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CHAPTER 1
From Human Prehistory to the Early Civilizations

Complete the following exercises in order as you read the chapter.

INTRODUCTION
Chapter introductions are a valuable guide to the material you are about to read, telling you what topics will be covered and how they fit together. If you keep the "big picture" provided by the introduction in mind as you read the chapter, you will find it much easier to organize your notes, identify important information, and avoid getting lost in the details. With this in mind, re-read the introduction to Chapter 1. As you read, make a list of the key topics you expect to learn about.

Key Topics
1. **HUMAN LIFE IN THE ERA OF HUNTERS AND GATHERERS**

As you read this section in your textbook, complete the following outline of the section to identify main ideas in each paragraph as well as the key words that inform those ideas.

I. Human species
   
   A. Emerged 2 to 2.5 million years ago
      
      1. 
      
      2. 
   
   B. 
      
      1. 
      
      2. 

II. Late Paleolithic Developments
    
    A. 
       
       1. 
       
       2. 
    
    B. 
       
       1. 
       
       2. 
    
    C. 
       
       1. 
       
       2. 
    
    D. 
       
       1. 
       
       2.
THE NEOLITHIC REVOLUTION

As you read this section in your textbook, complete the following outline of the section to identify main ideas in each paragraph as well as the key words that inform those ideas.

I. Development of Agriculture
   A. Conditions for agricultural development
      1.
      2.
   B.
      1.
      2.
   
II. The Geography of Early Agriculture
   A.
      1.
      2.
   B.
      1.
      2.
   
III. Patterns of Change
   A.
      1.
      2.
   B.
      1.
      2.
   
IV. Further Technological Change
   A.
      1.
      2.
   B.
      1.
      2.
3. **The Neolithic Revolution**

As you read this section in your textbook, complete the following chart to summarize the eras of prehistory before and after the introduction of agriculture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eras of Prehistory</th>
<th>Life Before Farming</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Life Before Farming</td>
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</table>
**CIVILIZATION**

After you read this section in your textbook, complete the following chart with details from the text to summarize the definition of civilization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Development of Civilization</th>
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<td><strong>Rise of Cities and Civilizations</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Features of Civilizations</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Changes Over Time</strong></td>
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</table>
5. **CIVILIZATION**

As you read this section in your textbook, complete the following chart with details from the text to identify the main ideas about the Sumerian city-states.
6. CIVILIZATION

As you read this section in your textbook, complete the following chart with details from the text to identify the main ideas about early civilizations.

- **Egyptian Civilization**
  - 
  - 
  - 

- **Great Cities of the Indus Valley**
  - 
  - 
  -

- **Early Civilization in China**
  - 
  - 
  -
7. The Heritage of the River Valley Civilizations

As you read this section in your textbook, complete the following outline with details from the text to summarize the contributions of the river valley civilizations.

I. Lasting Impact
   A.  
      1.  
      2.  
   B.  
      1.  
      2.  
II. Heritage of Early Civilizations
   A.  
      1.  
      2.  
   B.  
      1.  
      2.  
III. New Societies in the Middle East
   A.  
      1.  
      2.  
   B.  
      1.  
      2.  
IV. Judaism
   A.  
      1.  
      2.  
   B.  
      1.  
      2.  
V. Assessing the Early Civilization Period
   A.  
      1.  
      2.  
   B.  
      1.  
      2.
CHAPTER REVIEW

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS
The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Write a brief definition of each.

Paleolithic Age
Homo sapiens
Neolithic Age
hunting and gathering
Bronze Age
slash and burn agriculture
civilization
Çatal Hüyük
nomads
Mesopotamia
Sumerians
Indus River valley
Harappa
Shang dynasty

MY KEY TERMS
Write down terms that are unfamiliar. How are the words used? Do other words or examples reveal their meaning? Try to figure out meaning from the context.
SHORT ANSWER REVIEW

Write the word or phrase that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. Most civilizations developed writing, starting with the emergence of ________ in the Middle East around 3500 B.C.E.

2. It was under Babylonian rule that King ____________ introduced the most famous early code of law.

3. By about 1500 B.C.E., a line of kings called the ____________ ruled over early Chinese civilization.

4. A smaller regional group called the ____________ devised an alphabet with 22 letters; this in turn was the ancestor of the Greek and Latin alphabets.

5. The largest city to develop along the Indus River was ____________.

6. Early civilizations began in China along the ____________ River.

7. The ancient civilization with the longest-lasting stability was in ____________.

8. A large Neolithic village in modern Turkey, ____________ was inhabited by 7000 B.C.E.

9. The belief in a single deity is known as ____________.

10. The development of sedentary agriculture began is called the ____________ revolution.
MULTIPLE CHOICE REVIEW

Choose the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. The human species was characterized in the Paleolithic Age by all of the following EXCEPT
   a. the development of simple stone and wooden tools.
   b. slow population growth.
   c. the development of economies based on agriculture.
   d. the ability to communicate with speech.

2. The characteristic political organization of the Tigris-Euphrates civilization was
   a. democracy.
   b. large, durable empires.
   c. village-level government.
   d. regional city-states.

3. Jewish monotheism
   a. was spread actively by Jewish missionaries throughout the Middle East.
   b. emphasized the power and abstraction of God.
   c. included worship of various lesser gods.
   d. emerged at the high point of Sumerian civilization.

4. The development of writing
   a. resulted from new technologies, notably the invention of paper.
   b. helps explain why agriculture could develop.
   c. was necessary for the development of civilization.
   d. facilitated the development of more formal and bureaucratic governments.

5. The concept of civilization includes all of the following EXCEPT:
   a. greater social equality.
   b. writing systems.
   c. the development of cities.
   d. political units capable of ruling large regions.

6. Egyptian civilization differed from Mesopotamian civilization by stressing
   a. the use of slave labor.
   b. more centralized government, that controlled the economy.
   c. trade and science.
   d. intense religious practice, tied to governmental structures.

7. As the most influential of the smaller Middle Eastern regional cultures, the Jewish culture differed from others most in its
   a. monotheism.
   b. strong military tradition.
   c. large, centralized state.
   d. vigorous sea trade.
8. A characteristic of the human species before the advent of civilization was
   a. the ability to spread to various geographic settings and climate zones.
   b. the ability to organize large political units.
   c. the inability to communicate about abstractions such as death.
   d. the ability to write and keep records of trade.

9. Which river valley civilization was most completely destroyed by invasion?
   a. Huanghe
   b. Amazon
   c. Indus
   d. Nile

10. The Neolithic Revolution refers to the period
    a. in which democracy developed.
    b. that saw the rise of settled agriculture.
    c. before the full development of the *Homo sapiens* species.
    d. before people learned to use fire.
READING CHECK: MAKING CONNECTIONS

After reading and studying the chapter, review your understanding by answering each of the following questions, which emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. What characteristics are associated with civilization?

2. Describe the culture of Paleolithic hunting and gathering societies.

3. How did the Neolithic revolution transform the material life and social organization of human communities?
4. Why did civilization begin in Mesopotamia?

5. What defined civilization in Sumerian culture?

6. What centers of civilization other than Egypt and Mesopotamia developed in the Middle East?
CHAPTER 2
Classical Civilization: China

Complete the following exercises in order as you read the chapter.

INTRODUCTION
Chapter introductions are a valuable guide to the material you are about to read, telling you what topics will be covered and how they fit together. If you keep the "big picture" provided by the introduction in mind as you read the chapter, you will find it much easier to organize your notes, identify important information, and avoid getting lost in the details. With this in mind, re-read the introduction to Chapter 2. As you read, make a list of the key topics you expect to learn about.

Key Topics

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
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10.
1. **Establishment of Political Order**

As you read this section in your textbook, complete the following outline of the section to identify main ideas in each paragraph as well as the key words that inform those ideas.

I. Breakdown of dynastic control between 8th and 3rd centuries B.C.E.

   A. 
      1. 
      2. 

   B. 
      1. 
      2. 

II. Cultural Traditions 

   A. 
      1. 
      2. 

   B. 
      1. 
      2. 

   C. 
      1. 
      2.
As you read this section in your textbook, complete the following outline of the section to sequence the important events in early China.

**Focus Question:** What characteristics defined the civilization that developed in China under its early rulers?

I. The Zhou Dynasty
   A.
   B.
   C.
   D.
   E.
   F.
   G.

II. The Qin Dynasty
    A. 1.
    2.
    3.
    B.
    C.
    D.
    E.
    F.
    E.

III. The Han Dynasty
     A.
     B.
     C.
     D.
     F.

Using the outline you completed, write a brief answer to the Focus Question.
3. **Political Institutions**

As you read this section of your textbook, complete the following chart summarizing government traditions established during China's classical period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Bureaucracy</th>
<th>Role of the State</th>
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</table>
Religion and Culture

As you read this section of your textbook, complete the following chart summarizing the political and social philosophy of Confucianism and Daoism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political and Social Philosophy</th>
<th>Confucianism</th>
<th>Daoism</th>
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</table>
5. **ECONOMY AND SOCIETY**

As you read this section of your textbook, complete the following concept web summarizing the technological advances during the Han period.

**Focus Question:** *How did the development of new technologies change Han society?*

---

**Advances in Technology**

---

Using the information in your concept web, write a brief answer to the Focus Question.
CHAPTER REVIEW

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS
The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Write a brief definition of each.

Zhou

Feudalism

Mandate of Heaven

Qin

Shi Huangdi

Warring States period

Confucius

Taoism

Legalism

Great Wall

Han

MY KEY TERMS
Write down terms that are unfamiliar. How are the words used? Do other words or examples reveal their meaning? Try to figure out meaning from the context.
**SHORT ANSWER REVIEW**

Write the word or phrase that best completes each statement or answers the question.

1. Families of kings, called ________________, ruled over China during the classical period.

2. The Great Wall of China was built during the rule of the first emperor, ________________.

3. The most famous ruler of the Han dynasty was ________________.

4. Wu Ti set up a(n) ________________ for all those who took exams to join the state bureaucracy.

5. The period when the Zhou dynasty disintegrated is called the ________________.

6. During the Zhou dynasty, ________________ traveled to many parts of China, preaching political virtue.

7. Confucian doctrine was recorded in a book called ________________.

8. During the Qin and Han periods, an alternate system of political thought called ________________ developed in China.

9. Daoism was spread in 5th-century China by the author ________________.

10. Chinese art during the classical period stressed careful detail and ________________.
1. One characteristic that differentiated classical civilizations from the earlier river valley societies was that
   a. they were agricultural.
   b. there was a higher rate of literacy.
   c. there was less warfare.
   d. they created larger political structures capable of controlling more territory.

2. A major factor in China’s development of the first elaborate classical society was
   a. a reduction in China’s population.
   b. a stable political leadership.
   c. its ability to remain isolated and avoid outside invasion.
   d. an absence of religious activity.

3. The Chinese view of nature stressed
   a. harmony and balance.
   b. a mystical belief that humans and nature were one.
   c. the scientific control and domination of nature.
   d. nature was determined by God.

4. Classical Chinese civilization was ruled by all of these EXCEPT
   a. the Shang dynasty.
   b. the Zhou dynasty.
   c. the Qin dynasty.
   d. the Han dynasty.

5. A distinguishing feature of the classical Chinese economy was
   a. very little social stratification.
   b. a series of international trading networks.
   c. state support for merchant and artisan classes.
   d. a high level of technology.

6. The Qin and Han dynasties were both characterized by
   a. the formation of popular political parties.
   b. increasing trade with the rest of the world.
   c. a disdain for science and art.
   d. powerful centralized governance.

7. The Qin dynasty was marked by all of the following EXCEPT
   a. the decrease in power held by regional rulers and independent armies.
   b. the building of the Great Wall of China.
   c. an increase in the economic status of the peasant communities.
   d. the incorporation of Hong Kong into the Chinese Empire.
8. China's classical period gave rise to all of the following intellectual traditions EXCEPT
   a. Buddhism.
   b. Daoism.
   c. Legalism.
   d. Confucianism.

9. Besides the "mean people," which of the following groups was considered to have the least status in classical China?
   a. Merchants
   b. Peasants
   c. Philosophers
   d. Artisans

10. All of the following constituted a function of the state in Han China EXCEPT
    a. attack on local warrior landlords.
    b. civil service examinations.
    c. promoting Confucian philosophy.
    d. detachment from the lives of the Chinese masses.
Reading Check: Making Connections

After reading and studying the chapter, review your understanding by answering each of the following questions, which emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. Describe Confucius' political philosophy.

2. Describe the Daoist alternative to Confucian political and social philosophy.

3. What was the significance of the Qin dynasty?
4. How did the Han institutionalize Confucian political philosophy?

5. What circumstances led to the overthrow of the Han in 9 C.E. and 220 C.E.?
PART I
From Hunting and Gathering to Civilizations, 2.5 million—1000 B.C.E.: Origins

Chapter 1 From Human Prehistory to the Early Civilizations

OVERVIEW

The earliest known, fully human species lived in east Africa about 2.5 million years ago. Gradually humans developed a more erect stance and greater brain capacity. Early humans lived by hunting and gathering. Because hunting-and-gathering economies require a great deal of space—on average about 2.5 square miles per person—populations remained small, and people lived in small groups. Even a modest population increase in a hunting-and-gathering group required part of the group to migrate in search of new game. Tens of thousands of years ago, the most advanced of the human species, Homo sapiens sapiens, migrated from Africa into the Middle East, then into Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas. Early humans developed tools, first using stones, sticks, and other natural objects. Gradually, people learned to fashion tools and weapons from stone, bone, and wood.

Agriculture began at different times in different places, from about 10,000 years ago onward. It developed independently in at least three regions and perhaps more. The map shows the early centers of food production. Gradually, agriculture spread widely, though not universally, from these initial centers.

The development of agriculture was a radical change in humans’ way of life. By providing a dependable source of food, it allowed people to live in larger groups. Later on, toolmaking technology advanced with the discovery of metalworking, which in turn further increased agricultural production. Increased production freed some members of the society to perform other kinds of work. This in turn encouraged a further series of organizational changes we call civilization.

Early civilizations arose in five different sites, four of them along the fertile shores of great rivers. At least three and possibly all five of these early civilizations arose entirely independently of each other. The map of early civilizations makes another point clear: large parts of the world were not involved in these developments. Early world history focuses on agricultural civilizations, but it must also pay attention to regions that developed different kinds of economies and different organizational structures.

Hunting-and-gathering societies offered an intriguing mixture of features. Not surprisingly, material life could be meager. The food supply could be precarious, which was one reason for frequent movement and migration, as when the supply of game ran low. On the other hand, average workdays were short, leaving a good bit of time for rest, ritual, and play. Warfare was limited. Hunting bands might confront one another, but conflict involved more bluster than bloodshed—more serious wars developed only when societies become more advanced. Men and women both had important though separate economic tasks, and overall formal inequality was usually limited. Here too, more complex societies would bring changes that were not necessarily improvements.
Initial Centers and Spread of Agriculture

Early Centers of Civilization
Big Concepts

Each of the key phases of the long period of early human history (2.5 million B.C.E.–1000 B.C.E.) can be characterized by a central topic or Big Concept. The first of these is the development of human hunting skills, the adaptation of these skills to the shifting geography and climate of the Ice Age, and the patterns of human migration. The second Big Concept is the rise of agriculture and the changes in technology associated with the Neolithic revolution (9000 and 4000 B.C.E.). These changes set in motion the agricultural phase of the human experience that lasted until just a few centuries ago. The final Big Concept is the appearance of increasingly distinctive human societies through agriculture or nomadic pastoralism and the earlier contacts among these early societies, particularly after 3500 B.C.E. when larger and more formally organized societies, often with early cities as well, emerged and began to develop more consistent patterns of interregional trade.

TRIGGERS FOR CHANGE

The key story in the long early phases of human history focuses on adaptation to environments, and particularly the search for adequate food supplies. Humans still react to their environment, but the process was more visible in earlier periods, when human ability to control aspects of the environment was less well developed. The early changes in human history—evolutionary development, more advanced toolmaking, and the extensive migrations—all occurred within the context of a hunting-and-gathering economy.

About ten thousand years ago, in the Black Sea region, hunting became less productive. With the end of the Ice Age, climate changes may have reduced big game animals in the region. Perhaps a human population increase led to excessive hunting, depleting the supply of animals. Hunting groups sometimes deliberately kill off too much game, far more than needed, with the unintended consequence of producing a food crisis. Whatever the causes of the shortage, people were forced to look for new sources of food. Women, as gatherers, had undoubtedly become aware of the possibility of deliberately planting seeds and harvesting grain. Thus the rise of agriculture was under way.

Even the advent of new social organizations associated with civilization involved efforts at greater environmental control. Early civilizations provided social structures that could coordinate projects like irrigation. The early civilizations also emerged after the invention of new kinds of tools. The wheel and metal hand tools, initially of bronze, could increase agricultural production and transport. But they also depended on some new manufacturing skills. Greater specialization and greater productivity alike encouraged the kind of organization that early civilization involved. New technology helped shape another new stage in world history.

THE BIG CHANGES

Agriculture offered a very different set of opportunities and problems than hunting-and-gathering, and these had far-reaching consequences. Agriculture al-

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<td>2.5 million B.C.E.</td>
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<td>2.5 million Emergence of <em>Homo sapiens</em> in eastern Africa</td>
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<td>600,000 Wide spread of human species across Asia, Europe, Africa; control of fire</td>
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tered family forms, for example, by encouraging higher birth rates. It reduced migration, for in most agricultural regions, permanent settlements arose fairly quickly. By creating a surplus of food in most years, agriculture permitted a portion of the population to engage in occupations other than food production. This led to the development of unprecedented levels of social inequality, including heightened inequality between men and women. Agriculture altered the environment, sometimes resulting in overcultivation that depleted the soil. Surplus food allowed humans to live in larger groups, and by doing so it created new vulnerability to communicable diseases. While agriculture clearly generated a mixture of advantages and disadvantages, its greater food production helps explain why it tended to spread and why many people were willing to change basic aspects of their lives to create this economic shift.

As agriculture produced surplus food, the population grew rapidly. In the most fertile areas, agricultural centers developed the organizational forms associated with civilization, most notably formal political structures and cities. Not all did so: stateless, loosely organized agricultural societies persisted in a few places until relatively modern times. But more formal political structures—states—plus larger urban centers—cities—as places to exchange goods and ideas could further the direction of agricultural economies. It was no accident that the first four centers of civilization developed along river valleys, with their opportunities for irrigation: civilization resulted from the prosperity of this kind of agriculture but also responded to its organizational needs. Civilizations also helped direct many of the surpluses of agricultural economies to upper-class groups—rulers, landlords, and sometimes priests. As with agriculture, though to a lesser extent, the arrival of civilizations had wider consequences. Most early civilizations, for example, developed monumental buildings—often associated with religion—and more formal art and culture were standard features of this final great innovation in early human history.

**CONTINUITY**

While the development of agriculture brought enormous changes, it is important to remember that important continuities persisted as well. Changes took place very slowly. It took thousands of years for humans to develop New Stone Age technologies such as fashioning tools rather than simply picking up suitably shaped objects.

The slow pace of change had two causes. First, inventing fundamental new devices took time. In some cases, it never occurred at all: impressive agricultural societies flourished without ever developing the wheel or metal tools. In addition, many people remained attached to old ways. Because the food supply was so precarious, taking the risk of innovation probably seemed dangerous. This was one reason that agriculture, though it did fan out from its initial centers, took so long to spread widely. People cherished the habits long associated with migration. Many men valued the challenge of hunting. Some groups held out against agriculture, even when they knew of it.

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<td>First town at Jericho</td>
<td>Beans domesticated in Western Hemisphere</td>
<td>Domestication of maize (corn)</td>
<td>Development of writing, bronze metalworking, wheel, plow in Middle East</td>
<td>Origins of Shang kingdom in China</td>
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<td>5000-2000 Yangshao culture in north China</td>
<td>3500-1800 Sumerian civilization</td>
<td>3100-1087 Founding and flowering of Egyptian civilization</td>
<td>1800 Formation of Babylonian Empire in Middle East</td>
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<td>2500-1500 Indus civilization in south Asia</td>
<td>1700-1300 Rise of village culture in Mesoamerica</td>
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<td>1600 Beginning of Indo-European invasions of India and parts of the Mediterranean and Middle East</td>
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<td>1600 Spread of civilization to Crete (Minoan)</td>
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<td>1250 Moses and Jewish exodus from Egypt (according to Jewish belief)</td>
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Change could produce efforts to preserve older values in new ways. In hunting-and-gathering societies, men and women both had key productive roles; the roles were very different but they generated some mutual respect. With agriculture, men took on functions that probably seemed rather feminine, because they were linked to food gathering. They had far less time to hunt or to enjoy the masculine rituals associated with hunting. So men looked for ways within agriculture to emphasize manhood. One common response was to claim new levels of superiority over women. This was a key change in gender relations, but it can also be seen as a kind of compensation. To this extent, men could feel that not all traditions were being lost.

Once established, agriculture generated its own impulses toward continuity. Many peasant farmers clung fervently to traditional techniques and village structures, regarding further change with great suspicion. Thus, a tension between change and continuity was built into early human experience.

IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE: CHILDREN
Children are an important part of any human society. Some aspects of children's lives are doubtless natural, part of human experience at any time, in any place. But the arrival of agriculture had huge implications for children. Hunting-and-gathering societies depended on a relatively low birth rate, with few children per family. Too many children would overwhelm resources; and no family could easily transport more than one young child during migrations. So hunters and gatherers limited births, mainly by breast feeding each child for up to four or five years, thus reducing the chances of new conception.

With agriculture, however, more children could be supported, and indeed children became a vital part of the family labor force. Infants began to be weaned at about 18 months on average, a huge change from earlier human patterns. Birth rates shot up—agricultural families usually averaged five to seven children, though some would die, as infant mortality rates were
high. Childhood began to be defined in terms of work. Even young children had obligations. And by the time they were teenagers, their families depended on their labor. This was a dramatic redefinition of childhood, even as children became more numerous in the population at large.

Civilization, as an organizational form, had less impact on children, but it added its own changes. Most civilizations developed written language, though only a minority could afford the time to learn to write. As a result, the vast majority of children worked, but an elite minority were sent to school. Also, civilizations used codes of law and other prescriptions to emphasize the duties of children to their families. All agricultural civilizations emphasized the authority of parents over children and children's obligation to obey their parents. In this way, civilizations tried to instill in children a willingness to work for the benefit of their families. Some law codes, as in early Judaism, allowed parents to kill disobedient children. An early Chinese saying stated simply: "No parent is ever wrong." Children could be loved and could flourish, but there was a distinctive tone of strict discipline and obedience in agricultural civilizations that bolstered the necessity of children's labor.

Small wonder that some hunting-and-gathering or herding groups, when they encountered civilizations, were shocked at how rigorously children were handled. Many American Indians were appalled by the harsh physical discipline European immigrants dealt out to their children. Here was an example of agriculture's profound impact on daily life.

Chapter 1 describes the development of agriculture and the ways in which it changed the lives of early humans. It then describes how farming led, in fertile river valleys, to the development of civilization. It also notes the limits of these developments—the many regions that continued living by hunting and gathering as well as the different trajectory that was followed by societies whose people lived by herding animals rather than by farming.
From Human Prehistory to the Early Civilizations

- Human Life in the Era of Hunters and Gatherers
- The Neolithic Revolution
- Civilization

VISUALIZING THE PAST: Mesopotamia in Maps

DOCUMENT: Aryan Poetry in Praise of a War Horse

The Heritage of the River Valley Civilizations
THINKING HISTORICALLY: The Idea of Civilization in World Historical Perspective
GLOBAL CONNECTIONS: The Early Civilizations and the World

One day about 10,000 years ago, in a rock shelter near the Pecos River, an early human inhabitant of what is today West Texas inserted the bloom stalk of a yucca plant into one of several holes worn into a fire-starting stick and, holding the stalk upright, twirled it between her hands, as depicted in the artist's recreation on the next page. After much effort on the part of the young woman, as shown here, the friction between the spinning stalk and the stick produced wisps of smoke, then sparks, then glowing embers. The woman used the embers to set fire to a small pile of dried yucca leaves that she had gathered nearby. Yucca leaves have thin tendrils which, when dry, catch fire readily. Carefully tended, the leaves could be used to kindle a steady fire that provided not only warmth, but the means for cooking a meal. And, importantly, stalks, firesticks, and leaves could easily be carried by migratory groups of early humans.

Several yucca-based fire-starter kits, some including bows used in the place of hands to turn the yucca stalk, have been found across the American Southwest. These Neolithic (New Stone Age) kits send us a number of messages about early world history. Most obviously, early men and women were tool users. They not only deliberately selected branches, stones, and other natural objects from the environment, they crafted them into weapons, utensils, and tools that could be used to ward off animal and human enemies, hunt, trap, fish, prepare food, and construct shelters. This capacity to fashion tools distinguishes human beings from all other animals. Although a number of other animals, including apes, are tool users, only human beings construct their tools. By this time, humans had known how to make and use fire for thousands of years—another discovery unique to humans. The use of fire for cooking allowed early humans to eat a wider variety of foods, particularly animal protein.

The toolmakers of the American Southwest lived far from eastern Africa, where human beings first evolved. Just decades ago, it was believed that the first humans migrated from northeast Asia into what is now Alaska only 12,000 years ago. Vastly improved archeological techniques have recently revealed that the crossing had been made at least as early as 25,000 B.C.E. and that the migrants spread out quickly, probably traveling both overland and by boat along the Pacific Coast, from Alaska to Chile.

Finally, we know our early ancestors could talk. Human beings had developed what some call the "speech gene" about 70,000 years earlier, vastly improving the species' capacity to communicate, beyond the sounds and gestures common to a number of animal groups. Neolithic humans were what we sometimes call "primitive," but they had already experienced a number of fundamental changes and, in some places, they were poised to introduce some more.

The creation of fire-starters and other tools, including weapons, proved critical to the survival of early humans and to the development of ever larger communities and eventually whole societies. In the chapter that follows we will trace the successive stages of the early material and social development of the human species. We will explore the technological and organizational innovations that made it possible for what became the great majority of humans to move from tiny bands of wandering hunters and gatherers to sedentary village dwellers and then the builders of walled cities with populations in the thousands. More than any other factor, these transformations were made possible by the development of agriculture that increased and made more secure the supply of food by which more and more humans could be sustained.

The domestication of animals and the shift to agriculture was accompanied by major changes in the roles and relationships between men and women and patterns of childrearing. They also led
Figure 1.1 Crouching against a wall to shelter the first sparks from wind, a Neolithic woman spins a dried yucca stalk against a much-used fire-starter to generate heat that will kindle a fire on the dried plant material she has placed under the fire-starter stick.

to increasing social stratification, new forms of political organization, increasingly elaborate means of artistic expression, and more lethal ways of waging war. During these millennia of transition farming communities occupied only small pockets of the earth's land area and only rarely ventured out on the sea or large rivers. Pastoral peoples who depended on herds of domesticated animals for their livelihood occupied a far greater share of the space where there was a human presence. An uneasy balance between the peoples who followed these two main adaptations to the diverse ecosystems in which humans proved able to survive was a dominant feature of the history of the species and the planet until five or six centuries.

Human Life in the Era of Hunters and Gatherers

The human species has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time. There are significant disagreements over how long an essentially human species, as distinct from other primates, has existed. However, a figure of 2 or 2.5 million years seems acceptable. This is approximately 1/4000 of the time the earth has existed. That is, if one thinks of the whole history of the earth to date as a 24-hour day, the human species began at about 5 minutes before midnight. Human beings have existed for less than 5 percent of the time mammals of any sort have lived. Yet in this brief span of time—by earth-history standards—humankind has spread to every landmass (with the exception of the polar regions) and, for better or worse, has taken control of the destinies of countless other species.

To be sure, human beings have some drawbacks as a species, compared to other existing models. They are unusually aggressive against their own kind: While some of the great apes, notably chimpanzees, engage in periodic wars, these conflicts can hardly rival human violence. Human babies are dependent for a long period, which requires some special child-care arrangements and often has limited the activities of many adult women. Certain ailments, such as back problems resulting from an upright stature, also burden the species. And, insofar as we know, the human species is alone in its awareness of the inevitability of death—a knowledge that imparts some unique fears and tensions.
### 2.5 Million B.C.E.
- Emergence of more humanlike species, initially in eastern Africa
- Further development of human species into *Homo erectus*
- Widespread of human species across Asia, Europe, Africa; development of fire use
- Apparent completion of basic human evolution; migrations from Africa begin; *Homo sapiens sapiens* displaces other human species

### 30,000 B.C.E.
- Migration of people from Siberia to tip of South America
- End of great ice age
- Fashioning of stone tools; end of Paleolithic (Old Stone) Age

### 10,000 B.C.E.
- Development of farming in the Middle East
- Domestication of sheep, pigs, goats, cattle
- Transition of agriculture; introduction of silk weaving in China

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Distinctive features of the human species account for considerable achievement as well. Like other primates, but unlike most other mammals, people can manipulate objects fairly readily because of the grip provided by an opposable thumb on each hand. Compared to other primates, human beings have a relatively high and regular sexual drive, which aids reproduction. Being omnivores, they are not dependent exclusively on plants or animals for food, which helps explain why they can live in so many different climates and settings. The unusual variety of their facial expressions aids communication and enhances social life. The distinctive human brain and a facility for elaborate speech are even more important: much of human history depends on the knowledge, inventions, and social contracts that resulted from these assets. Features of this sort explain why many human cultures, including the Western culture that many Americans share, promote a firm separation between human and animal, seeing in our own species a power and rationality, and possibly a spark of the divine, that "lower" creatures lack.

Although the rise of humankind has been impressively rapid, its early stages can also be viewed as painfully long and slow. Most of the two million plus years during which our species has existed are described by the term Paleolithic (Old Stone) Age. Throughout this long time span, which runs until about 14,000 years ago, human beings learned only simple tool use, mainly through employing suitably shaped rocks and sticks for hunting and warfare. Fire was tamed about 750,000 years ago. The nature of the species also gradually changed during the Paleolithic, with emphasis on more erect stature and growing brain capacity. Archeological evidence, remnants of tools from early settlements, also indicates some increases in average size. A less apelike species, whose larger brain and erect stance allowed better tool use, emerged between 500,000 and 750,000 years ago; it is called, appropriately enough, *Homo erectus*. Several species of *Homo erectus* developed and spread in Africa, then to Asia and Europe, reaching a population size of perhaps 1.5 million 100,000 years ago.

### Late Paleolithic Developments

Considerable evidence suggests that more advanced types of humans killed off or displaced many competitors over time, which explains why there is only one basic human type throughout the world today, rather than a number of rather similar human species, as among monkeys and apes. There was also a certain amount of intermarriage. The newest human breed, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, of which all humans in the world today are descendants, originated about 240,000 years ago, also in Africa. The success of this subspecies means that no major changes in the basic human physique or brain size have occurred since its advent.

Even after the appearance of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, human life faced important constraints. People who hunted food and gathered nuts and berries could not support large numbers or elaborate societies. Most hunting groups were small, and they had to roam widely for food. Two people required at least one square mile for survival. Population growth was slow, partly because women breast-fed infants for several years to limit their own fertility. On the other hand, people did not have to work very hard—hunting took about seven hours every three days on average. Women, who gathered fruits and
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<th>Metal Age</th>
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<td><strong>6000 B.C.E.</strong></td>
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<td>6000 First potter's wheel</td>
<td>2000 Kotosh culture in Peru</td>
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<td>5500 Çatal Hüyük at its peak</td>
<td>2000 Conversion to agriculture in northern Europe, southern Africa</td>
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<td>5000 Domestication of maize (corn) in Mesoamerica</td>
<td>1500 Emergence of Shang kingdom in China; writing develops</td>
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<td>1500 First ironwork in the Middle East</td>
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vegetables, worked harder, but there was significant equality between the sexes based on common economic contributions.

Paleolithic people gradually improved their tool use, beginning with the crude shaping of stone and wooden implements. Speech developed with *Homo erectus* 100,000 years ago, allowing more group cooperation and the transmission of technical knowledge. By the later Paleolithic period, people had developed rituals to lessen the fear of death and created cave paintings to express a sense of nature's beauty and power (Figure 1.2). Goddesses often played a prominent role in the religious pantheon. Thus, the human species came to develop cultures—that is, systems of belief that helped explain the environment and set up rules for various kinds of social behavior. The development of speech provided rich language and symbols for the transmission of culture and its growing sophistication. At the same time, different groups of humans, in different locations, developed quite varied belief systems and corresponding languages.

The greatest achievement of Paleolithic people was the sheer spread of the human species over much of the earth's surface. The species originated in eastern Africa; most of the earliest types of human remains come from this region, in the present-day countries of Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. But gradual migration, doubtless caused by the need to find scarce food, steadily pushed the human reach to other areas. Key discoveries, notably fire and the use of animal skins for clothing—both of which enabled people to live in colder climates—facilitated the spread of Paleolithic groups. The first people moved out of Africa about 750,000 years ago. Human remains (Peking man, Java man) dating from 600,000 and 350,000 years ago have been found in China and southeast Asia, respectively. Humans inhabited Britain 250,000 years ago. They first crossed to Australia 60,000 years ago, followed by another group 20,000 years later; these combined to form the continent's aboriginal population. Dates of the migration from Asia to the Americas are under debate. Most scholars now believe that humans crossed what was then a land bridge from Siberia to Alaska about 30,000 years ago, with several subsequent migration waves until warmer climates and rising ocean levels eliminated the land bridge by 8000 B.C.E.**

* In Christian societies, historical dating divides between years "before the birth of Christ" (b.c.) and after (a.d., anno Domini, or "year of our Lord"). This system came into wide acceptance in Europe in the 18th century, as formal historical consciousness increased (although ironically, 1 A.D. is a few years late for Jesus' actual birth). China, Islam, Judaism, and many other societies use different dating systems, referring to their own history. This text, like many recent world history materials, uses the Christian chronology (one has to choose some system) but changes the terms to B.C.E. ("before the common era") and C.E. ("of the common era") as a gesture to less Christian-centric labeling.
Many of the new arrivals quickly spread out, reaching the tip of the South American continent possibly within a mere thousand years. Settlers from China reached Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia 4500 to 3500 years ago.

In addition, soon after this time—roughly 14,000 years ago—the last great ice age ended, which did wonders for living conditions over much of the Northern Hemisphere. Human development began to accelerate. In the Mesolithic (Middle Stone) Age, a span of several thousand years, from about 12,000 to 8000 B.C.E., human ability to fashion stone tools and other implements improved greatly. People learned to sharpen and shape stone, to make better weapons and cutting edges. Animal bones were used to make needles and other precise tools. People built log rafts and dugouts, which improved fishing, and manufactured pots and baskets for food storage. Mesolithic people domesticated more animals, such as cows, which again improved food supply. Population growth accelerated, which also resulted in more conflicts and wars. Skeletons from this period show frequent bone breaks and skull fractures caused by weapons.

In time, better tool use, somewhat more elaborate social organization, and still more population pressure led people in many parts of the world to the final Stone Age—the Neolithic (New Stone) Age (Map 1.1). From Neolithic people, in turn, came several more dramatic developments that changed the nature of human existence—the invention of agriculture, the creation of cities, and other forebearings of civilization, which ended the Stone Age altogether throughout much of the world.

**The Neolithic Revolution**

Agriculture generated a variety of important changes in human cultures. Human achievements during the various ages of stone are both fascinating and fundamental; and some points are hotly debated. Our knowledge of Stone Age society is of course limited, although archeologists have been creative in their interpretations of tool remains and other evidence, such as cave paintings and burial sites, that Stone Age people produced in various parts of the world. What people accomplished during this long period of prehistory remains essential to human life today; our ability to make
and manipulate tools thus depends directly on what our Stone Age ancestors learned about physical matter.

However, it was the invention of agriculture that most clearly moved the human species toward more elaborate social and cultural patterns of the sort that people today would find recognizable. With agriculture, human beings were able to settle in one spot and focus on particular economic, political, and religious goals and activities. Agriculture also spawned a great increase in the sheer number of people in the world—from about 6 to 8 million across the earth’s surface during early Neolithic times, to about 100 million some 3000 years later.

The initial development of agriculture—that is, the deliberate planting of grains for later harvest—was probably triggered by two results of the ice age’s end. First, population increases, stemming from improved climate, prompted people to search for new and more reliable sources of food. Second, the end of the ice age saw the retreat of certain big game animals, such as mastodons. Human hunters had to turn to smaller game, such as deer and wild boar, in many forested areas. Hunting’s overall yield declined. Here was the basis for new interest in other sources of food. There is evidence that by 9000 B.C.E., in certain parts of the world, people were becoming increasingly dependent on regular harvests of wild grains, berries, and nuts. This undoubtedly set the stage for the deliberate planting of seeds (probably accidental to begin with) and the improvement of key grains through the selection of seeds from the best plants.

As farming evolved, new animals were also domesticated. Particularly in the Middle East and parts of Asia, by 9000 B.C.E., pigs, sheep, goats, and cattle were being raised. Farmers used these animals for meat and skins and soon discovered dairying as well. These results not only contributed to the development of agriculture but also served as the basis for nomadic herding societies.

The Geography of Early Agriculture

Farming was initially developed in the Middle East, in an arc of territory running from present-day Turkey to Iraq and Israel. This was a very fertile area, more fertile in those days than at present. Grains such as barley and wild wheat were abundant. At the same time, this area was not heavily forested, and animals were in short supply, presenting a challenge to hunters. In the Middle East, the development of agriculture may have begun as early as 10,000 B.C.E., and it gained ground rapidly after 8000 B.C.E. Gradually during the Neolithic centuries, knowledge of agriculture spread to other centers, including parts of India, north Africa, and Europe. Agriculture also developed independently; for example, with the rise of rice cultivation in southeast Asia, from which it spread to China. Thus, within a few thousand years agriculture had spread to the parts of the world that would produce the first human civilizations (Map 1.2). We will see that agriculture spread later to much of Africa south of the Mediterranean coast, reaching west Africa by 2000 B.C.E., although here too there were additional developments with an emphasis on local grains and also root crops such as yams. Agriculture had to be invented separately in the Americas, based on corn cultivation, where it was also a slightly later development (about 5000 B.C.E.).

Many scholars have termed the development of agriculture a Neolithic revolution. The term is obviously misleading in one sense: agriculture was no sudden transformation, even in the Middle East where the new system had its roots. Learning the new agricultural methods was difficult, and many peoples long combined a bit of agriculture with considerable reliance on the older systems of hunting and gathering. A “revolution” that took over a thousand years, and then several thousand more to spread to key population centers in Asia, Europe, and Africa, is hardly dramatic by modern standards.

Patterns of Change

The concept of revolution is, however, appropriate in demonstrating the magnitude of change involved. Early agriculture could support far more people per square mile than hunting ever could; it also allowed people to settle more permanently in one area. The system was nonetheless not easy. Agriculture required more regular work, at least of men, than hunting did. Hunting groups today, such as the pygmies of the Kalahari Desert in southwest Africa, work an average of 2.5 hours a day, alternating long, intense hunts with periods of idleness. As much as agriculture was demanding, it
was also rewarding. Agriculture supported larger populations, and with better food supplies and a more settled existence, agricultural peoples could afford to build houses and villages. Domesticated animals provided not only hides but also wool for more varied clothing.

We know next to nothing of the debates that must have raged when people were first confronted with agriculture, but it is not hard to imagine that many would have found the new life too complicated, too difficult, or too unexciting. Most evidence suggests that gathering-and-hunting peoples resisted agriculture as long as they could. Gradually, of course, agriculture did gain ground. Its success was hard to deny. And as farmers cleared new land from forests, they automatically drove out or converted many hunters. Disease played a role: settled agricultural societies suffered from more contagious diseases because of denser population concentrations. Hunting-and-gathering peoples lacked resistance and often died when agriculturists who had developed immunity to these diseases carried them into their areas.

Not all the peoples of the world came to embrace the slowly spreading wave of agriculture, at least not until very recently. Important small societies in southern Africa, Australia, the islands of southeast Asia, and even northern Japan were isolated for so long that news of this economic system simply did not reach them. The light-skinned hunting tribes of northern Japan flourished until about a hundred years ago. Northern Europeans and southern Africans converted to agriculture earlier, about 2000 years ago, but well after the Neolithic revolution had transformed other parts of their continents. Agriculture was initiated in the Americas as early as 5000 B.C.E. and developed vigorously in Central America and the northern part of South America. However, most Indian tribes in North America continued a hunting-and-gathering existence, sometimes combined with limited agriculture, until recent centuries. Finally, the peoples of the vast plains of central Asia long resisted a complete conversion to agriculture, in part because of a harsh climate; herding, rather than grain-growing, became the basic socioeconomic system of this part of the world. From this area would come waves of tough, nomadic invaders whose role in linking major civilizations was a vital force in world history until a few centuries ago.
Further Technological Change

Development possibilities among people who became agriculturists were more obvious than those among smaller populations who resisted or simply did not know of the system. Agriculture set the basis for more rapid change in human societies. Greater wealth and larger populations freed some people for other specializations, from which new ideas or techniques might spring. Agriculture itself depended on control over nature that could be facilitated by newly developed techniques and objects. For example, during the Neolithic period, farming people needed storage facilities for grains and seeds, which promoted the development of basket-making and pottery. The first potter’s wheel came into existence around 6000 B.C.E., and this, in turn, encouraged faster and higher-quality pottery production. Agricultural needs also encouraged certain kinds of science, supporting the human inclination to learn more about weather or flooding.

Much of what we think of as human history involves the doings of agricultural societies—societies, that is, in which most people are farmers and in which the production of food is the central economic activity. Nonagricultural groups, like the nomadic herders in central Asia, made their own mark, but their greatest influence usually occurred in interactions with agricultural peoples. Many societies remain largely agricultural today. The huge time span we have thus far considered, including the Neolithic revolution itself, is all technically “prehistorical”—involved with human patterns before the invention of writing allowed the kinds of recordkeeping historians prefer. In fact, since we now know how to use surviving tools and burial sites as records, the prehistoric–historic distinction means less than it once did. The preagricultural–agricultural distinction is more central. Fairly soon after the development of agriculture—although not, admittedly, right away—significant human change began to occur in decades and centuries, rather than in the sizeable blocks of time, several thousand years or more, that describe preagricultural peoples.

Indeed, one basic change took place fairly soon after the introduction of agriculture, and, again, societies in the Middle East served as its birthplace. The discovery of metal tools dates back to about 4000 B.C.E. Copper was the first metal with which people learned how to work, although a more resilient metal, bronze, soon entered the picture. In fact, the next basic age of human existence was the Bronze Age. By about 3000 B.C.E., metalworking had become so commonplace in the Middle East that the use of stone tools dissipated, and the long stone ages were over at last—although, of course, an essentially Neolithic technology persisted in many parts of the world, even among some agricultural peoples.

Metalworking was extremely useful to agricultural or herding societies. Metal hoes and other tools allowed farmers to work the ground more efficiently. Metal weapons were obviously superior to those made from stone and wood. Agricultural peoples had the resources to free up a small number of individuals as toolmakers, who would specialize in this activity and exchange their products with farmers for food. Specialization of this sort did not, however, guarantee rapid rates of invention; indeed, many specialized artisans seemed very conservative, eager to preserve methods that had been inherited. But specialization did improve the conditions or climate for discovery, and the invention of metalworking was a key result. Like agriculture, knowledge of metals gradually fanned out to other parts of Asia and to Africa and Europe.

Gradually, the knowledge of metal tools created further change, for not only farmers but also manufacturing artisans benefited from better tools. Woodworking, for example, became steadily more elaborate as metal replaced stone, bone, and fire in the cutting and connecting of wood. We are still living in the metal ages today, although we rely primarily on iron—whose working was introduced around 1500 B.C.E. by herding peoples who invaded the Middle East—rather than copper and bronze.

Civilization

Agriculture encouraged the formation of larger as well as more stable human communities than had existed before Neolithic times. A few Mesolithic groups had formed villages, particularly where opportunities for fishing were good, as around some of the lakes in Switzerland. However, most
hunting peoples moved in relatively small groups, or tribes, each containing anywhere from 40 to 60 individuals, and they could not settle in a single spot without the game running out. With agriculture, these constraints changed. To be sure, some agricultural peoples did move around. A system called slash and burn agriculture existed in many parts of the world, including portions of the American South, until about 150 years ago. Here, people would burn off trees in an area, farm intensively for a few years until the soil was depleted, and then move on—often returning to earlier sites every 20–30 years. Herding peoples also moved in tribal bands, with strong kinship ties. The rise of nomadic herding economies was a vital development in Central Asia, the Middle East, the Sudan and elsewhere.

Settled Societies

The major agricultural regions, however, involved more permanent settlements. There were advantages to staying put: houses could be built to last, wells built to bring up water, and other "expensive" improvements afforded because they would serve many generations. In the Middle East, China, and parts of Africa and India, a key incentive to stability was the need for irrigation devices to channel river water to the fields. This same need helps explain why agriculture generated communities and not a series of isolated farms. Small groups simply could not regulate a river's flow or build and maintain irrigation ditches and sluices. Irrigation and defense encouraged villages—groupings of several hundred people—as the characteristic pattern of residence in almost all agricultural societies from Neolithic days until our own century. Neolithic settlements spread widely in agricultural societies. New ones continued to be founded as agriculture spread to regions such as northern Europe, as late as 1500 B.C.E. (Figure 1.3).

One Neolithic village, Çatal Hüyük (kah-THAL HOHY-uhk) in southern Turkey, has been elaborately studied by archaeologists. It was founded about 7000 B.C.E. and was unusually large, covering about 32 acres. Houses were made of mud bricks set in timber frameworks, crowded together, with few windows. People seem to have spent a good bit of time on their rooftops in order to experience daylight and make social contacts—many broken bones attest to frequent falls. Some houses were lavishly decorated, mainly with hunting scenes. Religious images, both of powerful male hunters and "mother goddesses" devoted to agricultural fertility, were common, and some people in the village seem to have had special religious responsibilities. The village produced almost all the goods it consumed. Some trade was conducted with hunting peoples who lived in the hills surrounding the village, but apparently it was initiated more to keep the peace than to produce economic gain (Figure 1.4). By 5500 B.C.E., important production activities developed in the village, including those of skilled toolmakers and jewelers. With time also came links with other communities. Large villages like Çatal Hüyük ruled over smaller communities. This meant that some families began to specialize in politics, and military forces were organized. Some villages became small cities, ruled by kings who were typically given divine status.

By 3000 B.C.E., Çatal Hüyük had become part of a civilization. Although many of the characteristics of civilization had existed by 6000 or 5000 B.C.E. in this Middle Eastern region, the origins of civilization, strictly speaking, approximately date to only 3500 B.C.E. The first civilization arose in the Middle East along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Another center of civilization started soon thereafter in northeast Africa (Egypt), and a third by about 2500 B.C.E. along the banks of the Indus River in northwestern India. These three early centers of civilization had some interaction. The fourth and fifth early civilization centers, a bit later and considerably more separate, arose in China and Central America.
Defining Civilization

Unlike an agricultural society, which can be rather precisely defined, civilization is a more subjective construct. Some scholars prefer to define civilizations only as societies with enough economic surpluses to form divisions of labor and a social hierarchy involving significant inequalities. This is a very inclusive definition, and under it most agricultural societies and even some groups like North American Indians who combined farming with hunting would be drawn in. Others, however, press the concepts of civilization further, arguing, for example, that a chief difference between civilizations and other societies (whether hunting or agricultural) involves the emergence of formal political organizations, or states, as opposed to dependence on family or tribal ties. Most civilizations produce political units capable of ruling large regions, and some characteristically produce huge kingdoms or empires.

The word civilization itself comes from the Latin term for city, and in truth most civilizations do depend on the existence of significant cities. In agricultural civilizations, most people do not live in cities. But cities are crucial because they amass wealth and power, and they allow the rapid exchange of ideas among relatively large numbers of people, thereby encouraging intellectual thought and artistic expression. Cities also promote specialization in manufacturing and trade and encourage the emergence of centers of political power.

Most civilizations developed writing, starting with the emergence of cuneiform (kyoo-NAY-uh-form) (writing based on wedgelike characters) in the Middle East around 3500 B.C.E. Societies that employ writing can organize more elaborate political structures because of their ability to send messages and keep records. They can tax more efficiently and make contracts and treaties. Societies with writing also generate a more explicit intellectual climate because of their ability to record data and build on past, written wisdom. (One of the early written records from the Middle East is a recipe for making beer—a science of a sort.) Some experts argue that the very fact of becoming literate changes the way people think, encouraging them to consider the world as a place that can be understood by organized human inquiry, or "rationally," and less by a host of spiritual beliefs. In all agricultural civilizations—that is, in all human history until less than 200 years ago—only a minority...
of people was literate, and usually that was a small minority. Nonetheless, the existence of writing did make a difference in such societies.

Since civilizations employ writing and are by definition unusually well organized, it is not surprising that almost all recorded history is about what has happened to civilized societies. We simply know the most about such societies, and we often are particularly impressed by what they produce in the way of great art or powerful rulers. It is also true that civilizations tend to be far more populous than nomadic or hunting-and-gathering societies. Therefore, the history of civilization generally covers the history of most people.

But the history of civilization does not include everybody. Few hunting or nomadic peoples could generate a civilization—they lacked the stability and resources, and, with the exception of a limited number of signs and symbols, they never developed writing, unless it came from the outside. Furthermore, some agricultural peoples did not develop a full civilization, if our definition of civilization goes beyond the simple acquisition of economic surplus to formal states, cities, and writing. Portions of west Africa, fully agricultural and capable of impressive art, have long lacked writing, major cities, or more than loose regional government.

People in civilizations, particularly during the long centuries when they were surrounded by nomadic peoples, characteristically looked down on any society lacking in civilization. The ancient Greeks coined the word barbarian to describe such cases—indeed, they were prone to regard all non-Greeks as barbarians. As a result of labels like this, it is easy to think of much human history as divided between civilizations and primitive nomads.

Such a distinction is incorrect, however, and it does not follow from the real historical meaning of civilization. In the first place, like agriculture, civilization brings losses as well as gains. As Çatal Hüyük moved toward civilization, distinctions based on social class and wealth increased. Civilizations often have firmer class or caste divisions, including slavery, than do "simpler" societies. They also often promote greater separation between the rulers and ruled, monarchs and subjects. Frequently, they are quite warlike, and there is greater inequality between men and women than in hunter-gatherer societies. With civilization, more fully patriarchal structures emerged. In cities, male superiority was even clearer than in agriculture, as men did most of the manufacturing and assumed political and religious leadership, thus relegating women to subordinate roles. "Civilization," then, is not a synonym for "good."

By the same token, nomadic or hunter-gatherer societies may be exceptionally well regulated, with complex and imaginative cultures. Many such societies, in fact, have more regulations—in part, because they depend on rules transmitted by word of mouth—than civilized societies. Some of the societies most eager to repress anger and aggression in human dealings, such as Zuni Indians in the American Southwest, are based at least in part on hunting and gathering. Although some hunting-gathering societies treat old people cruelly, others display more respect and veneration toward elders than most civilizations do. Many nomadic societies may be shocked by the doings of civilized peoples. For example, American Indians were appalled at the insistence of European settlers on spanking their children, a behavior they regarded as vicious and unnecessary. A fascinating, although probably unanswerable, question involves determining whether or not the civilization form has left more or less good in its wake.

It is also important to note that many nomadic peoples contributed greatly to world history. While many remaining hunting-and-gathering peoples became increasingly isolated, except in parts of the Americas, nomadic herding economies continued to flourish in many places. They depended on the domestication of animals and on key technological improvements, for example iron mining equipment and weaponry. Precisely because they traveled widely, nomadic peoples could play vital roles in world trade and in developing contacts among more settled areas. Nomadic groups in central Asia would play a particularly great role in world history, but groups in the Mediterranean and Africa were significant as well.

Despite the importance of alternatives, it remains true that the development of civilization most obviously continued the process of technological change and political organization. Civilizations also generated the largest populations and the most elaborate artistic and intellectual forms. It is in this context that the term has real meaning and in which it legitimately commands the attention of most historians.

Civilizations also increased human impact on the environment. For example, the first center of copper production in Europe, along the Danube valley, led to such deforestation that the fuel supply was destroyed, and the industry collapsed after about 3000 B.C.E. The extensive agriculture
needed to support Indus River cities opened the land to erosion and flooding because of overuse of the soil and removal of trees.

Having started in 3500 B.C.E., civilization developed in its four initial centers—the Middle East, Egypt, northwestern India, and northern China—over the following 2500 years. (An early civilization would also emerge in Central America, though slightly later in time.) These areas covered only a tiny portion of the inhabited parts of the world, although they were the most densely populated. Such early civilizations, all clustered in key river valleys, were in a way pilot tests of the new form of social organization. Only after about 1000 B.C.E. did a more consistent process of development and spread of civilization begin—and with it came the main threads of world history. However, the great civilizations unquestionably built on the achievements of the river valley pioneers, and so some understanding of this contribution to the list of early human accomplishments is essential.

**Tigris–Euphrates Civilization**

The most noteworthy achievements of the earliest civilizations were early versions of organizational and cultural forms that most of us now take for granted: writing, formal codes of law, city planning and architecture, and institutions for trade, including the use of money. Once developed, most of these building blocks of human organization did not have to be reinvented, although in some cases they spread only slowly to other parts of the world.

It is not surprising then, given its lead in agriculture, metalworking, and village structure, that the Middle East generated the first example of human civilization. Indeed, the first civilization, founded in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in a part of the Middle East long called Mesopotamia (Map 1.3), forms one of only a few cases of a civilization developed absolutely from scratch—and with no examples from anywhere else to imitate. (Chinese civilization and civilization in Central America also developed independently.) By 4000 B.C.E., the farmers of Mesopotamia were familiar with bronze and copper and had already invented the wheel for transportation. They had a well-established pottery industry and interesting artistic forms. Farming in this area, because of the need for irrigation, required considerable coordination among communities, and this in turn served as the basis for complex political structures.

By about 3500 B.C.E., a people who had recently invaded this region, the Sumerians, developed a cuneiform alphabet, the first known case of human writing. Their alphabet at first used different pictures to represent various objects but soon shifted to the use of geometric shapes to symbolize spoken sounds. The early Sumerian alphabet may have had as many as 2000 such symbols, but this number was later reduced to about 300. Even so, writing and reading remained complex skills, which only a few had time to master. Scribes wrote on clay tablets, using styluses shaped quite like the modern ballpoint pen.

Sumerian art developed steadily, as statues and painted frescoes were used to adorn the temples of the gods. Statues of the gods also decorated individual homes. Sumerian science aided a complex agricultural society, as people sought to learn more about the movement of the sun and stars—thus founding the science of astronomy—and improved their mathematical knowledge. (Astronomy defined the calendar and provided the astrological forecasts widely used in politics and religion.) The Sumerians employed a system of numbers based on units of 10, 60, and 360 that we still use in calculating circles and hours. In other words, Sumerians and their successors in Mesopotamia created patterns of observation and abstract thought about nature that a number of civilizations, including our own, still rely on, and they also introduced specific systems, such as charts of major constellations, that have been current at least among educated people for 5000 years, not only in the Middle East, but by later imitation in India and Europe as well.

Sumerians developed complex religious rituals. Each city had a patron god and erected impressive shrines to please and honor this and other deities. Massive towers, called ziggurats (ZIG-uh-rat), formed the first monumental architecture in this civilization. Professional priests operated these temples and conducted the rituals within. Sumerians
Mesopotamia in Maps

Throughout their centuries of existence, the Mesopotamian civilizations steadily expanded from their roots in the fertile valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Reading the maps can help explain the nature of the civilizations in the region.

QUESTIONS What do these maps suggest about the relationships between Mesopotamian civilizations and the rest of the Middle East? Does geography suggest reasons for developing political instability in this civilization? Are some river valley regions more prosperous than others? What were the potential threats that the native river valley civilizations and other river valley civilizations encountered and how did they respond? What has been so significant in European, African and South American?

Map 1.4: Mesopotamia and the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean. This map shows the location of Sumer and two later empires in the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean.

believed in many powerful gods, for the nature on which their agriculture depended often seemed swift and unpredictable. Prayers and offerings to prevent floods as well as to protect good health were a vital part of Sumerian life. Sumerian ideas about the divine force in natural objects—in rivers, trees, and mountains—were common among early agricultural peoples. A religion of this sort, which sees gods in many aspects of nature, is known as polytheism. More specifically, Sumerian religious notions, notably their ideas about the gods’ creation of the earth from water and about the divine punishment of humans through floods, later influenced the writers of the Old Testament and thus continue to play a role in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim cultures. Sumerian religious ideas, which had a decidedly gloomy cast, also included a belief in an afterlife of punishment—an original version of the concept of hell.

Sumerian political structures stressed tightly organized city-states, ruled by a king who claimed divine authority. The Sumerian state had carefully defined boundaries, unlike the less formal territories of precivilized villages in the region. Here is a key early example of how civilization and a more formal political structure came together. The government helped regulate religion and
enforce its duties; it also provided a court system in the interests of justice. Kings were originally military leaders during times of war, and the function of defense and war, including leadership of a trained army, remained vital in Sumerian politics. Kings and the noble class, along with the priesthood, controlled considerable land, which was worked by slaves. Thus began a tradition of slavery that would long mark Middle Eastern societies. Warfare remained vital to ensure supplies of slaves taken as prisoners during combat. At the same time, slavery was a variable state of existence, and many slaves were able to earn money and even buy their freedom.

The Sumerians added to their region's agricultural prosperity not only by using wheeled carts but also by learning about fertilizers and by adopting silver as a means of exchange for buying and selling—an early form of money. However, the region was also hard to defend and proved a constant temptation to outside invaders from Sumerian times to the present. The Sumerians themselves fell to a people called the Akkadians, who continued much of Sumerian culture. Another period of decline was followed by conquest by the Babylonians, who extended their own empire and thus helped bring civilization to other parts of the Middle East. It was under Babylonian rule that the king Hammurabi introduced the most famous early code of law, boasting of his purpose: "to promote the welfare of the people, I, Hammurabi, the devout, god-fearing prince, cause justice to prevail in the land by destroying the wicked and the evil, that the strong might not oppress the weak." Hammurabi's code established rules of procedure for courts of law and regulated property rights and the duties of family members, setting harsh punishments for crimes.

For many centuries during and after the heyday of Babylon, peace and civilization in the Middle East were troubled by the invasions of hunting and herding groups. Indo-European peoples pressed in from the north, starting about 2100 B.C.E. In the Middle East itself, invasions by Semitic peoples from the south were more important, and Semitic peoples and languages increasingly dominated the region. The new arrivals adopted the culture of the conquered peoples as their own, so the key features of the civilization persisted. But large political units declined in favor of smaller city-states or regional kingdoms, particularly during the centuries of greatest turmoil, between 1200 and 900 B.C.E. Thereafter, new invaders, first the Assyrians and then the Persians, created large new empires in the Middle East.

**Egyptian Civilization**

A second center of civilization sprang up in northern Africa, along the Nile River. Egyptian civilization, formed by 3000 B.C.E., benefited from the trade and technological influence of Mesopotamia, but it produced a quite different society and culture. Less open to invasion, Egypt retained a unified state throughout most of its history. The king, or pharaoh, possessed immense power. The Egyptian economy was more fully government-directed than its Mesopotamian counterpart, which had a more independent business class. Government control may have been necessary because of the complexity of coordinating irrigation along the Nile. It nonetheless resulted in godlike status for the pharaohs, who built splendid tombs for themselves—the pyramids—from 2700 B.C.E. onward. During periods of weak rule and occasional invasions, Egyptian society suffered a decline, but revivals kept the framework of Egyptian civilization intact until after 1000 B.C.E. (Map 1.5). At key points, Egyptian influence spread up the Nile to the area now known as the Sudan, with an impact on the later development of African culture. The kingdom of Kush interacted with Egypt and invaded it at some point.

Neither Egyptian science nor the Egyptian alphabet was as elaborate as its Mesopotamian equal, although mathematics was more advanced in this civilization. Egyptian art was exceptionally lively; cheerful and colorful

Map 1.5 Egypt, Kush, and Axum, Successive Dynasties. As Egypt weakened, kingdoms farther up the Nile and deeper into Africa rose in importance.
pictures decorated not only the tombs—where the belief in an afterlife made people want to be surrounded by objects of beauty—but also palaces and furnishings. Egyptian architectural forms were also quite influential, not only in Egypt but in other parts of the Mediterranean as well. Egyptian mathematics produced the idea of a day divided into 24 hours, and here too Egypt influenced the development of later Mediterranean cultures (Figure 1.5).

Indian and Chinese River Valley Civilizations

River valley civilizations developed in two other centers. A prosperous urban civilization emerged along the Indus River by 2500 B.C.E., supporting several large cities, including Harappa and Mohenjo Daro (moh-HEN-joh-DA-roh), whose houses even had running water. Indus River peoples had trading contacts with Mesopotamia, but they developed their own distinctive alphabet and artistic forms. Infiltrations by Indo-Europeans, however, plus natural calamities, resulted in such destruction that it makes it hard to speak with confidence about either the nature of this culture or its subsequent influence on India. Harappan writing, for example, has yet to be deciphered. It remains true that civilization never had to be fully reinvented in India. The Indo-European migrants combined their religious and political ideas with those that had taken root in the early cities. In recent times, Indians' pride in their early civilized history has become an important part of their national identity.

The Great Cities of the Indus Valley

Though hundreds of miles apart, Harappa, Mohenjo Daro, and other urban centers were remarkably similar in layout and construction. Both were built on a square grid pattern that was divided by main roads into 12 precisely measured segments. Each city was surrounded by walls, which extended a mile from east to west and one-half mile from north to south. The buildings and the city walls were usually made of standardized kiln-dried bricks. Coordinated construction on such a massive scale might have meant an effective central government that could organize and supervise the daily tasks of large numbers of laborers.

The existence of a strong ruling class is also indicated by the presence of large, well fortified citadels in each capital city. These citadels may have served as sanctuaries for the cities' populations in times of attack and as community centers in times of peace. The citadel at Mohenjo Daro included a very large building that may have been a palace. Both citadels contained what are believed to have been audience and assembly halls or places of worship as well as public bathing tanks. The elaborately decorated bath at Mohenjo Daro was surrounded by a cloister, which opened onto many small rooms that may have housed priests. Large granaries near each of the citadels suggest that the state stored grain for ceremonial purposes, times of shortage, and possibly the regulation of grain production and sale.

The great cities and many towns of the Harappan complex were supported by a rather advanced agricultural system based on the cultivation of wheat, rye, peas, and possibly rice. Cotton was widely cultivated, and numerous domesticated animals were reared. It is likely that irrigation systems were built to catch and control waters from the monsoon and the rivers, and that fish caught in the rivers were a dietary staple. Local goods were carried by riverboats and ox carts, reproduced in clay models.

The cities of Harappa were major trading centers. Jade from China and precious jewels from what later became Burma have been unearthed at various Indus sites. Stone seals produced in the Indus region, such as those shown in Figure 3.5, have been found in the urban ruins of other ancient civilizations such as Sumer in Mesopotamia. In addition to realistic depictions of animals and human figures, the seals contain a complex writing system that no one has ever deciphered. The fact that Harappan merchants used large numbers of the seals to ensure that crates and urns were not opened during transport suggests that trade was highly developed in the Indus valley civilization.

Despite these overseas contacts, Harappan peoples appear to have been conservative and highly resistant to innovations introduced from the outside. They cast tools and weapons in bronze,
Aryan Poetry in Praise of a War Horse

The following early Vedic hymn extolls the power of a great Aryan war horse.

Rushing to glory, to the capture of herds,
Swooping down as a hungry falcon,
Eager to be first, he darts amid the ranks of the chariots
Happy as a bridegroom making a garland,
Spurning the dust and champing at the bit.
And the victorious steed and faithful,
His body obedient to his driver in battle,
Speeding on through the melee,
Stirs up the dust to fall on his brows.

And at his deep neigh, like the thunder of heaven,
The foemen tremble in fear,
For he fights against thousands, and none can resist him,
So terrible is his charge.

QUESTIONS: In what way does this poem emphasize the light in warfare? What does it reflect about the role of horses in their battles and their attitudes towards the foemen? What is the significance of the battle to their culture? How does the author convey the qualities of manliness, heroism, and bravery, and how do the foemen react to these qualities?

but most of their implements were inferior to those of Mesopotamian peoples, with whom they had contact. Their weapons were even more primitive and would have left them vulnerable to invasions by peoples more adept at warfare.

Harappan society appears to have been dominated by a powerful priestly class, which ruled from the citadel of each capital. The priests would have derived this control from their role as intermediaries between the Harappan populace and a number of gods and goddesses, who controlled fertility. Representations of mother goddesses appear to have been objects of worship for the common people, whereas a horned god was apparently favored by the priests and upper classes. The presence of these figures in Sumer and other urban sites in the Persian Gulf region suggests that large quantities of various commodities were traded in the region spanning Mesopotamia and the Indus River valley.

It is likely that a combination of factors led to Harappa's demise. There is evidence of severe flooding at Mohenjo Daro and other sites. Short-term natural disasters, including severe earthquakes, may have compounded the adverse effects of long-term climatic changes. Shifts in the monsoon pattern and changes in temperature may have begun the process of desertification that eventually transformed the region into the arid steppe that it has been for most of recorded history. Rapid changes in pottery types suggest sudden waves of migrants into the region. It is possible that the Harappans were too weak militarily to prevent these incoming peoples from settling down or taking over their towns and cities. In many cases these centers of urban life had already been abandoned in response to natural calamities, particularly flooding. A marked decline in the quality of building and town planning suggests that the priestly elite may have lost control over the artisans and laborers.

Some of the migrants were bands of Aryan herders who entered the Indus region over an extended period of time rather than in militant waves. But the Aryan pastoralists may have consciously destroyed or neglected the dikes and canals on which the agrarian life of the Harappan peoples had once depended. Cattle raising would then have replaced crop cultivation, further undermining the economic basis of the civilization. That there was a good deal of violent conflict in this transition cannot be ruled out. Groups of skeletons with smashed skulls or in postures of flight from floods or foreign invaders have been found on the stairways at some sites. Thus, environmental changes and related administrative decline may have combined with the effects of nomadic migrations to undermine south Asia's first civilization.

Early Civilization in China

Civilization along the Yellow River in China developed in considerable isolation, although some overland trading contact with India and the Middle East did develop. Huang he civilization was the subject of much later Chinese legend, which praised the godlike kings of early civilization, starting with the mythic ancestor of the Chinse, P'an Ku. The Chinese had an unusually elaborate concept of their remote origins, and they began early to record a part-fact, part-fiction history of their early kings. What is clear is the following: First, an organized state existed that carefully regulated irrigation in the fertile but flood-prone river valley. Second, by about 2000 B.C.E. the Chinese had produced an advanced technology and developed an elaborate intellectual life. They had learned how
to ride horses and were skilled in pottery; they used bronze well and by 1000 B.C.E. had introduced iron, which they soon learned to work with coal. Their writing progressed from scratches of lines on bone to the invention of ideographic symbols. Science, particularly astronomy, arose early. Chinese art emphasized delicate designs, and the Chinese claim an early interest in music (Figure 1.6).

By 1500 B.C.E., one of the tribes in the north China, the Shang, conquered most of the other tribes and established a kingdom that would lay the foundations of Chinese civilization. Until recent decades we knew little more about the Shang than about their Xia predecessors. But extensive excavation of Shang sites at Anyang (ahn-yahng), Zhengzhou (jehng-joh), and elsewhere have given insights into many aspects of Shang culture and society. In some respects they were very much like the Aryans, who were conquering northern India during this same period. Like the Aryans, the Shang were warlike nomads. They fought on horseback and from chariots with deadly bronze weapons. Non-Shang subject peoples provided the foot soldiers that made up the bulk of their armies. Like those of Aryan India and Homeric Greece, Shang battles were wild clashes between massed soldiers that hinged on hand-to-hand combat between a few champions on each side. But unlike the Aryans and ancient Greeks, the Shang warriors were ruled by strong kings, who drew on their vassals' energies and military prowess to build an extensive empire.

The Shang monarch was seen as the intermediary between the supreme being, Shangdi (shahng-deh), and ordinary mortals. His kingdom was viewed as the center of the world, and he claimed dominion over all humankind. Shang rulers directed the affairs of state and bore ritual responsibilities for the fertility of their kingdom and the well-being of their subjects. In the springtime, they participated in special ceremonies that included a symbolic mating with female fertility spirits. In times of drought and famine, Shang rulers, or perhaps designated surrogates, were obliged to perform ritual dances in the nude. The dancer—presumably the surrogate—was later burned alive to placate the spirits whose anger had caused the natural calamities.

Shang monarchs were served by a sizeable bureaucracy in the capital city at Anyang and the surrounding areas. But most of the peasant and artisan populations of the kingdom were governed by vassal retainers: subordinate leaders serving the king and great lords and usually bound to them by personal ties. These officials were recruited from the former ruling families and the aristocratic classes of the many subordinate states. The vassals depended on the produce and labor of the commoners in these areas to support their families and military forces. In return for grants of control over varying numbers of peasants, warrior aristocrats collected tribute (usually in the form of agricultural produce), which went to support the monarch and his court. They supplied soldiers for the king's armies in times of war, and they kept the peace and administered justice among the peasants and townspeople.

Like the elites of many early civilizations, the Shang rulers and nobility were preoccupied with rituals, oracles, and sacrifices. In addition to the fertility functions of the ruler, the entire elite was involved in persuading spirits to provide good crops and large families. Shang artistic expression reached its peak in the ornately carved and expertly cast bronze vessels that were used to make these offerings. Offerings included fine grain, incense, wine, and animals, but Shang records also tell of water festivals at which ritual contests were waged between rival boats, each attempting to sink the other. Those aboard the losing craft drowned when it capsized, and they were offered up to the deities responsible for fertility and good harvests.

Concern for abundant harvests and victory in war led the Shang elite to put great stock in the predictions of shamans, or priests, who served as oracles—sacred people who could prophesy the future. Much of Shang artistic expression went into producing the ritual objects used by the oracles. Warriors about to go into battle, officials embarking on long journeys, or families negotiating marriage alliances routinely consulted these oracles to ensure that their efforts would turn out well. This reliance on the shamans strongly influenced beliefs and behavior in the Shang era.

The actual procedures followed by the shamans who presided over these rituals gave rise to perhaps the single most important element in Chinese culture—writing. Since pre-Shang times, Chinese oracles had based their predictions on readings taken from animal bones or tortoise shells. A bone or shell was drilled with a hole and seared with a red-hot iron poker. The bone or shell cracked, and the patterns of the cracks were interpreted by a shaman or priest. Over time the practice evolved of inscribing the bones and shells with painted designs that became part of the patterns
the shamans read. These designs gradually were standardized and came to form the basis of a written Chinese language.

Like the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians, early Chinese characters were pictographic. Thus, they readily conveyed the ideas they were intended to express. The original character for the sun, for example, was a circle with a dot in the center, the character for a tree was a single tree, and a forest was a set of three trees. Combinations of characters made it possible for the Chinese elite to convey increasingly complex ideas. The character for emperor, for example, combined elements of the ideographs for king, heaven, earth, and harmony.

Over time the number of characters increased substantially. By the end of the Shang period, there were an estimated 3000 characters. A well educated scholar in the modern era would need to master some 8000 characters. The way they are written also changed significantly. Many characters were simplified, and most were stylized so that they are less pictographic. The bones or bronze vessels on which the characters were originally carved gradually gave way to bamboo slips, silk scrolls, and wooden plates, and they in turn were supplanted in the 1st century C.E. by paper (a critical Chinese invention). Assorted fine brushes and inks were developed to paint the characters, which themselves became a major mode of artistic expression in later periods.

Writing became the key to Chinese identity and the growth of civilization in China. The people of the loess region and the north China plain spoke a bewildering variety of languages, often unintelligible from one group to the next. They were surrounded by nomadic herders to the north and shifting cultivators to the south, whose contacts with and movements into the loess zone further complicated the linguistic muddle. But the use of increasingly standardized and sophisticated written characters provided the bond that gave growing numbers of these loess zone peoples a common identity. This sense of identity was felt most keenly by the elite groups, who monopolized the use of the characters, but eventually it filtered down to the cultivating and artisan classes. With the persistence and growth of this identity, the Chinese people entered history for the first time.

The Heritage of the River Valley Civilizations

Many accomplishments of the river valley civilizations had a lasting impact. Monuments such as the Egyptian pyramids have long been regarded as one of the wonders of the world. Other achievements, although more prosaic, are fundamental to world history even today: the invention of the wheel, the taming of the horse, the creation of usable alphabets and writing implements, the production of key mathematical concepts such as square roots, the development of well organized monarchies and bureaucracies, and the invention of functional calendars and other divisions of time. These basic achievements, along with the awe that the early civilizations continue to inspire, are vital legacies to the whole of human history. Almost all the major alphabets in the world today are derived from the writing forms pioneered in the river valleys, apart from the even more durable concept of writing itself. For this reason, almost all later civilizations are built on the massive foundations first constructed in the river valleys.

Despite these accomplishments, most of the river valley civilizations were in decline by 1000 B.C.E. The civilizations had flourished for as many as 2500 years, although of course with periodic disruptions and revivals. But, particularly in India, the new waves of invasion did produce something of a break in the history of civilization, a dividing line between the river valley pioneers and later cultures.

Heritage of Early Civilizations

This break raises one final question: besides the vital achievements—the fascinating monuments and the indispensable advances in technology, science, and art—what legacies did the river valley civilizations impart for later ages? The question is particularly important for the Middle East and Egypt. In India, there is still much ignorance about possible links between Indus River accomplishments and what came later. In China, there is a definite connection between the first civilization and subsequent forms. Indeed, the new dynasty in China, the Zhou, took over from the Shang about 1000 B.C.E., ruling a loose coalition of regional lords; recorded Chinese history flowed smoothly at this point. But what was the legacy of Mesopotamia and Egypt for later civilizations in or near their centers?

Europeans, even North Americans, are sometimes prone to claim these cultures as the "origins" of the Western civilization in which we live. These claims should not be taken too literally. It is
The Idea of Civilization in World Historical Perspective

The belief that there are fundamental differences between civilized and “barbaric” or “savage” peoples is very ancient and widespread. For thousands of years the Chinese set themselves off from cattle- and sheep-herding peoples of the vast plains to the north and west of China proper, whom they saw as barbarians. To the Chinese, being civilized was cultural, not biological or racial. If barbarians learned the Chinese language and adopted Chinese ways—from the clothes they wore to the food they ate—they were regarded as civilized.

A similar pattern of demarcation and cultural absorption was found among the American Indian peoples of present-day Mexico. Those who settled in the valleys of the mountainous interior, where they built great civilizations, lived in fear of invasions by peoples they regarded as barbarous and called Chichimecs, meaning “sons of the dog.” The latter were nomadic hunters and gatherers who periodically moved down from the desert regions of north Mexico into the fertile central valleys in search of game and settlements to pillage. The Aztecs were simply the last, and perhaps the fiercest, of a long line of Chichimec peoples who entered the valleys and confronted the urban-based empires that had developed there. But after the conquerors settled down, they adopted many of the religious beliefs and institutional patterns and much of the material culture of defeated peoples.

The word civilization is derived from the Latin word civilis, meaning “of the citizens.” The term was coined by the Romans. They used it to distinguish between themselves as citizens of a cosmopolitan, urban-based civilization and the “inferior” peoples who lived in the forests and deserts on the fringes of their Mediterranean empire.

Centuries earlier, the Greeks, who had contributed much to the rise of Roman civilization, made a similar distinction between themselves and outsiders. Because the languages of the non-Greek peoples to the north of the Greek heartlands sounded like senseless babble to the Greeks, they lumped all the outsiders together as barbarians, which meant “those who cannot speak Greek.” As in the case of the Chinese and Aztecs, the boundaries between civilized and barbarian for the Greeks and Romans were cultural, not biological.

Until the 17th and 18th centuries C.E., the priority given to cultural attributes (e.g., language, dress, manners) as the means by which civilized peoples set themselves off from barbaric ones was rarely challenged. But in those centuries, a major change occurred among thinkers in western Europe. Efforts were made not only to define the differences between civilized and barbarian but to identify a series of stages in human development that ranged from the lowest savagery to the highest civilization. Depending on the writer in question, candidates for civilization ranged from Greece and Rome to (not surprisingly) Europe of the 17th and 18th centuries. Most of the other peoples of the globe, whose “discovery” since the 15th century had prompted the efforts to classify them in the first place, were ranked in increasingly complex hierarchies. Nomadic cattle- and sheep-herding peoples, such as the Mongols of central Asia, usually were classified as barbarians. In the 19th century, racial differences were added to the hierarchy, with white people seen as having evolved the most advanced civilizations.

The second major shift in Western ideas about civilization began at the end of the 18th century but did not really take hold until a century later. In keeping with a growing emphasis in European thinking and social interaction on racial or biological differences, modes of human social organization and cultural expression...
were increasingly linked to what were alleged to be the innate capacities of each human race. Although no one could agree on what a race was or how many races there were, most European writers argued that some races were more inventive, moral, courageous, and artistic—thus more capable of building civilizations—than others. Of course, white (or Caucasian) Europeans were considered by white European authors to be the most capable of all. The hierarchy from savage to civilized took on a color dimension, with white at the top, where the civilized peoples clustered, to yellow, red, brown, and black in descending order.

Some authors sought to reserve all the attainments of civilization for whites, or peoples of European stock. As the evolutionary theories of thinkers such as Charles Darwin came into vogue in the late 1800s, race and level of cultural development were seen in the perspective of thousands of years of human change and adaptation rather than as being fixed in time. Nevertheless, this new perspective had little effect on the rankings of different human groups. Civilized whites were simply seen as having evolved much further than backward and barbaric peoples.

The perceived correspondence between race and level of development and the hardening of the boundaries between civilized and "inferior" peoples affected much more than intellectual discourse about the nature and history of human society. These beliefs were used to justify European imperialist expansion, which was seen as a "civilizing mission" aimed at uplifting barbaric and savage peoples across the globe. In the last half of the 19th century, virtually all non-Western peoples came to be dominated by the Europeans, who were confident that they, as representatives of the highest civilization ever created, were best equipped to govern lesser breeds of humans.

In the 20th century, much of the intellectual baggage that once gave credibility to the racially embedded hierarchies of civilized and savage peoples was discarded. Racist thinking was discredited by 20th-century developments, including the revolt of the colonized peoples and the crimes committed by the Nazis before and during World War II in the name of racial purification. In addition, these ideas have failed because racial supremacists cannot provide convincing proof of innate differences in mental and physical aptitude between various human groups. These trends, as well as research that has resulted in a much more sophisticated understanding of evolution, have led to the abandonment of rigid and self-serving 19th-century ideas about civilization. Yet even though non-European peoples such as the Indians and Chinese are increasingly given credit for their civilized attainments, much ethnocentrism remains in the ways social theorists determine who is civilized and who is not.

Perhaps the best way to avoid the tendency to define the term with reference to one's own society is to view civilization as one of several human approaches to social organization rather than attempting to identify specific kinds of cultural achievement (e.g., writing, cities, monumental architecture). All peoples, from small bands of hunters and gatherers to farmers and factory workers, live in societies. All societies produce cultures: combinations of the ideas, objects, and patterns of behavior that result from human social interaction. But not all societies and cultures generate the surplus production that permits the levels of specialization, scale, and complexity that distinguish civilizations from other modes of social organization. All peoples are intrinsically capable of building civilizations, but many have lacked the resource base, historical circumstances, or desire to do so.

**QUESTIONS** Identify a society you consider civilized. What criteria did you use to determine that it was civilized? Can you apply those criteria to other societies? Can you think of a society that might not fit your criteria and yet be considered civilized? What standards that you and others use reflect your own cultural, economic, and political values, rather than universal criteria?

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**New Societies in the Middle East**

There was a final connection between early and later civilizations in the form of regional cultures that sprang up under the influence of Mesopotamia and Egypt, along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean mainly after 1200 B.C.E. Although the great empires from Sumer through Babylon were disrupted and the Egyptian state finally declined, civilization in the Middle East had spread widely enough to encourage a set of smaller cultures capable of surviving and even flourishing after the great empires became weak. These cultures produced important innovations that would affect later civilizations in the Middle East and throughout the Mediterranean. They also created a diverse array of regional identities that would continue to mark the Middle East even as other forces, like the Roman Empire or the later religion of Islam, took center stage. Several of these small cultures proved immensely durable, and in their complexity and capacity to survive, they would influence other parts of the world as well.

A people called the Phoenicians, for example, devised a greatly simplified alphabet with 22 letters around 1300 B.C.E.; this alphabet, in turn, became the predecessor of Greek and Latin alphabets. The Phoenicians also improved the Egyptian numbering system and, as great traders, set up colony cities in north Africa and on the coasts of Europe. Another regional group, the Lydians, first introduced coined money.

**Phoenicians** Seafaring civilization located on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean; established colonies throughout the Mediterranean.
Judaism

The most influential of the smaller Middle Eastern groups, however, were the Jews, who gave the world the first clearly developed monotheistic religion. We have seen that early religions, both before and after the beginnings of civilization, were polytheistic, claiming that many gods and goddesses worked to control nature and human destiny. The Jews, a Semitic people influenced by Babylonian civilization, settled near the Mediterranean around 1200 B.C.E. The Jewish state was small and relatively weak, retaining independence only when other parts of the Middle East were in political turmoil. What was distinctive about this culture was its firm belief that a single God guided the destinies of the Jewish people. Priests and prophets defined and emphasized this belief; and their history of God's guidance of the Jews formed the basis for the Hebrew Bible. The Jewish religion and moral code persisted even as the Jewish state suffered domination by a series of foreign rulers, from 772 B.C.E. until the Romans seized the state outright in 63 B.C.E. Jewish monotheism has sustained a distinctive Jewish culture to our own day; it would also serve as a key basis for the development of both Christianity and Islam as major world religions.

Because Judaism stressed God's special compact with the chosen Jewish people, there was no premium placed on converting non-Jews. This belief helps explain the durability of the Jewish faith itself; it also kept the Jewish people in a minority position in the Middle East as a whole. However, the elaboration of monotheism had a wide, if not immediate, significance. In Jewish hands, the concept of God became less humanlike, more abstract. This represented a basic change in not only religion but also humankind's overall outlook. God had not only a power but also a rationality far different from what the traditional gods of the Middle East or Egypt possessed. These gods were whimsical and capricious; the Jewish God was orderly and just, and individuals would know what to expect if they obeyed God's rules. God was also linked to ethical conduct, to proper moral behavior. Religion for the Jews was a way of life, not merely a set of rituals and ceremonies. The full impact of this religious transformation on Middle Eastern civilization would be realized only later, when Jewish beliefs were embraced by other, proselytizing faiths. However, the basic concept of monotheistic religion was one of the legacies of the end of the first great civilization period to the new cultures that would soon arise.

Assessing the Early Civilization Period

Overall, the river valley civilizations, flourishing for many centuries, created a basic set of tools, intellectual concepts such as writing and mathematics, and political forms that would persist and spread to other parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Invasion and natural calamities in India, and invasion and political decline in Egypt, marked a fairly firm break between the institutions of these river valley civilizations and those that would later develop. Huang he civilization, in contrast, flowed more fully into the more extensive Chinese civilization that would follow. The Middle East, where civilization had first been born, provided the most complex heritage of all. Here too there was a break between the initial series of riverine empires and the civilizations of Greece and Persia that would later dominate the region. However, the development of smaller cultures, such as that of the Jews, provided a bridge between the river valley period and later Middle Eastern society, producing vital new inventions and ideas. The smaller cultures also generated a deeply entrenched network of regional or minority values and institutions that would continue to make the Middle East a complex, vibrant, and sometimes troubled part of the world.

One final result of the first, long period of human civilization is certainly clear: a pattern of division among the world's peoples. The diffusion of Homo sapiens sapiens set the initial stage. Small groups of people spread to almost every corner of the world but maintained little contact with each other thereafter. Separate languages and cultures developed widely. The rise of agriculture stimulated new links, and the spread of farming and new technologies began to cut into local isolation. Trade soon entered the picture. Although most commerce centered within a region, linking a city to its hinterland, a few routes traveled greater distances. By 1000 B.C.E., Phoenicians traded with Britain for metals (they bought lead to make bronze), while Chinese silk was reaching Egypt. Here we have one of the basic themes of world history: steadily proliferating contacts against a background of often fierce local identity.

The rise of civilization further reduced local autonomy, as kings and priests tried to spread trade contacts and cultural forms and worried to gain new territory. Civilization itself was an inte-
grating force at a larger regional level, although, as we have seen in the Middle East, smaller identities persisted. However, individual civilizations had only sporadic contacts with each other. They, and their leading institutions and cultural forms, developed separately. Thus, four distinct centers of civilization developed (five, if the emerging Olmec culture in Mexico is included), each with widely varied patterns, from style of writing to beliefs about nature.

The early civilizations shared important features, including cities, trade, and writing, that helped them meet the common basic definition of civilization in the first place. They also frequently developed some mutual relationships, although the Huang he culture in China is one example of a civilization that flourished in relative isolation. Egypt and Mesopotamia, in particular, had recurrent contacts through trade and war. But the values or belief systems of each civilization, and their manifestation in political and business styles, were not so easily disseminated. Even relatively close neighbors, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, developed radically different political attitudes, beliefs about death, and artistic styles. Civilization and considerable diversity thus coexisted hand in hand.

Global Connections
The Early Civilizations and the World

Mesopotamia and Egypt presented two different approaches to relationships outside the home region. Mesopotamia was flat, with few natural barriers to recurrent invasion from the north. Perhaps for this reason, Mesopotamian leaders thought in terms of expansion. Many conquering emperors expanded their territory, though within the Middle East. Many traders pushed outward, dealing either with merchants to the east or sending expeditions into the Mediterranean and beyond, and also to India. The Middle East’s role as active agent in wider contact was clearly being established.

Egypt, though not isolated, was more self-contained. There was important trade and interaction along the Nile to the south, which brought mutual influences with the peoples of Kush and Ethiopia. Trade and influence also linked Egypt to Mediterranean islands like Crete, south of Greece. A few interactions, finally, occurred with Mesopotamia. But most Egyptians, including the leaders, thought of Egypt as its own world. There was less need or desire to learn of wider horizons. Correspondingly, ancient Egypt played less of a role as intermediary among regions than did Mesopotamia.

River valley civilization in China had fewer far-reaching contacts than its counterpart in Mesopotamia. Ultimately, however, contacts with China would shape developments in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Already in the river valley period, the Chinese were advancing new technologies, for example in the manufacture of silk, which would have wide influence on later interregional trade. Chinese irrigation systems became increasingly sophisticated, involving engineering principles that would gain wider scope later on.

Harappan society traded widely with Mesopotamia, but there is little evidence of significant influence. The decline of Harappan civilization also limited the civilization’s impact on later developments in world history. Harappan civilization proved much more vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change, particularly in contrast to China. Comparison of the early civilizations thus emphasizes quite different patterns of scope and legacy.

Further Readings

World historians have been drawn to Ronald Wright’s A Short History of Progress (2004), which attempts to show how even the most recent of humanity’s struggles can be better understood by examining its origins and early history. Perhaps the fullest account of human prehistory available is Brian Fagan’s People of the Earth (1998), which includes an extensive bibliography on prehistoric developments in virtually all regions of the world. A considerable literature has developed in recent years on early humans and the critical Neolithic transformations. John Mears’s pamphlet on Agricultural Origins in Global Perspective (American Historical Association, 2000) provides a concise and authoritative survey of this process in key regions over much of the globe. For other broad overviews that trace the archeological and historical discoveries that made it possible for us to understand these critical processes in the shaping of human history, see Robert J. Wenke’s Patterns in Prehistory (1984) and C. Wesley Cowan and Patty Jo Watson, eds., The Origins of Agriculture: An International Perspective (1992).

For a clear discussion of debates on the Neolithic revolution and references to major authors and works, see Stephen K. Sanderson, Social Transformations (1995). Several of these works are of special relevance, despite their sometimes technical language and details, especially Donald O. Henry’s From Foraging to Agriculture (1989), Douglas Price and James A. Brown, eds., Prehistoric Hunter-Gatherers: The Emergence of Cultural Complexity (1986), and Allen W. Johnson and Timothy Earle, The Evolution of Human Societies: From Foraging to Agriculture (1987).

On the Web

A virtual tour of the social life of early humans in the Americas, including weaving and toolmaking can be taken at http://pecosrio.com/. The dramatic findings at Olдуvai Gorge made by the Leakey family that revolutionized knowledge about human prehistory can be viewed at http://www.talkorigins.org/. Views of Chauvet, rich in cave paintings, can be found at http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/arcnat/chauvet/en/. A virtual walk through an exhibit on human prehistory is offered at http://users.hol.gr/~dilos/prehis/prerm5.htm includes a gallery of art and artifacts, and an artist's reconstruction of Çatal Hüyük. Çatal Hüyük is served by an exciting interactive site at http://okapi.dreamhosters.com/remixing/mainpage.html.

It is possible to make a virtual visit to the Mesopotamian city of Ur at http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/archaeology/sites/middle_east/ur.html and also the city of Nippur at http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/projects/nip/nsc.html.


1. The transformation that was most responsible for initially moving humans toward civilization was the
   (A) introduction of the use of iron.
   (B) growth of towns and cities.
   (C) rise of agriculture.
   (D) rise of specialized classes.

2. The emergence of sedentary agriculture
   (A) occurred simultaneously in various places and spread around the world.
   (B) began only in the savannas of West Africa.
   (C) started in the Middle East first but developed independently in other areas.
   (D) arose in the river valleys of the Huang he and Yangtze.

3. Cuneiform and other types of writing are important in part because they
   (A) help organize elaborate political structures.
   (B) normally reduce social stratification.
   (C) can compel leaders to follow written guidelines of behavior.
   (D) hinder economic development in certain circumstances.

4. Which of the following is NOT a feature of Sumerian civilization?
   (A) a simplified alphabet of 22 letters.
   (B) ziggurats.
   (C) cuneiform.
   (D) a numeric system based on 10, 60, and 360.

5. Unlike Sumer and Egypt, the Indus Valley or Harappan civilization
   (A) became a geographic center for a unified, continuous culture lasting millennia.
   (B) is particularly difficult to study because its writing has not been deciphered.
   (C) was secure from nomadic incursions and invasions.
   (D) never developed a military social class.

6. Compared to river valley cultures in Egypt and Mesopotamia, Chinese civilization
   (A) probably developed after civilizations in the Nile Valley and Mesopotamia.
   (B) predates the rise of civilization in both Egypt and Mesopotamia.
   (C) developed simultaneously with Egypt and Mesopotamia.
   (D) did not rely on heavy irrigation as year-round water was plentiful.

7. Stone tools, hunting and gathering, and an increasing number of Homo sapiens sapiens are features of the
   (A) Late Paleolithic Age.
   (B) Bronze Age.
   (C) Early Copper Age.
   (D) River valley civilizations.

Free-Response Question
To what extent was the Neolithic revolution responsible for the development of early civilizations? What are the problems in positing a direct connection?
PART I

Retrospective

From Hunting and Gathering to Civilizations, 2.5 million–1000 B.C.E.: Origins

Contacts and Their Limits

No regular pattern of contacts among the major population centers developed during the long early phases of human history. Even at the end of the period of the river valley civilizations, no such pattern existed. To be sure, separate developments did not prevent many similar features. In broad outline, early civilizations developed many of the same functions, as they introduced formal governments, writing systems, and significant cities. Agriculture generated similar tendencies to establish patriarchal family structures, but these similarities occurred spontaneously, the result of similar needs, not because they learned extensively from one another. And of course the specifics varied considerably—the system of government and the gender relations in Egypt, for example, differed from those in Mesopotamia.

Three kinds of contacts did exist during the early phases of human history. Their results were significant, though they were somewhat sporadic. First, local or long-distance trade could bring knowledge of new developments or products. People in one region could learn about innovations in the region next door. Local exchanges of products or symbolic gifts—the latter designed to help keep the peace—served as conduits. Through this kind of interaction, diffusion occurred. This was the mechanism through which knowledge of agriculture gradually spread from the areas where it was first developed to neighboring regions, and ultimately over whole subcontinents. Knowledge of new technologies, like metalwork, spread the same way. So did knowledge of new foodstuffs: some crops original to southeast Asia, for example, reached Africa by 1000 C.E. and became staples.

This kind of diffusion was the most important contact in early human history. We do not always know the precise processes involved. For example, an Indian Ocean trade system existed by 1000 C.E., involving timber and perfumes; this led to a southeast Asian migration to the island of Madagascar. But we know almost nothing about the specifics of the system. It is also true that some trade contacts, like the Phoenician voyages to southern England to get tin, did not seem to produce wider diffusion of products or technologies.

A second kind of contact resulted from migration and invasion. We have seen that this combination occurred frequently in the Middle East, leading to changes in language but also the spread of new technologies. The wheel was almost certainly invented in central Asia, then brought by a migrant group to the Middle East. Migrations and invasions could be extremely disruptive, as when the Indo-Europeans moved into India, doing great violence to local populations. But they could also bring new knowledge to immigrants and local populations alike.

A third kind of contact involved direct trade, diplomatic relations, and military activity between two major early civilization centers. While Mesopotamia and Egypt developed separately for the most part, there were periods of invasion from one direction or another, some trade, and some cultural exchange. Tablets have been found, for example, whose text was written in
both cuneiform and hieroglyphics, showing a need for direct translations. Egyptians and Mesopotamians both interacted with parts of Greece, including the island of Crete, which was therefore able to borrow from both societies. Some trade (though no military contact) probably occurred between Mesopotamia and the Indus valley. Early civilizations in China and the Americas were more fully isolated.

Contacts brought fundamental changes to the people involved, even in these early periods. Diffusion, particularly, was responsible for basic shifts in economic and therefore social systems. Most contact was sporadic, however, and did not lead to elaborate exchanges of religious or scientific ideas or political institutions. Here, the emphasis on separate patterns of development remains valid.
The major development during the classical period of world history was the formation of large regional civilizations in China, India, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, East Africa, and Mesoamerica. These developments can be seen in the accompanying maps. The map on the top depicts the Eastern Hemisphere early in the classical period (around 800 B.C.E.); the map on the bottom shows the same area around 100 C.E. In China and the Mediterranean, what had been a set of small states—or no states at all—had been replaced by two giant empires. India also developed substantial empires at several key points in the classical centuries.

Although much of the world remained outside the main areas of civilization, these areas had by far the largest concentration of population. Furthermore, the influence of these civilizations extended into surrounding regions outside their direct control. Classical civilizations also had important relationships with nomadic groups, mostly from central Asia, who traded with them and periodically attempted invasion. Nevertheless, regions outside the world's main civilizational areas require some separate attention during this long period.

Except for brief interludes, the main civilizations did not share direct borders. Much of the development of each civilization was separate, and the establishment of distinctive cultural and institutional patterns was a key legacy of this period. Nevertheless, trade offered some contacts, as products like silk were carried from east Asia to the Mediterranean. Occasionally interaction was more direct. The conquests of the Greek-trained warrior Alexander the Great resulted in the creation of a short-lived empire that stretched from the Mediterranean into northwestern India. This empire brought into direct contact Mediterranean, cultural Asian, Middle-Eastern, and Indian societies, an encounter that yielded interesting results, some of which are clearly evident in art of the period. For example, a statue sculpted by an Indian artist depicts the beloved Buddha clothed in Greek fashions. This combination of cultural elements, called syncretism, is a common result of significant contact between cultures. It can have lasting implications. Syncretism was not the most common feature of the classical period, but its occurrence hinted at what would develop more fully later.
Political Units of the World, c. 800–750 B.C.E.

Political Units of the World, c. 1–100 C.E.
BIG CONCEPTS

The formation of the classical societies involved two striking features. First was the emergence and standardization (within each society) of key cultural and religious traditions and second, in the political real, was the development of state and empires—again, with each society producing some characteristic political forms within this category. Finally, as the period's third overarching feature, the contacts that did develop among different regions spurred trade and, to some degree, communication. All three of these features would affect world history long after the classical period had itself ended.

TRIGGERS FOR CHANGE

Despite the lack of a clear transition, the classical civilizations that began to emerge about 1000 B.C.E. were measurably different from their river valley predecessors. While they built on the earlier achievements, they grew noticeably larger in their geographic, cultural, economic, and political reach.

What allowed this greater reach was military conquest, made possible by the introduction of iron tools and weapons, beginning about 1500 B.C.E.

As larger empires developed, leaders worked to tie their territories together both commercially and culturally. New trade links emerged, sometimes encouraged by new infrastructure such as canals (China) or postal service (Persia). Religion and philosophy were formalized and disseminated as part of training a cohesive elite. New conquests, possible in part because of technological change, led to further developments intended to integrate larger regions.

Each of the classical societies ultimately declined, and great empires like the Han dynasty in China, the Gupta in India, and the western Roman Empire collapsed altogether. Though these developments did not happen at exactly the same time, together they brought the classical period to a close by 500 C.E.

THE BIG CHANGES

Each of the classical civilizations had its own social structure, religion, political system, system of science, and styles of art. Comparisons of these differences, which have continued to the present day, form a vital part of studying the classical period. To take one example: in the late 20th century the Chinese government proved reasonably effective in mandating drastic changes in birth rates. The Indian government tried and failed to enforce somewhat similar regulations. Many factors accounted for China's success and India's failure in enforcing a population policy, but an important one was the extent to which people in each country accepted as legitimate government monitoring of personal behavior. These differences in attitude can be traced back to the classical period. The civilization styles

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<tr>
<th>5000 B.C.E.</th>
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<td>5000 Early Japanese Settlement</td>
<td>2000 Germans settle in Denmark</td>
<td>1000 Germans expand southward</td>
<td>750-600 Mesopotamia ruled Egypt</td>
<td>500-449 Greek wars with Persia; Persia defeated</td>
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<td>1200-700 Vedas composed</td>
<td>900 Maya begins</td>
<td>600 Zoroastrian religion in Iran</td>
<td>500-450 Beginnings of Roman republic</td>
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<td>1500-500 Polynesian migrations</td>
<td>850-250 Chavin culture (Andes)</td>
<td>600 Legendary ruler in Japan</td>
<td>470-430 Height of Athenian culture; Socrates and Greek philosophical style</td>
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<td>800 B.C.E.-1000 C.E. Bantu migration, sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>550 Formation of Persian Empire</td>
<td>330 Alexander the Great</td>
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<td>770-403 Later Zhou kingdom; beginning of China's classical period</td>
<td>C. 542-483 Buddha</td>
<td>327-325 Alexander's invasion</td>
<td>322-185 Mauryan Empire</td>
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<td>300-300 Hellénistic Period</td>
<td>300 B.C.E.-300 B.C. Heights of Maya</td>
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<td>264-140 Roman expansion in North Africa (Punic Wars) and eastern Mediterranean</td>
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set in the classical period hardly predetermined the future, but they had, and have, undeniable influence.

The first major change, then, was the establishment of cultures that developed over time during the classical period and left durable legacies. All of the major civilizations set up vigorous internal trade that allowed considerable regional specialization—each region within a civilization produced the crops most suitable to its ecology and traded for other necessities.

Each major civilization promoted a common cultural system that would legitimate characteristic social and family customs, integrate elites, and provide bonds between ordinary people and leadership groups. This system might involve more than one component. For example, there was outright, though usually peaceful, competition between Buddhism and Hinduism in India. But the generation of powerful beliefs and their spread within each civilization was an important development in the classical period, and one that had lasting impact.

Each major civilization, at least periodically, conquered other peoples and areas and created large empires. Although empires were not new in world history, those of the classical period in world history were more powerful and widespread than any precedent.

The growth of the classical civilizations, with their impressive achievements and monuments, clearly had an impact on surrounding peoples. Some trade with neighboring regions was common. India had the widest commercial reach, extending all the way into southeast Asia, but Rome also traded with parts of Africa and Asia outside its own empire. Even more widely, nomadic peoples were often attracted toward the centers of civilization as immigrants, soldiers, or invaders. Some nomadic peoples facilitated trade between civilizations. These developments were important at the time and had implications for later patterns in world history. For example, cultural and trade contacts often prepared the way for later nomadic migrations into the classical societies.

The achievements of the major classical civilizations inspired awe, at the time and later. Great developments in philosophy, politics, and art in classical civilizations provided the foundations for subsequent civilizations. Confucianism, for example, would influence other Asian societies besides China, and a number of societies would build on the achievements of Greek science. It is for this reason that the term classical is commonly used to refer to this period.

**CONTINUITY**

While the introduction of iron helped usher in the classical period, the period itself did not witness sweeping technological developments. Most peasants continued to use traditional agricultural tools and methods. Similarly, except for the improved road systems introduced by more powerful governments,
there were no great advances in transportation during this period. Rural culture remained somewhat apart from classical culture, particularly in China and the Mediterranean. Many rural people retained their traditional festivals and polytheistic religious beliefs alongside official religions and philosophies.

Patriarchal culture prevailed in each of the major civilizations of the classical period. Each culture had particular ways of defining women’s roles and obligations. Comparisons among the classical civilizations are important in this area, for different styles of patriarchy would affect family life and even art, but the basic idea of patriarchal superiority had already been established. The civilizations simply related a patriarchal system to the particular cultures they developed and emphasized.

Finally, though the classical civilizations all introduced significant innovations beyond their river valley predecessors, they also retained and built on key achievements of the earlier societies. They did not have to reinvent money, the idea of codes of law, or scientific interests such as astronomy. While the classical civilizations left a heritage that shaped future developments, they also drew upon a heritage established in earlier periods.

IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE: OLD AGE

In all the classical civilizations, the achievement of old age won respect. It was seen, legitimately enough, as a sign of good habits and wisdom. Furthermore, in groups where literacy was uncommon, the elderly could be vital sources of information and cultural memory—the kinds of stories that help shape the identity of families and cultures. Respect for the elderly was a sign of good manners in all the classical societies.

But the classical civilizations also differed in their attitudes toward the elderly. Chinese Confucianism placed particular emphasis on venerating the elderly. Even older women, if they were mothers (and especially if they were widows and mothers of sons) had clear status, although officially their sons ran the household.

In Mediterranean cultures, there was greater ambivalence concerning older people. The themes of
wisdom and respect were visible (though they applied much more clearly to men than to women). But the elderly also were depicted as both greedy and laughable as their capacities declined. Stories made fun of old misers or men who lusted after younger women. In the Mediterranean, more attention was paid to the physical and mental deterioration of older people, and while this sometimes produced sympathy, it could also generate scorn. The Greek dramatist Aeschylus wrote about people "old in their bones, dishonored, cut off," and the Bible offered many accounts of enfeebled, foolish elders. Societies that placed great emphasis on military prowess and youthful beauty could be harsh to people past their prime, and in the Mediterranean, there was no systematic set of beliefs, like Confucianism, to cut through these contradictions.

Did these cultural differences matter in the actual way older people were treated? Here, the evidence is sketchier; we know much more about classical value systems than about the details of daily life. What is clear is that this ambivalence toward the elderly had staying power. Even today, many argue, ambivalence about older people that goes back to Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews affects policy and outlook in the West, while in contrast, some East Asian systems write respect for the elderly into their constitutions.

TRENDS AND SOCIETIES

Initial chapters in this section describe developments in each of the major civilizations during the classical period, starting with China in Chapter 2 and India in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 returns to the Mediterranean, to take up the history of Greece and Rome. Chapter 5 returns to the main classical centers, dealing with patterns of decline and with concurrent religious innovations, including the rise of Christianity. The story of the decline of each civilization was distinct, but the overall pattern of change had some important common features.
Late in the 6th century B.C.E., a brilliant middle-aged scholar-philosopher applied for a high post in the bureaucracy of the small kingdom of Lu in northeast China. Perhaps because Kongzi—or Confucius as he came to be known centuries later in the West—was widely reputed to be an opinionated and outspoken person, he was denied the position for which he was confident he was well qualified. Angered by this rebuff, Confucius left Lu and took to the road in search of the ideal ruler, who presumably would recognize his talents and offer him employment at a suitable level of distinction at his court.

The China of Confucius’s day offered abundant options for a talented political advisor. The declining power of the Zhou kingdom, which had for centuries dominated early Chinese civilization along the Yellow River, opened the way for the rise of a patchwork of rival states. Many of these competing states were ruled by nomadic peoples who had migrated from the north or west. Wars between these upstart forces and the lords of long-established households with imperial pretensions were frequent, sanitation was widespread, commerce was threatened, and displaced peasants and warrior bands wandered throughout the countryside. The monarchs of some nomad kingdoms had extensively adopted the distinct culture that had been developing in the Huanghe region since the age of the Shang warrior kings. Nonetheless, Confucius and others in the emerging scholar-gentry—or shi—social strata continued to regard most of the nomads as uncouth, warlike barbarians. Convinced that he was a man with a mission, Confucius undertook a lifelong quest to become chief advisor to a ruler who possessed the vision and skills to restore centralized control, peace, and order.

One among many wandering scholars in the late Zhou era, Confucius attracted numerous disciples, some of whom became distinguished philosophers in their own right. The master’s students preserved, spread, and debated his teachings, and after his death in the early 5th century B.C.E., they compiled his wisdom in what would come to be known as the Analects, or collected sayings; hence, “Confucius says.”

Over time, Confucius’s political and social philosophy became foundational for one of humanity’s greatest and most enduring civilizations. In view of the turmoil in China when Confucian teachings were formulated, it is not surprising that they idealized strong rulers and the consolidation of political power. Confucius advocated rule by a highly educated, exclusively male elite, but one that was deemed responsible for the well-being of all of the subjects of the state. Primarily an ethical rather than a religious system, Confucianism sought to establish norms for all aspects of Chinese life, from relationships within the family that stressed respect for one’s elders to manners for rulers and subjects. Confucianism also highlighted the importance of art, music, and elegant calligraphy in the cultivation of the scholar-bureaucrats.

Measured in terms of the acquisition of wealth and power, Confucius was a failure. He never found his ideal monarch, or even a suitable post at any of the numerous royal households that jostled for dominance across China. In fact, in the centuries following his death—often appropriately designated as the era of the warring states—political and social disintegration intensified. But the students and disciples of Confucius found a large and enthusiastic audience for his teachings in these troubled times.
This chapter focuses on the conditions that gave rise to Confucianism as well as the teachings of rival philosophical systems, such as Legalism, Daoism, and Buddhism. As we shall see, even as late as the end of the 3rd century B.C.E., when Chinese political unity was again restored by the warrior strongman Shi Huangdi's kingdom of Qin, Confucian social norms and political prescriptions were eclipsed by more authoritarian alternatives. But with the rise of the Han dynasty after 207 B.C.E., the teachings of Confucius and several of his more prominent followers came to provide the ideological underpinnings of both the Chinese state and society. In subsequent dynasties, the influence of Confucianism waxed and waned, but even after its alleged extinction in the crisis-ridden decades of the 20th century, it has persisted as a major cultural force to the present day. Confucianism has also exerted a pervasive and enduring influence on other societies throughout Asia, from Japan and Korea through central Asia and southward into present-day Vietnam. China's Confucian ideals, scholar-gentry bureaucracy, technological advancements, and prosperous agrarian state captivated major thinkers in Europe and the United States—from Jesuit missionaries to Thomas Jefferson.

Establishment of Political Order

The Zhou dynasty's ability to control its vassals broke down in the 8th century B.C.E. and led to a long period of political conflict and social turmoil throughout China. Political structures developed in key phases, with cultural traditions contributing as well. In both the Yellow and the Yangzi river basins, many states rose and fell, each seeking to replace the Zhou as the paramount power in east Asia. Chinese expansions to the south and west created periodic instability as local peoples tried to defend themselves. Internal conflicts left China vulnerable to outside invaders, and between the 8th and 3rd centuries B.C.E., nomadic peoples often raided the farming areas of the north China plain. Many of the nomads settled down and eventually assimilated the distinct culture that had been developing in the region since the age of the Shang warrior kings. Some of these invaders captured existing states; others established new dynasties that further intensified the already complex political maneuvers and wars for supremacy.
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<th>0 B.C.E.</th>
<th>500 B.C.E.</th>
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<td>1029–258 Zhou dynasty; introduction of a standard spoken language</td>
<td>c. 500 Laozi and Daoism</td>
<td>c. 221–202 Qin dynasty: the First Emperor, the Great Wall begins, a single basic language</td>
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<td>551–478 Life of Confucius</td>
<td>c. 800 Editing of the Five Classics</td>
<td>220 B.C.E.–220 C.E. Han dynasty:</td>
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<td>c. 450 Development of Chinese calendar</td>
<td>c. 200 Introduction of ox-drawn plow, horse collar, water mill</td>
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<td>402–201 Era of the Warring States</td>
<td>141–87 Reign of Han Wu Ti, increased bureaucracy; examinations, spread of Confucianism</td>
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The yearning for unity and an end to civil strife appeared to be answered in the 3rd century B.C.E. by the emergence of the warrior strongman Shi Huangdi (shihuh-hwahng-dee). By 221 B.C.E., Shi Huangdi's state of Qin (chin) had vanquished all its rivals, and he founded a new imperial dynasty that promised to bring an end to the centuries of strife. But Shi Huangdi proved to be a tyrant. His death in 210 B.C.E. was the signal for resistance throughout the empire to the rule of his less despotic and less capable son and his inner circle of advisors. A rapidly spreading revolt, led by two peasants, toppled the Qin dynasty in 207 B.C.E. and gave rise to its much longer-lived successor, the Han.

The Han era, which lasted, with a brief interruption, for more than 400 years, saw the consoliation of Chinese civilization. Unity was established in the old core regions, and Chinese political control was greatly extended in all directions. Perhaps more critically, the Han rulers founded the largest, most effective, and most enduring bureaucracy in the preindustrial world. They oversaw the development of the first civil service examinations and the professionalization of Chinese administration. These institutions helped build a sense of Chinese distinctiveness and identity that was reflected in later centuries by Chinese references to themselves as the "sons of Han." This identity proved critical to the survival of Chinese civilization in the centuries of war, foreign invasion, and internal division that returned when the Han dynasty collapsed in the early 3rd century C.E.

Cultural Traditions

China generated the first of the great classical societies. The region's isolation limited its ability to learn from other cultures but also spared it frequent invasion and encouraged an intense, and distinctive, Chinese identity. The decline of the Shang dynasty did not result in as much internal chaos as did invasions of parts of the Middle East and particularly India. Hence, the Chinese could build more strongly on Huang he precedents, including technological advancements. Particularly important was a general, if somewhat vague, worldview developed by thinkers in the Shang and Zhou dynasties and accepted as a standard approach in later Chinese thinking. This intellectual heritage stressed the basic harmony of nature: every feature is balanced by an opposite, every yin by a yang. Thus for hot there is cold, for male female. According to this philosophy, an individual should seek a way to relate to this harmony, avoiding excess and appreciating the balance of opposites. Individuals and human institutions existed within this world of balanced nature not, as in later Mediterranean philosophy, on the outside. Chinese traditions about balance, Dao, and yin-yang were intrinsic to diverse philosophies and religions established in the classical period, and they provided some unity among various schools of thought in China.

Despite important cultural continuity, classical China did not simply maintain earlier traditions. The formative centuries of classical Chinese history were witness to a great many changes. The religious and particularly the political habits of the Shang kingdom were substantially modified as China built the world's largest classical empire. These new developments led to much diversity, but also to often painful conflict. From them, the Chinese emerged with an unusually well integrated system in which government, philosophy, economic incentives, the family, and the individual were intended to blend into a harmonious whole.

Patterns in Classical China

Of all the societies in the world today, it is China that has maintained the clearest links to its classical past—a past that has been a source of pride but also the cause of some problems of adaptation. Already in the period of classical Chinese history, a pattern was set in motion that lasted until the
early part of the 20th century. A family of kings, called a dynasty, would start its rule of China with great vigor, developing strong political institutions and encouraging an active economy. Subsequently, the dynasty grew weaker and tax revenues declined, while social divisions increased in the larger society. Internal rebellions and sometimes invasions from the outside hastened the dynasty's decline. As the ruling dynasty declined, another dynasty emerged, usually from the family of a successful general, invader, or peasant rebel, and the pattern would start anew. Small wonder that many Chinese conceive of history in terms of cycles, in contrast to the Western tendency to think of steady progress from past to present.

The Zhou Dynasty

Three dynastic cycles cover the many centuries of classical China: the Zhou, the Qin, and the Han (Map 2.1). The Zhou (joh) dynasty lasted from 1029 to 258 B.C.E. Although lengthy, this dynasty flourished only until about 700 B.C.E.; it was then beset by a decline in the political infrastructure and frequent invasions by nomadic peoples from border regions. Even during its strong centuries, the Zhou did not establish a powerful government, ruling instead through alliances with regional princes and noble families. The dynasty initially came into China from the north, displacing its predecessor, the Shang rulers. The alliance systems the Zhou used as the basis for their rule were standard in agricultural kingdoms. (We will see similar forms later emerge in Japan, India, Europe, and Africa.) Rulers lacked the means to control their territories directly and so gave large regional estates to members of their families and other supporters, hoping that their loyalties would remain intact. The supporters, in exchange for land, were supposed to provide the central government with troops and tax revenues. This was China's feudal period, with rulers depending on a network of loyalties and obligations to and from their landlord-vassals. Such a

Map 2.1 China from the Later Zhou Era to the Han Era. As this map showing the boundaries of successive Chinese dynasties illustrates the extent of the early Han empire greatly exceeded even that of the Qin dynasty, which was the first to effectively unify the core regions of Chinese civilization.
system was, of course, vulnerable to regional disloyalties, and the ultimate decline of the Zhou dynasty occurred when regional land-owning aristocrats solidified their own power base and disregarded the central government.

The Zhou did, however, contribute in several ways to the development of Chinese politics and culture in their active early centuries. First, they extended the territory of China by encouraging settlers to move into the Yangzi River valley. While the Zhou were too weak to take this territory over directly, the expanded settlement, from the Huang he to the Yangzi, became China’s core—often called the “Middle Kingdom.” It provided rich agricultural lands plus the benefits of two different agricultures—wheat-growing in the north, rice-growing in the south—a diversity that encouraged population growth. The territorial expansion obviously complicated the problems of central rule, for communication and transport from the capital to the outlying regions were difficult.

Despite limited control over key regions, the Zhou did actually heighten the focus on the central government. Zhou rulers claimed direct links to the Shang rulers. They also asserted that heaven had transferred its mandate to rule China to the Zhou emperors. This political concept of a Mandate of Heaven remained a key justification for Chinese imperial rule from the Zhou onward. Known as Sons of Heaven, the emperors lived in a world of awe-inspiring pomp and ceremony.

The Zhou worked to provide greater cultural unity in their empire. They discouraged some of the primitive religious practices of the Huang he civilization, banning human sacrifice and urging more restrained ceremonies to worship the gods. They also promoted linguistic unity, beginning the process by which a standard spoken language, ultimately called Mandarin Chinese, would prevail over the entire Middle Kingdom. This resulted in the largest single group of people speaking the same language in the world at this time. Regional dialects and languages remained, but educated officials began to rely on the single Mandarin form. Oral epics and stories in Chinese, many gradually recorded in written form, aided in the development of a common cultural currency.

Increasing cultural unity helps explain why, when the Zhou empire began to fail, scholars were able to use philosophical ideas to lessen the impact of growing political confusion. Indeed, the political crisis spurred efforts to define and articulate Chinese culture. During the late 6th and early 5th centuries B.C.E., the philosopher known in the West as Confucius wrote an elaborate statement on political ethics, providing the core of China’s distinctive philosophical heritage. Other writers and religious leaders participated in this great period of cultural creativity, which later reemerged as a set of central beliefs throughout the Middle Kingdom.

Cultural innovation did not, however, reverse the prolonged and painful Zhou downfall. Regional rulers formed independent armies, ultimately reducing the emperors to little more than figureheads. Between 402 and 201 B.C.E., a period known aptly enough as the Era of the Warring States, the Zhou system disintegrated.

The Qin Dynasty
At this point, China might have gone the way of civilizations such as India, where centralized government was more the exception than the rule. But a new dynasty arose to reverse the process of political decay. One regional ruler deposed the last Zhou emperor and within 35 years made himself sole ruler of China. The young warrior took the imperial title Qin Shi Huangdi, or “the tiger.” The dynastic name, Qin, conferred on the whole country its name of China. Shi Huangdi was a brutal ruler, but effective given the circumstances of internal disorder. He understood that China’s problem lay in the regional power of the aristocrats, and like many later centralizers in world history, he worked vigorously to undo this force. He ordered nobles to leave their regions and appear at his court, assuming control of their feudal estates. China was organized into large provinces ruled by bureaucrats appointed by the emperor. Shi Huangdi was careful to select his officials from nonaristocratic groups, so that they would owe their power to him and not dare to develop their own independent bases. Under Shi Huangdi’s rule, powerful armies crushed regional resistance.

The First Emperor followed up on centralization by extending Chinese territory and political control to the south, reaching present-day Hong Kong on the South China Sea and even influencing northern Vietnam. In the north, to guard against outside invasions and to protect his own expansionist drives. Shi Huangdi built the Great Wall, extending over 3000 miles, wide enough for chari-
ots to move along its crest. This wall, probably the largest construction project in human history, was built by forced labor, conscripted by the central bureaucracy from among the peasantry.

The Qin dynasty was responsible for a number of innovations in Chinese politics and culture. To determine the empire's resources, Shi Huangdi ordered a national census, which provided data for the calculation of tax revenues and labor service. The government standardized coinage, weights, and measures through the entire realm. Even the length of axles on carts was regulated to promote coherent road planning. The government also made Chinese written script uniform, completing the process of creating a single basic language in which all educated Chinese could communicate. The government furthered agriculture, sponsoring new irrigation projects, and promoted manufacturing, particularly that of silk cloth. The activist government also attacked formal culture, burning many books. Thinking, according to Shi Huangdi, was likely to be subversive to his autocratic rule.

Although it created many durable features of Chinese government, the Qin dynasty was short-lived. Shi Huangdi's attacks on intellectuals and particularly the high taxes needed to support military expansion and the construction of the Great Wall made him fiercely unpopular. One opponent described the First Emperor as a monster who "had the heart of a tiger and a wolf. He killed men as though he thought he could never finish, he punished men as though he were afraid he would never get around to them all." On the emperor's death, in 210 B.C.E., massive revolts organized by aggrieved peasants broke out. One peasant leader defeated other opponents and in 202 B.C.E. established the third dynasty of classical China, the Han.

The Han Dynasty

The Han dynasty, which lasted over 400 years, to 220 C.E., rounded out China's basic political and intellectual structure. Han rulers retained the centralized administration of the Qin but sought to reduce the brutal repression of that period. Like many dynasties during the first flush of power, early Han rulers expanded Chinese territory, pushing into Korea, Indochina, and central Asia. This expansion gave rise to direct contact with India and also allowed the Chinese to develop contact with the Parthian Empire in the Middle East, through which trade with the Roman Empire around the Mediterranean was conducted. The most famous Han ruler, Wu Ti (140-87 B.C.E.), enforced peace throughout much of the continent of Asia, rather like the peace the Roman Empire would bring to the Mediterranean region a hundred years later, but embracing even more territory and a far larger population. Peace brought great prosperity to China itself. A Han historian conveys the self-satisfied, confident tone of the dynasty:

The nation had met with no major disturbances so that, except in times of flood or drought, every person was well supplied and every family had enough to get along on. The granaries in the cities and the countryside were full and the government treasuries were running over with wealth. In the capital the strings of cash had stacked up by the hundreds of millions until they could no longer be counted. In the central granary of the government, new grain was heaped on top of the old until the building was full and the grain overflowed and piled up outside, where it spoiled and became unfit to eat. Even the keepers of the community gates ate fine grain and meat.

Under the Han dynasty, the workings of the state bureaucracy also improved and the government was linked to formal training that emphasized the values of Confucian philosophy. Reversing the Qin dynasty's policies, Wu Ti urged support for Confucianism, seeing it as a vital supplement to formal measures on the government's part. Shrines were established to promote the worship of the ancient philosopher as a god.

The quality of Han rule declined after about two centuries. Central control weakened, and invasions from central Asia, spearheaded by a nomadic people called the Huns, who had long threatened China's northern borders, overturned the dynasty entirely. Between 220 and 589 C.E., China was in a state of chaos. Order and stability were finally restored, but by then the classical or formative period of Chinese civilization had ended. Well before the Han collapse, however, China had established distinctive political structures and cultural values of unusual clarity, capable, as it turned out, of surviving even three centuries of renewed confusion.
Political Institutions

The Qin and Han dynasties of classical China established a distinctive, and remarkably successful, kind of government. The Qin stressed central authority, whereas the Han expanded the powers of the bureaucracy. More than any other factor, it was the structure of this government that explained how such a vast territory could be effectively ruled—for the Chinese empire was indeed the largest political system in the classical world. This structure would change after the classical period, particularly in terms of streamlining and expanding bureaucratic systems and procedures, but it never required fundamental overhaul.

The political framework that emerged as a result of the long centuries of China's classical period had several key elements. Strong local units never disappeared. Like most successful agricultural societies, China relied heavily on tightly knit patriarchal families. Individual families were linked to other relatives in extended family networks that included brothers, uncles, and any living grandparents. Among the wealthy land-owning groups, family authority was enhanced by the practice of ancestor worship, which joined family members through rituals devoted to important forebears who had passed into the spirit world. For ordinary people, among whom ancestor worship was less common, village authority surmounted family rule. Village leaders helped farming families regulate property and coordinate planting and harvest work. During the Zhou dynasty, and also in later periods when dynasties weakened, the regional power of great landlords also played an important role at the village level. Landed nobles provided courts of justice and organized military troops.

Strong local rule was not the most significant or distinctive feature of Chinese government under the Qin and Han dynasties, however. Shi Huangdi not only attacked local rulers but also provided a single law code for the whole empire and established a uniform tax system. He appointed governors to each district of his domain, who exercised military and legal powers in the name of the emperor. They, in turn, named officials responsible for smaller regions. Here indeed was a classic model of centralized government that other societies would replicate in later times: the establishment of centralized codes and appointment of officials directly by a central authority, rather than reliance on arrangements with numerous existing local governments. The effectiveness of a central government was further enhanced by the delegation of special areas and decisions to the emperor's ministers. Some dealt with matters of finance, others with justice, others with military affairs, and so on.

Strong Bureaucracy

Able rulers of the Han dynasty resumed the attack on local warrior-landlords. In addition, they realized the importance of creating a large, highly skilled bureaucracy, one capable of carrying out the duties of a complex state. By the end of the Han period, China had about 130,000 bureaucrats, representing 0.2 percent of the population. The emperor Wu Ti established examinations for his bureaucrats—the first example of civil service tests of the sort that many governments have instituted in modern times. These examinations covered classics of Chinese literature as well as law, suggesting a model of the scholar-bureaucrat that would later become an important element of China's political tradition. Wu Ti also established a school to train men of exceptional talent and ability for the national examinations. Although most bureaucrats were drawn from the landed upper classes, who alone had the time to learn the complex system of Chinese characters, individuals from lower ranks of society were occasionally recruited under this system. China's bureaucracy thus provided a slight check on complete upper-class rule. It also tended to limit the exercise of arbitrary power by the emperor himself. Trained and experienced bureaucrats, confident in their own traditions, could often control the whims of a single ruler, even one who, in the Chinese tradition, regarded himself as divinely appointed—the "Son of Heaven." It was no accident then that the Chinese bureaucracy lasted from the Han period until the 20th century, outliving the empire itself.

Small wonder that from the classical period at least until modern times, and possibly still today, the Chinese were the most tightly governed people in any large society in the world. When it worked well—and it is important to recall that the system periodically broke down—Chinese politics represented a remarkable integration of all levels of authority. The edicts of an all-powerful emperor were administered by trained scholar-bureaucrats, widely respected for their learning and,
Capital Designs and Patterns of Political Power

The design and physical layout of the capital cities of early civilizations can tell us a great deal about the distribution of political power and social status in different centers of the ancient world. In addition, the configurations of these pivotal cities usually manifest religious beliefs and conceptions of the cosmic order in the ways they are oriented and physically constructed. Therefore, plans of the capital centers of ancient civilizations can be read like written texts to help us understand the early history of some of humankind's greatest civilizations. Reproduced here are schematic diagrams of some of the key features of the capital cities of three of the great early civilizations of Eurasia: from Xi'an in Han China, Athens in Greece, and Harappa in India. Study and compare these diagrams for what they tell us about the kinds of elite groups that exercised political power, social stratification, and thinking about the relationship between the supernatural and human rulers in each civilization for which they served as capitals. In thinking about these issues, you may want to refer to relevant sections in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

QUESTIONS: Which social groups were the most important politically in each society? How prominent was the exercise of power by the elites in each civilization? How was political power legitimized by religious figures and institutions in each of the workings of the cosmos? How were the gods and political elites seen to separate themselves from the rest of the population, and what evidence can you find that supports this? Often, their noble birth. Individual families also emphasized this strong principle of authority, with the father in charge, presumably carrying on the wishes of a long line of ancestors to which the family paid reverence. The Chinese were capable of periodic rebellions, and gangs of criminals regularly came to disrupt the social scene—indeed, frequently harsh punishments reflected the need of the government to eradicate such deviant forces. Nevertheless, whether within the family or the central state, most Chinese in ordinary times believed in the importance of respect for those in power.

Roles of the State

Goverment traditions established during the classical period included an impressive list of state functions. Like all organized states, the Chinese government operated military and judicial systems. Military activity fluctuated, as China did not depend on steady expansion. Although classical China produced some enduring examples of the art of war, the state was not highly militaristic by the Han
period. Judicial matters—crime and legal disputes—commanded more attention by local government authorities.

The government also sponsored much intellectual life, organizing research in astronomy and the maintenance of historical records. Under the Han rulers, the government played a major role in promoting Confucian philosophy as an official statement of Chinese values and in encouraging the worship of Confucius himself. The government developed a durable sense of mission as the primary keeper of Chinese beliefs.

The imperial government was also active in the economy. It directly organized the production of iron and salt. Its standardization of currency, weights, and measures facilitated trade throughout the vast empire. The government additionally sponsored public works, including complex irrigation and canal systems. Han rulers even tried to regulate agricultural supplies by storing grain and rice in good times to control price increases—and potential popular unrest—when harvests were bad.

China's ambitious rulers in no sense directed the daily lives of their subjects; the technology of an agricultural society did not permit this. Even under the Han, it took over a month for a directive from the capital city to reach the outlying districts of the empire—an obvious limit on imperial authority. A revealing Chinese proverb held that "heaven is high, and the emperor is far away." However, the power of the Chinese state did extend considerably. Its system of courts was backed by a strict code of law; torture and execution were widely employed to supplement the preaching of obedience and civic virtue. The central government taxed its subjects and also required some annual labor on the part of every male peasant—this was the source of the incredible physical work involved in building canals, roads, and palaces. No other government had the organization and staff to reach ordinary people so directly until virtually modern times, except in much smaller political units such as city-states. The power of the government and the authority it commanded in the eyes of most ordinary Chinese people help explain why its structure survived decline, invasion, and even rebellion for so many centuries. Invaders like the Huns might topple a dynasty, but they could not devise a better system to run the country, and so the system and its bureaucratic administrators normally endured.

Religion and Culture

The Chinese way of viewing the world, as this belief system developed during the classical period, was closely linked to a distinct political structure. Upper-class cultural values emphasized a good life on earth and the virtues of obedience to the state, more than speculations about God and the mysteries of heaven. At the same time, the Chinese tolerated and often combined various specific beliefs, so long as they did not contradict basic political loyalties.

Rulers in the Zhou dynasty maintained belief in a god or gods, but little attention was given to the nature of a deity. Rather, Chinese leaders stressed the importance of a harmonious earthly life, which would maintain proper balance between earth and heaven. Harmony included carefully constructed rituals to unify society and prevent individual excess. Among the upper classes, people were trained in elaborate exercises and military skills such as archery. Commonly, ceremonies venerating ancestors and even marking special meals were conducted. The use of chopsticks began at the end of the Zhou dynasty; it encouraged a code of politeness at meals. Soon after this, tea was introduced, although the most elaborate tea-drinking rituals developed later on.

Even before these specific ceremonies arose, however, the basic definition of a carefully ordered existence was given more formal philosophical backing. Amid the long collapse of the Zhou dynasty, many thinkers and religious prophets began to challenge Chinese traditions. From this ferment came a restatement of the traditions that ultimately reduced intellectual conflict and established a long-lasting tone for Chinese cultural and social life.

Confucianism

Confucius, or Kong Fuzi (which means Kung the philosopher), lived from roughly 551 to 478 B.C.E. His life was devoted to teaching, and he traveled through many parts of China preaching his ideas of political virtue and good government. Confucius was not a religious leader; he believed in a divine order but refused to speculate about it. Chinese civilization was unusual, in the classical period and well beyond, in that its dominant values were secular rather than religious.
Confucius saw himself as a spokesman for Chinese tradition and for what he believed were the great days of the Chinese state before the Zhou declined. He maintained that if people could be taught to emphasize personal virtue, which included a reverence for tradition, a solid political life would naturally result. The Confucian list of virtues stressed respect for one’s social superiors—including fathers and husbands as leaders of the family. However, this emphasis on a proper hierarchy was balanced by an insistence that society’s leaders behave modestly and without excess, shunning abusive power and treating courteously those people who were in their charge. According to Confucius, moderation in behavior, veneration of custom and ritual, and a love of wisdom should characterize the leaders of society at all levels. With virtuous leaders, a sound political life would inevitably follow: “In an age of good government, men in high stations give preference to men of ability and give opportunity to those who are below them, and lesser people labor vigorously at their husbandry to serve their superiors.”

Confucianism was primarily a system of ethics—do unto others as your status and theirs dictate—and a plea for loyalty to the community. It confirmed the distaste that many educated Chinese had developed for religious mysteries, as well as their delight in learning and good manners. Confucian doctrine, carefully recorded in a book called the Analects, was revived under the Han emperors, who saw the usefulness of Confucian emphasis on political virtue and social order. Confucian learning was also incorporated, along with traditional literary works, into the training of aspiring bureaucrats.

The problems Confucius set out to rectify, notably political disorder, were approached through an emphasis on individual virtuous behavior, both by the ruler and the ruled. “When the ruler does right, all men will imitate his self-control. What the ruler does, the people will follow.” According to Confucius, only a man who demonstrated proper family virtues, including respect for parents and compassion for children and other inferiors, should be considered for political service. “When the ruler excels as a father, a son, and a brother, then the people imitate him.” Confucius thus built into his own system the links among many levels of authority that came to characterize larger Chinese politics at its best. His system also emphasized personal restraint and the careful socialization of children.

For subordinates, Confucius largely recommended obedience and respect; people should know their place, even under bad rulers. However, he urged a political system that would not base rank simply on birth but would make education accessible to all talented and intelligent members of society. The primary emphasis still rested nonetheless on the obligations and desirable characteristics of the ruling class. According to Confucius, force alone cannot permanently conquer unrest, but kindness toward the people and protection of their vital interests will. Rulers should also be humble and sincere, for people will grow rebellious under hypocrisy or arrogance. Nor should rulers be greedy; Confucius warned against a profit motive in leadership, stressing that true happiness rested in doing good for all, not individual gain. Confucius projected the ideal of a gentleman, best described by his benevolence and self-control, a man always courteous and eager for service and anxious to learn.

Legalism

During the Qin and early Han periods, an alternate system of political thought, called “Legalism,” sprang up in China. Legalist writers prided themselves on their pragmatism. They disdained Confucian virtues in favor of an authoritarian state that ruled by force. Human nature for the Legalists was evil and required restraint and discipline. In a proper state, the army would control and the people would labor; the idea of pleasures in educated discourse or courtesy was dismissed as frivolity. Although Legalism never captured the widespread approval that Confucianism did, it too entered the political traditions of China, where a Confucian veneer was often combined with strong-arm tactics.

Confucianism did not explicitly seek popular loyalty. Like many early civilizations, China did not produce a single system of beliefs, as different groups embraced different values, with the same individual even turning to contrasting systems depending on his or her mood. Confucianism had some obvious limits in its appeal to the masses and indeed to many educated Chinese. Its reluctance to explore the mysteries of life or nature deprived it of a spiritual side. The creed was most easily accepted by the upper classes, who had the time and resources to pursue an education and participate in ceremony. However, elements of Confucianism, including a taste for ritual, self-control, and polite manners, did spread beyond the upper classes. But most peasants needed more than civic virtue
The brief passages quoted here are taken from the writings of Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, and Laozi. Identify whether each passage is Confucian or Daoist and explain why you made each choice.

I take no action and the people are reformed.
I enjoy peace and people become honest.
I do nothing and people become rich.
I have no desires and people return to the good and simple life.
The gentleman cherishes virtue; the inferior man cherishes possessions.
The gentleman thinks of sanctions; the inferior man thinks of personal favors.
The nature of man is evil; his goodness is acquired.
His nature being what it is, man is born, first, with a desire for gain.
If this desire is followed, strife will result and courtesy will disappear.

Keep your mouth closed.
Guard your senses.
Temper your sharpness.
Simplify your problems.
Mask your brightness.
Be at one with the dust of the earth.
This is primal union.
Personal cultivation begins with poetry, is made firm with rules of decorum, and is perfected by music.

When it is left to follow its natural feelings, human nature will do good. That’s why I say it is good. If it becomes evil, it is not the fault of man’s original capability.

QUESTIONS Which of these ideas are most compatible with your own? Which of them could be called religious? Which are secular? Which philosophers propose ideas that are best suited for people who want to build a strong and unified political order?

to understand and survive their harsh life, where in constant toil they eked out only a precarious and meager existence. During most of the classical period, polytheistic beliefs, focusing on the spirits of nature, persisted among much of the peasant class. Many peasants strove to attract the blessing of conciliatory spirits by creating statues, emblems, and household decorations honoring the spirits, and by holding parades and family ceremonies for the same purpose. A belief in the symbolic power of dragons stemmed from one such popular religion, which combined fear of these creatures with a more playful sense of their activities in its courtship of the divine forces of nature. Gradually, ongoing rites among the ordinary masses integrated the Confucian values urged by the upper classes.

Daoism

Classical China also produced a more religious philosophy—Daoism—which arose at roughly the same time as Confucianism, during the waning centuries of the Zhou dynasty. Daoism first appealed to many in the upper classes, who had an interest in a more elaborate spirituality. Daoism embraced traditional Chinese beliefs in nature’s harmony and added a sense of nature’s mystery. As a spiritual alternative to Confucianism, Daoism produced a durable division in China’s religious and philosophical culture. This new religion, vital for Chinese civilization although never widely exported, was furthered by Laozi (low-dzuh), who probably lived during the 5th century B.C. Laozi stressed that nature contains a divine impulse that directs all life. True human understanding comes in withdrawing from the world and contemplating this life force. Dao, which means “the way of nature,” refers to this same basic, indescribable force:

There is a thing confusedly formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
Silent and void
It stands alone and does not change,
Goes round and does not weary.
It is capable of being the mother of the world.
I know not its name,
So I style it “the way.”

Along with secret rituals, Daoism promoted its own set of ethics. Daoist harmony with nature best resulted through humility and frugal living. According to this movement, political activity and learning were irrelevant to a good life, and general conditions in the world were of little importance.
Daoism, which would join with a strong Buddhist influence from India during the chaos that followed the collapse of the Han dynasty, guaranteed that China's people would not be united by a single religious or philosophical system. Individuals did come to embrace some elements from both Daoism and Confucianism, and indeed many emperors favored Daoism. They accepted its spread with little anxiety, partly because some of them found solace in Daoist belief but also because the religion, with its otherworldly emphasis, posed no real political threat. Confucian scholars disagreed vigorously with Daoist thinking, particularly its emphasis on mysteries and magic, but they saw little reason to challenge its influence. As Daoism became an increasingly formal religion, from the later Han dynasty onward, it provided many Chinese with a host of ceremonies designed to promote harmony with the mysterious life force. Finally, the Chinese government from the Han dynasty onward was able to persuade Daoist priests to include expressions of loyalty to the emperor in their temple services. This heightened Daoism's political compatibility with Confucianism.

Literature, Art, and Science

Confucianism and Daoism were not the only intellectual products of China's classical period, but they were the most important. Confucianism blended easily with the high value of literature and art among the upper classes. In literature, a set of Five Classics, written during the early part of the Zhou dynasty and then edited during the time of Confucius, provided an important tradition. They were used, among other things, as a basis for civil service examinations. The works provided in the Five Classics included some historical treatises, speeches, and other political materials; a discussion of etiquette and ceremonies; and in the Classic of Songs, over 300 poems dealing with love, joy, politics, and family life. The Chinese literary tradition developed on the basis of mastering these early works, plus Confucian writing; each generation of writers found new meanings in the classical literature, which allowed them to express new ideas within a familiar framework. Several thinkers during the Han dynasty elaborated Confucian philosophy. In literature, poetry commanded particular attention because the Chinese language featured melodic speech and variant pronunciations of the same basic sound, a characteristic that promoted an outpouring of poetry. From the classical period onward, the ability to learn and recite poetry became the mark of an educated Chinese. Finally, the literary tradition established in classical China reinforced the Confucian emphasis on human life, although the subjects included romance and sorrow as well as political values.

Chinese art during the classical period was largely decorative, stressing careful detail and craftsmanship (Figure 2.2). Artistic styles often reflected the precision and geometric qualities of the many symbols of Chinese writing. Calligraphy itself became an important art form. In addition, Chinese artists painted, worked in bronze and pottery, carved jade and ivory, and wove silk screens. Classical China did not produce monumental buildings, aside from the awe-inspiring Great Wall and some imperial palaces and tombs, in part

Figure 2.2 A Han relief on a funeral tile found in the Chengdu region in Sichuan (eastern Han dynasty, 25 C.E.-221 C.E.). The hunting scene in a luxuriant landscape (upper panel) is linked with a scene (lower panel) of peasants working in the fields. Such illustrations enable historians to track the development of toolmaking and weaponry in ancient civilizations such as China. They also make it possible to study patterns of organization in agrarian and artisan production (for which direct evidence is sparse) as well as the leisure activities of officials and the landed elites.
Women in Patriarchal Societies

Most agricultural civilizations, including China, downgraded the status and potential of women, at least according to modern Western standards and to the implicit standards of hunting-and-gathering societies. Agricultural civilizations were characteristically patriarchal; that is, they were run by men and based on the assumption that men directed political, economic, and cultural life. Furthermore, as agricultural civilizations developed over time and became more prosperous and more elaborately organized, the status of women deteriorated from its initial level. Individual families were normally set up on a patriarchal basis. The husband and father determined fundamental conditions and made the key decisions, and the woman gave humble obedience to this male authority at least in principle. Patriarchal family structure rested on men's control of most or all property, starting with land itself. Marriage was based on property relationships, and it was assumed that marriage, and therefore subordination to men, was the normal condition for the vast majority of women. A revealing symptom of patriarchy in family life was the fact that after marrying, a woman usually moved to the orbit (and often the residence) of her husband's family.

Characteristic patriarchal conditions had developed in Mesopotamian civilization. Marriages were arranged for women by their parents, and a formal contract was drawn up. The husband served as authority over his wife and children just as he did over his slaves. Early Sumerian society may have given women greater latitude than they enjoyed later on. The Sumerian religion attributed considerable power to female sexuality, and their law gave women important rights, so that they could not be treated as outright property. Still, even in Sumerian law, the adultery of a wife was punishable by death, while a husband's adultery was treated far more lightly—a double standard characteristic of patriarchalism. Mesopotamian societies after Sumerian times began to emphasize the importance of a woman's virginity at marriage and to impose the veil on respectable women when they were in public to emphasize their modesty. These changes showed a progressive cramping of women's social position and daily freedom. At all points a good portion of Mesopotamian law (such as the Hammurabic code) was given over to prescriptions for women, assuring certain basic protections but clearly emphasizing limits and inferiority.

Specific patriarchal conditions varied from one agricultural civilization to another. This means that comparisons are important, and sometimes subtle. Egyptian civilization gave upper-class women more credit than Mesopotamia did, and there were several powerful queens. Jewish law traced descent from mothers rather than fathers, though it held women to be separate and inferior even in worship. Confucianism, in China, had important implications for women, recommending their good treatment, but in the context because of the absence of a single religion; indeed, the entire tone of upper-class Confucianism was such that it discouraged the notion of temples soaring to the heavens.

In science, important practical work was encouraged, rather than imaginative theorizing. Chinese astronomers had developed an accurate calendar by 444 B.C.E., based on a year of 365.5 days. Later astronomers calculated the movement of the planets Saturn and Jupiter and observed sunspots—more than 1500 years before comparable knowledge developed in Europe. The purpose of Chinese astronomy was to make celestial phenomena predictable, as part of the wider interest in ensuring harmony between heaven and earth. Chinese scientists steadily improved their instrumentation, inventing a kind of seismograph to register earthquakes during the Han dynasty. The Chinese were also active in medical research, developing precise anatomical knowledge and studying principles of hygiene that could promote longer life.

Chinese mathematics also stressed the practical. Daoism encouraged some exploration of the orderly processes of nature, but far more research focused on how things actually worked. For example, Chinese scholars studied the mathematics of music in ways that led to advances in acoustics. This focus for science and mathematics contrasted notably with the more abstract definition of science developed in classical Greece.

Economy and Society

Although the most distinctive features of classical China centered on politics and culture, developments in the economy, social structure, and family life also shaped Chinese civilization and continued to have an impact on the empire's history for a significant period of time.
of their deference and subservience to men. Variety, in other words, operated within a clearly patriarchal framework.

Why was patriarchalism so pervasive? As agriculture improved with the use of better techniques, women's labor, though still absolutely vital, became less important than it had been in hunting-and-gathering societies. This was particularly true in the upper classes and in cities where men frequently took over the most productive work—craft production, for example—and political leadership. The inferior position of women was less marked in peasant families, where their work was essential. More generally, agricultural societies were based on concepts of property. It seemed essential for men to know who their heirs were, in order to pass along land; this meant attention to regulating women's sexuality, to try to assure faithfulness. All this helps explain why women became seen as both inferior and ornamental, really as part of men's property. Patriarchalism, in sum, responded to economic and legal conditions in agricultural civilizations and often deepened over time.

Patriarchalism raises important questions about women themselves. Many women internalized patriarchal culture, believing that they should obey and please men and agreeing that they were inferior. But patriarchalism did not preclude some important options for women. In many societies a minority of women could gain some relief through religious functions, which could provide them a chance to operate independently of family structures. Patriarchal laws defined some rights for women even within marriage, protecting them at least in theory from the worst abuses. Confucian theorists argued that women must obey men but urged men to treat them decently in return. Women could also wield informal power in patriarchal societies by their emotional hold over husbands or sons. Such power was indirect, behind the scenes, but a force. A woman might use these means to figure prominently in a society's history. Women could also form networks within a large household. Older women, who commanded the obedience of many daughters-in-law as well as unmarried daughters and servant women, could powerfully shape the activities of a family.

The fact remains that patriarchalism was a commanding theme in most agricultural civilizations. Enforcement of patriarchalism, through law and culture, provided one means by which these societies regulated their members and tried to achieve order. While women were not reduced to literal servitude by most patriarchal systems, they might have come close. Their options were severely constrained. Girls were reared to accept patriarchal conditions, and boys were fully conscious of their own superiority. In many agricultural civilizations, patriarchalism dictated that boys, because of their importance in carrying on the family name and chief economic activities, were more likely to survive. When population excess threatened a family's well-being, patriarchal assumptions often determined that female infants be killed as a means of population control.

**QUESTIONS** How do you think most women reacted to patriarchal society? Why did they suffer so much? Were the differences in women's condition in patriarchal societies transferable from one society to another? Why were upper class women better considered more inferior to men than lower class women?

As in many agricultural societies, considerable gaps developed between China's upper class, which controlled large landed estates, and the masses, farmer-peasants who produced little more than what was needed for their own subsistence. The difficulty of becoming literate symbolized these gaps, for landlords enjoyed not only wealth but also a culture denied to most common people. Prior to the Zhou dynasty, slaveholding may have been common in China, but by the time of the Zhou the main social division existed between the land-owning gentry—about 2 percent of the total population—and peasants, who provided dues and service to these lords while also controlling some of their own land. The Chinese peasantry depended on intensive cooperation, particularly in the southern rice region; in this group, property was characteristically owned and regulated by the village or the extended family, rather than by individuals. Beneath the peasantry, Chinese social structure included a group of "mean" people who performed rough transport and other unskilled jobs and suffered from the lowest possible status. In general, social status was passed from one generation to the next through inheritance, although unusually talented individuals from a peasant background might be given access to an education and rise within the bureaucracy.

**The Confucian Social System**

Officially then, and to a large extent in fact, classical China consisted of three main social groups. The landowning aristocracy plus the educated bureaucrats, or mandarins, formed the top group. Next came the laboring masses: peasants and also urban artisans who manufactured goods. These people, far poorer than the top group and also condemned to a life of hard manual labor, sometimes
worked directly on large estates but in other cases had some economic independence. Finally, came the mean people, the general category we already identified as applying to those without meaningful skills. Interestingly, performing artists were ranked in this group, despite the fact that the upper classes enjoyed plays and other entertainments provided by this group. Mean people were punished for crime more harshly than other groups and were required to wear identifying green scarves. Household slaves also existed within this class structure, but their number was relatively few, and China did not depend on slaves for actual production.

Trade and Technology

Trade became increasingly important during the Zhou and particularly the Han dynasties. Much trade focused on luxury items for the upper class, produced by skilled artisans in the cities—silks, jewelry, leather goods, and furniture. There was also food exchange between the wheat- and rice-growing regions. Copper coins began to circulate, which facilitated trade, with merchants even sponsoring commercial visits to India. Although significant, trade and its attendant merchant class did not become the focal points of Chinese society, and the Confucian emphasis on learning and political service led to considerable scorn for lives devoted to moneymaking. The gap between the real importance and wealth of merchants and their officially low prestige was an enduring legacy in Confucian China.

If trade fit somewhat uncomfortably into the dominant view of society, there was no question about the importance of technological advance; here, the Chinese excelled. Agricultural implements improved steadily. Ox-drawn plows were introduced around 300 B.C.E., which greatly increased productivity. Under the Han, a new collar was invented for draft animals, allowing them to pull plows or wagons without choking—this was a major improvement that became available to other parts of the world only many centuries later. Chinese iron mining was also well advanced, as pulleys and winding gear were devised to bring material to the surface. Iron tools and other implements such as lamps were widely used. Production methods in textiles and pottery were also highly developed by world standards. Under the Han, the first water-powered mills were introduced, allowing further gains in manufacturing. Finally, during the Han, paper was invented, which was a major boon to a system of government that emphasized the bureaucracy. In sum, classical China reached far higher levels of technical expertise than Europe or western Asia in the same period, a lead that it would long maintain.

The relatively advanced technology of classical China did not, however, steer Chinese society away from its primary reliance on agriculture. Farming technology helped increase the size of the population in the countryside; with better tools and seeds, smaller amounts of land could support more families. But China's solid agricultural base, backed by some trade in foodstuffs among key regions, did permit the expansion of cities and of manufacturing. Nonagricultural goods were mainly produced by artisans, working in small shops or in their homes. Even though only a minority of the workforce was involved in such tasks that used manual methods for the most part, the output of tools, porcelain, and textiles increased considerably, aided in this case as well by the interest in improving techniques.

Gender and Family Life

In all major social groups, tight family organization helped solidify economic and social views as well as political life. The structure of the Chinese family resembled that of families in other agricultural civilizations in emphasizing the importance of unity and the power of husbands and fathers. Within this context, however, the Chinese stressed authority to unusual extremes. Confucius said, "There are no wrongdoing parents"—and in practice, parents could punish disobedient children freely. Law courts did not prosecute parents who injured or even killed a disobedient son, but they would severely punish a child who scolded or attacked a parent. In most families, the emphasis on obedience to parents, and a corresponding emphasis on wives' obedience to husbands, did not produce great friction. Chinese popular culture stressed strict control of one's emotions, and the family was seen as the center of such an orderly, serene hierarchy. Indeed, the family served as a great training ground for the principles of authority and restraint that applied to the larger social and political world.
Women, although subordinate, had their own clearly defined roles and could sometimes gain power through their sons and as mothers-in-law of younger women brought into the household. The mother of a famous Confucian philosopher, Mencius, continually claimed how humble she was, but during the course of his life she managed to exert considerable influence over him. There was even a clear hierarchical order for children, with boys superior to girls and the oldest son having the most enviable position of all. Chinese rules of inheritance, from the humblest peasant to the emperor himself, followed strict primogeniture, which meant that the oldest male child would inherit property and position alike.

How Chinese Civilization Fits Together

China's politics and culture meshed readily, especially around the emergence of a Confucian bureaucracy. Economic innovation did not disrupt the emphasis on order and stability, and family structures were closely linked to political and cultural goals.

Classical Chinese technology, religion, philosophy, and political structure evolved with very little outside contact. Although important trade routes led to India and the Middle East, most Chinese saw the world in terms of a large island of civilization surrounded by barbarian peoples with nothing to offer save the periodic threat of invasion. Proud of their culture and of its durability, the Chinese had neither the need nor the desire to learn from other societies. Nor, except to protect their central territory by exercising some control over the mountainous or desert regions that surrounded the Middle Kingdom, did Chinese leaders have any particular desire to teach the rest of the world. A missionary spirit was foreign to Chinese culture and politics. China displayed some patterns that were similar to those of the other agricultural civilizations, and it occasionally embraced the concepts of these cultures. Indeed, the spread of Buddhism from India, during and after the Han decline, was a notable instance of a cultural diffusion that altered China's religious map and also its artistic styles. Nevertheless, the theme of unusual isolation, developed during the formative period of Chinese civilization, was to prove persistent in later world history—in fact, it has not entirely disappeared to this day.

Social and Cultural Links to Politics

Chinese civilization was also noteworthy for the relative harmony among its various major features. We have, in this chapter, examined the pattern of leading historical events in classical China and then the systems of government, belief, economy, and social structure. All these facets were closely meshed. Although the centralized government, with its elaborate functions and far-reaching bureaucracy, gave the clearest unity and focus to Chinese society, it did not do so alone. Confucianism provided a vital supplement, making the bureaucracy more than a collection of people with similar political objectives, but rather a trained corps with some common ideals. An appreciation of distinctive artistic styles, poetry, and the literary tradition added to this common culture. Cohesive government and related beliefs about human ideals and aesthetics were linked, in turn, to the economy. Political stability over a large and fertile land aided economic growth, and the government took a direct role in encouraging both agriculture and industry. A strong economy, in turn, provided the government with vital tax revenues. Economic interests were also related to the pragmatic Chinese view of science, whose aim was to determine how nature worked. Finally, social relationships reinforced all these systems. The vision of a stable hierarchy and tight family structures meshed with the strong impulse toward orderly politics and helped instill the virtues of obedience and respect that were important to the larger political system.

Not surprisingly, given the close links among the various facets of their civilization, the Chinese tended to think of their society as a whole. They did not distinguish clearly between private and public sectors of activity. They did not see government and society as two separate entities. In other words, these Western concepts that we have used to define classical China and to facilitate comparisons with other societies do not really fit the Chinese view of their own world. Confucius himself, in seeing government as basically a vast extension of family relationships, similarly suggested that the pieces of the Chinese puzzle were intimately joined.
Complexities in Classical China

A grasp of Chinese civilization as a whole, however, should not distract us from recognizing some endemic tensions and disparities. The division in belief systems, between Confucianism and Daoism, modifies the perception of an ultimately tidy classical China. Confucianists and Daoists tolerated each other. Sometimes, their beliefs coincided in such a way that a single individual who behaved politically as a Confucianist might explore deeper mysteries through Daoist rituals. However, between both groups there was considerable hostility and mutual disdain, as many Confucianists found Daoists superstitious and overexcited. Daoism did not inherently disrupt the political unity of Chinese culture, but at times the religion inspired attacks on established politics in the name of a mysterious divine will.

Tension in Chinese society showed in the way Confucian beliefs were combined with strict policing. Chinese officials did believe in fundamental human goodness and the importance of ceremony and mutual respect. However, they also believed in stern punishment, not only against criminals but also as warnings to the larger, potentially restless population. People arrested were presumed guilty and often subjected to torture before trial. The Chinese, in fact, early discovered the usefulness of alternating torture with benevolence, to make accused individuals confess. In the late Han period, a thief who refused to confess even under severe torture was then freed from chains, bathed, and fed, "so as to bring him in a happy mood"—whereupon he usually confessed and named his whole gang. In sum, both Confucianism and the Chinese penal system supported tight control, and the combination of the two was typically effective; however, they involved quite different approaches and quite different moral assumptions.

All of this suggests that classical China, like any vigorous, successful society, embraced a diversity of features that could not be fully united by any single formula. Elites and masses were divided by both economic interests and culture. Some shared the same values, particularly as Confucianism spread, and upper-class concern for careful etiquette and the general welfare of the population mitigated the tension. But such calm was a precarious balance, and when overpopulation or some other factor tipped the scale, recurrent and often violent protest could be the result.

Despite any divisions, the symbiosis among the various institutions and activities of many people in classical China does deserve strong emphasis. It helps account for the durability of Chinese values. Even in times of political turmoil, families would transfer beliefs and political ideals by the ways in which they instructed their children. The overall wholeness of Chinese society also helps account for its relative immunity to outside influence and for its creativity despite considerable isolation.

Chinese wholeness, finally, provides an interesting contrast to the other great Asian civilization that developed in the classical period. India, as fully dynamic as China in many ways, produced different emphases, but also a more disparate society in which links among politics and beliefs and economic life were less well defined. Many would argue that this contrast between the two Asian giants persists to our own time.
Global Connections

Classical China and the World

The short-lived Qin dynasty and four centuries of Han rule established the basic components of a civilization that would last for thousands of years, making it the longest-lived in world history. As the achievements of the classical age demonstrate, China had also become one of the most creative and influential civilizations of all human history. The strength of its agrarian base has allowed China to carry about one-fifth of the total human population from the last centuries B.C.E. to the present day. The productivity of its peasants has made it possible for some of the world’s largest cities to flourish in China, and nurtured one of history’s largest and most creative elites. In China’s classical age, the world’s largest and for much of history its best-run bureaucracy was established, and civil service exams were invented. The Chinese also pioneered in the development of a whole range of basic technologies that were later disseminated over much of Eurasia and northern Africa. These ranged from paper and compasses, which created new possibilities for human communication and cross-cultural interaction, and water mills, which provided new sources of power and food processing, to porcelain, which elevated dining to unparalleled levels of elegance and opened up exciting possibilities for artistic expression. Over the centuries, beginning in this classical period itself, Chinese merchants and central Asian nomads disseminated these inventions over much of the globe. Chinese innovations consequently contributed to technological transformations in societies as diverse as those found in Japan, Rome, the Middle East, and England.

Chinese influence was directly involved in the patterns of world trade that began to emerge during the classical centuries. China’s silk was unusually high quality, and the product began to be valued elsewhere, in India, the Middle East, and even the distant Mediterranean during the Roman Empire. Trade in silk and other luxury products generated a network of roads through central Asia known collectively as the Silk Road. Under the Han, the Chinese government actively encouraged this trade with regions to the west. Improved roads, both in China and in the Middle East, encouraged trade as well. One Chinese emissary, Zhang Qian, actually traveled to western India. Most trade along the Silk Road was carried by nomadic merchants, and until well after the classical period no one seems to have traveled all the way from China to the Mediterranean or vice versa. But the trade was lively, spurring attention also to sea routes in the Indian Ocean. While we do not know the volume of goods involved, Silk Road trade was important enough to win considerable attention in upper-class and government circles, and it provided an initial framework on which global trading patterns would later elaborate. China’s role was greater still in the huge swath of territory from central Asia to the Pacific.

Over much of central and east Asia, Chinese influence in political thought and organization, approaches to warfare, art and architecture, religion, and social norms was pervasive. For nearly 2000 years, China would serve as the “Middle Kingdom” for the diverse peoples of this vast area—the focus of their trade and the model for their often successful efforts to fashion their own variants of empire, prosperity, and sophisticated lifestyles.

Further Readings


On the Web


1. Confucianism and Daoism
   (A) were officially sanctioned doctrines of the Qin and Han emperors.
   (B) emphasized the needs of the individual over the welfare of the state.
   (C) had little influence upon China and Chinese society until the late 900s C.E.
   (D) offered answers to societal problems during times of disruption.

2. Confucian social relationships
   (A) established a hierarchy and insisted upon reciprocal duties between people.
   (B) taught its practitioners to seek inner harmony with the natural way.
   (C) promoted the use of material rewards for correct behavior and punishments for transgressions.
   (D) were based on universal love and forgiveness.

3. The policy sponsored by the Qin Dynasty to support its state
   (A) encouraged education, new ideas, and tolerated criticism of the state.
   (B) broke the power of vassals in order to enhance the power of the emperor.
   (C) paid the northern nomadic groups tribute to prevent invasions.
   (D) tolerated local lords performing functions for the central government.

4. During the Han Dynasty, scholar officials
   (A) came increasingly from the merchant and peasant classes.
   (B) utilized Legalism as a ruling doctrine.
   (C) insisted on harsh law codes to maintain control.
   (D) instituted a system of examinations to prepare professional civil servants.

5. Although they varied greatly in wealth and social status in China,
   (A) the commoners, especially the peasants, remained the largest group.
   (B) the scholar bureaucrats cooperated to limit the influence of the ruler.
   (C) aristocrats owned all of the land.
   (D) women had many legal rights and protections.

6. Chinese women in the Classical Age
   (A) were free to choose the men they would marry.
   (B) could become scholar-gentry provided they passed the state exams.
   (C) were legally subordinated to fathers and husbands at all class levels.
   (D) dominated the intellectual and artistic activities of China.

7. Despite their material success and increased wealth,
   (A) foreigners were prohibited from settling in China.
   (B) Chinese rulers were isolated from the masses and did not intervene in government.
   (C) Chinese aristocrats had no influence within the government.
   (D) merchants in China ranked below peasants and had little political influence.

Free-Response Question
In what ways did the three philosophical movements of classical China shape its civilization?