



THE EARTH AND ITS PEOPLES

A GLOBAL HISTORY

SIXTH EDITION

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Chapter 2 The First River-Valley Civilizations, 3500–1500 B.C.E.

Gilgamesh Strangling a Lion



The Art Archive/Alamy

This **eighth-century B.C.E. sculpture** of a king, possibly Gilgamesh, from the palace of the Assyrian king Sargon II, **represents the magical power and omnipotence of kingship.**

The Gilgamesh story was still popular in Mesopotamia twenty centuries after the king of Uruk's lifetime.



Mesopotamia

- **civilization**
- Settled Agriculture in an Unstable Landscape
 - “Fertile Crescent”
 - Tigris-Euphrates Valley
 - river system irrigation

Map 2.1 River-Valley Civilizations, 3500–1500 B.C.E.



The **earliest complex societies** arose in the floodplains of large rivers: in the fourth millennium B.C.E. in the **valley of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers** in Mesopotamia and the **Nile River** in Egypt, in the third millennium B.C.E. in the **valley of the Indus River** in Pakistan and in the second millennium B.C.E. in the **valley of the Yellow River** in China.

Map 2.2 Mesopotamia



In order to organize labor resources to create and maintain an irrigation network in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, a land of little rain, the **Sumerians** of southern Mesopotamia **developed new technologies, complex political and social institutions, and distinctive cultural practices.**

Mesopotamia

- **Sumerians and Semites**
 - Semitic political dominance by 2000 B.C.E.
 - Akkadian (Semitic language) also became dominant

Mesopotamia

- Cities, Kings and Trade
 - **city-state**
 - mobilization of labor
 - irrigation
 - self-protection
 - the *lugal* – “big man”
 - **Babylon**
 - **Hammurabi**

Reed Huts in the Marshes of Southern Iraq

Courtesy, Dominique Collon



Reeds growing along the riverbanks or in the swampy lands at the head of the Persian Gulf were **used in antiquity**—and **continue to be used today**—for a variety of purposes, including **baskets** and **small watercraft** as well as **dwelling**s.

Mesopotamia

- Mesopotamian Society
 - Law Code of Hammurabi
 - Tripartite social division
 - Free landowners; dependent farmers and artisans; slaves
 - **scribes**
 - Women's standing

Mesopotamian Cylinder Seal



Seals indicated the identity of an individual and were impressed into wet clay or wax to “**sign**” legal documents or to mark ownership of an object. This seal, produced in the period of the Akkadian Empire, depicts **Ea** (second from right), the **god of underground waters**, symbolized by the stream with fish emanating from his shoulders; **Ishtar**, whose **attributes of fertility and war** are indicated by the date cluster in her hand and the pointed weapons showing above her wings; and the **sun-god Shamash**, cutting his way out of the mountains with a jagged knife, an evocation of sunrise.

Mesopotamia

- Gods, Priests, and Temples
 - Appeasement of the gods
 - **ziggurats**
 - **amulets**

Ziggurat of Ur-Nammu, circa 2100 B.C.E.

World Religions Photo Library/The Bridgeman Art Library



Built at Ur by King Ur-Nammu for the Sumerian moon-god, Nanna, an exterior made of fine bricks baked in a kiln encloses a sun-dried mudbrick core. Three ramps on the first level converge to form a stairway to the second level.

The function of ziggurats is not known.

Mesopotamia

- Technology and Science
 - **cuneiform**
 - **bronze**
 - Military forces
 - Mathematics



Mesopotamia: Discussion

- *How did Mesopotamian civilization emerge, and what technologies promoted its advancement?*

Egypt

- The Land of Egypt: “Gift of the Nile”
 - Self-sufficiency and isolation
 - “Black Land” vs. “Red Land”
 - Annual flood
 - Centralization

Map 2.3 Ancient Egypt



The Nile River, flowing south to north, **carved out of the surrounding desert a narrow green valley that became heavily settled in antiquity.**

Egypt

- Divine Kingship
 - Menes and unification
 - **pharoah**
 - **ma'at**: order of the universe
 - **pyramid**: culture and technology

Solar Ship of King Khufu

Andrea Thompson Photography/Getty Images



This **full-size ship** (143 feet [43.6 meters] long and 19.5 feet [5.9 meters] wide) was **buried in a pit at the base of the Great Pyramid circa 2500 B.C.E.**

While it was probably **intended to carry the resurrected king along with the sun-god Ra across the sky**, it may also have been **used to transport Khufu's embalmed body to Giza**. Ships equipped with sails and oars were well suited for travel on the peaceful Nile and sometimes were used for voyages on the more turbulent Mediterranean and Red Seas.

Pyramids of Menkaure, Khafre, and Khufu at Giza, circa 2500 B.C.E.



Michele Burgess/SuperStock

With a width of 755 feet (230 meters) and a height of 480 feet (146 meters), the **Great Pyramid of Khufu is the largest stone structure ever built**. The construction of these massive edifices depended on relatively **simple techniques of stonecutting, transport** (the stones were floated downriver on boats and rolled to the site on sledges), **and lifting** (the stones were dragged up the face of the pyramid on mud-brick ramps). However, the **surveying and engineering skills required** to level the platform, lay out the measurements, and securely position the blocks **were very sophisticated** and have withstood the test of time.

Egypt

- Administration and Communication
 - capitals: **Memphis; Thebes**
 - bureaucracy
 - **hieroglyphics**
 - **papyrus**
 - foreign policy

Egypt

- The People of Egypt
 - society and social hierarchy
 - peasantry
 - lives of women
 - legal rights
 - role in society

Egypt

- Belief and Knowledge
 - the environment
 - royalty and the gods
 - cult activities
 - the afterlife
 - **mummy**

Scene from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, circa 1300 B.C.E.



The mummy of a royal scribe named Hunefar is approached by members of his household before being placed in the tomb.

Behind Hunefar is **jackal-headed Anubis**, the god who **will conduct the spirit of the deceased to the afterlife.**

The Book of the Dead provided Egyptians with the **instructions they needed to complete this arduous journey and gain a blessed existence in the afterlife.**



Egypt: Discussion

- *What role did the environment and religion play in the evolution of Egyptian civilization?*



The Indus Valley Civilization

- Natural Environment
 - Himalayas and the Indus



The Indus Valley Civilization

- Material Culture
 - **Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro**
 - engineering and infrastructure
 - metal
 - technological skills
 - trading

Man from Mohenjo-Daro, circa 2600–1900 B.C.E.



This statue of a seated man wearing a cloak and headband was carved from a soft stone called steatite.

It is often called the “Priest-King” because some scholars believe it may represent someone with religious and secular authority, but the true identity and status of this person are **unknown**.



The Indus Valley Civilization

- Transformation of the Indus Valley Civilization
 - nature, environment, and decline



The Indus Valley Civilization: Discussion

- *What does the material evidence tell us about the nature of the Indus Valley civilization and what is the most likely reason for its collapse?*

Chapter Chronology

3500 B.C.E.-1500 B.C.E.

	Mesopotamia	Egypt	Indus Valley
3500 B.C.E.		3100-2575 B.C.E. Early Dynastic	
3000 B.C.E.	3000-2350 B.C.E. Early Dynastic (Sumerian)		
2500 B.C.E.	2350-2230 B.C.E. Akkadian (Semitic) 2112-2004 B.C.E. Third Dynasty of Ur (Sumerian)	2575-2134 B.C.E. Old Kingdom 2134-2040 B.C.E. First Intermediate Period 2040-1640 B.C.E. Middle Kingdom	2600 B.C.E. Beginning of Indus Valley civilization
2000 B.C.E.	1900-1600 B.C.E. Old Babylonian (Semitic)	1640-1532 B.C.E. Second Intermediate Period	1900 B.C.E. End of Indus Valley civilization
1500 B.C.E.	1500-1150 B.C.E. Kassite	1532-1070 B.C.E. New Kingdom	