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The Cradle of Civilization

Chronology

c. 8000–5000 BC	Neolithic Age
c. 3500 BC	First Cities Appear in Sumer
c. 3300–3100 BC	First Writing Appears in Sumer
c. 3100 BC	Civilization Appears in Nile River Valley
c. 2500 BC	Civilization Appears in Indus River Valley
c. 2150 BC	*Epic of Gilgamesh* is Written Down
c. 2100–2050 BC	Code of Ur-Nammu, Oldest Known Law Code
c. 1900 BC	Abram (Abraham) Leads Hebrews From Ur to Canaan
c. 1754 BC	Law Code of Hammurabi
c. 1500 BC	Civilization Appears in Yellow River Valley
c. 1446 BC	One Possible Date for Hebrew Exodus from Egypt
c. 1393 BC	Birth of Moses
c. 1270 BC	One Possible Date for Hebrew Exodus from Egypt
c. 1024–930 BC	United Kingdom of Israel
722 BC	Assyria Conquers northern Kingdom of Israel
587 BC	Babylonians Capture Jerusalem, Fall of Kingdom of Judah

The story of Western Civilization began during the Neolithic Age (c. 8000 BC–5000 BC), before the appearance of civilization. Humans ceased being hunters and gatherers and began to domesticate animals and cultivate crops. Agriculture enabled human beings to take control of their environment rather than be controlled by it. A technological revolution followed. New tools to cultivate the land and clear forests appeared, along with methods of collecting, storing, and using water from the nearby rivers to irrigate fields. Agricultural centers, or villages, appeared consisting of a group of individuals living together, mutually dependent on one another. As agriculture spread, trade in surplus crops and necessary tools and resources followed.

Discoveries of certain of the Neolithic communities by archeologists are very revealing. Jericho, located in the Jordan valley, was first settled sometime between 10 000 and 9 000 BC.

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By around 9400 BC Jericho occupied about 10 acres (4 ha). There were more than 70 circular dwellings made of sun-dried brick measuring about 15 ft. (4.6 m) across. Estimates of the size of the population vary anywhere from 200 to 300 upward to 2000 or 3000. The village was surrounded by a stone wall more than 12 ft. (3.7 m) high and nearly 6 ft. (1.8 m) wide at the base. Inside the wall stood a stone tower more than 12 ft. (3.7 m) tall with an internal stone staircase. Outside the stone wall was a moat approximately 10 ft. (3.8 m) deep.

The wall served as a defense against potential enemies. The purpose of the tower remains shrouded in mystery. Two archeologists from Tel Aviv University, Roy Liran and Ran Barkai, after studying how the setting sun on the summer solstice interacted with the tower and the surrounding landscape suggest that "the tower was built not just as a marker or a time-keeping device, but as a guardian against the dangers present in the darkness cast by a dying sun's last rays of light" (Sutherland 2018). The dead were buried within the village, often under the floor of the dwelling in which the deceased is assumed to have lived. The skulls were covered in plaster, painted, and placed in the walls. The practice may be evidence of some sort of ancestor worship, but like so much else, that explanation is speculation.

Even more interesting is the Neolithic settlement located in southern Anatolia (modern Turkey) called Çatalhöyük (sometimes spelled Çatal Höyük or Çatal Hüyük), which existed from approximately 7500 to 5700 BC. The site was discovered in the late 1950s and first excavated between 1961 and 1965. Excavations and research by an international team of archeologists began in 1993 and are ongoing.

With a population that ranged between 3000 and 8000, Çatalhöyük was much larger than Jericho. It consisted of about 32 acres (approximately 13 ha) of mud-brick dwellings closely packed together without streets or alleyways. Access to the individual dwellings was through holes in the roofs. The life of the community took place largely on the roofs of what must have resembled a large beehive-like structure. Each dwelling had an oven and furniture that consisted of mud-brick platforms under which deceased family members were buried. The floors were covered in reeds. The walls were covered in bright white plaster, often decorated with colorful frescos. Paintings of bulls on the walls, plastered skulls of oxen embedded in the walls, and the presence of bull horns suggest some sort of religion centered on the worship of bulls, like the religion that appeared later in Minoan Crete (see Chapter 2). One scene painted on a wall depicts a village with a mountain, perhaps Mount Hasan, an inactive volcano. Some art historians regard the painting as the first painted landscape in history.

Most importantly, the people of the Neolithic villages like Jericho and Çatalhöyük did not possess the ability to read and write. Hence, there is no evidence of religious or philosophical thought, no recorded attempts to wrestle with those perennial questions of meaning and purpose. Writing is the defining characteristic of civilization, and so, as impressive as their technologic achievements were, most scholars regard these Neolithic villages as proto-civilizations. To locate the birthplace of civilization, and at the same time, provide some explanation of the difference between a Neolithic village and a civilization, we must look to the fertile land that lies between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, an area known as Mesopotamia, or the "land between the rivers."

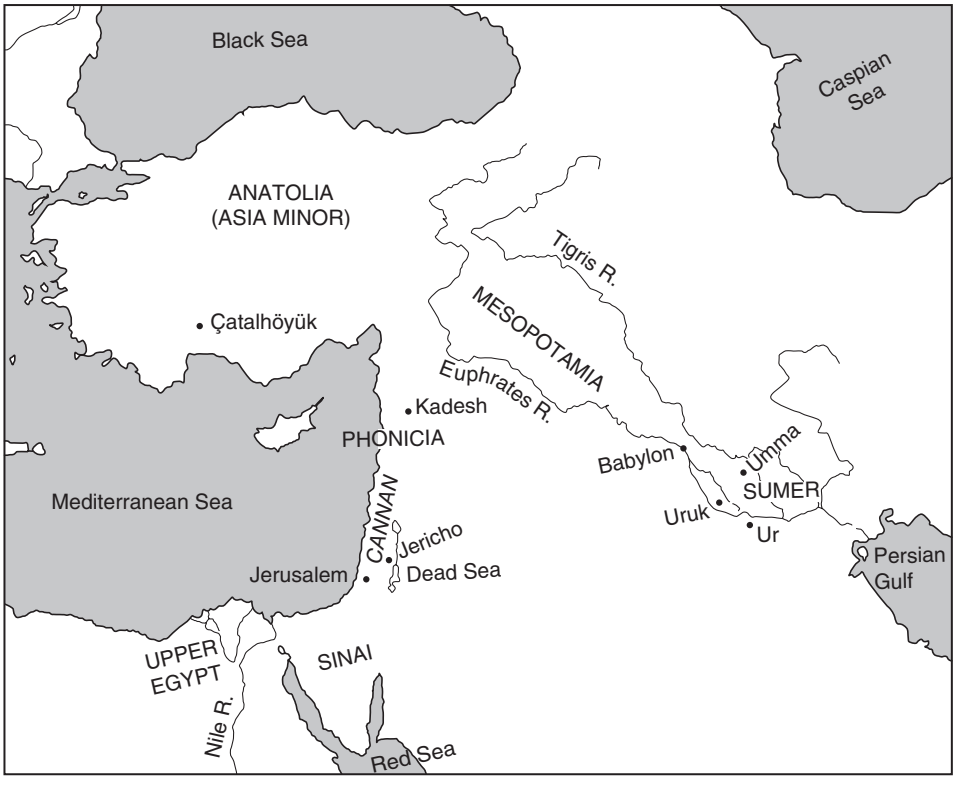


Figure 1.1 Map of the ancient Near East: The Birth of Civilization.

Birth of Civilization

The cradle of civilization lay in the southern most area of Mesopotamia known as Sumer where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers empty into the Persian Gulf. The Sumerians called themselves "the black-headed people" and their home "the land of the black-headed people," or simply "the land." It was in Sumer around 3500 BC that the first cities appeared, and most important, it was in Sumer sometime between 3300 BC and 3100 BC that people first learned to write.[1]

Writing was a byproduct of urbanization. Trade between the cities of Sumer required the ability to communicate. Using a reed with the end cut off, scribes made wedge-shaped marks in small clay tablets that were then allowed to dry in the sun. At first, they made

1 Approximately four centuries later, around 3100 BC, civilization appeared in the Nile River Valley of Egypt. It then appeared in the Indus River Valley of India around 2500 BC, and in the Huang Ho (or Yellow) River Valley of China about 1500 BC. The spread of civilization in ancient history, and contacts between ancient civilizations is an interesting topic, but beyond the scope of this survey. Dates of events in ancient history are always approximate and vary widely from one source to another.

marks that represented objects (pictographs), and then marks that represented sounds (phonograms). This style of writing is known as "cuneiform," meaning "wedge-shaped."

Scribes were trained in schools that taught not only the art of writing and reading, but law, medicine, and astrology. Literature appeared as scribes began to write down stories about the gods and heroic figures. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, considered by many to be the first great work of literature in history, was written down sometime around 2150 BC. It tells the story of Gilgamesh ("Bilgamesh" in Sumerian), king of Uruk, and his companion Enkidu.

In the first half of the epic tale, Gilgamesh and Enkidu go on a series of adventures including a journey to the Cedar Forest, the dwelling place of the gods. There, they defeat the giant monster Humbaba ("Huwawa" in Sumerian), guardian of the Cedar Forest. Gilgamesh spurns the advances of Ishtar, goddess of fertility, love, war, and sex. Ishtar punishes Gilgamesh for his impudence by convincing the gods to kill Enkidu.

The death of Enkidu leads to Gilgamesh's quest to find the meaning of life and death. It is this second half of the epic that is of greatest importance, for in the attempt to answer the perennial questions of meaning and purpose, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* becomes more than an epic tale; it becomes a work of philosophy, another characteristic of a civilization.

Some of the stories related in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* have counterparts in the Old Testament book of Genesis. The flood account in Genesis bears a striking resemblance to the flood story in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The two stories have at least 20 points of similarity leading to the obvious conclusion that there must be some connection, but there are significant points in the two accounts that differ. Some who subscribe to the school of thought known as "Panbabylonism," which asserts that the Hebrew Bible and Judaism are derived from Mesopotamian (Babylonian) mythology, consider the Genesis flood story to be modeled after that in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Others consider both to be myths with spiritual significance, or accounts of an actual flood that occurred at some time in the past.

Religious beliefs are at the heart of any given civilization's identity. Ultimately, a people's worldview, or understanding of what is real, determines every aspect of life. Since worldview and religious belief are entwined, how a society is governed and organized, as well as its literary and artistic expressions, are rooted in its religious beliefs. Not surprisingly, temples with gods and priests who interceded on behalf of the people were the center of life in Sumerian cities.

For the people of Sumer and Mesopotamia in general, both life and the afterlife were gloomy at best. People were only the pawns of capricious gods who controlled the universe and all that is part of it, and who might bestow blessings or suffering at will. Everywhere there were hostile gods and demons that the people feared. Natural disasters or human actions such as wars were caused by the gods. The people used various means of divination to try and determine what fate the gods might have in store for them as individuals or for the city. Sacrifices, prayers, and magic were employed to appease the gods and ward off the demons. The belief that the will of the gods was revealed in the position of the planets and stars led the Mesopotamians to the study of astronomy and astrology.

People could not look forward to death for relief from uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. The netherworld was understood to be a dark existence governed by a hierarchy of gods. It was not some sort of heaven or hell, a place to which the dead went according to how they lived their lives. Life after death offered only a gloomy existence, a fate that could not be avoided.

Despite their gloomy view of life, the Mesopotamians greatly influenced the history of civilization and continue to influence life today. The number 60, sacred to the sky god An (or Anu), became the basic unit of mathematical calculation and lives on in our division of time into the 60-second minute, the 60-minute hour, and the degrees of a circle. When we add urbanization, the wheel, chariots, and four-wheeled wagons, writing and the first literature, mathematics, and the science of astronomy, and agriculture and animal husbandry to the list, we must acknowledge civilization's debt to the people of ancient Mesopotamia.

Mesopotamia sat at the crossroads of trade, migration, and invasions of conquering armies, all of which spread its culture. Kingdoms and empires rose and fell as power shifted between rival city-states[2] and conquering armies. The appearance of a new technology such as smelting bronze or iron, or the appearance of a new weapon like the first metal arrowheads, the composite bow, body armor, or the war chariot enabled the possessor of the new technology to enjoy its historical moment until the next conqueror appeared armed with some new military technology.

The era of warring city-states ended when Lugalzaggisi, king of Umma, united all of Sumer during his reign, c. 2375–2350 BC. He ruled for only 25 years. In c. 2334 BC, Lugalzaggisi's army was defeated in battle by Sargon (reigned 2334–2279 BC), leader of the Akkadians, a Semitic-speaking people in Mesopotamia north of Sumer. Sargon founded the first multi-national empire. It stretched from the Persian Gulf to the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Sargon appointed his daughter, Enheduanna, High Priestess in the temple of the moon god Nanna in the Sumerian city-state of Ur. Enheduanna is the first author and poet known by name in history. She left behind a collection of literary works that include poetry, devotionals, and hymns to Nanna. A collection of her temple hymns known as the "Sumerian Temple Hymns" is considered by some scholars to be the first attempt at a systematic theology.

Sargon's empire ended about 2100 BC. Of the empires that followed, two require mention. First is the Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III) that lasted from c. 2112 BC to c. 2004 BC. The significance of this brief empire lies in the appearance of one of the oldest known law codes, the Code of Ur-Nammu, king of Ur during the mid-twenty-first century BC. It is not the first written law code. That honor may belong to Urukagina (sometimes spelled Uruinimgina or Irikagina), who ruled the city-state of Lagash in the first half of the twenty-fourth century BC. Though no copy of his law code has been found, its content can be deduced from references to it in other sources from the period.

The Code of Ur-Nammu (r. 2047–2030 BC) consists of 57 laws inscribed on clay tablets. The laws are stated in a simple form: If this is the crime, then this is the punishment. It differs from the later Code of Hammurabi in that it prescribes monetary compensation for crimes that cause physical harm, except in cases of murder, robbery, adultery, and rape, which were capital offenses.

The first two fragments of the Code of Ur-Nammu were found at Nippur in Sumer and translated in 1952. They contained the prologue and five of the laws. Additional tablets were found at Ur and translated in 1965. Something of a social class structure in society at the time can be deduced from the code. All of the people below the king were divided into two classes, free and slave.

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2 A city and the surrounding territory controlled by it are commonly referred to as a city-state, kingdom, or city-state kingdom.

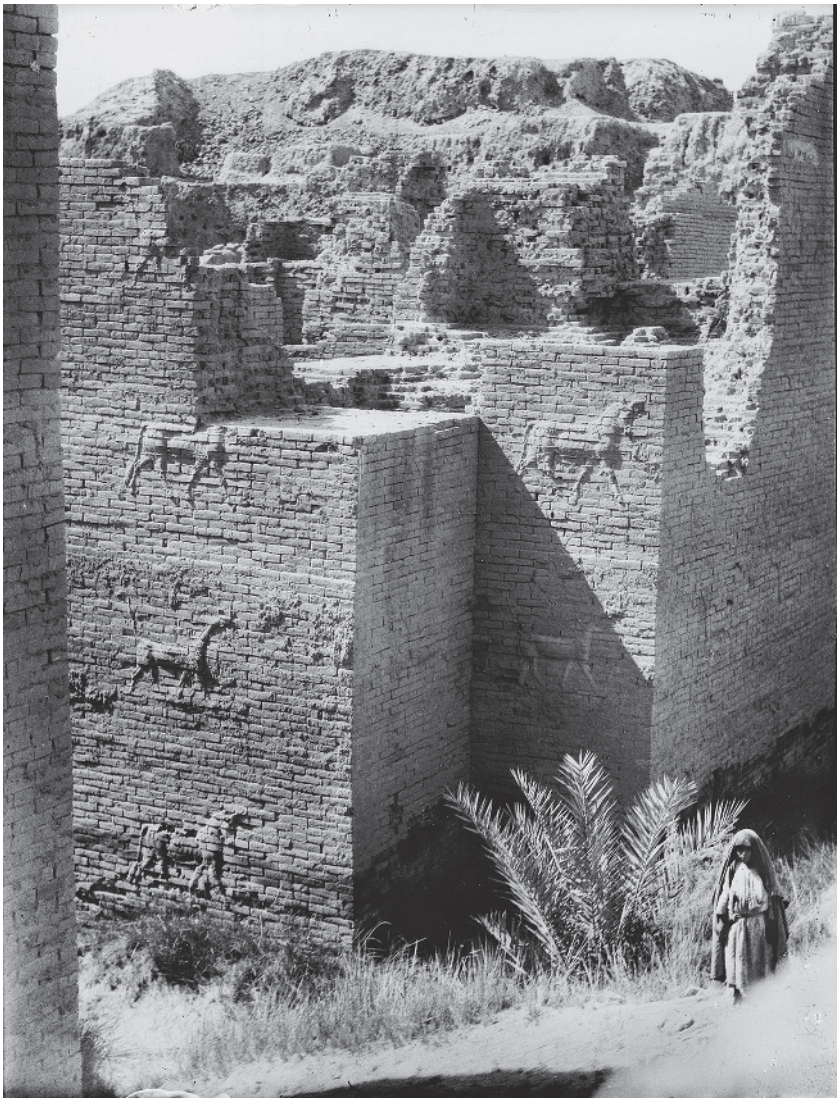


Figure 1.2 The Ishtar Gate, entrance to the inner city of ancient Babylon, was constructed by King Nebuchadnezzar II c. 575 BC. *Source:* Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Collections.

Better known is the Code of Hammurabi issued in 1754 BC, during the Old Babylonian Empire. The Code of Hammurabi was found at Susa in 1901 by Jean-Vincent Scheil (1858–1940), a French Dominican scholar. Scheil translated and published the code in 1902. The code consists of 282 laws found on 12 tablets. Unlike the Code of Ur-Nammu, Hammurabi's law code follows the principle of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," the law of retaliation, or *Lex Talionis*. Punishment varied according to whether the injured party was a nobleman or a commoner.

> If a man has destroyed the eye of a man of the 'gentleman' class, they shall destroy his eye. If he has broken a gentleman's bone, they shall break his bone. If he has destroyed the eye of a commoner or broken a bone of a commoner, he shall pay one mina of silver. If he has destroyed the eye of a gentleman's slave, he shall pay half the slave's price. (From The Code of Hammurabi, 2019)

Around 1600 BC, the Babylonian Empire collapsed when invaded from the north by the Hittites and from the east by the Kassites. The Hittites plundered and then left, but the Kassites remained and ruled Mesopotamia for the next five centuries.

The Hittites were a powerful empire in Anatolia between c. 1700 BC and c. 1200 BC. They spoke an Indo-European[3] language and entered Anatolia as part of a widespread migration of Indo-European people. The Hittites were the first to work iron, although they did not use it for weapons. The fall of the Hittite Empire was a part of the general, catastrophic collapse of the Bronze Age civilizations at the end of the thirteenth century BC. The collapse was brought about by invasions (or migrations) of Indo-Europeans from the north, and repeated attacks from the sea by a mysterious people known as the "Sea People."

Egypt

About the time that cities and writing were appearing in Mesopotamia, civilization was emerging at the southern end of the Fertile Crescent along the Nile River. Ancient Egypt occupied 450 miles (724 km) of the Nile River valley from the first cataract[4] to the Mediterranean Sea. The regular flooding of the Nile created a narrow band of cultivatable land that varied from 5 to 25 miles wide. It was possible to produce two crops per year. It was there, in that narrow band of fertile soil, the "Black Land," that civilization developed. Beyond it on both sides were the vast barren oceans of desert sand, the "Red Land."

Not only did the Nile make agriculture – and with it, civilized life – possible, it was easily navigated, thus providing a measure of unity between Upper (southern) and Lower (northern) Egypt. Relative isolation benefitted ancient Egypt. Invading armies had to either go down the Nile River, where they would be easy targets for defending forces, or cross the Sinai Peninsula, a wide desert. From the beginning of Egypt's history in c. 3100 BC, until it became a part of the Roman Empire in 30 BC, the sight of invading armies was rare. Thus, the Egyptians experienced a sense of regularity, permanence, and security unknown to the people of Mesopotamia.

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3 The term "Indo-European" refers to a group of languages that originated in the Eurasian Steppes about 6000 years ago.

4 The cataracts are shallow sections of the Nile River where rocks, small islands, and whitewater rapids make navigation difficult or impossible. There are six cataracts.

Neolithic Period	c. 4500 – 3000 BC
Early Dynastic Period	c. 3000 – 2650 BC
Old Kingdom	c. 2650 – 2150 BC
First Intermediate Period	c. 2150 – 2040 BC
Middle Kingdom	c. 2040 – 1640 BC
Second Intermediate Period	c. 1640 – 1550 BC
New Kingdom	c. 1550 – 1070 BC
Third Intermediate Period	c. 1070 – 712 BC
Late Period	c. 712 – 332 BC
Graeco-Roman Period	c. 332 BC – AD 642

Figure 1.3 Chronology of ancient Egypt.

Around 3100 BC, Upper and Lower Egypt were unified by Narmer, who became the founder of the first dynasty and thus the first king, or pharaoh, of Egypt.[5] The history of ancient Egypt is divided into 31 dynasties beginning in c. 3100 BC and concluding in 30 BC, and further divided into the Early Dynastic Period, Old Kingdom, First Intermediate Period, Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period, New Kingdom (or Empire), and Post-Empire.

The pharaohs of the Old Kingdom (c. 2700–c. 2200 BC) ruled from Memphis in Upper Egypt. Unlike the kings in Mesopotamia, who were servants of the gods, the pharaoh was a living god, often associated with the falcon-headed god Horus. Upon death, the pharaoh became Osiris, god of the dead. In life, it was his duty to maintain Ma'at – harmony, continuity, unchanging order, justice, and truth. In so doing, the pharaoh guaranteed the safety and prosperity of the people. If he failed to rule wisely, chaos would return in the form of famine or some other disaster. As the possessor of Ma'at, the pharaoh was the source of law and justice. Hence, the Egyptians never developed a law code. There was no need for one.

During the Old Kingdom only the pharaoh, and those he chose to be with him, enjoyed an afterlife. It was important to preserve the pharaoh's body and to provide him with the things he would need in his afterlife. Pyramids of great size, and later tombs, were constructed and filled with the objects, or models of them, that the pharaoh would need. Scenes depicting hunting or other events that the pharaoh enjoyed in life were carved or painted on the walls. They would become reality in the afterlife.

The Egyptians developed a system of writing that combined pictographs and symbols representing sounds in a script referred to as hieroglyphs ("sacred carvings"), meaning "god's words." By inventing the 24 signs for the sounds of consonants, the Egyptians invented the alphabet, or at least the principle of the alphabet. Because of the abundance of Cyperus papyrus, an aquatic plant that grew along the Nile especially in the Delta, the

5 The name of the unifier of Egypt is disputed. Some credit Menes, or Scorpion II, rather than Narmer. The consensus appears to be that Menes and Narmer were the same person, and Scorpion II was a king during the pre-dynastic period. The title "pharaoh" was not used for the Egyptian kings until the reign of Thutmose III (c. 1479–1425 BC) during the period of the New Kingdom, or Empire.

Egyptians were able to make a form of paper known simply as papyrus. Instead of having to make wedge-shaped marks in clay tablets as in Sumerian cuneiform, the Egyptians could use pen and ink to write hieroglyphs on papyrus, as well as carve them or paint them on stone.

The construction of the pyramids during the Old Kingdom testifies to the absolute power of the pharaohs, as well as the engineering skills of the Egyptians. Contrary to the impression one may get from Hollywood, the pyramids were not built by slaves. During the three months each year when the flood waters of the Nile covered the arable land and farming ceased, thousands of peasants were put to work constructing the pyramids. By ensuring the preservation of the pharaoh's body, they were ensuring the continuity of the rhythm of life, especially the regularity of the Nile's flooding upon which life depended.

The pyramids are among the most impressive man-made wonders in history. The first pyramid was built for Djoser (r. c. 2686–c. 2613 BC) at Saqqara, on the west bank of the Nile River opposite Memphis. It has six stepped layers of stone that reached a height of 204 ft. (62 m). The pyramid was surrounded by a 40-acre (16-ha) complex of temples and other buildings enclosed by a 30 ft. (9.1m) high wall. The Step pyramid, as it is called, was designed by history's first known architect, Imhotep (c. 3000–c. 2950 BC).

Most impressive of the pyramids built during the Old Kingdom is the Great Pyramid, built one century later for Khufu (or Cheops, r. c. 2589–2566 BC). It was the first and largest of the pyramids built at Giza on the west bank of the Nile River close to modern-day Cairo, and is the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World still standing.



Figure 1.4 The Great Pyramid of Khufu, or Cheops, completed c. 2560 BC. *Source:* Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Collections.

To build the Great Pyramid, workers cut approximately 2.3 million limestone blocks at quarries 500 miles (804.7 km) away and brought them to Giza. Each block weighed an average of 2.5 tons (2.3 MT), though some were as heavy as 16 tons (14.5 MT). The base is 755 ft. (230.4 m) long on each side (570 000 sq. ft., or 52 954.7 sq. m). The stones are so accurately placed that there is no more than an 8-in. (20.3 cm) difference between the lengths of the sides. The original height was 481 ft. (147 m), making the Great Pyramid the tallest man-made structure well into the nineteenth century AD. The pyramid was encased in smooth limestone. The outer stones fit together so well that a hair cannot be wedged between them. It is estimated that in order to finish the pyramid in 30 years, it would have been necessary to set in place one block every two and a half minutes. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus wrote in *The Histories* (c. 430 BC) that the Egyptians told him it took 100 000 men 20 years to build the Great Pyramid.

A series of weak pharaohs toward the end of the Old Kingdom allowed much of the central government's power to slip into the hands of powerful regional nobles. The result was roughly one century of weak central government and general turmoil between c. 2150 and c. 2050 BC. Mentuhotep II (r. c. 2046–c. 1995 BC), who ruled from Thebes in Upper Egypt, reunited Egypt sometime around the 39th year of his 51-year reign. He was the first pharaoh of the Middle Kingdom, a period of stability and prosperity that lasted from c. 2050 to c. 1652 BC.

The pharaoh's role changed somewhat during the Middle Kingdom. His power over the whole of Egypt was restored, but he was no longer the absolute ruler that he was during the Old Kingdom. The age of the great pyramids was over. The pharaohs of the 11th and 12th dynasties undertook great building projects that benefitted the people by providing employment, but nothing on the scale of the Great Pyramid. It was the pharaoh's role as shepherd of his people that was emphasized. The conquest of Lower Nubia on the southern border of Upper Egypt and military expeditions north along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea enhanced the power of the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom.

During the latter part of the eighteenth-century BC, Lower Egypt (the Delta region) was invaded by a people whom the Egyptians called the Hyksos (meaning "rulers of foreign lands"). The Hyksos spoke a Semitic language and migrated away from the Middle East after Indo-Europeans migrated into it in the second millennium. The Hyksos kings, or pharaohs, ruled Lower Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period from their capital at Avaris in the eastern Delta.

The Hyksos invaders enjoyed the advantage of advanced military organization and technology. The Egyptian army was outdated both in its weaponry and its emphasis on infantry. They relied on their infantry organized into sections of spearmen, bowmen, and archers. Their main weapons were the mace, a solid shaft with a heavy round head used to bludgeon the enemy, and a simple bow. One can only imagine the fear that must have possessed the Egyptians when confronted with a mobile army of warriors with lightweight, horse-drawn chariots. The Egyptians had never seen horses before. Furthermore, the Hyksos warriors had a new composite bow that could fire an arrow at least 200 yards further than the simple bows used by the Egyptians. They wore helmets and body armor and carried penetrating axes, swords, and quivers of arrows. Weapons made of bronze gave the Hyksos a decisive advantage on the battlefield, and subsequently brought Egypt into the Bronze Age.

The Hyksos controlled Lower Egypt, while Upper Egypt remained under a native Egyptian line that ruled from Thebes. Pharaoh Ahmose I (1570–1546 BC) eventually drove the Hyksos out of Egypt and pursued them north into Palestine as far as the Euphrates River. Ahmose I also led a campaign south into Nubia. Ahmose I's reign marks the beginning of the New Kingdom, or the Egyptian Empire (1550–1069 BC). His conquered lands were consolidated and expanded by his successors, Amenhotep I (1546–1526 BC), Thutmose I (1525–1512 BC), Thutmose II (1512–1504 BC), and Thutmose III (1504–1450). Babylon, Assyria, and the Hittite Empire were compelled to send tribute annually to Egypt.

One of the most interesting rulers of Egypt during the New Kingdom was Queen Hatshepsut (c. 1508–1458 BC). She was the daughter of Thutmose I and the half-sister of her husband, Thutmose II, whom she married when she was only 12 years old. When Thutmose II died in 1479 BC, the heir was an infant son by one of his concubines. Hatshepsut assumed the role of regent for her stepson, Thutmose III. At some point, she assumed the role of pharaoh and co-ruler with Thutmose III.

Hatshepsut's reign was a period of prosperity and peace for Egypt. She succeeded in restoring Egyptian culture and religion, which had been interrupted by the Hyksos, to their former glory. Her extensive efforts to expand Egypt's trade included an expedition she sent to the Land of Punt. The location of Punt is not known for sure, but is usually assumed to be the area of modern Somalia and Sudan. The expedition returned with live myrrh trees, frankincense, and other treasures. Trade between Egypt and Punt continued throughout the New Kingdom.

Upon the death of his stepmother in 1458 BC, Thutmose III became pharaoh in his own right. A gifted military commander, he led his armies north as far as Niya in northern Syria and south into Nubia as far as the fourth cataract. In all, Thutmose III led 17 campaigns during 20 years of his 46-year reign. The Egyptian Empire reached its greatest extent under Thutmose III, who is referred to by some as "the Napoleon of Egypt." He died at 90, a remarkable achievement even in the twenty-first century AD.

If Hatshepsut has a rival for "most interesting of the pharaohs," it is Amenhotep IV, also known as Akhenaten (r. c. 1353–c. 1336 BC). Amenhotep IV attempted to replace the various gods of Egypt with one god, Aten, represented as the sun disk. He changed his name from Amenhotep, which means "Amun is satisfied," to Akhenaten, meaning "Effective Spirit of Aten." Beginning in the first year of his reign, Amenhotep IV built several structures at Karnak dedicated to Aten, including a temple. During the fifth or sixth year he constructed a new capital, Akhetaten ("Horizon of Aten") on the east bank of the Nile, 194 miles (312 km) south of modern Cairo.

Akhenaten's religious revolution gave birth to a new style in art, one more realistic than the stiff, formal style normally associated with ancient Egypt. Traditional artistic styles emphasized the eternal, unchanging nature of the universe that was central to the Egyptian worldview as far back as the Old Kingdom. Akhenaten's new religion and new capital, well away from Thebes and the old gods, ushered in a new artistic style called the Amarna Renaissance that was more realistic. Art from the period includes scenes of Akhenaten, his queen Nefertiti, and their children in everyday settings, playing together beneath "the Aten." Nature in all its beauty likewise became the subject of art. One need only compare

the famous bust of Nefertiti[6] with any traditional bust or statue made before or after Akhenaten to see how radically new were the artistic styles.

Literature embraced the artistry of the Amarna period. Akhenaten himself is believed to have written a number of hymn-poems to Aten. The "Great Hymn to Aten," found on the west wall of the tomb of Ay, Akhenaten's chief minister and pharaoh after the death of Tutankhamun (Tutankhaten), is the primary source for the new religion.

> O sole god without equal!
> You are alone, shining in your form of the living Aten.
> Risen, radiant, distant, and near.
> (Great Hymn, 47 & 73–74)

The noted Egyptologist Toby A.H. Wilkinson (b. 1969) says that "it has been called 'one of the most significant and splendid pieces of poetry to survive from the pre-Homeric world'" (Darnell and Manassa 2007, p. 41).

Akhenaten's religious reforms may represent a power struggle between the pharaoh and the powerful priesthood of Amun (Amen, Amen Re) at Thebes. Ahmose I emphasized the worship of Amun when he drove the Hyksos out of Egypt, perhaps as an attempt to unify the Egyptian people after roughly one century of foreign rule in Lower Egypt. By the beginning of the reign of Akhenaten, the power of the priests of Amun in Thebes rivaled that of the pharaoh. The fact that Akhenaten changed his name, built a new capital and center for the worship of Aten, and attempted to erase the worship of Amun and the other traditional gods, supports the theory that his religious reforms were a part of an effort to restore the pharaoh's historic position as the sole ruler of Egypt. Also, it is worth noting that the new religion was not in fact true monotheism. Only Akhenaten and his family worshiped Aten. All others worshiped the pharaoh, Akhenaten. The pharaoh was the only access to Aten.

Akhenaten's attempt to establish the worship of Aten did not survive him. His obsession with his new religion meant he neglected his responsibility to rule and defend Egypt. The resulting chaos or appearance of chaos no doubt contributed to the abandonment of Atenism and the restoration of Amun and his powerful priesthood. Akhenaten's son, Tutankhaten (c. 1341–c. 1323), ascended the throne at age nine or ten. The worship of Aten was abandoned along with Akhetaten, which was left to eventually disappear beneath the sand. The temples to Aten were abandoned as well and became the source of building materials for new construction. In the third year of his reign, Tutankhaten changed his name to Tutankhamun, meaning "Living Image of Amun."

Tutankhamun was a minor pharaoh who likely would have been forgotten if the British archeologist Howard Carter (1874–1939) had not discovered his tomb in 1922. The discovery of the only intact tomb of a pharaoh was one of the greatest discoveries in the history of Egyptology. When one considers what was found in King Tut's tomb, one can only wonder what might have been found in the tomb of, say, Ramses II.

Ramses II, also known as Ramses the Great (c. 1303–1213 BC), became pharaoh at 30 and reigned for 67 years. It is not just his longevity that makes him the most celebrated of Egypt's pharaohs. He reasserted Egyptian control over territories lost due to Akhenaten's

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6 The authenticity of the famous Nefertiti bust was called into question in 2009 in a somewhat sensationalized news release by the Swiss art historian Henri Stierlin (Fake claims 2009). Stierlin has since been proven to be mistaken (Dell'Amore 2009).

neglect. He led successful campaigns north to Syria and south to Nubia. At the Battle of Kadesh (1258 BC) in Syria, Ramses II's forces engaged the Hittites led by King Muwatalli II (c. 1295–1272 BC). Ramses II hailed it as a great victory. He had his account of the battle carved on the walls of the great temple of Abu Simbel. Most scholars today believe the battle was indecisive. The Battle of Kadesh is significant because it resulted in the Treaty of Kadesh, the first known peace treaty in history.

Ramses II is considered by many the greatest pharaoh of the Egyptian Empire. When his mummy was sent to Paris in 1974 to be treated for a fungus, he was issued an Egyptian passport that listed his occupation as "King (deceased)." Upon arrival at Le Bourget Airport near Paris, his mummy was greeted with full military honors and a red carpet.[7] After Ramses II's death, the Egyptian Empire began a steady, prolonged decline. Ramses III (1217–1155 BC) was the last great pharaoh of the New Kingdom. He reigned 1186–1155 BC, during a period of economic decline and foreign invasions.

The whole of the Middle East, indeed the whole of the Mediterranean world, was experiencing a tidal wave of migration and invasion between 1250 and 900 BC. Indo-European-speaking people swept down from the north destroying everything in their path. On the Greek mainland, the Mycenaean civilization, the Greece of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, was destroyed by the invaders. The powerful Hittite Empire also succumbed. The Egyptians were driven back into Africa, but were able to beat back repeated assaults by invaders referred to as the "Sea People," some of whom may have been refugees from Greece.

Of those civilizations that were present in 1200 BC, only weakened Egypt survived the cataclysm. In the Middle East, there was a power vacuum. Between c. 1250 and 750 BC, no one power exerted hegemony over the area. This period before the rise of the empires of the Assyrians, Chaldeans (Neo-Babylonian), and Persians is referred to as the "era of the small kingdoms." The Phoenician (or Canaanite) city-states flourished along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and the Hebrew Kingdom of Israel rose and fell.

The brief life of the Kingdom of Israel merits attention, for the ancient Hebrews provide one of the three streams of civilization that blend together to produce what we call Western, or European, Civilization. The other two are the Greco-Roman, or Classical, and Germanic traditions. It is primarily to the Hebrews and the Greeks, not the Egyptians or other civilizations of the ancient Near East, that we look to for the spiritual roots of Western Civilization. The Hebrews broke radically with the other peoples of the ancient Near East in how they answered the perennial questions of the meaning and purpose of existence.

Hebrews

Much of what is known about the early history of the Hebrews comes from the Hebrew Scriptures. They are a sacred history, the story of a special, covenant relationship between the one God (Yahweh) and his chosen people, the Hebrews.[8] According to the biblical story, Yahweh is the eternally existing, personal, sovereign creator of all that exists, the one who

7 Ramses II is remembered for his remarkable family. He may have had as many as 200 wives and fathered as many as 100 sons and 60 daughters, two of which were included among his wives.

8 Most scholars consider the Hebrew Scriptures to contain passages of reliable history and an indispensable primary source for studying Ancient Near Eastern history.

chose to identify Himself to Moses[9] (Exodus 3) as "I AM." The Hebrew people were a semi-nomadic group of sheep herders who Yahweh chose to be his people. They were not chosen because of who they were, but to become the means by which Yahweh would make himself known to his creation, and through whom he would bless all his creation.

The Hebrew Scriptures relate the story of a group of Hebrews who left the city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia sometime around 1900 BC on a journey westward to the land of Canaan. They were led by Abram, later known as Abraham ("father of a multitude"). Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph, was taken to Egypt, where he was a slave who became a high official of the pharaoh. That was likely during the time when the Hyksos ruled Lower Egypt. Being foreigners themselves, they would not have any reservations about appointing a foreigner to a position of importance in the government.

When a severe famine struck Canaan, Joseph's father, Jacob, went to Egypt with his family. The Hebrews prospered and grew in number until, according to Exodus 1:8, "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (ESV). The new pharaoh, perhaps alarmed by the fact that the foreigners were living on the frontier of Egypt through which the Hyksos had invaded Egypt and through which any future invasion would likely come, decided to make forced laborers, or slaves, out of them.

The Hebrews were in bondage in Egypt perhaps 400 (Genesis 15:13) or 430 years (Exodus 12:41). When the period of bondage in Egypt, foretold in Genesis 15:13, was fulfilled, the Hebrew people were led out of Egypt by Moses, a leader raised up by Yahweh for that purpose. Moses led them into the Sinai Peninsula, where they wandered for 40 years. Yahweh renewed his covenant with the Hebrews and gave them a code of laws, both legal and moral. During that period, known as the Exodus, the Hebrews became a nation.

There is much debate over when the Exodus occurred. It took place in the year 2448, according to the Jewish calendar. Some scholars, called biblical minimalists (or the Copenhagen School), do not believe that there ever was such a historical event. They begin with the presupposition that the Bible does not contain reliable evidence for historical events in the history of ancient Israel.

The debate centers around two possible dates for the Exodus. One, that favored by most historians, is c. 1270 BC, during the reign of Rameses II (r. 1279–1213 BC). The second, favored by some biblical scholars, is c. 1446 BC, during the reign of Amenhotep II (r. c. 1450–1425 BC). There are good arguments for and against each one. Given the importance of the event in the history of both Judaism and Christianity the debate is unlikely to ever be resolved.

After a period of 40 years wandering in the wilderness, the Hebrews entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Moses' assistant and successor. The conquest and settlement of Canaan took generations. It was a three-way struggle between the Hebrews, the Canaanites, and the Philistines. The Philistines were an element of the Sea People who were conquering and settling along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Following Joshua's

9 Dates for Moses are largely speculative and bound up with the problem of dating the Hebrew exodus from Egypt. According to the Jewish calendar, Moses was born on the seventh of Adar of the year 2368 from creation or c. 1393 BC. The same difficulty arises when trying to determine the dates for Abraham, Joseph, Jacob, and Joshua.

death, the Hebrews were organized into a loose confederation of 12 tribes. During crises, they united under charismatic leaders known as judges.

Around 1024 BC, the 12 tribes united as a kingdom. Saul (d. 1010 BC) of the tribe of Benjamin in Israel was chosen king and anointed by Samuel (fl. c. 1000 BC), who, according to rabbinical literature, was the last judge and the earliest of the Major Prophets. Saul was succeeded by his son-in-law, David (c. 1040–c. 970 BC), who completed the conquest of the Canaanites and the Philistines. David established a united kingdom of Israel with its capital at Jerusalem. Israel reached its greatest geographic extent under one of David's younger sons, Solomon (c. 970–931 BC).

Solomon's reign was the "golden age" of Israel. Great prosperity allowed Solomon to engage in a number of impressive building projects, including a very elaborate temple and temple complex in Jerusalem. Jerusalem under Solomon was a very cosmopolitan capital city. Foreigners journeyed to Jerusalem to witness the splendor of Solomon's court. The Old Testament records an account of the queen of Sheba (kingdom of Saba in present day Yemen) who "came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones" (1 Kings 10:2, ESV). Solomon's wealth was not measured in just gold and silver, but in the size of his harem. According to 1 Kings 11:1-3, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Following Solomon's death in 931 BC, Israel was divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel with its capital at Samaria and the kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as its capital.

The Hebrew people understood themselves to be in a covenant relationship with Yahweh. They were to remain separate from the other nations. They were not to worship other gods, intermarry with foreigners, or mix other cultures with their own. They were, in a word, to remain holy. They failed.

Solomon's building projects brought many skilled laborers to Israel. Israel became the center for much of the trade in the Middle East. The wealth gained from trade brought with it foreign cultural influences. Solomon concluded marriage alliances with foreign states, including Egypt. Not only did he intermarry with women from among the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites, all of which were forbidden under the covenant with Yahweh, but he committed idolatry by constructing for them places where they could worship their gods. Solomon, himself, joined in worshiping the foreign gods.

Hebrew Contribution to Western Civilization

The roots of Western Civilization, that is, those core values or principles that distinguishes it from other civilizations, are found in its Judeo-Christian and Greek heritage. These include the emphasis on reason, the unique value of the individual, and the conviction that there is meaning and purpose for both history and the individual.

In contrast to the other religions of the ancient Near East that believed in many gods who were in some fashion or other born or created, Yahweh is sovereign and transcendent, eternal and omnipotent, the creator of all that exists. Nature is not an extension of the divine, nor is it the dwelling place of gods, spirits, and demons, but the handiwork of God, created from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). Nature is meant to show forth God's glory and inspire worship.

God the Creator alone is to be worshiped, not nature. This demythicizing of nature made possible both the Scientific Revolution and the Industrial Revolution in the West.

Central to Judeo-Christianity is the belief that God created human beings in his own image, distinct from the rest of creation. Since God created an orderly universe, not a universe of random chance, and created human beings in his image, they are able to use reason to understand how the universe works, or as the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626) said, "capable of thinking God's thoughts after him." But the Hebrews did not create scientific thought, that is, the scientific method. That awaited the Greek philosophers who sought to understand reality beginning with reason alone. The Hebrews were concerned with knowing God and his will for them, not philosophical speculation.

The Hebrews believed that although God was sovereign over all of his creation, he endowed human beings with a free will. Each individual was not only empowered with the ability to choose between right and wrong, good and evil, but obligated to do so: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life ..." (Deuteronomy 30:19, ESV). God alone was the source of what was right or wrong, good or evil. Choosing to obey God's will resulted in blessings; choosing to disobey resulted in death:

> If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you ... But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. (Deuteronomy 30: 16-18, ESV)

The Hebrews had an explanation for the existence of evil. It was not the result of the capricious or whimsical will of finite gods who were themselves subject to fate. Rather, evil resulted from the willful choice of the individual to reject God's moral law and act as if autonomous.

Just as the nation of Israel was God's chosen people bound to him by a covenant, so too was the individual. According to the covenant between God and Abraham, the Hebrew people were to make God's moral law known to all the nations of the world by their obedience. There is both parochialism and universalism implied in the covenant. On the one hand, it is a covenant between God and his Chosen People. On the other hand, it is a covenant between God and all humanity. The prophet Isaiah gives a vision of a time when all the nations (i.e. all people groups) of the earth will come to the mountain of the Lord (Isaiah 2:2).

The Hebrew prophets reminded the people that because they were chosen to know God's Law, they had a responsibility to be on the side of justice. They reminded the people that tolerating injustice violated God's Law and would bring upon them God's righteous wrath. Injustice violated the dignity of the individual (both male and female) who bore the image of God, and injustice was therefore an affront to God himself. By reminding the people that their freedom of will impacted the present and the future, the prophets held out the vision of a messianic age free of poverty and injustice. The belief that human beings were able to construct a better world order became one of the core values of Western Civilization.

The worldview of the ancient Hebrews differed dramatically from that of all the other civilizations of the ancient world. It is a "mechanistic" view of a universe that operates by discoverable natural laws, not random chance. Time is understood to be linear with both a beginning and an end not an endless repetition of cycles. There is meaning and purpose for both history and the individual. All this is known by human beings through reason. Because there are moral absolutes implicit in the universe, and because human beings possess a free will, individual choices and actions influence the flow of history. When blended with the worldview of the ancient Greeks (see Chapter 2) and later certain Germanic traditions (see Chapter 4) the result is what is called Western Civilization.

Later Empires

The first of the later empires to arise as the invasions from the north subsided was Assyria. By c. 750 BC, the Assyrians had conquered the whole of Mesopotamia. The northern Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. The Assyrians scattered many of the Hebrews throughout their empire. Thus, the ten northern Hebrew tribes that made up the northern kingdom of Israel after the division of Solomon's kingdom disappeared as they blended in with the inhabitants of the areas in which they settled. The Assyrian Empire expanded until it eventually included Syria, Phoenicia, and Egypt. It contributed nothing of value to civilization, and its people are remembered primarily for their extreme cruelty.

The Assyrian capital of Nineveh was captured and burned by the Chaldeans in 612 BC. The Chaldean, or Neo-Babylonian, Empire succeeded the Assyrian Empire in Mesopotamia. The empire reached the height of its power under King Nebuchadnezzar II (634–562 BC). Nebuchadnezzar II was a great builder. He transformed the city of Babylon into one of the most splendid cities of the ancient Near East. "In addition to its size," Herodotus wrote, "Babylon surpasses in splendor any city in the known world."

Nebuchadnezzar II invaded and conquered the southern kingdom of Judah in 597 BC. After taking Jerusalem, he deposed Jehoiakim (c. 635–598) and placed on the throne, a new king of his own choosing, Zedekiah (b. 618). When Zedekiah revolted and made an alliance with Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar II invaded and laid siege to Jerusalem. After an 18-month siege, Jerusalem fell. The city and Solomon's Temple were razed to the ground. Zedekiah and several thousand prominent citizens were taken captive to Babylon. Zedekiah died in prison, but those who were taken captive with him endured 70 years of exile in Babylon. The period of the "Babylonian Captivity" became a defining moment in Jewish history.

The Chaldean Empire, impressive as it was, lasted less than a century. In 539 BC, a force of Medes and Persians led by a brilliant military strategist, Cyrus the Great (r. 559–530 BC), brought the curtain down on the Chaldean Empire with the capture of Babylon. Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Hebrew exiles to return to Judah. Many made "the return to Zion" over the next 110 years, where they enjoyed a measure of autonomy under Persian rule. When Cyrus' son Cambyses died in 522 BC, having added Egypt to the empire founded by his father, all of western Asia was under Persian rule. Darius the Great (550–486 BC) abandoned any further conquest, concentrating instead upon transforming the vast conquests into what many call the world's first modern empire.

Persia under Darius was the first empire to be administered by a royal bureaucracy. Darius divided his empire into provinces under the rule of royal officials known as "satraps." Commerce was encouraged by a state-issued coinage, an idea borrowed from the Lydians. Lydia was a wealthy kingdom in west-central Anatolia (modern Turkey). Many believe that the Lydians were the first to mint coins. Cyrus the Great conquered Lydia in 546 BC. Along with the standardized coinage went a common system of weights and measures. A system of roads, including the Royal Post Road, which stretched from Ephesus on the Aegean Sea to Susa near the Persian Gulf, encouraged commerce and unified the empire. A canal linking the Red Sea with the Nile River, originally dug by the Egyptians but since allowed to fill with sand, was reopened. Aramaic became the official language throughout the empire. Zoroastrianism, a dualistic religion that stressed ethics while rejecting blood sacrifices, polytheism, and temple worship, became a universal faith, transcending both the state and the people that gave it birth, thus further unifying the Persian Empire.

The expansion of the Persian Empire through Asia Minor to the Aegean coast brought the Persians into contact with the Greeks. The so-called Persian Wars between 499 and 479 BC, and the subsequent conquest of the Persian Empire by the youthful Alexander the Great of Greece, spread Greek culture throughout the ancient world from Egypt and Greece in the west to the Indus River in the east. It remained for the Romans to complete the mission by unifying the whole of the Mediterranean world, and then pass both the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions on to Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire in the West in AD 476.

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