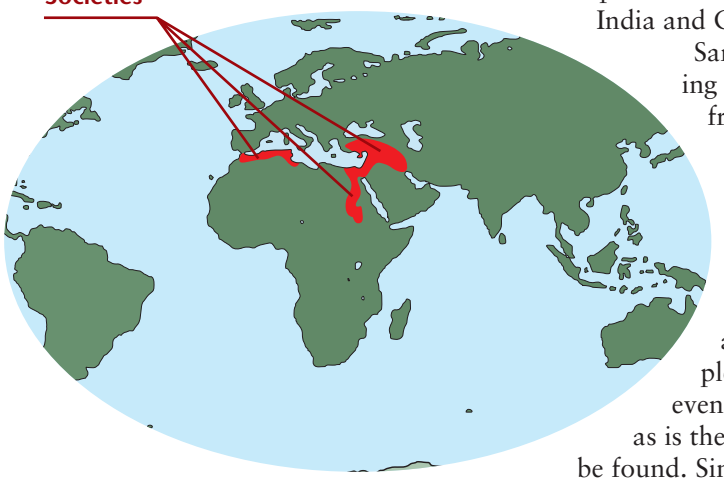
CHAPTER 2

Early Societies of West Asia and North Africa, to 500 B.C.E.

The Ziggurat Of Ur

Early West Asian and North African societies produced impressive monuments, such as this massive "ziggurat" temple in the ancient Sumerian city of Ur, amply attesting to the power of their rulers and religions (page 27).

According to legend, King Sargon of Akkad (*AH-kuhd*), regarded as history's first empire-builder, was a man of humble birth. Abandoned in infancy by his mother, who put him in a basket and set him adrift on a river, he was rescued and raised by a gardener. Having thus found favor with the fertility goddess Ishtar, the story continues, Sargon became a local ruler's cup bearer and grew into a great warrior. Assembling an empire in West Asia in the twenty-fourth century B.C.E., he conquered Sumer (*SOO-mehr*), a prosperous region northwest of the Persian Gulf. But rather than destroying its great cities he embraced their culture and later imposed it on other lands he conquered. He also expanded commerce, trading with lands as far away as India and Crete.



Sargon's story exemplifies the challenge of studying ancient times. Fragmentary records surviving from that era often were compiled centuries after the events described. Many were based on oral traditions, passed on from one generation to the next and typically embellished by heroic legends and accounts of godly interventions. It is thus difficult for historians to determine precisely what occurred. The actual events of Sargon's early life, for example, as well as the boundaries of his realm and even the years of his reign, are open to question—as is the location of his capital city, which has yet to be found. Similar gaps exist in our knowledge of all ancient societies, which is based on fragmentary records and archeological evidence supplemented by the enlightened speculation of scholars. The accounts that emerge are incomplete and often differ in details, but the story they tell is fascinating nonetheless.

Sargon's story also shows how connections were created among cultures. Sometimes warriors conquered cosmopolitan societies and then adopted their culture, as Sargon did when he annexed and emulated the cities of Sumer. Sometimes conquerors imposed their values on the people they vanquished, as Sargon did by spreading his adopted culture to other lands he ruled. And sometimes cultures influenced each other through commerce, exchanging their ideas along with their commodities, a process encouraged by Sargon in his expansion of trade.

Such connections were central to the growth of the complex societies that emerged in West Asia and Northeast Africa more than 5,000 years ago. As we saw in Chapter 1, these societies arose along rivers (the Tigris, Euphrates, and Nile) where farming had long been practiced and where the resulting food supply supported sizable settlements. In each society people lived at the mercy of the rivers that, while sustaining their settlements, could also destroy them. In each society people worshiped many gods and goddesses, believing they could intervene in human lives and hoping to get their help. Through various connections and conflicts, over several millennia, these societies interacted with each other and with peoples in other regions, leaving striking legacies that endure to this day.

Early West Asian Societies

Agriculture, as we saw in the last chapter, first arose in West Asia around 9000 B.C.E. In the following millennia, it came to be practiced extensively in the plains around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (now part of modern Iraq), where periodic floods deposited rich silt that kept the soil fertile.

By the fourth millennium B.C.E., as farming flourished in this region, its population seems to have grown considerably. Shielded from outsiders by mountains to the north and deserts to the south and fed by ample harvests from fertile farmlands, people there formed increasingly complex societies. Farming villages merged into towns, and some towns grew into cities, with central governments, organized religions, extensive commerce, and eventually even writing systems.

Thus emerged what is traditionally considered the world's first civilization, in a region that the Greeks would later call Mesopotamia (*MESS-uh-puh-TĀ-mē-uh*), a name that means "between the rivers." So impressive were its achievements that later conquerors, including Sargon of Akkad, adopted and imposed its ways throughout West Asia and beyond.

Towns and cities emerge in Mesopotamia, forming early civilization

Early Mesopotamia: The City-States of Sumer

The largest and most influential of the early Mesopotamian cities, such as Ur, Uruk, and Lagash, had emerged by 3500 B.C.E. in the region called Sumer, near where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers connect (Map 2.1). By 3000 B.C.E. some of these settlements, surrounded by protective walls, were more than a mile in diameter and home to more than 30,000 people. Most of the residents were farmers, living in huts made of sun-baked mud bricks, who went out by day to tend their crops in nearby fields. But other city-dwellers, supported by surplus food supplied by the farmers, specialized in a variety of occupations. Their numbers included artisans, merchants, laborers, priests and priestesses, soldiers, and government officials.

Early Sumerian city-states connect and conflict with each other

Conflict was common among Sumerian cities, many of which were actually **city-states**, independent urban political domains that controlled the surrounding countryside. Eager to enhance their security and wealth, the larger city-states sometimes sought to swallow up others, provoking periodic wars. Warriors who emerged as leaders in combat typically became the kings and officials of their city-states.

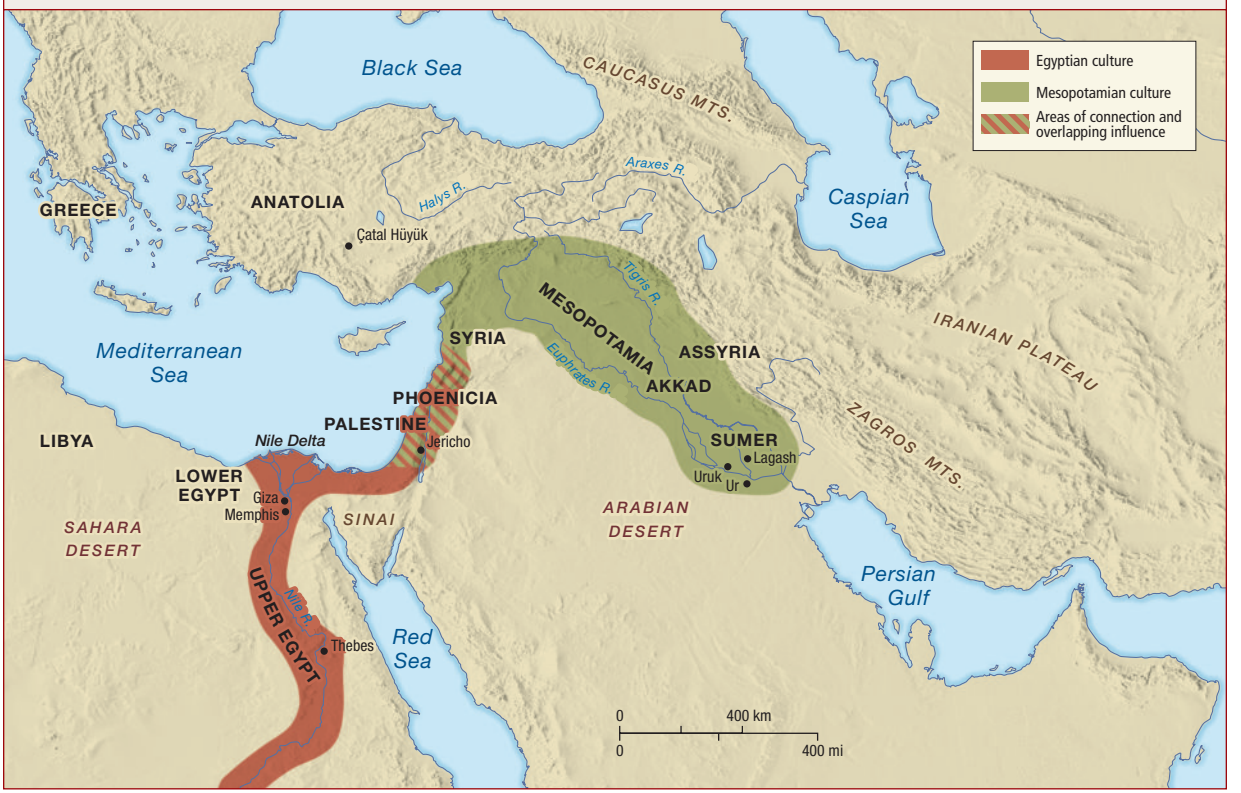
Over time the kings amassed great power to command armies, levy tribute and taxes, dispense justice, and organize the building of roads, canals, and dikes. In many places kingship became hereditary, as rulers succeeded in passing on their powers to their sons. Officials helped the kings govern, while priests and priestesses exalted the rulers as descendants of the gods. Royal authority was thus reinforced by religion.

King Sargon and a High Official.

Sumerian Religion and Worldview. The most famous Sumerian ruler was King Gilgamesh (*GIL-guh-mesh*) of Uruk, hero of the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* a magnificent narrative poem from the third millennium B.C.E. In this epic the handsome young king, described as part god and part man, is confronted by Enkidu (*EN-kih-doo*), a former wild man who has been tamed by a prostitute. The two men battle ferociously, but emerge as friends. Together they embark on many adventures and overcome many challenges.

FOUNDATION MAP 2.1 Complex Societies Emerge in West Asia and Northeast Africa by 3000 B.C.E.

By the third millennium B.C.E., complex societies had emerged in Mesopotamia and Egypt and acquired extensive regional influence. Note that the lands on the eastern Mediterranean coast, later called Phoenicia and Palestine, connected Mesopotamia and Egypt, and were eventually influenced by both cultures. How did these connections develop, and how did each culture influence the other?



When fertility goddess Inanna (later called Ishtar) becomes infatuated with Gilgamesh, he brazenly spurns her advances, so in a rage she has her father the sky god send a wild bull to destroy him. Together, Gilgamesh and Enkidu manage to slay the beast. But the gods respond by taking the life of Enkidu, who describes to Gilgamesh the dismal underworld awaiting people after death. Hoping to avoid his friend's fate, Gilgamesh searches for immortality, only to learn that eternal life is beyond his grasp.

Gilgamesh epic illuminates Sumerian religion and worldview

The epic exhibits fundamental features of Mesopotamian religion. Like many ancient belief systems, it was **polytheistic** (*PAH-lē-thē-ISS-tik*), meaning that people worshiped more than one god. Gods and goddesses personified forces central to agricultural society, such as earth, sun, water, sky, fertility, and storms. Deities such as Ishtar and her father were temperamental figures, portrayed in human form and believed to affect every aspect of life. People who pleased the gods by rituals and sacrifices could hope for assistance and good fortune, but those who (like Gilgamesh and Enkidu) displeased the

gods could expect retribution. The overall outlook was gloomy: humans had to serve unpredictable and often spiteful gods in this life, with little hope for a better fate in the next life.

Religion was crucial to early cultures and rulers

Religion nonetheless played a central role in most ancient societies. It supplied an explanation for the forces of nature, and a means by which people could try to influence those forces. It provided a focus for festivals, such as new year holidays at the start of spring, celebrating life's natural cycles with rituals, dances, and songs. Religion also exalted the rulers as divine agents, thus enhancing their authority and helping them to maintain stability and order. Priests and priestesses, typically members of rulers' families or devoted followers, heralded the rulers as godlike beings descended from divinities and performed rituals intended to bring divine favor on the realm.

Early religion and governance are intertwined

To further enhance their status and the city's prestige, rulers built splendid temples to the gods and palaces for themselves. Beginning around 2200 B.C.E., some cities constructed **ziggurats** (*ZIG-uh-rahtz*), massive brick towers that ascended upward in a series of tiers, typically topped by shrines that could be used for religious ceremonies. Dominating urban landscapes, ziggurats also served as symbols of a city's power and as lookout towers for its defense (see page 23). Governance and religion were thus allied and intertwined, each supporting the other.

Commerce, Innovation, and Cuneiform Writing. Secured by this alliance and sustained by surplus food, Sumerians made great strides in other endeavors. They promoted interregional commerce, pioneered the use of wheels, learned to fashion metals into tools and weapons, devised ways to keep track of time, performed architectural and engineering feats, and invented writing.

Sumerians connect commercially with neighboring cultures

Although Sumer's farms produced abundant wheat and barley, and its herds of sheep supplied abundant wool, woods and metals were scarce in Sumer—so its cities traded with other lands to get them. As early as the fourth millennium B.C.E., Sumerians were exchanging their textiles and grains for cedar wood and copper from the eastern Mediterranean, gold from Egypt, and gems from what is now Iran. To carry these trade goods, Sumerians fashioned wooden boats for rivers, cargo ships for seas, and wheeled carts to be pulled over land by animals.

Development of wheeled carts improves overland connections

Overland transport was vastly improved by the wheel, an innovation that, although often associated with Sumer, probably originated among nomads to its north. By 3000 B.C.E., Sumerian traders were transporting goods in carts with wooden wheels, and thus introducing wheels to other regions as they traveled. One of history's most useful inventions, wheels were later attached to chariots for warfare, thereby intensifying conflicts as well as contacts among cultures.

Sumerians also made advances in metalwork. In the late Neolithic period, hoping to improve on their wood and stone implements, some West Asians started fashioning tools out of copper ore. At first they simply pounded the copper into useful shapes; later they learned to heat it until it melted and pour it into clay molds to cool. However, although copper worked well for small tools and ornaments, it was too soft for larger tools and weapons. In the fourth millennium B.C.E., therefore, metalworkers began to mix the molten copper with tin, thereby producing a sturdier metal called bronze. By 3000 B.C.E., Sumerian artisans increasingly used bronze to make swords and shields for soldiers and sometimes knives and axes for farmers.

Development of writing aids governance, commerce, and spread of knowledge

Other innovations, involving calculation and record keeping, are credited to the Sumerians. They developed, for example, a calendar based on cycles of the moon. They devised a computation system, centered on segments of 12 and 60, which is still used for dividing time into hours, minutes, and seconds. And they used their architectural and engineering skills to construct palaces, temples, fortifications, and irrigation systems.

Furthermore, as trade and tribute grew extensive and society became more complex, Sumerians devised shapes and symbols to keep track of financial and administrative transactions. Later, as this system improved, they used it to record their rituals and laws, as well as the legends and exploits of rulers such as Gilgamesh. This momentous invention, which we now call writing, facilitated governance, enhanced commercial connections, and vastly aided the preservation and transmission of knowledge.

Cuneiform writing.

The Sumerians wrote by inscribing figures in wet clay, which then hardened into tablets, some of which are still preserved today. They etched their symbols from right to left, using wedge-like characters that scholars now call **cuneiform** (*KYOO-nē-ih-form*), which means "wedge-shaped." At first these characters were merely stylized pictures (pictographs) of people, animals, and objects such as carts, houses, baskets, and bowls. Eventually, however, as characters were added to express ideas (ideographs) and sounds (phonetics), writing became very complex, so schools were set up in palaces and temples to train writing specialists, or scribes. To enter this prestigious profession, relied on by rulers to help manage their realms, students in these early schools endured memorization, recitation, copy work, harsh discipline by teachers, and harassment by older classmates.

Few Sumerians actually learned to write, but those who did played a crucial role in spreading and preserving their culture. So useful, indeed, was their writing system that it was adopted not just by speakers of Sumer's various languages, but also by outside conquerors seeking to unite and rule the Sumer region.

Connections and conflicts help spread writing system

The Akkadian Conquest and Spread of Sumerian Culture

Conquest played a crucial role in spreading Sumerian culture. Beginning around 2350 B.C.E., the Sumerian city-states were conquered by King Sargon of Akkad, the ambitious ruler whose story is told at the start of this chapter. Sargon went on to conquer most of Mesopotamia, uniting the whole region under his rule and creating one of history's first empires (Map 2.2).

Akkadian conquerors adapt and spread Sumerian ideas

Sargon also established a pattern that repeated itself time and again throughout history: the conquerors learned from the people they conquered and helped to spread their culture. The Akkadians (*ah-KĀ-dē-inz*), for example, adopted the Sumerian calendar, writing system, and methods of computation, introducing them to other regions as Akkad's rule expanded westward. Hence, as a result of Akkadian conquests, Sumerian ideas spread across Mesopotamia and into the lands along the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

The Akkadian empire, which declined after Sargon's death, was overrun around 2230 B.C.E. by nomadic warriors from mountains to the northeast. The Sumerians later regained power, led by the city-state of Ur, which extended its rule over southern Mesopotamia until around 2000 B.C.E. After that the region came under the control of a people called the Amorites (*AM-uh-rītz*), who created their own extensive empire.

Map 2.2 Akkadian Empire Unites Mesopotamia in Twenty-fourth Century B.C.E.

King Sargon of Akkad created the Akkadian Empire in the twenty-fourth century B.C.E. and ruled it from his capital, known as Akkad (or Agade), whose ruins and precise location have yet to be found. Note that Sargon's empire embraced all of Mesopotamia and some of the surrounding regions. What steps did Sargon take to connect and unify his realm?

Babylonian Society and Hammurabi's Code

Babylonians adapt and spread Sumerian ideas

The Amorites, warlike pastoral nomads from Arabia, came to Mesopotamia shortly before 2000 B.C.E. through the region later called Syria, possibly in search of grazing lands for their herds. Through a series of conquests, they gradually extended their control over most of Mesopotamia, which they ruled until about 1600 B.C.E. Like the Akkadians before them, they embraced many aspects of Sumerian society, adapting the ruling and writing systems in order to meet their needs and even settling in cities supported by farming. Since their capital was a city called Babylon (*BAB-ul-ahn*) on the Euphrates River, their empire and culture are often called Babylonian (*bab-uh-LŌ-nē-in*).

Hammurabi's code seeks to regulate Mesopotamian society

The most notable Babylonian ruler was Hammurabi (*hah-moo-RAH-bē*), who reigned from 1792 to 1750 B.C.E. and issued the famous law code that now bears his name. **Hammurabi's code**, a compilation of earlier Mesopotamian laws, was carved on a black stone pillar and placed in a temple to promote public knowledge of the law (see "Excerpts from Hammurabi's Code"). The code sought to regulate matters such as trade and contracts, marriage and adultery, debts and estates, and relations among social classes. It assigned penalties based on retribution—the famous principle of "an eye for

Document 2.1 Excerpts from Hammurabi's Code

Hammurabi's Code had 282 articles, mostly assigning punishments for crimes or compensations for commercial and marital infractions. Today these articles provide fascinating insights into Mesopotamian society

6. If any one steal the property of a temple or of the court, he shall be put to death, and also the one who receives the stolen thing from him shall be put to death.

22. If any one is committing a robbery and is caught, then he shall be put to death.

104. If a merchant give an agent corn, wool, oil, or any other goods . . . , the agent shall give a receipt for the amount, and compensate the merchant . . . Then he shall obtain a receipt from the merchant for the money that he gives the merchant.

105. If the agent is careless, and does not take a receipt for the money . . . , he can not consider the . . . money as his own.

106. If the agent accept money from the merchant, but . . . quarrel with the merchant (denying the receipt), then shall the merchant swear before God and witnesses that he has given this money to the agent, and the agent shall pay him three times the sum.

108. If a tavern-keeper (feminine) does not accept corn . . . in payment of drink, but takes money, and the price of the drink is less than that of the corn, she shall be convicted and thrown into the water.

109. If conspirators meet in the house of a tavern-keeper, and these conspirators are not captured and delivered to the court, the tavern-keeper shall be put to death.

129. If a man's wife be [caught having intercourse] with another man, both shall be tied and thrown into the water, but the husband may pardon his wife and the king his slaves.

132. If the "finger is pointed" at a man's wife about another man, but she is not caught sleeping with the other man, she shall jump into the river for her husband.

142. If a woman quarrel with her husband, and say: "You are not congenial to me," the reasons for her prejudice must be presented. If she is guiltless . . . , but he leaves and neglects her, she shall take her dowry and go back to her father's house.

143. If she is not innocent, but leaves her husband, and ruins her house, neglecting her husband, this woman shall be cast into the water.

195. If a son strikes his father, his hand shall be hewn off.

196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.

199. If he put out the eye of a man's slave, or break the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half of its value.

200. If a man knock out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out.

SOURCE: *Hammurabi's Code of Laws.* Translated by L. W. King. http://eawc.evansville.edu/anthology/hammurabi.htm

an eye"—in an effort not only to deter crimes but also to limit retaliation by ensuring that the punishment did not exceed the damage done.

Hammurabi's code provides many insights into Mesopotamian society. It reveals, for example, that society was divided into nobles, commoners, and slaves, as different penalties are assigned depending on social status. A noble who knocked out another noble's tooth, for example, was liable to have his own tooth knocked out ("a tooth for a tooth"), but a noble who knocked out a commoner's tooth would only have to pay a fine. A noble who hit a commoner would likewise have to pay a fine, but a commoner who hit a noble would be publicly whipped, and a slave who hit a noble would have an ear cut off.

Property rights, as reflected in the code, were valued very highly. Theft and robbery, for example, were punishable by death. Merchants and artisans could be penalized for providing shoddy goods, but the principle regulating commercial transactions was "let the buyer beware." Tenant farmers were expected to work the land diligently and give the landowner a portion of their crops. Slaves, who were most likely debtors, criminals, or prisoners of war, had limited rights, but they were allowed to own property, marry nonslaves, and even purchase their freedom.

Hammurabi's code regulates commercial and familial connections

Hammurabi's code also sheds light on marriage and gender roles. It shows, for example, that marriages were contractual, typically arranged by the parents. To seal the contract, the groom gave a gift to the bride's father, and her family supplied a **dowry**—a bridal endowment of money or property (preserved today in a custom whereby the bride's family pays for her wedding). The code gave greater rights and higher status to men than to women. A husband, for example, could legally have a mistress, or even take a second wife if his first one failed to bear children. But a woman who cheated or ran off on her husband could be cast into the water to drown.

Men had greater rights than women in Mesopotamia

Women did have some rights: they could buy and sell goods, and even own property, which they were allowed to inherit and pass on to their descendants. Records indicate that some women owned shops or taverns, worked as brewers or bakers, and even served as priestesses or scribes. But records also show that men sometimes sold their wives into slavery, and that women often died before age forty, victimized by infections associated with childbirth or worn out by ceaseless labor.

Hammurabi centralizes administration and taxation

The law code was not Hammurabi's only achievement. He built fortifications, temples, irrigation channels, and dams that could cut off water to potential enemies downstream—a potent military tool in a region where survival depended on river water. He also centralized the state administration, appointing officials to control the regions of his realm and collect regular taxes from their residents. This practice was more efficient, and less disruptive to the economy, than the old Sumerian tribute system, in which armies were sent out from cities to the surrounding regions to collect tribute by force.

For all his accomplishments, however, Hammurabi failed to establish an enduring regime. Following his death in 1750 B.C.E. the Babylonian kingdom declined and was eventually overrun by warlike pastoral nomads using horse-drawn chariots.

Indo-European Migrations

The warriors that challenged Babylon, beginning around 1600 B.C.E., spoke languages now classified as **Indo-European.** Since numerous languages in India, Iran, and Europe share many common features, modern linguists group them as a language family called Indo-European, divided into subfamilies such as Celtic, Greek, Italic, Slavic, Indo-Iranian, and Germanic (the branch to which English belongs). The ancient tongues from which this family evolved differed substantially from Sumerian languages, which form their own language group, and from those spoken by Akkadians and Babylonians, which scholars place in the **Semitic** language family along with Arabic and Hebrew.

The peoples who spoke ancient Indo-European tongues are also called Indo-Europeans. Although their origin is unclear, many scholars think they descended from pastoral nomads who had herded sheep, goats, and cattle since before 4000 B.C.E. on the grassy plains northeast of the Black Sea called steppes (*stepz*).

Indo-European nomads domesticate horses

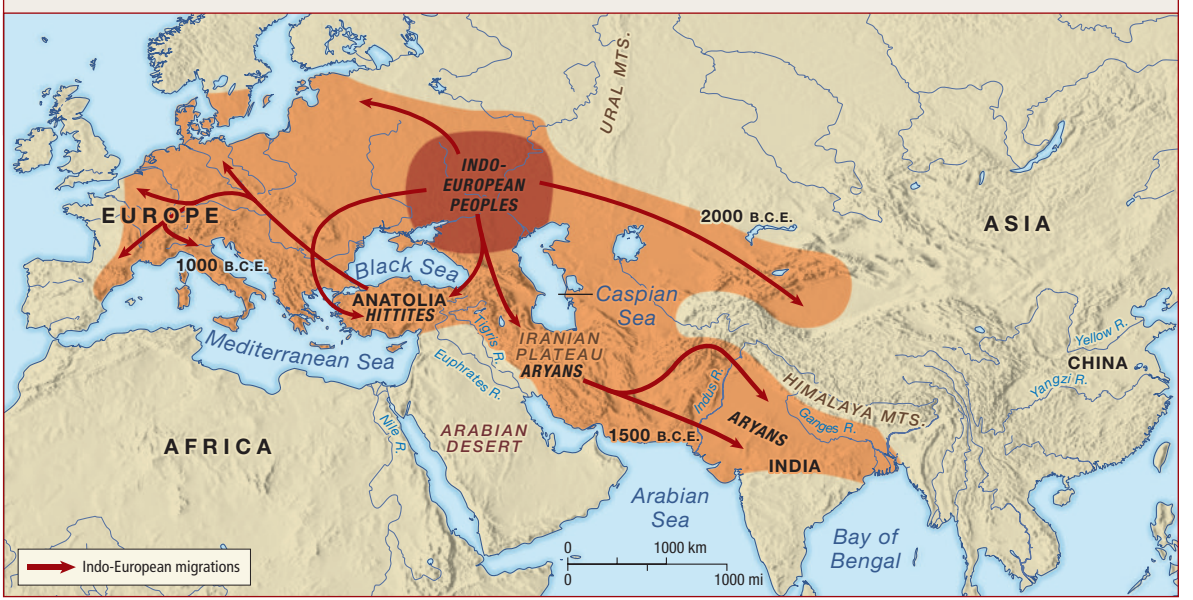
Among the enduring influences of the early Indo-Europeans was the domestication of horses, which proved immensely useful for both transport and warfare. When hitched to carts, horses hauled tents and supplies, helping people to move about more easily and travel longer distances. When attached to war chariots, developed in Central Asia by 2000 B.C.E., horses enabled warriors to attack and maneuver with great speed, giving them a huge advantage over traditional foot soldiers. When harnessed to military supply wagons, horses conveyed the provisions needed to support an army on the move. Indeed, horses ultimately became the main form of military transport, and remained so until the Second World War in the twentieth century C.E. Long before that, however, horses had aided some of history's greatest migrations.

Indo-Europeans migrate to Anatolia, Europe, Iran, India

In the third millennium B.C.E., perhaps because population growth was outpacing the availability of good pastureland in the steppes, nomads apparently migrated great distances in search of fresh pastures for their herds. Aided and accompanied by their horses, some went southwest to Anatolia (*an-uh-TŌ-lē-uh*), the site of modern Turkey, while others moved south to the Iranian Plateau (Map 2.3). During the second millennium B.C.E., some went further west, dispersing throughout much of Europe, while others migrated east into northern India. Both the widespread use of horses and the wide distribution of Indo-European languages can be attributed to these nomadic migrations.

Map 2.3 Indo-European Migrations Connect Eurasian Societies, 3000–1000 B.C.E.

In the third and second millennia B.C.E., according to scholars, nomadic peoples who spoke Indo-European languages migrated from their original homelands to various other regions. Notice that their migrations, as indicated by the arrows, helped to create connections throughout Eurasia. What factors facilitated these migrations, and what key ideas and techniques did they spread?



The Hittite Connection

Among the Indo-Europeans who settled in Anatolia were a people called Hittites (*HIT-tītz*). In the 1590s B.C.E., aided by horse-drawn war chariots and attracted by Babylonian wealth, Hittite armies swept into Mesopotamia, conquering the city of Babylon and ravaging the remnants of Hammurabi's realm. But unrest in their Anatolian homeland soon prompted Hittite armies to withdraw from Mesopotamia. After 1400 B.C.E., however, the Hittites again expanded into Syria and northern Mesopotamia, clashing eventually with Egyptians expanding from northeast Africa (Map 2.4). In these instances, as in so many others, conflict paved the way for cultural connections, as Hittites adopted various aspects of societies they encountered.

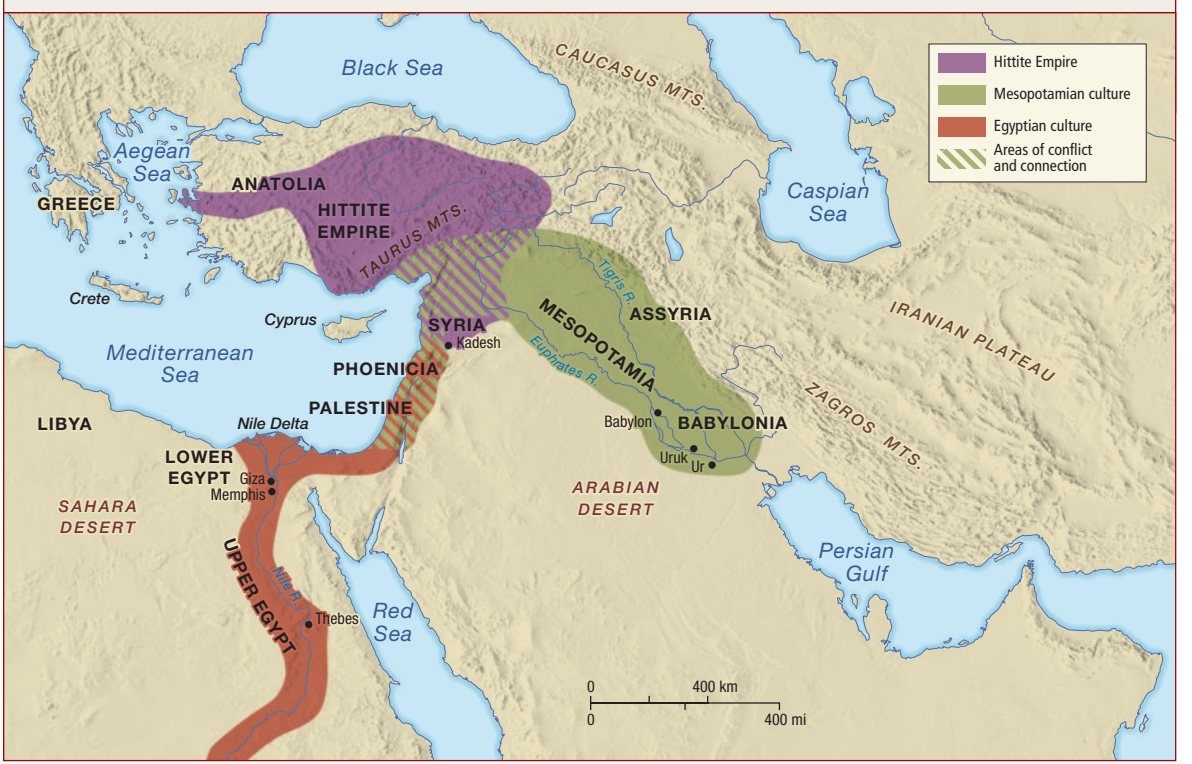
Indo-European Hittites settle in Anatolia

But the Hittites did not simply copy other cultures; instead they took features of the cultures they conquered and blended them into their own culture. The Hittites used cuneiform writing, for example, but modified it to fit their own Indo-European language.

Hittites blend Mesopotamian culture with their own

Map 2.4 Hittite Connections and Conflicts, 1600–1200 B.C.E.

Although the Hittite Empire was centered in Anatolia, its efforts at expansion brought connections and conflicts with Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures. Note, for example, that Hittite influence extended into western Mesopotamia and the region now called Syria, where Hittites fought Egyptians in the thirteenth century B.C.E. at Kadesh, then formed a Hittite-Egyptian alliance that enhanced cultural and commercial ties. What factors facilitated Hittite expansion, and what key ideas and techniques did the Hittites develop?



They worshipped many Mesopotamian gods, but absorbed these gods into their own polytheistic religion, in which the God of Storms was the main divinity. They established law codes in the manner of Hammurabi, but based them on their own pastoral customs, prescribing fines for the killing or theft of livestock—and death for men who had sex with cows or pigs. They adopted farming, but adjusted it to their climate and soil, supplementing grain crops with grapes for making wines and olives from which they made oil.

Hittites develop ironwork, advancing agriculture and warfare

The Hittites also mastered the art of metalwork. At first they cast weapons and farm tools of bronze, as others in West Asia had done for centuries. But copper and tin, the components of bronze, were relatively scarce in Hittite lands. Artisans long had tried making items of iron, a metal abundant in Anatolia and elsewhere, by melting and molding it as they did with bronze, but resulting cast iron goods proved very brittle. By the thirteenth century B.C.E., however, Hittites learned to sear iron until it was red-hot, and then to shape it with hammer strokes before it cooled. Using this process, Hittites forged sturdy iron daggers, swords, spears, and shields, as well as farm hoes and other tools. Within several centuries, despite Hittite efforts to keep iron forging a military secret, it had spread to other lands in Europe, West Asia, and North Africa, and had been developed independently in East Africa. By vastly increasing the availability of inexpensive tools and weapons, the use of iron greatly advanced both agriculture and warfare, enabling far more people than ever before to engage in such pursuits.

Hittites form an agricultural, warlike, patriarchal kingdom

The Hittite kingdom, like most societies centered on agriculture and warfare, was hierarchical and patriarchal. Its various farming villages were united under a warrior king, who was assisted by an influential aristocracy in supervising the soldiers, merchants, artisans, and slaves who made up the rest of society. Women were generally subordinate to men, but they were not entirely subservient: a man could have only one wife, a woman could sometimes reject the husband chosen by her parents, and queens could play important roles as diplomats and priestesses.

Hittites connect and conflict with Mesopotamia and Egypt

Although their political unity was challenged at times by internal strife, by 1300 B.C.E. the Hittites had fashioned an empire that stretched across Anatolia from the Aegean (*ih-JĒ-in*) Sea to upper Mesopotamia, and south along the Mediterranean coast toward Egypt. During the next century, the Hittites clashed and connected with the Egyptians (above). But after 1200 B.C.E. the Hittites succumbed to new invaders, including the **Sea Peoples**, assorted marauders of uncertain origins who ravaged eastern Mediterranean lands, perhaps after being driven by famine from Aegean islands, western Anatolia, and the Black Sea region.

Later Mesopotamia: Assyrians and Chaldeans

Several centuries after the Hittite collapse, much of West Asia was reunited by Assyrians (*uh-SEER-ē-inz*), rugged warriors from the hill country near the northern Tigris River. From the ninth through seventh centuries B.C.E., mounting numerous military campaigns, they gained wealth and power by dominating the productive farmlands and profitable trade routes of West Asia. They created an empire stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea, and even into Anatolia and Egypt (Map 2.5). In expanding their domain, the Assyrians acquired a reputation for brutality, overwhelming their foes with well-organized horse-drawn chariot assaults; then torturing, slaughtering, and exiling conquered peoples to prevent rebellions.

An Assyrian warrior on horseback.

But Assyrians also made important cultural contributions. Their magnificent city of Nineveh (*NIN-uh-vuh*), built near the northern Tigris, boasted gardens and zoos, a

Map 2.5 The Assyrian and Chaldean (New Babylonian) Empires, Ninth Through Sixth Centuries B.C.E.

From the ninth through seventh centuries B.C.E., the Assyrians, a people from the hilly region north of the Tigris, conquered a vast empire that included Mesopotamia, Egypt, and surrounding regions. Notice that the Chaldeans, who helped destroy the Assyrian realm in 614–612 B.C.E., created a smaller "New Babylonian" empire. What were the key contributions of the Assyrians and Chaldeans? When and how did the Chaldean empire come to an end?

water supply system to conduct fresh water from outlying mountains, and works of art distinguished by brutal realism. Nineveh's royal palace, for example, was adorned with a sequence of sculptured reliefs depicting scenes from bloody battles and lion hunts, arranged so observers could follow the story of the conflict or hunt. And its royal library, unearthed by archeologists in the nineteenth century C.E., housed more than 20,000 clay cuneiform tablets, carried off from Babylon and elsewhere. It thus preserved many centuries of Mesopotamian writings, including the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Chaldeans and Medes conquer the Assyrians

The Assyrians were hated and feared as few other conquerors had been—and this hatred finally proved their undoing. In 614 B.C.E. the Chaldeans (*kal-DĒ-inz*) from southern Mesopotamia, smarting from Assyrian brutality, allied with the Medes, a people from east of Assyria, to stage a massive assault. The Assyrian empire, which had tyrannized West Asia for almost three centuries, was shattered, and in 612 B.C.E. much of Nineveh was destroyed.

The Chaldeans, also called New Babylonians, then became the new masters of Mesopotamia. Under King Nebuchadnezzar (*NEB-oo-kud-NEZ-ur*), who reigned from

604 to 562 B.C.E., the city of Babylon once again rose to greatness, surpassing even Nineveh's size and splendor. Babylon's magnificent city wall, including the splendid Ishtar gate (named for the fertility goddess), was adorned with paintings of yellow and white animals against a bright blue background. And Babylon's remarkable Hanging Gardens, a rising set of stone terraces covered with plants and trees, were counted among the great wonders of the ancient world.

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

But Babylon's new glory did not last. In 539 B.C.E. it was conquered from the east by the Persians, a people whose history and culture are discussed in Chapter 6. The Persians eventually overran all West Asia and moved into Northeast Africa. There, situated along a river that ran through a desert, they encountered wealthy, complex societies that had developed at the same time as West Asia's early societies.

Early Northeast African Societies

North Africa is dominated by the Sahara Desert, a hot, dry wasteland roughly the size of modern China or the United States. Only the Nile River, flowing north through the desert from sub-Saharan Africa (Africa south of the Sahara), interrupts the arid expanse. According to scientists, however, between 10,000 and 5000 B.C.E. much of what is now desert was covered by grasslands, with rivers, lakes, and enough rain to support herding and farming. During this era, as noted in Chapter 1, inhabitants of the grasslands started to herd cattle and grow sorghum, while Nile Valley residents learned to raise wheat, barley, sheep, and goats. By 5000 B.C.E., people practiced farming and herding across the northern half of Africa (Map 2.6).

As Sahara Desert expands, people move to moister regions

After 5000 B.C.E., however, the climate grew steadily drier. As rainfall became scarce, the grasslands receded and the desert expanded, so farmers and herders had to settle in places where they would have access to water.

Some settled along the Mediterranean coast, with its mild climate and seasonal rains, where they mainly herded cattle until after 1000 B.C.E., when many turned to commerce as coastal ports and colonies emerged with an expanding sea trade. Others settled in the grasslands that still existed south of the Sahara, especially in the regions around Lake Chad and the Niger River, where they grouped into villages and clans, herded cattle, raised sorghum and yams (a starchy root crop), and traveled the rivers in canoes. Eventually, after 2000 B.C.E., perhaps compelled by a shortage of farmland as the population grew, some of this region's people began migrating to the south and southeast, bringing their agricultural way of life to lands whose inhabitants had hitherto lived by foraging. The migrating peoples, who spoke a variety of related languages now collectively called Bantu (a word simply meaning "people"), may have helped to spread farming and herding across the southern half of Africa during the next three millennia (see Chapter 13).

Bantu migrations spread farming and herding throughout sub-Saharan Africa

Most North Africans, however, settled near the Nile River, where they clustered in farming villages along its fertile floodplains. These villages in time would form the foundations of large, complex, dynamic societies later called Egypt and Nubia.

Many farmers and herders settle in fertile Nile Valley

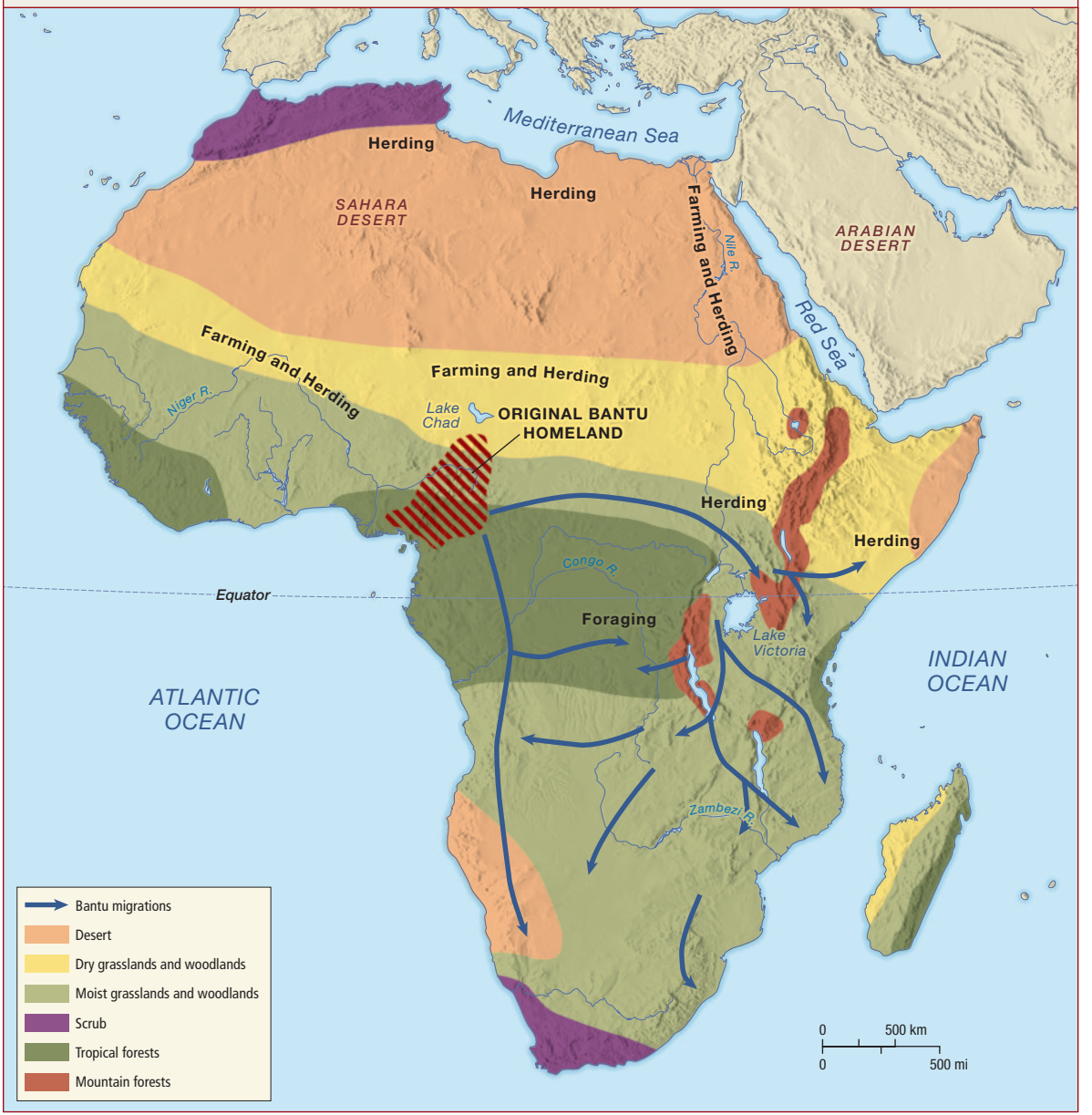
Egyptian Culture and Society

Nile settlements grow and unite into Kingdom of Egypt

After 4000 B.C.E., as the Nile Valley population grew, towns and villages along the river began uniting into small kingdoms. These kingdoms organized irrigation projects that

Map 2.6 African Environment and the Spread of Farming and Herding, Second Millennium B.C.E. Through First Millennium C.E.

Africa's widely varied environment supported the emergence of farming and herding in grasslands and river valleys, as noted by the labels on this map. Observe that people speaking Bantu languages, as indicated by the arrows, migrated throughout sub-Saharan Africa from the second millennium B.C.E. through the first millennium C.E. What factors facilitated the Bantu migrations, and what ideas and techniques did they help to spread?



brought river water to farm fields; they also traded with each other and sometimes fought one another. By 3100 B.C.E., through a series of conflicts and conquests, the northern kingdoms had combined into one large Kingdom of Egypt, destined to become one of the ancient world's most powerful and prosperous realms.

In some ways, developments in Egypt paralleled those in Mesopotamia. As in Mesopotamia, smaller states were combined by conquest into larger domains, with powerful rulers, polytheistic religions, writing systems, extensive commerce, and sophisticated technologies. As in Mesopotamia, trade and conquest created connections, with Egyptians adapting ideas and techniques from West Asians and from other Africans.

Egyptians develop connections with West Asians and other Africans

In other ways, however, Egypt differed markedly from Mesopotamia. Separated by seas and deserts from potential foes, and blessed by a river whose annual, soil-enriching floods enabled farmers to produce abundant crops year after year, ancient Egypt was bountiful, powerful, extensive, and predictable, much like the waterway that ran through its midst. Egyptian society seems to have been more stable, and its rhythms of life more regular, than those in West Asia. Egypt's worldview was less gloomy, and its religion more optimistic. And Egypt's women played more prominent roles than women in Mesopotamia.

Religion and Worldview. Religion was as integral to life in Egypt as it was in Mesopotamia. Egyptians too worshiped many gods, among them the rulers of Egypt. An elaborate system of priests and priestesses perpetuated traditional beliefs, maintained numerous temples, performed sacred rituals, and sought to instill among the people respect for order and obedience to the rulers. In time, belief in the prospect of life after death prompted efforts to preserve and house the remains of rulers and other prominent people.

Central to Egypt's worldview was the concept of *ma'at* (*mah-AHT*), the universe's elemental order, which encompassed truth, justice, harmony, and balance. The rulers, eventually called pharaohs (*FARE-ōz*), were powerful, godlike figures whose main duty was to maintain *ma'at*, without which there would be chaos. They were regarded as descendants of Re (*RĀ*), also known as Amon (*AH-muhn*) or Amon-Re, the sun god and chief divinity, who ruled the heavens much as pharaohs ruled the earth. Religion and governance in Egypt were thus one and the same.

Despite Amon-Re's preeminence, the two most popular deities came to be Osiris (*ō-SĪ-ris*), god of vegetation and the Nile, and Isis (*Ī-sis*), goddess of the earth, who was both his sister and his wife. According to legend, Osiris, a divine early ruler who taught the Egyptians to farm, was slain and cut to pieces by his evil brother Seth, but Isis put Osiris back together and restored him to life. Isis and Osiris thus became symbols of fertility, devotion, and the victory of life over death, inspiring an outlook far more hopeful than that of early Mesopotamian religion.

Seeing life as cyclical, Egyptians come to believe in an afterlife

Sustained by such myths and the cycles of the Nile, whose annual soil-renewing floods were more regular and predictable than floods in Mesopotamia, Egyptians concluded that life itself was cyclical and renewable. They came to believe that death was not the end of life, that Osiris judged the dead by weighing their hearts, and that those whose hearts were light from honorable living would merit eternal life. Religion in Egypt thus reinforced morality, as the prospect of attaining life after death gave people an incentive for honorable behavior.

The prospect of life after death also promoted **mummification**, an elaborate process for preserving the bodies of prominent people after death. First the innards and brains were removed; then the bodies were thoroughly cleansed, packed in a special mineral for

several months, tightly wrapped with strips of fine linen, coated with gum, and sealed in a wooden case. Anticipating immortality, those who could afford to do so often had splendid tombs constructed while they were alive, to house their remains and prized possessions after death. No other culture has lavished such care on the bodies of the dead.

Hieroglyphic Writing and Other Innovations. Like the early Mesopotamians, ancient Egyptians made momentous contributions to culture, knowledge, and written communication. They produced impressive works of art, decorating their temples and tombs with splendid paintings and sculptures. They charted the constellations, created a sophisticated calendar, and practiced a form of medicine based on natural remedies. They even devised an accounting system and developed mathematics to advance their architectural and engineering skills.

Egyptians also originated a form of writing known as **hieroglyphics** (*HĪ-ruh-GLIF-ikz*). Like Sumer's cuneiform system, it started as a series of pictures and eventually added symbols for ideas and sounds. Like the Sumerians, Egyptians trained scribes to master and use their complex writing system. Unlike the Sumerians, however, Egyptian scribes wrote with ink-dipped reeds on papyrus (*puh-PĪ-russ*), a paperlike material made from plants that grew along the Nile, and then rolled it into scrolls for easy storage or transport. These scrolls, far less cumbersome than the clay tablets used in Mesopotamia, enabled the Egyptians to readily record their legends, rituals, laws, and exploits, providing portraits of their society and recording its history.

Writing on papyrus aids communication and record keeping

Later, however, after Egyptians abandoned early hieroglyphics for other writing systems, no one could read the early records. For many centuries, historians had to rely for knowledge of ancient Egypt on accounts that were written after 300 B.C.E. in Greek. But in 1799 C.E., archeologists with French armies in Egypt discovered the Rosetta Stone, a large black slab on which the deeds of a ruler from the second century B.C.E. were inscribed in early hieroglyphics, a later Egyptian writing system, and Greek. Working from the Greek, which they already knew, linguists learned to read the others and hence to decipher the records of ancient Egypt.

Society, Family, Gender Roles, and Work. The records thus deciphered, combined with archeological evidence, reveal that Egypt had a high degree of political and social stratification. They also show that life focused mainly on family and farming, and on the cycles of the Nile.

Egypt's social structure tended to rank people according to status and wealth. Upper classes of priests and state officials lived in luxury; middle classes of merchants, scribes, and artisans enjoyed some prosperity; and lower classes of peasants and laborers worked hard to barely survive. The vast majority of Egyptians were peasants: humble farmers and herders who raised wheat, barley, cotton, cattle, and sheep.

Marriage and family were central to Egyptian society. Although some men practiced **polygyny**, which means they had more than one wife, marriages were mostly monogamous. As in West Asia, husbands provided the homestead while wives brought a dowry and furnishings into the marital union.

Gender roles were well defined but not totally rigid. In lower-class households men mostly worked the fields, but they might also be hunters, miners, craftsmen, or construction workers. Egyptian women mainly did household tasks, such as cooking and making clothes, much like women in West Asia.

Decorated wooden "mummy" case used for the remains of an ancient Egyptian woman.

Women often play key roles in Egyptian society

But women in Egypt seem to have had higher status than women in other ancient cultures. Egyptian women could own and inherit property, seek and obtain a divorce, and engage in such trades as entertaining, nursing, and brewing beer. Furthermore, in contrast to West Asian households, Egyptian families often were matrilineal, with property descending through the female line, and wives in Egypt were recognized as dominant in the home. Egyptian women serving as priestesses played a key role in religion, and a few women even served as rulers. But governance and warfare were, as elsewhere, mainly the work of men.

Nile cycles govern farming, irrigation, and construction

The rhythm of work in Egypt followed the ebb and flow of the Nile, which typically overflowed its banks between July and September. In October, once the waters had receded, the growing season began. With the help of oxen and other farm animals, peasants plowed their fields and planted their crops, then tended them for the next several months, bringing in buckets of water from irrigation canals. The harvest usually started in February, with women and children helping the men to gather crops and thresh grain. Wheat and barley were the principal crops, but Egyptians also grew dates, grapes, and various other fruits and vegetables. In ordinary times, when food was abundant, the government took a portion of the grain to store for use in times of scarcity. Large projects requiring many workers, such as the construction and repair of palaces, temples, and irrigation systems, were normally undertaken after the harvest was over.

The Kingdoms of Egypt

For almost three millennia, with occasional interruptions, Egypt was ruled by a series of kings, who came to be called pharaohs in the fifteenth century C.E. These monarchs governed through a network of agents and officials who enforced royal edicts, collected taxes, dispensed justice, commanded soldiers, and supervised laborers in constructing buildings, monuments, and water-control projects.

The history of ancient Egypt is generally divided into a succession of major eras distinguished by three great "kingdoms" and the periods surrounding them. Although scholars disagree on the precise dates, the approximate durations of these eras are as follows:

The Archaic Period	3100–2700 B.C.E.
The Old Kingdom	2700–2200 B.C.E.
First Intermediate Period	2200–2050 B.C.E.
The Middle Kingdom	2050–1700 B.C.E.
Second Intermediate Period	1700–1570 B.C.E.
The New Kingdom (Empire)	1570–1075 B.C.E.
The Late (Post-Imperial) Period	1075–332 B.C.E.

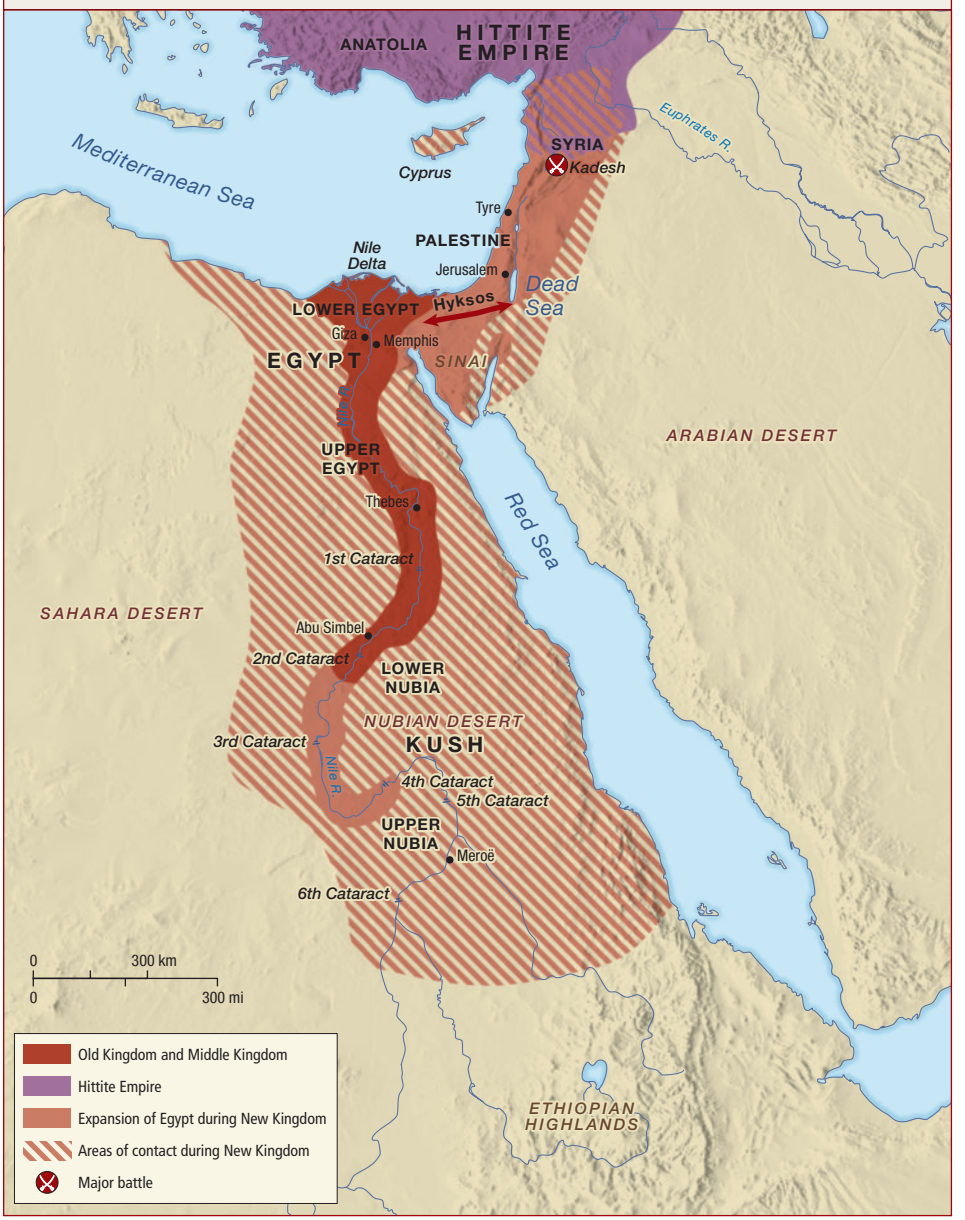
Ancient Egyptian history can further be divided into dynasties—each a succession of rulers from the same royal family. From the Archaic through the Post-Imperial Periods, historians have identified 31 dynasties in all.

Lower and Upper Egypt united in the Archaic Period

Early Kingdoms and Hyksos Rule. The Archaic Period, about which little is known, was the first time that Egypt was unified under a single ruler. Before that, it seems, there had been two separate realms: Lower Egypt, in the Nile River delta in the north, and Upper Egypt, which stretched along the river for hundreds of miles to the south (Map 2.7). Around 3100 B.C.E., the two were combined into one domain by a ruler from the south called Menes (*MĀ-nāz*), who began the first Egyptian dynasty.

Map 2.7 Egyptian Kingdoms and Imperial Expansion, 2700–1075 B.C.E.

During the Old Kingdom (2700–2200 B.C.E.) and Middle Kingdom (2050–1700 B.C.E.), ancient Egypt was a long, narrow country stretching along the Nile River. Notice, however, that during the New Kingdom (1570–1075 B.C.E.), Egyptians created an empire extending south along the Nile into Nubia and northeast into Palestine and Syria, where they clashed with the Hittites in the 1200s B.C.E. How did connections and conflicts with other cultures contribute to Egyptian wealth and power?



Somewhat more is known about the Old Kingdom, which lasted roughly from 2700 to 2200 B.C.E. During this period Egypt's rulers presided over a mostly peaceful and stable society. Internally they focused on enhancing their power and grandeur, and on creating a centralized state with an effective bureaucracy and tax collection system. Externally they seem to have followed a cautious policy, conducting some trade with other societies, but avoiding aggression and warfare.

Pyramids are built as monumental tombs for Old Kingdom rulers

The most distinctive achievements of the Old Kingdom were the pyramids, monumental structures with triangular sides sloping upward toward a point. Used as burial chambers for departed rulers, the pyramids were built mostly between 2700 and 2500 B.C.E., centuries before the Mesopotamian ziggurats (which the pyramids may have inspired). The first pyramid, erected as a tomb for king Zoser (*ZŌ-sur*), was composed of steps ascending toward a 200-foot peak. Not to be outdone, Zoser's successors commissioned ever more grandiose tombs, the largest of which was the Great Pyramid built for the monarch Khufu (*KOO-foo*). Standing almost 500 feet high, it was assembled by tens of thousands of workers using millions of tons of limestone blocks, carefully raised and fitted into place with a series of temporary ramps. The Great Pyramid would later be considered the ancient world's foremost wonder.

The Great Pyramid.

The Old Kingdom ended around 2200 B.C.E. with a series of ruinous droughts, followed by an era of civil war and chaos known as the First Intermediate Period. As central authority weakened, individual nobles carved out their own domains and battled among themselves, while bandits and marauders ravaged the land.

Around 2050 B.C.E., however, unity was restored by a powerful ruler named Mentuhotep (*men-too-HŌ-tep*) from Thebes in southern Egypt, beginning the Middle Kingdom. This era brought an increase in trade with other regions, including Mesopotamia, and a growing belief in life after death. Rather than building great pyramids, the kings undertook vast irrigation and land reclamation projects to expand the amount of farmland and enhance the prosperity of their realm.

Middle Kingdom brings increased trade and connections with other cultures

The Middle Kingdom lasted until around 1700 B.C.E., when a warlike people called Hyksos (*HICK-sōs*), perhaps related to the Amorites who had earlier moved into Mesopotamia, invaded Egypt from West Asia. Using horse-drawn chariots and bronze weapons, which they brought with them from West Asia, the invaders at first proved unstoppable in combat. They conquered all of Egypt, beginning what was later called the Second Intermediate Period.

Horses and bronze weapons help Hyksos conquer the Middle Kingdom

The Egyptians resented the harsh rule of the Hyksos, whom they deemed culturally inferior. This disdain, however, did not stop Egyptians from adopting Hyksos techniques, including the use of bronze to make improved farm tools and eventually the use of horses in warfare. The Hyksos in turn embraced the complex customs and religion of the great civilization they had come to control. Egyptians nonetheless continued to despise the Hyksos, and ultimately united to expel them.

Egypt's New Kingdom adapts Hyksos ways to conquer large empire

THE EGYPTIAN EMPIRE. In the mid-1500s B.C.E. the Hyksos were driven out by Ahmose (*AH-mōs*), another great Egyptian unifier from the south, who established the New Kingdom. Unlike its predecessors, the New Kingdom, born of military insurrection, was warlike and expansionist. Within a century its rulers, employing an army equipped with weapons and techniques derived from the Hyksos, had established an Egyptian Empire stretching from Nubia in the south to Syria in the north. In the process emerged two new

Egyptian classes: one of professional soldiers who made up the standing army; another of slaves who had been captured as prisoners of war.

Female ruler Hatshepsut fosters stability and trade

The New Kingdom produced some remarkable rulers. One was Hatshepsut (*hat-SHEP-soot*), who became regent for her six-year-old stepson, Thutmosis (*thoot-MŌ-sis*) III, around 1479 B.C.E., and later had the priests proclaim her king. Sidestepping Egypt's long tradition of male rule, Hatshepsut asserted that her father had made her his heir; she dressed in men's clothing, was portrayed on monuments wearing a beard, and often wore one in public. But above all she ruled with vigor and determination, providing Egypt with several decades of stability, commercial expansion, and peace.

After Hatshepsut died around 1458 B.C.E., her stepson Thutmosis III, raised in the army during her rule, emerged as one of Egypt's greatest military leaders. He extended his dominion north to the upper Euphrates, vanquishing various West Asian realms, and south up the Nile, conquering the people known as Nubians. He was the first Egyptian monarch to use the title pharaoh ("great house"), which hitherto had meant the king's palace, and the first known ruler to recognize the potential of sea power, amassing a navy that made Egypt master of the eastern Mediterranean.

Akhenaton and Nefertiti impose new religion and neglect empire

In the mid-1300s B.C.E., however, Egyptian power waned when a ruler named Amenhotep (*ah-mun-HŌ-tep*) IV, along with his wife Nefertiti (*nef-ur-TĒ-tē*), attempted a religious revolution. Promoting the worship of a universal deity called Aton (*AH-tun*), the pharaoh changed his own name from Amenhotep ("Amon rests") to Akhenaton (*AH-ken-AH-tun*), or "Aton is pleased." Akhenaton also expelled the temple priests and degraded the traditional gods, provoking a vast resistance among the priests and people. Obsessed with his religious reform, seen by some scholars as an early attempt at **monotheism** (belief in a single god), Akhenaton refused to dispatch soldiers to protect Egypt's Syrian provinces from the marauding Hittites, who were then expanding their West Asian empire. The results for Egypt were a loss of territory, a decline of income from tribute payments, and revolts in the provinces against the pharaoh.

Statues of Ramses II at Abu Simbel.

For most of his reign, Akhenaton seems to have ruled jointly with his wife Nefertiti, portrayed in the era's artwork as her husband's equal partner and a woman of great beauty. Late in his reign, however, she disappeared from public life; perhaps she died or fell from favor. Then, when the pharaoh himself died a few years later, the religious revolution ended. The old religion and traditional gods were restored under Tutankhamon (*toot-ahn-KAH-mun*), Akhenaton's youthful successor, today best known as the famed "King Tut" whose fabulous tomb was discovered intact by British archeologist Howard Carter in 1922 C.E.

Ramses II reinvigorates the empire and allies with the Hittites

In the 1200s B.C.E., Egypt's most notable pharaoh was Ramses (*RAM-sēz*) II, the Great, who reigned for more than sixty years. Early in his reign, seeking to regain lands lost under Akhenaton, Ramses fought the Hittites in an epic battle at Kadesh (*KĀ-desh*) in Syria. Although Ramses later claimed victory, his armies neither destroyed the Hittites' power nor drove them out of Syria. So he turned to diplomacy, forming an alliance with his former foes and marrying a Hittite princess to seal the ties. To glorify his kingdom and himself, Ramses ordered the construction of colossal monuments and temples, using an abundance of slave labor.

Sea Peoples' raids and internal divisions undermine the Egyptian Empire

Under Ramses' successors, however, Egypt was diminished by the attacks of the Sea Peoples, the same raiders who ravaged the Hittites around 1200 B.C.E. A century later, the high priests of Amon-Re seized control of southern Egypt, dividing the empire and making it vulnerable to new commercial and military challenges from abroad. In the eleventh century B.C.E., as Egypt's dominance waned, power in Northeast Africa shifted to the south.

Nubian Culture and the Kingdoms of Kush

Nubians and Egyptians form commercial and cultural connections

South of Egypt was the region known as Nubia, a name said to mean either "gold" (its most precious product) or "black" (the color of its people). Since at least 7000 B.C.E. Nubians had raised cattle and grain along the upper Nile, forming a series of kingdoms after 4000 B.C.E. Rich in gold and copper, Nubia also provided a link through the desert with lands to the south that produced precious products such as ebony and ivory (Map 2.8). As Egypt grew wealthy and powerful, its rulers often sent caravans and armies to procure these valuable goods, trading and often clashing with the Nubian kingdoms. During the Old and Middle Kingdoms, Egypt dominated northern Nubia; in southern Nubia a kingdom called Kush endured until the fifteenth century B.C.E., when it was conquered and then ruled by Egypt for the next four centuries.

Nubians bearing gifts.

Nubia and Egypt were thus closely linked for over two millennia, during which Nubians combined various aspects of Egypt's culture and religion with their own. They adapted hieroglyphic writing to fit their various languages and blended Egyptian deities, such as Amon-Re and Isis, into the Nubian religion, which featured such divinities as Dedwen, the god of prosperity and incense, and Apedemak (*ah-PEH-deh-mak*), the lion-headed god of war. In some crafts, such as ceramics and metalwork, Nubians were even more skilled than their northern neighbors.

Nubians blend Egyptian culture with their own

With the decline of the Egyptian Empire in the eleventh century B.C.E., the Nubians regained their independence, and eventually formed a new Kingdom of Kush. Effectively imitating the Egyptian pharaohs, the rulers of Kush expanded their dominion commercially and militarily, and in the eighth century B.C.E. they brought all of Egypt under their control. But they came less as conquerors than as restorers, reunifying the realm and assuming all the titles and traditions of Egyptian pharaohs. The Kushites returned the Nile valley to peace and prosperity and helped revive art and architecture in Egypt. For a while it looked as if they might restore the stability and grandeur of days gone by. But in the seventh century B.C.E. they were driven back south by the expanding Assyrians, who briefly controlled the northern Nile. Egypt subsequently regained its independence, only to be swallowed up in the next century by the Persian Empire.

Kingdom of Kush conquers and reunifies Egypt

The Kingdom and Culture of Meroë

Nubians rule from Meroë and develop new cultural distinctions

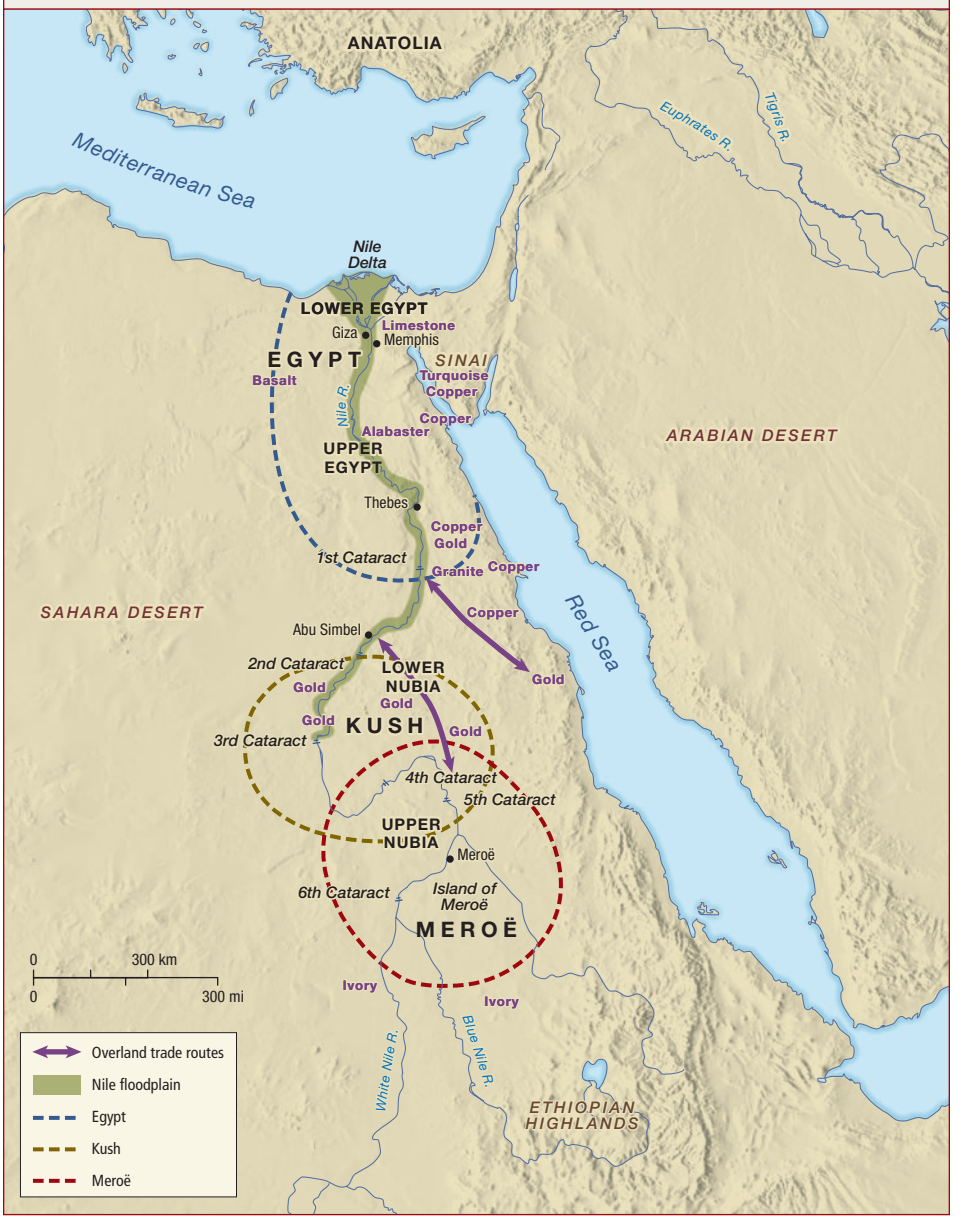
Up the Nile, as Egypt's influence waned, Nubia continued to flourish, but its cultural and commercial focus gradually shifted southward. In the sixth century B.C.E., its rulers moved south to Meroë (*MER-ō-ē*), a city with ties to sub-Saharan Africa rather than the Mediterranean. Forsaking hieroglyphics, the Nubians devised their own writing system and began to emphasize new religious, cultural, and economic themes. These included increased worship of distinctive Nubian deities such as Apedemak and Dedwen; an enhanced political role for women, indicated by a growing number of female rulers; and increased reliance on camels for transport, rather than horses or donkeys. Iron smelting, invented independently in West Asia and East Africa, spread to Meroë and became a key feature of its economy.

Meroë links Mediterranean world with sub-Saharan Africa

Egyptian influence, although diminished, persisted in Meroë. Its people, for example, continued to entomb their departed rulers beneath sandstone pyramids and to conduct regular commerce with Egypt. Lasting from the sixth century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E., the Kingdom of Meroë provided the main link between sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean world.

Map 2.8 Egypt, Kush, and Meroë, Second Millennium B.C.E. Through First Millennium C.E.

The Nubian Kingdom of Kush, which flourished up the Nile south of Egypt, had numerous connections and conflicts with Egypt, which it conquered and ruled for a time in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. Note, however, that Meroë, which later emerged farther south along the Nile, was located closer to the Ethiopian Highlands and sub-Saharan Africa, providing commercial and cultural links between these regions and the Mediterranean world. How did these connections influence the commerce and culture of Meroë?



West Asia and North Africa: The Phoenician Connection

Phoenicians form commercial empire linking Mediterranean lands

The Mediterranean world, meanwhile, had been connected into a commercial network with the help of the Phoenicians (*fih-NĒ-shinz*), Semitic-speaking people who lived in what is now Lebanon on the eastern Mediterranean coast. Dwelling by the sea, without large armies or extensive farmlands, Phoenicians turned to sea trade and established commercial cities and seaports. By the twelfth century B.C.E., following the attacks on Egypt conducted by the Sea Peoples, who may have been Phoenician allies, the Phoenicians gained sway over Mediterranean trade from the waning Egyptian Empire. Using hardy wood from the cedar trees of Lebanon, they built state-of-the-art ships with two decks of oarsmen to propel the vessel, a top deck of soldiers to protect cargo, and battering rams to smash enemy craft. Adept at both commerce and warfare, the Phoenicians formed a trading empire, founding city-states and colonies along the coast of North Africa, as well as in what are now Sicily, Sardinia, and Spain. The Phoenicians thus connected West Asia with North Africa and the western Mediterranean (Map 2.9).

Map 2.9 Phoenician and Carthaginian Colonies, Twelfth Through Second Centuries B.C.E.

The Phoenicians, a seafaring people from West Asia, conducted commerce and established colonies around the Mediterranean from the twelfth through eighth centuries B.C.E. Note that they had substantial connections in the western Mediterranean, where their largest colony, Carthage, founded around 800 B.C.E., would later become an independent commercial and naval power. How and why did the Phoenicians acquire such extensive influence?

Phoenician alphabet advances written communication

A simplified writing system, developed by Phoenicians, further enhanced connections by easing communications. Employing only 22 symbols, or letters, each for a consonant sound, this system represented spoken words and phrases simply by combining these symbols. Far easier to learn and use than cuneiform or hieroglyphics, whose numerous symbols each represented a word, the Phoenician alphabet greatly aided the spread of writing and reading. As later modified by Greeks (who added vowels) and Romans, it provided a basis for phonetic alphabets eventually adopted throughout the western world—including the one used in writing English today (See Figure 2.1).

Carthage creates a commercial empire connecting western Mediterranean

Of the colonies founded by Phoenicia, the greatest was the city of Carthage on the North African coast, established around 800 B.C.E. In the following centuries, as Phoenician power waned, Carthage became independent. Building its own commercial empire in the western Mediterranean, Carthage grew into one of the world's largest cities, with a bustling harbor, a metropolitan population of perhaps 400,000, and a city wall more than 20 miles around. An urban republic ruled by its prominent merchants, Carthage dominated its region for centuries, and even sent its vessels into the Atlantic to explore the African and British coasts.

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

Figure 2.1
Table Comparing Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek, and Roman Characters

The Israelites and Their God

Of all the early West Asians, among the least in power and wealth were the Hebrews, a small group of tribes who spoke a Semitic tongue, herded sheep and goats, fought among themselves, and were often conquered and controlled by others. The Hebrews nonetheless had an enduring religious legacy. For in recording their exploits, customs, and creeds, first in oral and later in written form, some of them produced the Hebrew Bible, one of history's foremost religious and literary works. In the process, they developed a monotheistic faith that would serve as a basis for some of the world's most influential religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The Children of Israel

Bible relates stories of Hebrews as Semitic pastoral nomads

The Hebrew Bible provides a striking story of the early Hebrews. According to its narrative, at the urging of his God, the patriarch Abraham left the realm of Ur in Mesopotamia to settle in the land of Canaan (*KĀ-nin*), later called Palestine. After several generations, the sons of his grandson Jacob, who was also called Israel, went to Egypt during a famine to find pastureland for their sheep. There these Hebrews, later called "Israelites" or "children of Israel," were eventually enslaved and spent years in bondage before being led by Moses, a prominent Egyptian born of Hebrew stock, in a flight to freedom called the Exodus (see "Excerpts from the Hebrew Bible"). On their way back to Canaan, the Bible asserts, the God of Israel embraced the children of Israel with his **covenant**, a binding agreement to protect them as his chosen people. He also instructed them to worship him alone, and to keep the Ten Commandments, religious and moral laws that he revealed to Moses. After wandering forty years in the desert, the story goes on, the children of Israel finally returned to Canaan.

A recreation of the ancient walled city of Jerusalem.

Like other ancient narratives, the Bible is based on oral traditions written down centuries after the events portrayed. It contains Hebrew versions of stories found in other narratives, as well as accounts that are not found anywhere else. The Bible tells of a great flood, for example, like one described in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. And the Biblical account of infant Moses, placed by his mother in the river in a basket and later found by pharaoh's daughter, is similar to the Sargon story told at the start of this chapter. But the Bible's depiction of the Exodus, in which the pharaoh's army drowns in the Red Sea pursuing Israelites who had passed safely through it, is not found in existing Egyptian records. Scholars thus have difficulty determining exactly what took place, and there is much dispute about how much the Bible represents historical fact.

Israelite Hebrews settle in Palestine and create a kingdom

The first non-Biblical reports of the Israelites locate them around 1200 B.C.E. in Canaan, henceforth called Palestine, where they settled in tribes and fought sporadic wars against other local peoples. Among these foes were the Philistines (*FIL-ih-stēnz*), from whom the name Palestine derives, possibly one of the Sea Peoples that attacked the Hittites and the Egyptians. Within a few centuries, the challenge posed by the Philistines, whose military power made them a threat to all their neighbors, compelled the tribes of Israel to combine forces under a warrior king.

The Kingdoms of Israel

King David centralizes power in Jerusalem

The first such king, Saul, proved a better politician than a general: he united the Israelites under his rule but failed to defeat the Philistines decisively before his death

Document 2.2 Excerpts from the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible contains compelling stories of the Hebrews and their relations with their God, who reportedly delivered them from bondage in Egypt and then gave them commandments, or laws by which to live.

CROSSING OF THE RED SEA. When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled . . . , Pharaoh . . . made ready his chariot and took his army with him . . . , and he pursued the people of Israel . . . When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were in great fear . . . And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD . . . " The LORD said to Moses, " . . . Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go on dry ground through the sea." . . . Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea . . . Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." So Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea . . . The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not so much as one of them remained. But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea . . .

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai . . . ; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up . . . And God spoke all these words, saying,

> "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt . . . You shall have no other gods before me . . .
>
> "You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above . . .
>
> "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain . . .
>
> "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor . . . , but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work . . .
>
> "Honor your father and your mother . . .
>
> "You shall not kill.
>
> "You shall not commit adultery.
>
> "You shall not steal.
>
> "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
>
> "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife . . . , or anything that is your neighbor's."

SOURCE: New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Exodus 14: 5–6, 8, 13, 15–16, 21–23, 26–27, 28–29; 19: 20; 20: 1–3, 4, 7, 8–10, 12, 13–17.

around 1000 B.C.E. This task was left to his successor David, who won many battles, making his kingdom a prominent power in Palestine. King David also collected taxes, created a standing army, consolidated his realm, and established as its capital the city of Jerusalem. As a result, he is often revered as Israel's greatest ruler.

Israelite prominence nonetheless reached its height in the reign of David's son Solomon, lasting from about 960 to 920 B.C.E. Building on his father's foundation of military security, Solomon transformed Jerusalem into a cosmopolitan city. His lavish

Kingdom splits into Israel and Judah after Solomon's death

construction projects included a city wall, a royal palace, and an elaborate temple to Israel's God. He also forged connections with other realms, often through marital alliances: according to the Bible his 700 wives included women from Arabia, Phoenicia, and Anatolia, as well as an Egyptian princess.

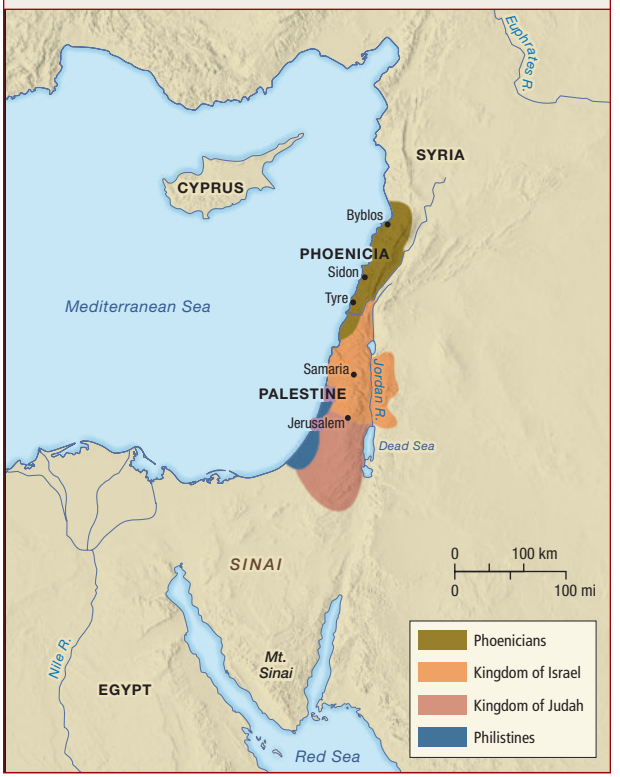
Israel's people are dispersed, then Judah's are exiled to Babylon

But Solomon's splendor caused problems. His massive projects, financed by harsh taxes and built by forced labor, offended the proud people whose ancestors, according to the Bible, had fled such servitude in Egypt. The resulting dissent, after Solomon's death, helped split the realm into two kingdoms (Map 2.10). The northern one, called Israel, lasted until 721 B.C.E., when Assyrian conquerors dispersed and assimilated its people, who thereby vanished from history as Israel's "ten lost tribes." The southern kingdom, known as Judah (after one of Jacob's sons), had a more lasting impact: its people, later called Jews (a term derived from Judah), managed despite numerous hardships to preserve their unique religious heritage.

In the early sixth century B.C.E., Judah was conquered by Chaldeans (New Babylonians), who demolished the temple in Jerusalem and exiled the people to Babylonia. Later, following Persia's conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C.E., the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and build a new temple. They remained, however, a part of the Persian Empire, free to practice their religion but lacking political autonomy. Eventually, along with the rest of West Asia, they were incorporated first into the world of the Greeks and then into the empire of the Romans.

Map 2.10 Israelites and Their Neighbors, Twelfth Through Eighth Centuries B.C.E.

After fleeing Egypt across the Sinai, as related in their Bible, the Israelites settled in Palestine, where they fought the Philistines and others, emerging as a united kingdom by the tenth century B.C.E. Notice, however, that their realm later split into two kingdoms: Israel, whose people were defeated and dispersed by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E., and Judah, whose people, eventually called Jews, survived later conquest and exile. How and why did the Israelites, a relatively small group of people with little power or wealth, have such an extensive historical impact?



The God of Israel

Throughout their ordeals the Israelites developed what became the Jewish faith. Their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and their covenant with Israel's God laid the foundations of their identity as a chosen people. The unity imposed by their kings and the establishment of Jerusalem as their center of worship helped consolidate this identity. Through division, defeat, and Babylonian captivity they struggled to maintain this identity. During times of trouble prophets arose to speak for their God, whose name Yahweh ("I am") was considered sacred, and to remind them of the covenant and laws that bound them to him and to each other. All these experiences were passed on for ages by word of mouth and eventually recorded in the Bible.

Jews come to believe in a single, all-powerful God

At first the Israelites saw Yahweh as their tribal deity, fearsome and vengeful like other West Asian gods. Eventually, however, the Jews perceived Yahweh as unique. While other gods they knew of could be vengeful and fickle, Yahweh was seen as forgiving and faithful, true to his covenant even when his people turned their backs on him. While other gods were embodied in human forms or graven images, Yahweh was considered a spirit: immortal, invisible, all-powerful, and transcendent. While other gods could be unreasonable and unfair, Yahweh was perceived as just, proclaiming laws based on love of God and neighbor. Above all, Jews came to believe that Yahweh stood alone: he was the one and only God, and all other gods were false.

Jewish monotheism will give rise to Christianity and Islam

This concept of a single divinity had enormous potential significance, for it implied that Israel's God was really everyone's God. Centuries later, offshoot monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam extended this claim still further, proclaiming that the God of Israel was a universal God whose covenant and laws applied to all humanity. The Hebrew heritage has hence been central to many subsequent societies.

Chapter Review

Putting It in Perspective

After their emergence in fertile river valleys in the fourth millennium B.C.E., the early societies of Mesopotamia and Egypt developed their cultures and expanded their influence through a complex combination of connections and conflicts. Sometimes these civilizations conquered their neighbors, as in the expansion of Egypt's New Kingdom, imposing on the vanquished the culture of the victors. Sometimes these societies were themselves overrun, by warlike peoples, such as the Akkadians, Amorites, Hyksos, and Assyrians, who then went on to adopt and spread the cultures of those they had conquered. Sometimes other peoples, including the Hittites, Nubians, Phoenicians, and Carthaginians, created connections through both conquest and commerce.

By the first millennium B.C.E., both Mesopotamia and Egypt had lost their independence and come under foreign rule. But these misfortunes also enhanced their influence, which was dispersed far and wide by their successors and conquerors, including eventually the Persians, Greeks, and Romans (Chapters 6, 7, and 8).

Later cultures thereby learned much from ancient West Asia and North Africa. From the Mesopotamians and Egyptians they acquired extensive knowledge in the areas of astronomy, medicine, mathematics, art, sculpture, and architecture. From the Hyksos and Hittites they inherited the use of horses to pull carts and chariots, and the use of metals to make tools and weapons. From the Phoenicians they adopted the use of seafaring ships to maintain distant colonies, and the employment of an alphabet to express their ideas and sounds. From the Jews they eventually inherited monotheism, in the forms of Christianity and Islam. Extensive indeed were the enduring legacies of early West Asian and North African societies.

Reviewing Key Material

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ASK YOURSELF

1. What were the main similarities and differences between Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations? What circumstances account for the similarities and differences?
2. What key roles did religions play in ancient societies? Why did rulers often portray themselves as descendants and agents of the gods?
3. How did the invention of writing contribute to governance, commerce, religion, law, and the recording of history?
4. How did the religious beliefs of the Hebrews differ from those of their neighbors? What were the main implications of these beliefs? How did these beliefs help the Jews to preserve their identity as a people?
5. How did conflicts and conquests help to spread the achievements of early civilizations? How did cultural and commercial connections contribute to the spread of these achievements?

GOING FURTHER

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Key Dates and Developments

West Asia

3500–2350 B.C.E.	Sumerian city-states in lower Mesopotamia
3000–1000 B.C.E.	Indo-European Migrations
2350–2100 B.C.E.	Empire of Akkad in Mesopotamia
2100–1900 B.C.E.	Sumerians again rule lower Mesopotamia
1900–1600 B.C.E.	Babylonians (Amorites) rule in Mesopotamia (*Hammurabi's reign, 1792–1750: Law Code*)
17th–13th centuries B.C.E.	Hittites dominate Anatolia
11th–9th centuries B.C.E.	Phoenicians flourish in Eastern Mediterranean
11th–10th centuries B.C.E.	Kingdom of Israel flourishes in Palestine
10th–7th centuries B.C.E.	Assyrians dominate West Asia
7th–6th centuries B.C.E.	Chaldeans (New Babylonians) dominate West Asia
586–539 B.C.E.	Babylonian Captivity of the Hebrews
6th–4th centuries B.C.E.	Persians dominate West Asia

North Africa

3100–2700 B.C.E.	Archaic Period (*Egypt unified*)
2700–2200 B.C.E.	Egypt's Old Kingdom (*pyramids built*)
2200–2050 B.C.E.	Egypt's 1st Intermediate Period
2050–1700 B.C.E.	Egypt's Middle Kingdom
1700–1570 B.C.E.	Egypt's 2nd Intermediate Period (*Hyksos rule*)
1570–1075 B.C.E.	Egypt's New Kingdom (Egyptian Empire)
13th century B.C.E.	Hebrews leave Egypt (*Moses*)
10th–8th centuries B.C.E.	Egypt under Libyan rule
8th–7th centuries B.C.E.	Egypt under Nubian rule (Kingdom of Kush)
7th century B.C.E.	Assyrians invade Egypt
7th–3rd centuries B.C.E.	Carthage flourishes in eastern Mediterranean
6th–4th centuries B.C.E.	Persians dominate Egypt
6th century B.C.E.–4th century C.E.	Kingdom of Meroë flourishes along Upper Nile