which consists of advice and instruction, anticipates parts of the Hebrew Bible. As Egypt's empire expanded and its government grew in size, greater emphasis was placed on the importance of writing. The *Satire of Trades*, a standard exercise text for student scribes, argues that the life of a government clerk is preferable to that of a farmer, soldier, baker, metalworker, and even a priest: "Behold," it concludes, "there is no profession free of a boss—except for the scribe: he is the boss!"

From the New Kingdom came a very personal type of poetry defined as **lyric** (literally, accompanied by the **lyre** or harp). A lovesick Egyptian boy expresses his secret passion thus:

> I will lie down inside,
> and there I will feign illness.
> Then my neighbours will enter to see,
> and then my sister[1] will come with them.
> She'll put the doctor to shame,
> for she will understand
> my illness.

[1] Meaning "mistress" or "lady."

Throughout the history of ancient Egypt, song and poetry were interchangeable (hymns praising the gods were chanted, not spoken). Musical instruments, including harps, flutes, pipes, and sistrums (a type of rattle)—often found buried with the dead—accompanied song and dance. Greek sources indicate that Egyptian music was based in theory; nevertheless, we have no certain knowledge of how that music actually sounded. Visual representations confirm, however, that music had a special place in religious rituals, in festive and funeral processions, and in many aspects of secular life. Such representations also confirm the importance of Egyptian women in musicmaking.

AFRICA: WESTERN SUDAN

The Nok Terracottas

While East Africa's ancient Egyptian civilization was known to the world as early as the eighteenth century, the western parts of the continent were not fully investigated by modern archeologists until the mid-twentieth century. In 1931, near a farming village called Nok, on the Niger River in the western Sudan (see Map 1.3, inset), tin miners accidentally uncovered a large group of **terracotta** (fired clay) sculptures (Figure **1.32**). Dating from the first millennium B.C.E., these hand-modeled animal figurines and portraitlike heads possibly once joined to life-sized bodies are the earliest known three-dimensional artworks of sub-Saharan Africa. They are true landmarks: the first evidence of the long tradition of realistic portraiture in African art (see page 248). The Nok heads, most of which display clearly individualized personalities, probably represent tribal rulers or ancestral chieftains.

Figure 1.32 Female figure, Guinea Coast, Nigeria, 900 B.C.E.–500 C.E. Earthenware, height 19 in. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. Photo © Yale University Art Gallery. Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933 Collection (2006.51.115).

THE AMERICAS

Native cultures in the Americas had their beginnings at least 20,000 years ago, when groups of nomads migrated from Asia across a land bridge that once linked Siberia and Alaska at the Bering Strait. Seafarers from the island cultures of the Pacific also may have made their way by boat to various points along the Pacific coast of the Americas. By land and sea, over a long period of time, many different peoples came to settle in North, South, and Meso- (or Middle) America—parts of present-day Mexico and Central America. The earliest populations formed a mosaic of migrant cultures (see Map 9.3). In the centuries prior to the late fifteenth century, when Europeans first made contact with the Americas, some one thousand agricultural societies and civilizations flourished.

Until recently, it was believed that the earliest civilization in the Americas dated from the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. However, in 2001, archeologists at Caral, a 150-acre complex near Lima, Peru, established a date of 2627 B.C.E. for the site's oldest artifacts; in 2008, the ruins of yet another ancient Peruvian stone complex at Sechin Bajo were dated to as early as ca. 3500 B.C.E. Located northwest of Lima, near the Pacific coast, these oldest known settlements in the Americas may be as old as (or older than) the Egyptian pyramids.

At Caral, six pyramids with stone and mud mortar walls, wide plazas, a sunken amphitheater, and numerous residences served an urban community with a population that probably exceeded 3000 (Figure **1.33**). The largest of the pyramids, the size of four football fields, boasts a wide staircase and is topped with shrine rooms. This type of stepped temple (compare Figures 1.19 and 9.15) prevailed for centuries in the civilizations of the Olmec, Maya, Aztec, and Inca peoples, the last of which flourished some 3000 years later in Peru. The remains of cotton nets at Caral indicate that fishing complemented native agricultural cultivation. Flutes made of bird bones and cornets created from deer and llama bones suggest a musical culture.

The dating of Caral raises many questions concerning the origins and development of ancient civilizations in the Americas. Capable of erecting mammoth temple structures, Caral's inhabitants must have reached a level of political and social complexity beyond that of the average Neolithic village. Yet they had no draft animals, no wheeled vehicles, and no metal tools and weapons (although gold was worked as early as 2000 B.C.E., copper and bronze did not come into use in the Americas until the ninth century C.E.). There is no evidence of ceramics, nor of written records. Hence, while Caral may indeed be the birthplace of "New World" civilization, it differs dramatically from

Figure 1.33 Amphitheater, Caral, Peru, ca. 2627 B.C.E.
Photo © Imáganes del Perú/Getty Images.

the first civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China. Ongoing excavation at Caral (and nineteen nearby sites) will surely provide more information about this fascinating place.

Around 1300 B.C.E., Meso-America was the site of one of the largest and most advanced cultures: that of the Olmecs. They were called "Olmecs" ("rubber people") by the Aztecs, who named the substance derived from the trees that flourished in their region. On the coast of the Gulf of Mexico south of the modern Mexican city of Veracruz, the Olmecs built ceremonial centers from which priestly rulers governed on behalf of the gods. The elite cadre of priests oversaw the spiritual life of the community—a population consisting of farmers and artisans at the lower end of the class structure and a ruling nobility at the upper end. Probably to honor their rulers, the Olmecs carved colossal stone heads weighing some 20 tons (Figure **1.34**). Producing massive sculptures and monumental pyramids required the labor of thousands and a high degree of civic organization. Olmec culture flourished until ca. 400 B.C.E., but their political, religious, and artistic traditions survived for centuries in the civilizations of the Maya and the Aztecs (see pages 255–258).

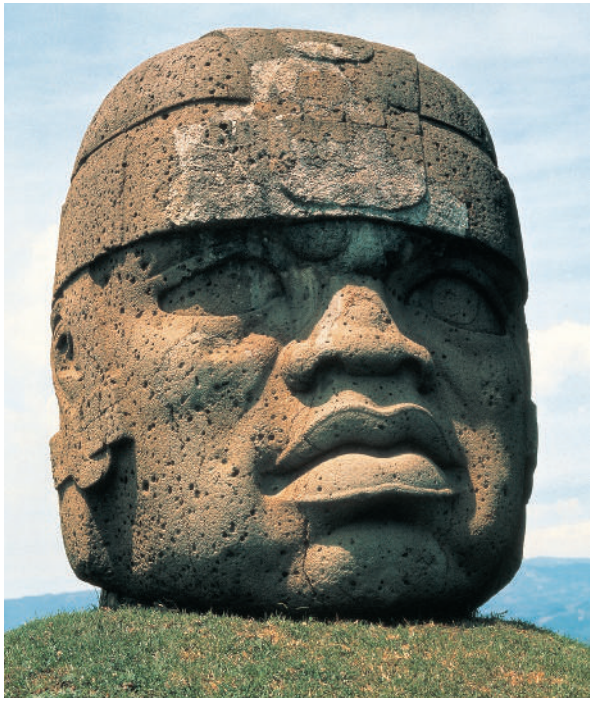


Figure 1.34 Colossal Olmec head, from San Lorenzo, Veracruz, Mexico, ca. 1000 B.C.E. Basalt, height 5 ft. 10⅞ in. The Olmecs paid homage to their rulers in the form of publicly displayed portraits. These heads are carved in basalt and are colossal in size, ranging in height from 5 to 12 feet and approximately 8 feet in diameter.
Museo de Antropología, Jalapa, Mexico. Photo © Werner Forman Archive/HIP/Art Resource, NY.

ANCIENT INDIA

Indus Valley Civilization (ca. 2709–1500 B.C.E.)

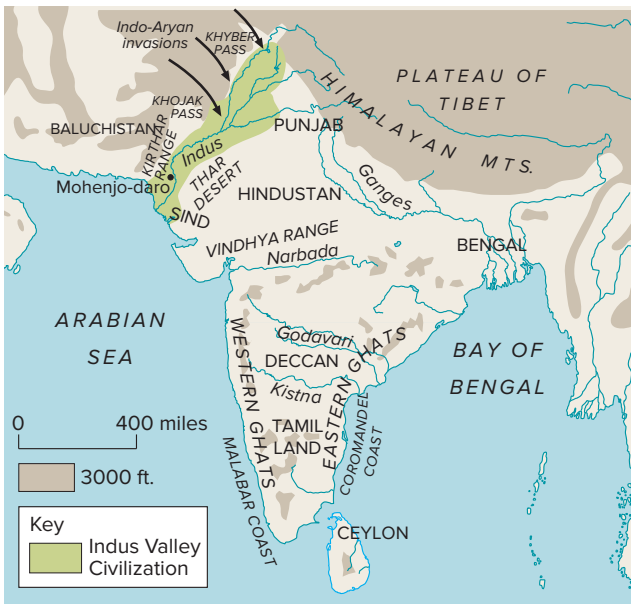
India's earliest known civilization was located in the lower Indus valley of northwest India, an area called Sind—from which the words "India" and "Hindu" derive (Map **1.4**). At Mohenjo-daro ("Mound of the Dead") and Harappa (both in modern-day Pakistan), a sophisticated Bronze Age culture flourished before 2500 B.C.E. India's first cities were planned communities: Mohenjo-daro's wide streets, lined with fired-brick houses, were laid out in a grid pattern, and their covered drains, bathing facilities, and sewage systems were unmatched in other parts of the civilized world. Bronze Age India also claimed a form of written language, although the 400 pictographic signs that constitute the earliest script are still undeciphered. There is little evidence of temple or tomb architecture, but a vigorous sculptural tradition existed in both bronze and stone (Figure **1.35**).

The Vedic Era (ca. 2709–1500 B.C.E.)

Between ca. 1700 and 1500 B.C.E., the decline of the Indus valley's urban centers coincided with a cultural transformation from which two major features emerged: the introduction of Sanskrit, the classic language of India; and a set of societal divisions known as the **caste system**. While a hierarchical order marked the social systems of all ancient civilizations, India developed the most rigid kind of class stratification, which prevailed until modern times. By 1000 B.C.E., there were four principal castes: priests and scholars, rulers and warriors, artisans and merchants, and unskilled workers. Slowly, these castes began to subdivide according to occupation. At the very bottom of the social order—or, more accurately, outside it—lay those who held the most menial and degrading occupations. They became known as Untouchables.

Writing in ancient Sanskrit, the bards of this era recorded stories of bitter tribal warfare. These stories were the basis for India's two great epics: the *Mahabharata* (*Great Deeds of the Bharata Clan*; ca. 750 B.C.E.) and the *Ramayana* (*Song of Prince*

Figure 1.35 Bearded Man, from Mohenjo-daro, Indus valley, ca. 2000 B.C.E. Limestone, height 7 in. In the medium of stone, the powerful portrait of a bearded man (possibly a priest or a ruler) distinguished by an introspective expression, anticipates the meditative images of India's later religious art.
Karachi Museum. Photo © Robert Harding Picture Library.



Map 1.4 Ancient India.

Ideas and Issues

THE "OUT OF INDIA" DEBATE

Two theories dominate the narrative of India's early history. The traditional one holds that warlike seminomadic foreigners speaking Indo-European languages and calling themselves Aryans ("nobles") invaded the Indus valley around 1500 B.C.E., enslaving or removing the native Dravidian population and initiating the unique cultural developments of Sanskrit (India's classic language) and the caste system. More recently, revisionist scholars have argued that the Aryans migrated gradually from Central to South Asia during the second millennium B.C.E., blending with the native peoples of the Indus valley to form a single population that generated India's cultural traditions.

Supporters of the revisionist "Out of India" theory hold that a series of natural disasters and environmental changes (rather than military conquest) was responsible for the decline of Indus valley civilization between 1700 and 1500 B.C.E. They maintain that India's unique culture and its devotional texts, the *Vedas*, emerged before ca. 1500 B.C.E., when Sanskrit became the dominant language; that the caste system grew out of tribelike social and economic organization; and that India's great epics were the product of native tribal warfare. Traditionalists, however, point to the fact that the *Vedas* themselves refer frequently to military conflict between Aryans and native peoples. To date, the available evidence—archeological, linguistic, and genetic—is insufficient to resolve the question of India's origins. The subject remains hotly debated.

Rama; ca. 750 B.C.E.), which were transmitted orally for generations but not recorded until the eighth century B.C.E. The *Mahabharata*—the world's longest epic—recounts the ten-year struggle for control of the Ganges valley that occurred around the year 1000 B.C.E. Along with the *Ramayana*, this epic assumed a role in the cultural history of India not unlike that of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Hellenic history (see pages 37–38). Indeed, the two epics have been treasured resources for much of the poetry, drama, and art produced throughout India's long history.

India's oldest devotional texts, the *Vedas* (literally, "sacred knowledge"), also originate in (and give their name to) the thousand-year period after 1500 B.C.E. The *Vedas* are a collection of prayers, sacrificial formulae, and hymns. Transmitted orally for centuries, they reflect a blending of ancient traditions of the Indus valley. Among the chief Vedic deities were the sky gods Indra and Rudra (later known as Shiva), the fire god Agni, and the sun god Vishnu. The *Vedas* provide a wealth of information concerning astronomical phenomena. The study of the stars, along with the practice of surgery and dissection, marks the beginnings of scientific inquiry in India.

Hindu Pantheism

From the Indus valley civilization came the most ancient of today's world religions: Hinduism. Hinduism is markedly different from the religions of the West. It identifies the sacred not as a superhuman personality, but as an objective, all-pervading Cosmic Spirit. **Pantheism**, the belief that divinity is inherent in all things, is basic to the Hindu view that the universe itself is sacred. While neither polytheistic nor monotheistic in the traditional sense, Hinduism venerates all forms and manifestations of the all-pervasive Spirit. Hence, Hinduism embraces all the Vedic gods, who themselves take countless forms. Hindus believe in the oneness of Spirit, but worship that Spirit by way of a multitude of deities, who are to this day perceived as emanations or avatars of the divine. In the words of the *Rig Veda*, "Truth is one, but the wise call it by many names."

Hinduism is best understood by way of the religious texts known as the *Upanishads* (ca. eighth to sixth centuries B.C.E.), some 250 prose commentaries on the *Vedas*. Like the *Vedas* themselves, the *Upanishads* were first orally transmitted and only later recorded in Sanskrit. While the *Vedas* teach worship through prayer and sacrifice, the *Upanishads* teach enlightenment through meditation. They predicate the concept of the single, all-pervading **Brahman**. Unlike the nature deities of Egypt and Mesopotamia, Brahman is infinite, formless, and ultimately unknowable. Unlike the Hebrew Yahweh (see page 96), Brahman assumes no personal and contractual relationship with humankind. Brahman is the Absolute Spirit, the Uncaused Cause, and the Ultimate Reality.

In every human being, there resides the individual manifestation of Brahman: the Self, or **Atman**, which, according to the *Upanishads*, is "soundless, formless, intangible, undying, tasteless, odorless, without beginning, without end, eternal, immutable, [and] beyond nature." Although housed in the material prison of the human body, the Self (Atman) seeks to be one with the Absolute Spirit (Brahman). The spiritual (re)union of Brahman and Atman—a condition known as ***nirvana***—is the goal of the Hindu. This blissful reabsorption of the Self into Absolute Spirit must be preceded by one's gradual rejection of the material world; that is, the world of illusion and ignorance, and by the mastery of the techniques of meditation. According to the *Upanishads*:

> What is within us is also without. What is without is also within. He who sees difference between what is within and what is without goes evermore from death to death.
>
> By the purified mind alone is the indivisible Brahman to be attained. Brahman alone is—nothing else is. He who sees the manifold universe, and not the one reality, goes evermore from death to death.

Essentially a literature of humility, the *Upanishads* offer no guidelines for worship, no moral injunctions, and no religious dogma. They neither exalt divine power, nor interpret it. They do, however, instruct the individual Hindu on ***dharma*** (conduct reflecting the moral order) and on the subject of death and rebirth. *Dharma* governs one's duties based on one's caste and station in life. The Hindu anticipates a succession of lives: that is, the successive return of the Atman in various physical forms. The physical form, whether animal or human and of whatever species or class, is determined by the level of spiritual purity the Hindu has achieved by the time of his or her death. The Law of ***Karma*** holds that the collective spiritual energy gained from accumulated deeds determines one's physical state in the next life. Reincarnation, the Wheel of Rebirth, is the fate of Hindus until they achieve *nirvana*. In this ultimate state, the Atman is both liberated from the endless cycle of death and rebirth and absorbed into the Absolute Spirit—a process that may be likened to the dissolution of a grain of salt in the vast waters of the ocean.

The fundamentals of Hinduism are issued in the sacred text known as the *Bhagavad-Gita* (*Song of God*; ca. eighth to sixth centuries B.C.E.). In this lengthy verse episode from the *Mahabharata*, a dialog takes place between the warrior-hero, Arjuna, and Krishna, the incarnation of the god Vishnu, himself a divine manifestation of Brahman. Facing the prospect of shedding his kinsmen's blood in the impending battle, Arjuna seeks to reconcile his duty as a soldier with his respect for life. Krishna's response—a classic statement of resignation, right conduct, and renunciation—represents the essence of Hindu thought as distilled from the *Upanishads*.

ANCIENT CHINA

Ancient Chinese civilization emerged in the fertile valleys of two great waterways: the Yellow and the Yangzi rivers (Map **1.5**). As early as 3500 B.C.E., the Neolithic villages of China were producing silk, a commodity that would bring wealth and fame to Chinese culture, but the hallmarks of civilization—urban centers, metallurgy, and writing—did not appear until the second millennium B.C.E. By 1750 B.C.E., the Chinese had developed a calligraphic script (see Figure 1.13) that employed some 4500 characters (each character representing an individual word), some of which are still used today. Combining pictographic and phonetic elements, Chinese characters became the basis for writing throughout East Asia. It is likely that China's dynastic system was in place well before the appearance of writing. But not until the rise of the warrior tribe known as the Shang is there evidence of a fully developed urban civilization in Bronze Age China.

Map 1.5 Ancient China.

The Shang Dynasty (ca. 1520–1027 B.C.E.)

Shang rulers were hereditary kings who were regarded as intermediaries between the people and the spirit world. Limited in power by councils consisting of China's land-holding nobility, they claimed their authority from the Lord on High (Shangdi). Hence, as in Egypt, they ruled by divine right. Royal authority was symbolized by the dragon, a hybrid beast that stood for strength, fertility, and life-giving water (Figure **1.36**). Occupants of the "dragon throne," China's early kings defended their position by way of a powerful bureaucracy and huge armies of archer-warriors recruited from the provinces. The king's soldiers consisted of peasants, who, in peacetime, farmed the land with the assistance of slaves captured in war.

The Chinese social order is clearly articulated in Shang royal tombs, where the king is surrounded by the men and women who served him. Royal graves also contain several hundred headless bodies, probably those of the slaves who built the tombs. As in Egypt and Mesopotamia, China's royal tombs were filled with treasures, most of which took the form of carved jade and magnificently worked bronze objects (Figure **1.37**); see also Figure 1.14).

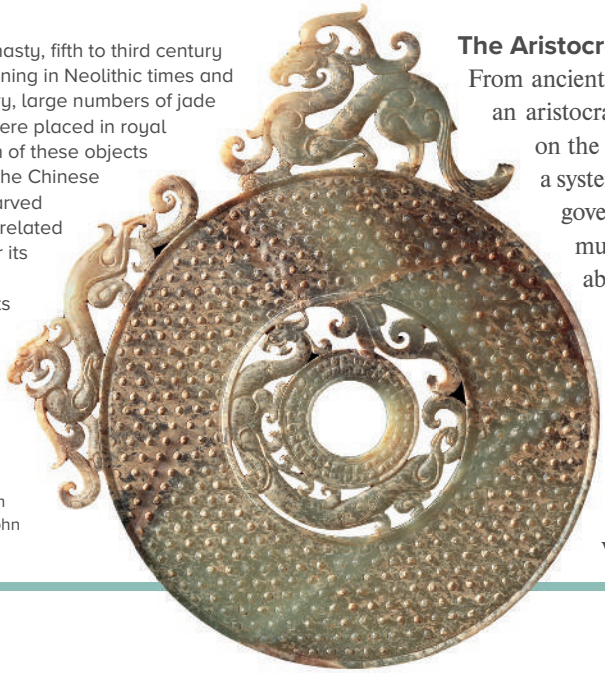


Figure 1.36 Ritual disk, Zhou dynasty, fifth to third century B.C.E. Jade, diameter 6½ in. Beginning in Neolithic times and throughout ancient Chinese history, large numbers of jade objects—especially jade disks—were placed in royal graves. The meaning and function of these objects is a matter of some speculation. The Chinese used jade for tools, but also for carved insignias and talismans probably related to ceremonial ritual. As well as for its durability, jade was prized by the Chinese for its musical qualities, its subtle, translucent colors, and its alleged protective powers—it was thought to prevent fatigue and delay the decomposition of the body.
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Photo © Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase William Rockhill Nelson Trust (33–81). Photo: John Lamberton.

The Aristocracy of Merit

From ancient China comes our earliest evidence of an aristocracy of merit; that is, leadership based on the principle of excellence, tied directly to a system of education and testing. Since order governs all of nature, argued the Chinese, it must also govern human intelligence and ability. Those with greater abilities, then, should govern, while those with lesser abilities should fulfill the physical needs of the state. Between the twelfth and the eighth centuries B.C.E., China put into practice the world's first system whereby individuals were selected for government service on the basis of merit and education.

Written examinations tested the competence and skill of those who sought government office. Such a system persisted for centuries and became the basis for an aristocracy of merit that has characterized Chinese culture well into modern times.

The Mandate of Heaven

The sacred right to rule was known in China as the Mandate of Heaven. Although the notion of divine-right kingship began in the earliest centuries of China's dynasties, the concept of a divine mandate was not fixed until early in the Zhou era (ca. 1027–256 B.C.E.), when the rebel Zhou tribe justified their assault on the Shang by claiming that Shang kings had failed to rule virtuously; hence, heaven had withdrawn its mandate. Charged with maintaining the will of heaven on earth, the king's political authority required obedience to established moral law, which in turn reflected the natural order.

Spirits, Gods, and the Natural Order

The agricultural communities of ancient China venerated an assortment of local spirits associated with natural forces, and with rivers, mountains, and crops. But the most powerful of the personalized spirits of ancient China were those of deceased ancestors, the members of an extended familial community. According to the Chinese, the spirits of powerful rulers and deceased ancestors continued to exist in heaven, where they assumed their role as mediators between heaven and earth. Since, like the pharaohs of Egypt, deceased rulers exerted a direct influence upon human affairs, their eternal welfare was of deep concern to the ancient Chinese. They buried their dead in elaborate tombs, regularly made sacrifices to them, and brought offerings of food and wine to their graves.

Figure 1.37 Bronze head, from Pit 1, Sanxingdui, Guanghan, Sichuan Province, late Shang dynasty, ca. 1300–1100 B.C.E. Bronze and gold, height 18½ in. In 1986, archeologists working in the Upper Yangzi region (see Map 1.5) uncovered graves containing more than 200 bronze, jade, and pottery artifacts, including the earliest life-sized human figures in Chinese art. Bronze dragons, snakes, tigers, and birds are found alongside human-style heads covered with gold masks. With the artifacts dating from ca. 1700 to 1150 B.C.E., this discovery challenges the long-held theory that Yellow River culture was the cradle of Chinese civilization.

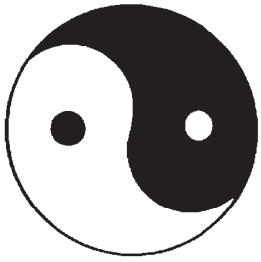


Figure 1.38 The yin and the yang as interpenetrating shapes in a circle. The interaction of yang, the male principle (associated with lightness, hardness, brightness, warmth, and the sun), and yin, the female principle (associated with darkness, softness, moisture, coolness, the earth, and the moon), describes the creative energy of the universe and the natural order itself.

The dead and the living shared a cosmos animated by spirits and regulated by the natural order—a holistic and primordial arrangement. In the regularity of the seasonal cycle and the everyday workings of nature, the Chinese found harmony and order. Signifying the order of nature most graphically is the cosmological metaphor of *yin/yang*. This principle, which ancient Chinese emperors called "the foundation of the entire universe," interprets all nature as the dynamic product of two interacting cosmic forces, or modes of energy, commonly configured as twin interpenetrating shapes enclosed in a circle (Figure **1.38**).

The natural order might be symbolized by way of abstract symbols, such as the circle, but it was also worshiped in the form of nature spirits and celestial deities. The creative principle, for instance, was known interchangeably as the Lord on High (Shang-di) and, more abstractly, as heaven (Tian). Although not an anthropomorphic deity of the kind found in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, Shang-di/Tian regulated the workings of the universe and impartially guided the destinies of all people. Chinese mythology described cosmic unity in terms of the marriage of Tian (the creative principle, or heaven) and Kun (the receptive principle, or earth).

The ancient Chinese perception of an inviolable natural order dominated all aspects of China's long and productive history. Unlike the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, China left no mythological tales or heroic epics. Rather, China's oldest text, the *I jing* (the *Book of Changes*; ca. 1000–500 B.C.E.), is a directory for interpreting the operations of the universe. The *Book of Changes*, which originated in the Shang era but was not recorded until the sixth century B.C.E. (see page 47), consists of cryptic symbols and commentaries on which diviners drew to predict the future. Order derived from the balance between the four seasons, the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water), and the five powers of creation (cold,

heat, dryness, moisture, and wind). For the Chinese, the cosmic and human order was a single sacred system. This holistic viewpoint identified **qi** (pronounced "chee") as the substance of the universe and, thus, the vital energy that pervades the human body.

Daoism: The Philosophy of the Way

The most profound expression of the natural order is the ancient Chinese practice known as Daoism. As much a philosophy as a religion, Daoism embraces a universal natural principle: the Dao, or Way. Daoism resists all intellectual analysis. It manifests itself in the harmony of things and may be understood as the unity underlying nature's multiplicity and the harmonious integration of yin and yang. Only those who live in total simplicity, in harmony with nature, can be one with the Dao. Daoists seek to cultivate tranquility, spontaneity, compassion, and spiritual insight. They practice meditation and breath control and observe special life-prolonging dietary regulations. While Daoism has its roots in Chinese folk religion, no one knows where or when it originated. The basic Daoist text is the *Dao de jing* (*The Way and its Power*; ca. mid-sixth century B.C.E.). This 5000-word "scripture" associated with the name Lao Zi ("the Old One") is a landmark work that has influenced every aspect of Chinese culture.

The following excerpt from the *Dao de jing* illustrates the unity of thing and nothing that typifies the Way:

Thirty spokes will converge
In the hub of a wheel;
But the use of the cart
Will depend on the part
Of the hub that is void.
With a wall all around
A clay bowl is molded;
But the use of the bowl
Will depend on the part
Of the bowl that is void.
Cut out windows and doors
In the house as you build;
But the use of the house
Will depend on the space
In the walls that is void.
So advantage is had
From whatever is there;
But usefulness rises
From whatever is not.

Afterword

Civilization emerged not in a fleeting moment of change, but in a slow process of urban growth and by the operation of an increasingly refined intelligence. By dint of individual ingenuity and communal cooperation, the peoples of ancient Mesopotamia, Africa, the Americas, India, and China generated a cultural heritage whose traditions would be passed from generation to generation. The landmarks of these cultures—from writing to metallurgy, from epic poetry to codes of conduct, and from lavish tombs to the temples and palaces of empires—provided the foundations for future civilizations, including and most immediately those of Classical antiquity.

Key Topics

- prehistory
- Paleolithic/Neolithic cultures
- the birth of civilization
- counting/writing
- animism
- polytheism/monotheism/pantheism
- Mesopotamia: the literary epic
- Hammurabi: written law
- Egyptian theocracy
- Old Kingdom tombs
- Egyptian women
- perceptual/conceptual art
- New Kingdom temples
- lyric poetry
- India: Hinduism
- reincarnation
- China: the Mandate of Heaven
- Daoism

THE FIRST CIVILIZATIONS TIMELINE

HISTORICAL EVENTS: MESOPOTAMIA	HISTORICAL EVENTS: AFRICA	HISTORICAL EVENTS: ASIA AND THE AMERICAS	LANDMARKS IN THE VISUAL ARTS	LITERARY LANDMARKS	
			• "Venus" of Willendorf (ca. 25,000–20,000) • Cave paintings (ca. 15,000–10,000) • Göbekli Tepe (ca. 9000)		25,000 B.C.E.
• Bronze metallurgy (ca. 4000) • Sumerian civilization (ca. 3500–2350) • Akkadian civilization (ca. 2350–2230)	• Predynastic Nile valley civilization (ca. 3500–3150) • Unification of Egypt (ca. 3150) • Egypt: Old Kingdom (ca. 2700–2150)	• Yellow River valley civilization (ca. 3500–1520) • Indus valley civilization (ca. 2700–1500) • Caral, Peru (ca. 2600)	• Stonehenge (ca. 3000–1800)	• *Egyptian Book of the Dead* (from 4000) • Invention of writing: pictographs (ca. 3100) • *Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2300)	4000 B.C.E.
			• Palette of Narmer (ca. 3100) • Standard of Ur (ca. 2700) • Pyramids, Gizeh (ca. 2650–2575) • Ziggurat at Ur (ca. 2150–2050)		
• Hittites introduce iron to Asia Minor (ca. 2000) • Babylonian Empire (ca. 2000–1600)			• Bearded man, from Mohenjo-daro (ca. 2000) • Stele of Hammurabi (ca. 1750)	• *The Babylonian Creation* (ca. 2000) • Hammurabi's Code (ca. 1750)	2000 B.C.E.
• Hittite Empire (ca. 1450–1200)	• Egypt: New Kingdom (ca. 1575–1085)	• Shang era in China (ca. 1520–1027) • Vedic era in India (ca. 1500–322) • Olmec, Mexico (ca. 1200–400)	• Queen Nefertiti (ca. 1355) • Shang standing figure (ca. 1300–1100) • Great Temple of Amon-Ra, Karnak (ca. 1220)	• Phoenicians develop nonpictographic alphabet (ca. 1500) • *Vedas* (ca. 1500–1000)	1500 B.C.E.
		• Zhou era in China (ca. 1027–256)	• Shang ceremonial vessel (ca. 1000) • Assyrian reliefs, from Nimrud (ca. 883–859)	• *I jing* (ca. 1000–500) • *Upanishads* (ca. 900–500)	1000 B.C.E.
• Assyrian Empire (ca. 750–600) • Chaldean Empire (ca. 600–540) • Persian Empire (ca. 550–330)			• Ishtar Gate (ca. 575)	• *Mahabharata* (ca. 750) • *Ramayana* (ca. 750) • *Dao de jing* (ca. 550)	750 B.C.E.
	• Western Sudan: Nok culture (ca. 500–200)				500 B.C.E.

Figure 1.20
Stele of Hammurabi, see p. 13
Photo © Christian Larrieu/ RMN-Grand-Palais/Art Resource, NY.

Figure 1.25 Great Pyramids of Gizeh, see p. 19
Photo © Dan Breckwoldt/Shutterstock.

Figure 1.9
Stonehenge, see p. 6
Photo © Heritage Image Partnership Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo.

(All dates on this timeline are before the common era—B.C.E.)

Figure 2.1 West end of the Parthenon, Athens, 447–432 B.C.E Pentelic marble, height of columns 34 ft.
Photo © Blackcastle Photography/Shutterstock

CHAPTER 2

Classicism:

THE GREEK LEGACY

ca. 1200–30 B.C.E.

When we call something a "classic"—whether it be a car, a film, or a novel—we mean that it is recognized as first-ranking or the best of its kind. A classic outlives the time in which it was created and sets the standard for future achievement. The civilization of ancient Greece produced classics in almost all genres of creative expression: literature, philosophy, music, the visual arts, and architecture. These classics advanced the aesthetic principles of clarity, simplicity, balance, regularity, and harmonious proportion. As a style, Classicism is characterized by these aesthetic principles and by the related ideals of reason, moderation, and dignity.

The foundations of Classicism were laid during the Bronze Age in the maritime civilizations that flourished in and around the Aegean Sea, but it was not until the fifth century B.C.E. that the Greek city-state of Athens ushered in a Golden Age of artistic productivity. The Hellenic (Greek) phase of Classical creativity was followed by an era in which Alexander the Great spread the Classical style throughout much of the civilized world, a phase of antiquity known as Hellenistic (Greeklike). The Romans, in turn, preserved the Classical style, which continued to provide inspiration for recurring Neoclassical (new classical) revivals.

A First Look

Millions of tourists travel to Greece each year to see the Parthenon, the outstanding architectural landmark of Greek Classicism (Figure **2.1**). Balance, regularity, and geometric simplicity—defining features of the Classical style—are united here in harmonious design. Overlooking Athens from the highest point of the citadel known as the Acropolis, the Parthenon served the people of ancient Athens as a sacred shrine, dedicated to Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war. It also functioned as a treasury and a civic meeting place. Unlike Egypt's pyramids and Mesopotamia's ziggurats, the Parthenon was constructed in gleaming marble, adorned with lifelike sculptures, and conceived according to human proportions (see pages 57–61). Despite its monumental grandeur, it does not impress us as awesome or colossal; rather, it reminds us of the churches and banks we find in our own towns and cities. This is no accident, since Western architects for centuries have taken this temple as a model of perfect design. Now a noble ruin, partially destroyed by warfare, pollution, and neglect, the Parthenon remains symbolic of Greek achievement, a landmark revered and imitated well into the present.

ANCIENT GREEK CIVILIZATION

The nineteenth-century British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley once proclaimed, "We are all Greeks." By this he meant that modern humankind—profoundly influenced by Hellenic notions of reason, beauty, and the good life—bears the stamp of ancient Greek culture. Few civilizations have been so deeply concerned with the quality of human life as that of the ancient Greeks. And few have been so committed to the role of the individual intellect in shaping the destiny of the community. Because their art, their literature, and their religious beliefs celebrate human interests and concerns, the Greeks have been called the humanists of the ancient world. The worldliness and robust optimism that mark Hellenic culture are evident in landmark works that have endured the test of time.

Aegean Civilizations

(ca. 3000–1200 B.C.E.)

The Bronze Age culture of Mycenae was not known to the world until the late nineteenth century, when an amateur German archeologist named Heinrich Schliemann uncovered the first artifacts of ancient Troy (Map **2.1**). Schliemann's excavations brought to light the civilization of an adventuresome tribal people, the Mycenaeans, who had established themselves on the Greek mainland around 1600 B.C.E. In the early twentieth century, the British archeologist Sir Arthur Evans found an even earlier pre-Greek civilization on the island of Crete in the Aegean Sea. He called it "Minoan" after the legendary King Minos, celebrated in ancient Greek legend. This maritime civilization flourished between around 2000 and 1400 B.C.E., when it seems to have been absorbed or destroyed by the Mycenaeans.

Centered on the Palace of Minos at Knossos on the island of Crete (Figure **2.2**), Minoan culture was prosperous and seafaring. The absence of protective walls around the palace complex suggests that the Minoans enjoyed a sense of security. The three-story palace at Knossos was a labyrinthine masonry structure with dozens of rooms and corridors built around a central courtyard. The interior walls of the palace bear magnificent frescoes illustrating natural and marine motifs, ceremonial processions, and other aspects of Cretan life. The most famous of the palace frescoes, the so-called bull-leaping fresco, shows two women and a man, the latter vigorously somersaulting over the back of a bull (Figure **2.3**). Probably associated with the cult of the bull—an ancient symbol of virility—the ritual game prefigures the modern bullfight, the "rules" of which were codified in Roman times by Julius Caesar. Minoan artifacts suggest the persistence of an-

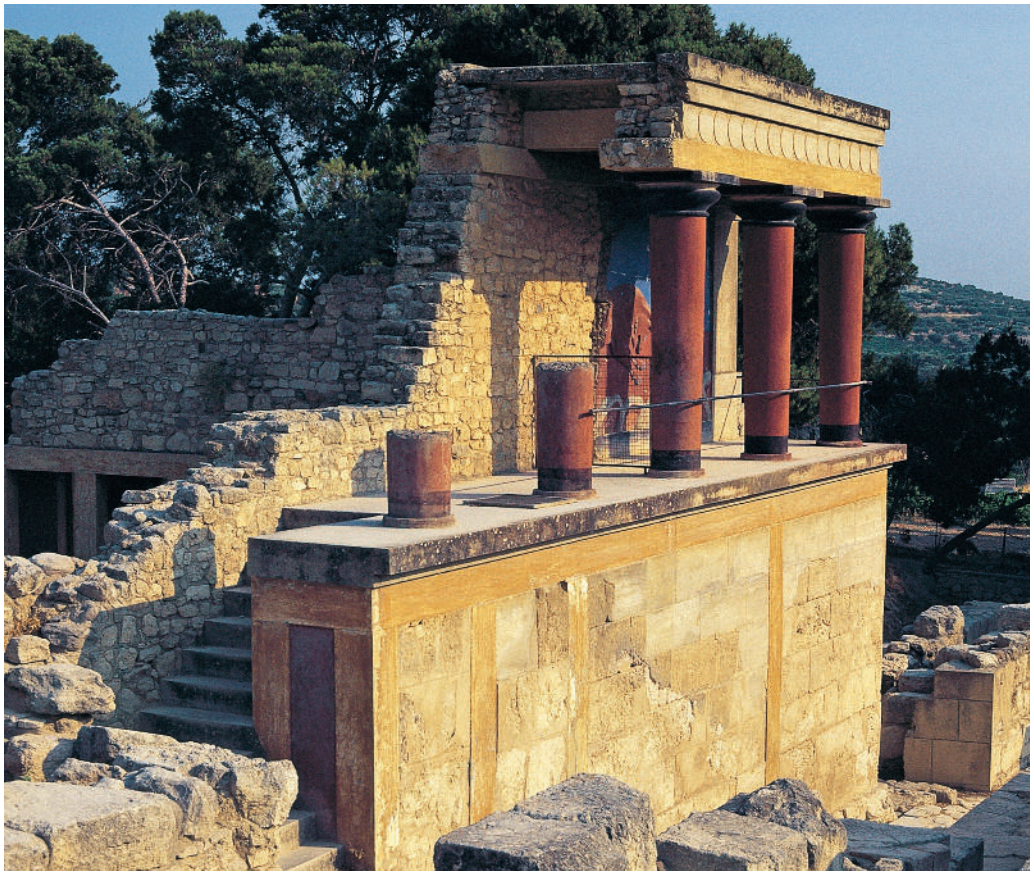


Figure 2.2 Palace of Minos, Knossos, Crete, ca. 1500 B.C.E.

Figure 2.3 Bull-leaping fresco, from the Palace of Minos, Knossos, Crete, ca. 1500 B.C.E. Height 32 in. Since 1979, when modern archeologists uncovered evidence of human sacrifice in Minoan Crete, historians have speculated on the meaning of ancient bull-vaulting (a sport still practiced in Portugal), and its possible relationship to rituals of blood sacrifice. Nevertheless, the significance of the representation lies in the authority it bestows upon the players: Human beings are pictured here not as pawns in a divine game, but, rather, as challengers in a contest of wit and physical agility.
Archaeological Museum, Heraklion, Crete. Photo © Marie Mauzy/Art Resource, NY.

cient fertility cults honoring gods traditionally associated with procreation. The small statue of a bare-breasted female brandishing snakes (ancient symbols of rebirth) may represent a popular fertility goddess, or it may depict a priestess performing specific cult rites (Figure **2.4**). Minoan writing (called by Evans "Linear A") has not yet been deciphered, but a later version of the script ("Linear B") found both at Knossos and on mainland Greece appears to be an early form of Greek.

Modern archeologists were not the first to prize Minoan culture; the Greeks immortalized the Minoans in myth and legend. The most famous of these legends describes a Minotaur—a monstrous half-man, half-bull born of the union of Minos' queen and a sacred white bull. According to the story, the clever Athenian hero Theseus, aided by the king's daughter Ariadne, threaded his way through the Minotaur's labyrinthine lair to kill the monster, thus freeing Athens from its ancient bondage to the Minoans. Around 1700 B.C.E., some three centuries before mainland Greece absorbed Crete, an earthquake brought devastation to Minoan civilization.

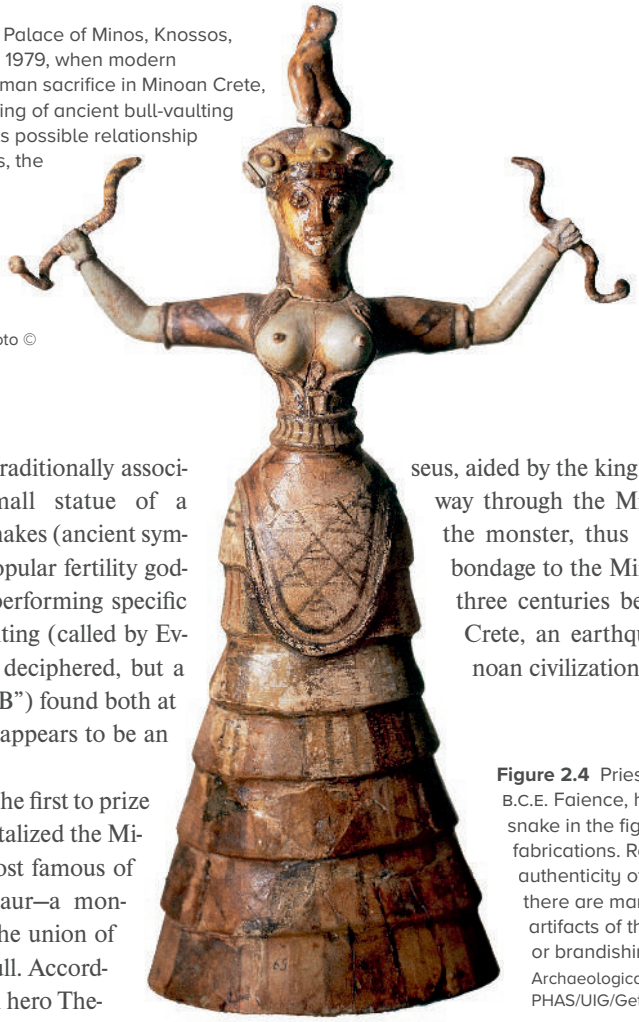


Figure 2.4 Priestess with Snakes, Minoan, ca. 1600 B.C.E. Faience, height 13½ in. The head and the snake in the figure's left hand are modern fabrications. Recent scholarship questions the authenticity of this reconstruction. Nevertheless, there are many similar eastern Mediterranean artifacts of this era that depict females flanked by or brandishing snakes or wild animals.
Archaeological Museum, Heraklion, Crete. Photo © PHAS/UIG/Getty Images.

Mycenaean Civilization
(ca. 1600–1200 B.C.E.)

By 1600 B.C.E., the Mycenaeans had established themselves in the Aegean. By contrast with the Minoans, the Mycenaeans were a militant and aggressive people: Their warships challenged other traders for control of the eastern Mediterranean. On mainland Greece at Tiryns and Mycenae (see Map 2.1), the Mycenaeans constructed heavily fortified citadels and walls so massive that later generations thought they had been built by a mythical race of giants known as the Cyclops. These "cyclopean" walls were guarded by symbols of royal power: In the triangular arch above the entrance gate to the citadel, two 9-foot-high stone lions flank a column that rests on a Minoan-style altar (Figure **2.5**). Master stonemasons, the Mycenaeans buried their rulers in beehive-shaped tombs. The royal graves, uncovered by Schliemann in 1876, are filled with weapons and jewelry fit for an Egyptian pharaoh. These items, and in particular a gold death mask that once covered the face of the deceased, Schliemann mistakenly identified as belonging to Agamemnon (Figure **2.6**), the legendary king who led the ancient Greeks against the city of Troy. This

Figure 2.5 Lion Gate, Citadel at Mycenae, ca. 1500–1300 B.C.E. Limestone, height of relief 9 ft. 6 in. Huge, rough-cut blocks of stone were set in projecting layers to hold in place the triangular relief. The heads of the lions, carved separately, are missing.

Map 2.1 Ancient Greece.

Figure 2.6 Funerary mask, ca. 1500 B.C.E. Gold, height 12 in. Death masks are frequently found in ancient graves going back to prehistory. Bound to the head of the mummified corpse, the mask was a kind of portrait that preserved the identity of the dead person in the afterlife.
National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Photo © Gianni Dagli Orti/ Shutterstock.

tale is immortalized in the first of the Greek epic poems, the *Iliad*. Although later archeologists have proved Schliemann wrong—the tombs are actually some three hundred years earlier than he thought—the legends and the myths of the Greek world would flower in Mycenaean soil.

Around 1200 B.C.E., the Mycenaeans attacked Troy ("Ilion" in Greek), a commercial stronghold on the northwest coast of Asia Minor. The ten-year-long war between Mycenae and Troy would provide the historical context not only for the *Iliad*, but also for the second of the two great epic poems of the ancient Greeks: the *Odyssey*.

The Heroic Age (ca. 1200–750 B.C.E.)

Soon after 1200 B.C.E., more powerful, iron-bearing tribes of Dorians, a Greek-speaking people from the north, destroyed Mycenaean civilization. During the long period of political and social turmoil that followed, storytellers kept alive the history of early Greece, the adventures of the Mycenaeans, and the tales of the Trojan War, passing them orally from generation to generation. It was not until at least the ninth century B.C.E. that these stories were transcribed; and it was yet another three hundred years before they reached their present form. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* became the "national" poems of ancient Greece, uniting Greek-speaking people by giving literary authority to their common heritage. Although much of what is known about the early history of the Greeks comes from these landmark epics, little is known about the blind poet Homer to whom they are traditionally attributed. Scholars are not sure when or where he lived, or, indeed, if he existed at all. It is unlikely that Homer actually composed the poems, although legend has it that he memorized the whole of each one. The only fact of which we can be fairly certain is that Homer represents the culmination of a long and vigorous tradition in which oral recitation—possibly to instrumental accompaniment—was a popular kind of entertainment.

The *Iliad* (ca. 850 B.C.E.) takes place in the last days of the Trojan War. It is the story of the Achaean (ancient Greek) hero Achilles (or Achilleus), who, moved to anger by an affront to his honor, refuses to join the battle against Troy alongside his Achaean comrades. Wearing Achilles' armor, the hero's dearest friend, Patroclus, routs the Trojans and slays many of their allies (Figure **2.7**). Only after Patroclus is killed by Hector (leader of the Trojan forces) does Achilles finally and vengefully go to war. He confronts and kills Hector, stripping him of his armor and dragging his nude body before the walls of Troy. Hector's father, the Trojan king Priam,

Figure 2.7 Euphronios and Euxitheos, *Death of Sarpedon*, ca. 515 B.C.E. Ceramic krater with red figure decoration, height 18 in. The legendary warrior and Trojan ally Sarpedon was killed by Patroclus in the course of the war. He is shown on this **krater** (a vessel used for mixing wine and water) being carried from the battlefield by the winged figures of Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death). Central to the lyrically balanced composition is the figure of Hermes, messenger of the gods, who guides the dead to the underworld.
National Etruscan Museum, Villa Giulia, Rome. Photo © Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali/Art Resource, NY.

is forced to humble himself before the victorious Achilles and request the return and proper burial of his son; the epic closes with Hector's funeral.

The *Odyssey* (ca. 850 B.C.E.), the second of the two epics, recounts the long, adventure-packed sea journey undertaken by Odysseus, the clever and resourceful Greek hero of the Trojan War, in his effort to return to his home and family and reassume his authority as king of Ithaca. Like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (see pages 12–13), the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* belong to the dynamic history of a rugged young culture, but whereas the *Epic of Gilgamesh* takes as its theme the pursuit of everlasting life, the Greek epics deal with the quest for individual honor and glory.

Almost 16,000 lines long, the *Iliad* is a robust tale of war, but its true subject is Achilles, the offspring of Peleus, king of Thessaly, and the sea goddess Thetis. (Later legends report that his mother, having dipped her infant son in the River Styx, made him invulnerable except for the heel by which she held him.) Like Gilgamesh, Achilles is the personification of youthful bravery, a superhero who embodies the ideals of his people, but he is a more psychologically complex character than Gilgamesh. The emotions he exhibits—anger, love, rage, and grief—are wholly human. His pettiness ("the wrath of Achilles" cited in the first line of the *Iliad*) is balanced by his unflinching courage in battle. Like the poem itself, the hero brings to light the terrible blend of brutality and compassion that remains a universal constant of war. Achilles' humanity, his effort to reconcile personal pride and moral virtue, is illustrated in the following lines from Book 24, in which Achilles, describing to King Priam the fate of humankind at the hands of the gods, reflects on his own failed obligations:

Let us put our griefs to rest in our own hearts,
rake them up no more, raw as we are with mourning.
What good's to be won from tears that chill the spirit?
So the immortals spun our lives that we, we wretched men
live on to bear such torments—the gods live free of sorrows.
There are two great jars that stand on the floor of Zeus' halls
and hold his gifts, our miseries one, the other blessings.
When Zeus who loves the lightning mixes gifts for a man,
now he meets with misfortune, now good times in turn.
When Zeus dispenses gifts from the jar of sorrows only,
he makes a man an outcast—brutal, ravenous hunger
drives him down the face of the shining earth,
stalking far and wide, cursed by gods and men.
So with my father, Peleus. What glittering gifts
the gods rained down from the day that he was born!
He excelled all men in wealth and pride of place,
he lorded the Myrmidons,[1] and mortal that he was,
they gave the man an immortal goddess for a wife.
Yes, but even on him the Father piled hardships,
no powerful race of princes born in his royal halls,
only a single son he fathered, doomed at birth,
cut off in the spring of life—
and I, I give the man no care as he grows old
since here I sit in Troy, far from my fatherland,
a grief to you, a grief to all your children.

[1] Warriors who followed Peleus and Achilles.

THE PRINCIPAL GREEK GODS

Greek Name	Roman Name	Signifies
Aesclepius	Vejovis	Medicine, healing
Aphrodite	Venus	Love, beauty, procreation
Apollo	Phoebus	Solar light, medicine, music
Ares	Mars	War
Artemis	Diana	Hunting, wildlife, the moon
Athena	Minerva	Wisdom, war
Demeter	Ceres	Agriculture, grain
Dionysus	Bacchus	Wine, vegetation, seasonal regeneration
Eros	Amor/Cupid	Erotic love, desire
Hades	Pluto	Underworld
Helios	Phoebus	Sun
Hephaestus	Vulcan	Fire, metallurgy
Hera	Juno	Queen of the gods
Heracles	Hercules	Strength, courage
Hermes	Mercury	Male messenger of the gods
Hestia	Vesta	Hearth, domestic life
Nike	Victoria	Victory
Persephone	Proserpina	Underworld
Poseidon	Neptune	Sea
Selene	Diana	Moon
Zeus	Jupiter	King of the gods, sky

The Greek Gods

The ancient Greeks envisioned their gods as a family of immortals who intervened in the lives of human beings. Originating in the cultures of Crete and Mycenae, the Greek pantheon exalted Zeus, the powerful sky god, and his wife, Hera, as the ruling deities. Among the lesser gods were Poseidon, god of the sea; Apollo, god of light, medicine, and music; Dionysus, god of wine and vegetation; Athena, goddess of wisdom and war; and Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty, and procreation. Around these and other deities there emerged an elaborate mythology.

Many Greek myths look back to the common pool of legends and tales that traveled throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East. In the *Theogony* (*The Birth of the Gods*; ca. 700 B.C.E.), a poem recounting the history and genealogy of the gods, Homer's contemporary Hesiod (fl. 700 B.C.E.) describes the origins of the universe and the birth of the gods.

The Greeks traced their origins to events related to the fury of Zeus: Angered by human evil, Zeus decided to destroy humankind by sending a flood. Deucalion, the Greek Noah, built a boat for himself and his wife and obeyed an oracle that commanded them to throw the "bones" of Mother Earth overboard. From these stones sprang up human beings, the first of whom was Hellen, the legendary ancestor of the Greeks, or "Hellenes."