CHAPTER ONE: AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

History is usually defined as the study of the past beginning with the first systematic written records sometimes in the 4th millennium (4000-3000 BCE). However, some important developments occurred earlier that greatly influenced the course of world history. Over tens of thousands of years, human beings spread over many parts of the earth from their earliest origins in East Africa. Then, beginning about 8000 BCE, an important “marker event” occurred: the development of agriculture and agricultural communities.

HUMAN LIFE BEFORE 8000 BCE

Exactly when the first human beings appeared is debatable, but they existed on earth for millions of years before 8000 BCE. Archaeologists currently believe that the decisive differentiation between humans and apes occurred between 6 and 8 million years ago. New discoveries are being made every day, but the general trend has been to push the date further and further back into prehistory. One distinction between humans and other mammals is bipedalism, or the preference from walking erect on two limbs rather than four. DNA analysis of bone fragments that are millions of years old indicates that the earliest known bipedal creature was *Ardepithecus ramidus*, discovered in Ethiopia in 2001. From there, many different species of humans developed, but all disappeared except for *Homo sapiens*, which appears to have been the only surviving human species by the time period between 50,000 and 10,000 years ago.

In the long period of time before people began keeping written records, primary sources did not take the form of documents but included objects, artifacts, and skeletal remains. Some objects made of stone and bone have survived, so we know that hominids used refined tools some 70,000 years ago during the Paleolithic Age (or Old Stone Age). The Paleolithic Age extended until about 8000 BCE, by which time humans inhabited all continents except Antarctica. *Homo sapiens* had several advantages over other species, including forelimbs freed from walking and opposable thumbs, with both features allowing them to manipulate objects as tools or weapons. Perhaps the most significant advantage, however, was the development of a large brain, especially well developed in the frontal regions where conscious and reflective thought takes place. Humans were not as strong as many other species, but they were able to figure out how to thrive, even in colder climates, by devising effective ways to solve the problems of survival. (timeline and map, pp. 7-8)

Hunting and Gathering- During the Paleolithic Age humans survived by foraging for their food: hunting wild animals and gathering edible plants. They traveled in small groups (probably about thirty to fifty members) and had to constantly keep moving in order to follow herds of animals and find new areas where edible plants grew. Their movement kept them from accumulating possessions and from developing any sense of property ownership. Although some people undoubtedly emerged as leaders, hunting and gathering groups were marked by very few status differences since they did not accumulate wealth. The basic division of labor was based on sex, with the men usually responsible for hunting and the women for gathering. However, it appears as if they made no judgment that one activity was more important than the

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1 Wood, Ethel. *AP World History: Essential Coursebook*, 2nd
other, so many scholars believe that one sex did not dominate the other. Meat was highly prized, as was the hunter, but the groups could not have survived without the gathering skills of women.

The survival of hunters and gatherers depended on a thorough understanding of their natural environment. Older women, in particular, had an extensive knowledge of which plants were edible and which were poisonous, and they passed their skills down to younger women, who were able to gather with young children strapped to their bodies. Hunters had to devise clever ways of catching animals that were often larger and faster than they were, and they wore disguises, carefully coordinated their movements, set traps, and created distractions in order to snare their prey.

The Importance of Tools- *Homo sapiens* and some of their ancestors created special tools, such as sharp knives, bows and arrows, and spears. Early tools were made from wood bone, and stone, although no wooden tools and few bone tools survive. The earliest stone tools were made by breaking off the edges of stone cores to create points or cutting surfaces. Later they sharpened flakes broken from the core stone. Humans used tools to help them build huts of branches, stones, bones, skins, and leaves, and some 26000 years ago they began to weave cloth. Tools also eventually allowed them to invent and sustain agriculture as early as 8000 BCE. (pg. 12)

Paleolithic Culture- Little is known about Paleolithic culture since few artifacts have survived to modern day. Perhaps the best known remainders are the cave paintings in Europe and North Africa, the oldest created about 32,000 years ago. The paintings show animals, such as wild oxen, reindeer, and horses, as well as people dressed in animal skins, smeared with paint. A newly discovered cave near Pont d’Arc in the Ardèche region of France features panthers, bears, owls, a rhinoceros, and a hyena. Some cave art also indicates that Stone Age people had well-developed religions, and at several Neanderthal (a *Homo sapiens* sub-species first found in the Neander valley in southwestern Germany) sites, there are signs of careful, ritualistic burials. In some, survivors placed flint tools and animal bones in and around the graves of the dead. Cro-Magnon people wore necklaces, bracelets, and beads, and also decorated their furniture.

The life styles of prehistoric peoples are often characterized as violent, uncertain, and exhausting, but many scholars believe that hunters and gatherers in areas abundant with game and plants, such as the African grasslands, probably only spent from three to five hours a day tending to their survival. In such areas, people would have had plenty of time to make tools, create art, and socialize with others in their group. (image and text, pg. 16)

**The Neolithic Revolution**

The term Neolithic (or Agricultural) Revolution refers to the changeover from food gathering to food producing that serves as a “marker event” that transformed human society and the natural environment. However, the term is deceiving because the revolution was not a single event but instead occurred at different times in different parts of the world. Even as the “agricultural revolution” took place in one place, it usually happened gradually over the course of several generations. Slowly, hunting and gathering gave way to sowing, harvesting, and keeping domesticated animals. Usually agriculture (the deliberate tending of crops and livestock in order to produce food and fiber) was adopted a little at a time to supplement the needs of hunters and gatherers. Some members of the group hunted while other experimented and planting seeds from wild plants, usually grasses, and eventually agriculture became the primary economic activity. When that event occurred, the revolution was complete for that group, as the sequence of events continued to evolve for other groups.
Early Horticulture and Pastoralism - Horticulture may be distinguished from agriculture in that horticulturalists used only hand tools, such as hoes and digging sticks, to plant seeds and cultivate crops. Horticulture developed earlier than agriculture, which made use of animals and plows to speed up and otherwise greatly improve the process. Pastoralists were the first domesticators of animals, and they remained semi-nomadic, regularly leading their herds to fresh grazing lands. Horticulturalists were the first to settle in one place, and eventually were able to integrate domesticated animals into their communities. Agriculturalists could cultivate fields vastly larger than the garden-sized plots worked by horticulturalists, and plows turned and aerated soil to increase fertility. As a result, their communities grew larger and their surpluses rose.

The Domestication of Grains - In the Middle East, the region with the earliest evidence of agriculture, humans transformed wild grasses into higher-yielding domesticated grains called emmer wheat and barley. According to Jared Diamond, author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, the development of agriculture was mainly dependent on the availability of grains and domesticable animals in the area. Another factor may have been the availability of food that could be hunted and gathered, and hunger may have necessitated invention in areas where readily available food was scarce. Plants domesticated in the Middle East spread to nearby areas through cultural diffusion as nearby people learned from those already practicing farming, but agriculture probably arose as an independent invention in many areas. Domestic rice originated in southern China, Southeast Asia, or northern India; maize (corn) was grown in Mesoamerica; and potatoes, squash, tomatoes, and peppers were grown in the Andes Mountain areas of Peru. (image, pg. 19)

The Domestication of Animals - As agriculture developed, many people also domesticated animals. It makes sense that as groups settled down, they had to free themselves from following the herds, so the logical solution was to train the animals to stay put, too. Of course, some animals are more easily domesticated than others. The dog was probably the first domesticated animal, as hunters discovered the animal’s helpfulness in tracking game. More directly related to the development of agriculture was the domestication of sheep and goats in southwest Asia; cows in Eurasia and northern Africa; water buffalo and chickens in China; camels in Arabia and central Asia; and horses and pigs in Eurasia. Some areas of the world appear to have had few good candidates for domestication, such as Mesoamerica, Sub-Saharan Africa, New Guinea, and the Andes area, although the llama was domesticated in the Andes.

The Neolithic Revolution as a “Marker Event” - Even though the changes were gradual, it is still appropriate to call the transition to agriculture a “revolution” or “marker event” because it profoundly affected the way that human beings lived. Some important changes include:

1) **People settled down**—To be near their crops, people settled into villages instead of constantly moving about as hunters and gatherers did. Because they didn’t have to worry about carrying their possessions with them, people began to accumulate goods and claim pieces of land as their own. The concept of private property began to define human society.

2) **Division of labor**—In hunting and gathering groups, the basic division of labor was between men (the hunters) and women (the gatherers). In early agricultural settlements, people began to see the advantages of “specialization”. For example, those most talented at crafting agricultural tools could do that for all the villagers, and those we best tended animals that pulled plows could do that. As a result, all work could be done more efficiently.

3) **Social inequality**—Whereas hunting and gathering groups were characterized by relative social equality,
agricultural groups began to display social distinctions, and eventually social classes. Some people accumulated more land than others and passed property down to their children, making some families “distinguished” and others not. With specialized occupations, some were awarded more respect and/or material rewards, and social inequality increased even more.

4) **Gender inequality**—The Neolithic Revolution is almost certainly responsible for the beginnings of status distinctions between men and women. Scholars offer many explanations, but most are based on the loss of women’s economic power. In hunting and gathering societies, a woman’s gathering skills were essential for the survival of the group. With agriculture, men took over both the care of animals and plants, and women were sidelined to domestic chores that enhanced, but were not central to, the survival of the village. One explanation for this change is that the male’s superior physical strength meant that he was better able to manage when animal and plant care were merged in agricultural production.

5) **The importance of surplus**—With increasing specialization, not everyone was a farmer. For every craftsman who did not spend his days tending to crops, the farmers had to produce enough to support the craftsman and his family. The only way to do this was to raise a surplus, or more crops than the farmer needed to feed his own family. Surplus also meant that foodstuffs could be put away for later so that food supplies became more reliable. Once food supplies became more reliable, people ate more regularly, health improved, and population increased. With larger populations, more specialization occurred, and so villages grew into towns and eventually into cities that needed to be coordinated and controlled, giving way to specialized jobs in government.

6) **Religious changes**—Religious beliefs are evident in hunting and gathering societies, but most agricultural societies developed polytheism, or the belief in multiple gods. Whereas earlier beliefs probably centered on spirits [animism], now “gods” with many human characteristics presided over areas and objects important to farmers—sun gods, rain gods, gods of the harvest, and female fertility gods. Neolithic people made the connection between fertility of the soil and fertility of human beings, and many voluptuous female goddesses were celebrated in the form of clay figurines, decorations on pots, vases, and tools, and ritual objects. Infant deities represented the regeneration of human, animal, and plant life.

**Three Craft Industries**—Three Neolithic craft industries emerged as agriculture developed: pottery, metallurgy, and textiles. Making use of natural products around them, early craftsworkers fashioned goods that were useful to agricultural communities. Pottery served as containers for storing food, and was made by fire-hardening clay into waterproof pots. Copper was probably the first metal that humans shaped into useful items and jewelry because it is easily malleable. By 6000 BCE people had discovered that it was even more versatile when heated to high temperatures, and they fashioned copper knives, axes, farm tools, and weapons. Textile production is hard to trace because fibers don’t easily survive the ages, but some fragments indicated that fibers were woven together as early as 6000 BCE and eventually fibers were spun into thread that was woven into cloth.

**The Growth of Towns and Cities**—By 4000 BCE a number of villages had grown into towns, and towns into a few small cities, such as Jericho on the Jordan River and Catal Hüyük in southern Turkey. Both settlements were founded by 7000 BCE, and both were heavily fortified for protection. Jericho’s round houses of mud and brick on stone foundations were
surrounded by a ditch and wall almost 12 feet high. Catal Hüyük’s houses were joined together so that once outside entrances were barricaded, the houses could not be invaded. Both places relied upon trade to supplement their agricultural base. Jericho traded its salt, sulfur, and pitch for semiprecious stones from Anatolia, turquoise from the Sinai, and obsidian and cowrie shells from other areas. Catal Hüyük traded flint, obsidian, and jewelry with towns and villages nearby. Although it is not accurate to call Jericho and Catal Hüyük cities, their organizations and the life styles of their inhabitants foreshadowed the development of great cities and civilizations during the watershed 4th millennium BCE.

CHAPTER TWO: THE EARLIEST CIVILIZATIONS

Farming encouraged new forms of social organization partly because owning property was an incentive to make improvements, particularly in getting access to water. Building and maintaining irrigation ditches depended on cooperation among farmers, and irrigation needs led people to settle in villages rather than on isolated farms. These activities called for supervision and regulation, so the need for some type of formalized government arose. Once the number of people in a settlement grew so that more division of labor occurred, the village could be called a town. Even more growth and specialization led to the formation of the first cities where interconnected citizens lived in close proximity. It is no wonder, then, that the first civilizations grew up in river valleys where access to fresh water allowed crops to be irrigated so that economic activities could be organized through interactions among cities, towns, and the countryside.

THE MEANING OF CIVILIZATION

Some important characteristics of civilizations are:

1) **Generation of reliable surpluses** – Agricultural technology allows farmers to produce more than their families need. In the earliest civilizations, farmers supported many city dwellers and filled food storage houses to provide a reliable food source in lean times.

2) **Highly specialized occupations** – Whereas village and town life was characterized by division of labor, occupational specializations in the early civilizations were far more complex, including jobs in government, trade, merchandise, and religion.

3) **Clear social class distinctions** – With the growing complexity of occupations, the early civilizations set status distinctions among them, so that big differences appeared in prestige levels and wealth.

4) **Urbanization** – Population centers in the ancient civilizations varied in size, but many were far larger than any that had been seen before. As economic, political, social, and cultural life grew more interrelated, some towns grew into cities.

5) **Complex, Formal Governments** – The early need for government to coordinate agricultural activities became even greater as more economic activities developed and cities grew larger.

6) **Long-Distance Trade** – The early civilizations first built internal [local] trade networks, and eventually developed long-distance [regional and inter-regional] trade networks among different civilizations. This trade stimulated economic development, encouraged cultural development, and accentuated social class distinctions.

7) **Organized Writing Systems** – Most early civilizations developed forms of writing that enabled traders, religious leaders, and political leaders to communicate. […]

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The earliest civilization is generally believed to have developed in Mesopotamia, or “land between the rivers,” in southwest Asia sometime during the 4th Millennium [3000s] BCE. By 3500 BCE writing [cuneiform] had developed, and by 3000 BCE governments were entrenched. The two rivers—the Tigris and the Euphrates—rise in modern day Turkey, parallel one another for about 400 miles, and finally join just before they empty into the Persian Gulf. Because the area is geographically accessible from many directions, it became a “crossroads” for diverse groups of people that sometimes settled and sometimes moved on. Many early settlers were members of the Semitic language family that was the precursor to both modern Hebrew and Arabic languages. A non-Semitic group called Sumerians, who came into lower Mesopotamia about 5000 BCE, is generally credited with building the earliest civilization with many of the characteristics listed above. Gradually they created small competing city-states, each centered in a large town that governed the countryside around it. By about 3000 BCE the Sumerians had subjugated many of the Semites in the area, either by coercion or consent, and the area of their control grew larger. Sumerian power was cemented by brisk trade resulting from conquests that brought food produced in villages to the towns and created thus created economic ties among the towns. Despite the growing economic interdependence, the towns remained quarrelsome, and the Sumerians’ early history was characterized by unceasing warfare, often provoked by competition for control of precious irrigated lands. (map, pg. 30)

**Economic Development**- As in all ancient civilizations, the majority of people were farmers, herders, or workers directly associated with agriculture, such as wine pressers, millers, or carters. Probably about 5% of the population lived in cities and did not grow their own food. Even those involved in trade were most likely to be involved in trading food, especially grain. However, the towns and cities were the birthplaces of literacy, and the numbers involved in occupations that required the ability to read and write—such as scribes, bookkeepers, and priests—grew as the population increased. Craftsmen did not have to be literate, but metalworking [metallurgy], leather work, pottery and jewelry making, carpentry, and masonry [stone-working] all required special training. Many people were involved in the central task of early civilizations: creating and maintaining a reliable water source. Labor systems [included free wage-based labor and unfree (or slave) labor]. Slaves made up a significant portion of the working population, and were often assigned unpleasant or dangerous work, such as mining or handling the dead.

**Political Development**- The Sumerian city-states were not physically united until about 2300 BCE when an invading Semitic group led by Sargon the Great conquered the entire area. He founded the Akkadian Empire that was dominated by the newly created town of Akkad. As a result of the political conquest, cultural diffusion [the movement of cultural elements across space] of Sumerian ways spread throughout much of the area, influencing a wide swath of land from Mesopotamia to Egypt that become known as the Fertile Crescent.

Before Sargon’s conquest most of the city-states were theocracies, governed by gods or priests. Sargon changed that tradition so that the cities were ruled by kings, but priests were so revered that the kings often obeyed their wishes. The location of the temple in the city’s heart and the king’s palace on the outskirts provides archaeologists with evidence for early control by priests. However, the constant warfare almost certainly increased the power of the warrior king, so that kings after Sargon assumed responsibility for the temples, city defenses, irrigation channels, and the system of justice. Sargon and his descendants secured loyalty from their soldiers by giving them land. The Akkadian Empire only lasted for a little over a century, and the city-state of Ur rose to replace Akkad in power. The government bureaucracy grew during this time,
and a system of messengers and road stations speeded up communication in the area. During the 1700s BCE Hammurabi led the Babylonians to conquer Mesopotamia, only to be followed by a series of other people that came through the crossroads over the centuries, including the Hittites in the 1500s BCE, the Assyrians in the 900s BCE, and finally the New Babylonians in the 500s BCE.

A significant “marker event” occurred under the Babylonians with the advent of the first known written law code (a systematic set of rules administered by a government). Hammurabi’s Code, inscribed on a black stone pillar, gave judges many examples of punishments for crimes meant to be used as standards for justice. These codes provide insight into much more than just laws, since they also illuminate a rich assortment of beliefs and customs of the Mesopotamian people.

**Social Distinctions** - The Code of Hammurabi identified three distinct classes in Mesopotamia in the 18th C [1700s] BCE:

1) The free land-owning class, which consisted of the royal family, priests, warriors, high government officials, merchants, and some craftsmen and shopkeepers;
2) A class of dependent farmers and craftsmen, who worked for the free land-owing class;
3) Slaves, who often did domestic work and less desirable jobs outside the home.

Slaves were often prisoners of war, and others were debtors. However, slave labor was not as important as it was later to become in ancient Greece and Rome. They were identified by a particular hairstyle, not by permanent marks or chains, so those that won their freedom could easily rid themselves of their previous status. It was not uncommon for a debtor to become a slave for a few years and then be freed when the debt was paid.

Women lost social standing and freedom with the spread of agriculture, and in the ancient civilizations—including Mesopotamia—a food surplus made larger families possible, so women were tied to their responsibilities at home. Women could own property, control their dowries, and participate in trade, but men controlled political and religious life. The status of women appears to have declined significantly during the 2nd millennium BCE as urbanization and private wealth increased. In later Mesopotamian history men could take a second wife if the first did not bear children, and kings and other rich men often had several wives. Daughters of nobility were married to noblemen of their family’s choosing in order to enhance the family’s wealth and status. It is possible that the wearing of veils dates back to this Mesopotamian era.

**Cultural Characteristics** - An important “marker event” in world history occurred in Mesopotamia about 3500 BCE with the Sumerian invention of writing, which had its origin in little pictures of objects on clay cylinder seals. The earliest writing evolved as pictures turned into symbols and eventually into phonetic elements baked on clay tablets. Writers used a wedge-shaped stick to mark the symbols on the tablets, resulting in cuneiform—meaning “wedge-shaped”—that was used for several thousand years in the Middle East. Cuneiform writing was difficult to learn because it involved several hundred signs, so specialized scribes were generally the only ones who knew it, giving them power and status that others did not have. By about 2000 BCE compilers wrote down a famous story—*The Epic of Gilgamesh*—that had been passed down orally since at least the 7th millennium BCE. Gilgamesh, the main character in the story, was a ruler of an early Sumerian city-state, probably Uruk. It explored human friendship, relations between humans and gods, and particularly the meaning of life and death. Gilgamesh went on an epic journey in pursuit of eternal life, which he ultimately did not find. The story was somber, and emphasized the control that gods had over human destiny.
Religious Beliefs - Mesopotamians, like most other people in ancient civilizations, [were polytheistic (believed in many gods) and] believed that deities intervened regularly in human affairs and that their very survival depended on their ability to please the gods. Each city had its own god who it held in higher esteem than all others, and a host of supporting priests devoted their lives to that deity. A temple dedicated to the special god was usually at the center of each urban area. The most distinctive were the ziggurats—large multi-storey pyramids constructed by bricks and approached by ramps and stairs.

Priests passed their positions and knowledge to their sons, and they enjoyed very high status in most of the city-states. The high priest performed great rituals, and others provided music, exorcised evil spirits, and interpreted dreams. Some divined the future by examining the remains of sacrificed animals. Archaeologists have also found amulets that were probably worn by individuals to protect them from evil spirits. Evidence also supports the regular occurrence of religious festivals in which priests read pleasing stories to the god’s image in front of both nobility and ordinary people.

Gods were associated with various forces of nature, and they often displayed disagreeable human characteristics, such as quarreling and using their powers in selfish ways. Gods caused flooding (as reflected in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*), and the afterlife was seen as full of suffering, an early version of the concept of hell. (image, pg. 36)

Civilization in Egypt

While Mesopotamian civilization was developing on one end of the Fertile Crescent, another was growing on the other end along the Nile River in northeastern Africa. The great Egyptian civilization is arguably the longest lived in world history, stretching from its inception around 3100 BCE until its conquest by the Persians in 525 BCE. After that conquest, Egyptian rulers had to bow to more powerful civilizations, but they still participated in the interactions among civilizations for hundreds of years more. [...]  

The Natural Environment - The natural environments of Mesopotamia and Egypt had many common characteristics. Both were in river valleys and were not a long distance apart, so they shared similar latitudes. The weather was generally hot and dry with mild winters and rainy seasons. Neither could rely on consistent rainfall for their crops, so irrigation was vital to agricultural success. However, one important contrast in geographical locations shaped very different political, economic, and cultural beliefs and practices: Egypt was isolated for much of its existence, while Mesopotamia was at a crossroads of population movements. As a result, Mesopotamia was open to assault from several directions and was repeatedly conquered by invaders, whereas Egypt was surrounded by desert with few groups of people nearby. Additionally, it was protected from invasion along the Nile River from the south by a series of cataracts, or areas where the water was too swift and rocky to allow boats to pass. Another environmental difference was seasonal flooding. Both areas were subject to heavy downpours that temporarily flooded the land. However, flooding in Egypt was regular and predictable, so that farmers and political leaders could take preventative and containing measures. In contrast, flooding in Mesopotamia was irregular and unpredictable, so that people had no choice but to react to, rather than prevent and contain, the damage that was done. Not only did this difference impact economic and political life, it may have led to differences in the way that people approached life, with Mesopotamians apparently gloomy and resigned to their fate in life, and Egyptians generally more optimistic about their ability to control their destinies. (map, pg. 41)

Economic Development: Mesopotamia and Egypt Compared - Like the Mesopotamians, most Egyptians were farmers, and both economies became increasingly diverse as
time passed. As cities grew, craftsmen refined techniques for making pottery and textiles, and other specialized in woodworking, leather production, brick-making, stone cutting, and masonry. About 3000 BCE Mesopotamian metalworkers invented bronze by alloying copper and tin to make a harder, stronger metal. Bronze was used to fashion military weapons as well as farming tools and plows, giving both warriors and farmers important advantages in their respective occupations. Egyptians did not make use of this new invention until after the 17th C BCE when they were attacked and defeated by the Hyksos (a people from modern day Turkey) who had superior military power because of their bronze weapons. Egypt’s delayed adoption of bronze was partly because their natural environment provided neither tin nor copper, and partly because their physical isolation did not encourage them to experiment with different weapons. By this time, societies were interrelated enough that the technology spread rapidly, including to Egypt.

Another important invention that increased job specialization and economic efficiency was the wheel. No one knows exactly when the wheel was invented, but Sumerians probably used wheeled carts long before they began to organize into city-states in the mid-4th millennium BCE. Wheeled carts and wagons allowed heavy loads of bulk goods to be hauled over long distances, and the technology spread to nearby areas, including Egypt. Both Mesopotamia and Egypt experimented with maritime travel, with Sumerians learning to navigate in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea, and the Egyptians sailing boats in the Nile and the Red Sea. Specialized occupations in ship and boat building appeared in both civilizations.

Increasing job specialization and transportation improvements encouraged long-distance trade. Mesopotamians and Egyptians were already trading by 3500 BCE and by 2300 BCE, the Sumerian were trading with Harappans in the Indus River valley (in modern-day Pakistan). By the time of the Babylonians (about 1900 to 1600 BCE), Mesopotamians were importing silver from Anatolia in the northwest, cedar from Lebanon in the southwest, copper from Arabia in the south, gold from Egypt, and tin from Persia in the southeast. After 3000 BCE Egyptians traded actively in the Mediterranean, and a few centuries later they established regular trade across the Red Sea and eventually to an east African land they called Punt. Egyptians offered gold, linens, leather goods, dried lentils, and silver, and traded for ebony, ivory, cattle, slaves, cosmetics, and myrrh (an aromatic).

**Political Characteristics** - Like those of all other ancient civilizations, Egypt’s political system reflected the importance of religious beliefs. At the heart of the government was the pharaoh, who was not then considered to be just a king, but also a god. Although Mesopotamians often believed that their kings had special access to the gods, they saw them as purely human, not gods themselves. According to Egyptian legend, the first pharaoh was Menes, who supposedly lived about 3100 BCE, although scholars are not at all sure that he actually existed. What is clear is that the middle and lower areas of the Nile were united under one ruler who was followed by an unbroken line of god-kings until about 2500 BCE. The pharaohs were believed to be reincarnations of Horus, the sky god, so they were often represented by a hawk, the symbol of Horus. In this role they maintained ma’at, the divinely controlled order of the universe. The pharaoh’s will was law, since he was all-knowing and forever correct as the representation of the mighty gods. His regulations were carried out without question, and as a result, pharaohs enjoyed more power and prestige than almost any other rulers in world history.

The pharaoh was represented throughout the countryside by a group of officials who were responsible only to him. They were usually landed nobility that were trained in writing and law. Governors were appointed for key regions and
were responsible for supervising irrigation and great public works [roads, bridges, canals, etc.]. Although the pharaoh usually granted his top bureaucrats a great deal of local authority, the pharaoh’s power was ultimate, and the state remained highly centralized. In contrast, Mesopotamia’s political system was composed of city-states, whose constantly clashing leaders made centralized government very tenuous.

Pharaohs were most powerful during Egypt’s early history, probably because few outsiders challenged their power and economic prosperity was the general rule. Ancient Egypt’s long political history is often divided into three eras:

- **The Old Kingdom (3100 – 2500 BCE)**- These were the years when pharaohs were most powerful and the economy was the strongest. The success of this era was capped by the construction of the first of the great pyramids as tombs for the pharaohs. (image, pg. 43)
- **The Middle Kingdom (2100 – 1600 BCE)**- After a period of instability with unknown causes, pharaohs regained their power during this long, relatively peaceful period. During this era, trade with neighbors became more extensive, and a small middle class of officials and merchants developed. Peace and prosperity ended with the invasion of the Hyksos, a people who came from the north to conquer the Nile Delta.
- **The New Kingdom (1550 – 700 BCE)**- The Hyksos ruled the native Egyptians for almost a century, but they were defeated by princes from Thebes, and the New Kingdom was inaugurated.... Realizing that they no longer had the luxury of ignoring the outside world, pharaohs aggressively expanded control of territory north into Syria and Palestine and south into Nubia. These new territories provided a buffer zone from attackers, and the formerly isolationist Egyptians actively sought to convert their new subjects to Egyptian beliefs and practices. For the first 300 years of this ear, Egypt’s armies were generally successful, but military reversals began during the 1300s BCE and by 1100, the pharaoh again ruled only the Nile Valley.

**Social Distinctions**- The modern stereotype of an Ancient Egyptian is generally that of a person with dark, straight hair and clay-colored skin. In reality, even before the New Kingdom, Egyptians ranged from dark-skinned people related to the populations of Sub-Saharan Africa to lighter-skinned people related to inhabitants of southwest Asia. Egyptians tended to think of themselves as superior to other people, so foreigners were generally seen with some suspicion. However, Egypt had less pronounced social divisions than Mesopotamia, where more formal classes emerged. Clearly, though, the pharaoh and his high-ranking officials had superior social status and lower-level officials—along with priests and other professionals, and artisans—appear to have had high status than peasants who made up the vast majority of the population. Social mobility (the ability of an individual to change social status) appears to have been possible, since Egypt relied on professional military forces and an elaborate bureaucracy of administrators to serve the pharaoh. As in Mesopotamia, slavery existed on a limited scale, and slaves were often prisoners of war or debtors that were usually freed when their debts were paid off.

Like Mesopotamia, Egypt was a patriarchy dominated by men. However, it is probably that the status of women was higher in Egypt than in Mesopotamia, where women’s position seems to have deteriorated in later days. Egyptian women in the upper classes were respected because marriage alliances were important for preserving the continuity of the pharaoh’s line and those of his high officials. Also, Egyptian religion deified its goddesses as sources of great creativity.

**Cultural Characteristics**- Egypt is of course famous for its pyramids, some of the most impressive monuments ever built. They held religious significance, and they contained impressive art and artifacts in the burial chambers. Egyptians
also built large temples and great statues, illustrating that their
mastery of stonework was unrivaled among the earliest
civilizations. They excelled in other art forms, including
frescoes, pottery, fine jewelry, and miniature sculpture.

Both Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian
hieroglyphics made use of pictographs, or pictures
representing animals, people, and objects. A writing system
that depends on pictures was convenient for keeping trade
records, but was very cumbersome for communicating abstract
ideas. Beginning about 2900 BCE, Sumerians began using
graphic symbols to represent ideas, sounds, and syllables, and
the Egyptians, too, supplemented their hieroglyphics with
symbols representing abstract ideas. The Egyptian writing
remained more pictographic than cuneiform, but in both
societies, the writing systems were complex, and their use was
largely restricted to priests. Egyptians developed a new
material to write on, papyrus, made from strips of a plant
pressed together. Despite their sophisticated writing system,
the Egyptians created no epic literary works, such as the
Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh.

Mesopotamian achievements in mathematics were far
more advanced than those of Egypt. The Sumerian system of
numbers, based on units of 12, 60, and 360, are used for
modern day geometry and for calculating time. Sumerians
charted major constellations, and followed the movement of
the sun and stars carefully, setting the foundation for the
science of astronomy. The Egyptians had fewer mathematical
and scientific achievements, but they established the length of
the solar year, which they divided into 12 months, each with
three 10-day weeks. The calendar was crucial in predicting the
Nile floods. They also had knowledge of a variety of drugs, and
elements of their medical knowledge were passed down to the
Greeks.

Religious Beliefs- Like Mesopotamia, Egyptian religion was
polytheistic, and its chief deities were associated strongly with
agriculture.... The Egyptians were very concerned with death
and preparation for life in another world where supreme
happiness could be achieved. They carefully mummified
bodies and held elaborate funeral rituals, especially for rulers
and bureaucrats. In the earlier days, these rituals were
inscribed on coffins and pyramids of the elite, but they became
much more commonplace in later times. During the New
Kingdom, many incantations of these rituals were collected
into papyrus texts known today as The Book of the Dead.
Divided into more than 150 chapters, it was mass-produced for
a prosperous clientele who each purchased a scroll, filled in the
name of the deceased, and buried it with the person’s body.

INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

A third “cradle of civilization” developed in the Indus River
Valley in what is now Pakistan. By 5000 BCE agriculture had
developed, and by 3000 BCE the villages and towns had
evolved into cities. Much about the people remains mysterious
today, partly because archaeologists were generally unaware of
the civilization until the 1850s, when British construction of a
railroad across the Indus led to the discovery of the remains of
one of the major cities, Mohenjo-Daro. Some controversy
surrounds the origins of the civilization. Until recently, most
scholars believed that the Indus Valley people spoke a
Dravidian language similar to languages spoken in southern
India. It was thought that they were conquered around 1500
BCE by Aryans, invaders from the northwest who spoke Indo-
European languages, and that some of them moved southeast
into India to escape. More recent evidence, however, does not
support a sudden change in body types or civilization patterns
during that time, so there is still much to learn about these
early people and the changes they may have experienced.

Geographical Features- Today the area around the Indus
Valley is a desert, with many ancient riverbeds now dried up.
However, in ancient times it was forested, green, and lush,
with plenty of game animals and good pasture for
domesticated animals. The river system was formed by water
running from melting snow in the world’s highest mountain range, the Himalayas to the northeast, and the Hindu Kush Mountains to the northwest. The river and its tributaries have been fed by monsoon rains that are created by seasonal winds that blow from the seas toward the Indian subcontinent. Like the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates Rivers, the Indus River carried rich soil to the plains around it, allowing extensive agriculture to flourish.

The mountains provided some protection from invasion, but very early on, people discovered passes that allowed them to cross, particularly through the Hindu Kush. The Aryans probably used these passes as they traveled to the southeast, and eventually made their way into many parts of the Indian sub-continent, including the Indus River Valley.

**Economic Characteristics** - The cities and towns in the Indus River Valley were supported by an advanced agricultural system based on wheat, rye, peas, and perhaps rice. Cotton was cultivated, and many animals were domesticated, including chickens, cattle, goats, and sheep. As in Mesopotamia and Egypt, abundant crops allowed job specialization in the cities to develop. Beginning in the 1850s, archaeologists discovered the remains of the largest city, Mohenjo-Daro, a second city, Harappa and a huge complex of towns and villages connected to them. Because the cities were not constructed in the same way that cities in Mesopotamia and Egypt were [Indus Valley cities were laid out in a grid pattern, unlike the more haphazard organization of cities in Mesopotamia and Egypt], they almost certainly were not colonies but were part of an independent civilization.

The cities were major trading centers, with contacts in China, Southeast Asia, southern India, Afghanistan, and Mesopotamia. Jade from China and precious jewels from Southeast Asia have been excavated in the Indus River Valley, and Indus stone seals have been found in Mesopotamia. Small clay wheeled carts pulled by oxen have been found at various Indus sites, suggesting that they were used as land transportation among cities, towns, and villages in the valley. Judging by the size of the cities, job specialization had to be extensive, yet their craftsmen appear to have been inferior to those in Egypt and Mesopotamia. They cast tools and weapons in bronze, but they lacked swords, used stone for arrowheads, and bronzed the tips of their spears so thinly that they could not have been very effective.

**Political Development** - Very little is known about political systems in the Indus River Valley, but the construction of the cities suggests a well-organized government planned them. The main thoroughfares of Mohenjo-Daro were 34 feet wide, and a sophisticated sewage system with canals that ran from each house to a connecting canal in the street carried off household wastes. Some scholars speculate that Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were twin capitals, or that there may be other unexcavated cities that each ruled the countryside around it. The two cities both had fortifications and large granaries that were probably controlled by governments, but the pieces of evidence do not yet support a good knowledge of who governed and to what ends. (image and text, pg. 50)

**Society and Culture** - Although less is known about social distinctions in the Indus River Valley than in Egypt or Mesopotamia, the evidence points to the existence of clear social classes. For example, house sizes in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa varied considerably, with most people living in single-room dwellings in larger barracks-like structures. The wealthy had individual houses of two and three storeys, with several rooms and an interior courtyard. Most of the larger houses had their own wells and brick ovens. Indus River Valley society was dominated by a powerful priestly class, which ruled from the cities. The priests mediated between the people and a number of gods and goddesses, although very little is known about the religion. One popular god depicted on the seals is a naked male with a horned head, sometimes pictured in a posture of meditation, leading some to speculate that the
lotus position and/or yoga originated here. Mother-goddesses appear to have been worshipped by ordinary people, whereas the horned god was favored by the priests. There is little evidence to support an interest in artistic endeavors, other than a few carved figurines of people and animals that reflect a strong interest in fertility.

If the Indus Valley writing system could be deciphered with any consistency, scholars would know much more about the civilization. Egyptian hieroglyphics were decoded with the very fortunate discovery of the Rosetta Stone, a tablet with a relatively long script in three languages: formal hieroglyphics, an informal Egyptian writing, and Greek. Since Greek was known, the tablet was used to find many parallel symbols in hieroglyphics. With that head start, scholars were able to decode most of the hieroglyphic writing samples that have been discovered. Archaeologists have had no such luck in the Indus Valley, but new discoveries may unearth some comparable clue in the future.

**Decline of the Indus River Valley Civilization** - The Indus Valley cities were abandoned sometime after 1900 BCE, although the reasons for their decline are uncertain. No evidence of an invasion has been found, so one theory is that the civilization suffered **systems failure**, a breakdown of the political, social, and economic systems that supported it. There might have been a precipitating event, such as an earthquake or a flood, but gradual ecological changes appear to have occurred as well. The cities may have grown too fast, so that the large population put stress on the environment, burning trees to make mud bricks for construction and farming land too intensively. Some argue that a radical change to a much drier climate occurred, or that the course of the rivers changed significantly, or that the population may have fallen victim to malaria. The decline was relatively gradual, with Mohenjo-Daro being abandoned in about 1200 BCE and Harappa somewhat later. Almost certainly, the civilization was under stress by the time the Aryans came into the valley across the Hindu Kush Mountains sometime around 1500 BCE.

**ANCIENT CHINA**

Neolithic People of east Asia probably domesticated rice sometime about 7000 BCE, and by 5000 BCE rice had become the staple of the diet in the Yangzi River Valley. In later centuries, the people farther north around the Yellow (Huang He) River domesticated wheat, barley, and eventually millet that had probably arrived from Mesopotamia. After about 3000 BCE, villages along both rivers communicated and traded with others throughout the region, and by about 1700 BCE they had established cities and complex political, cultural, and social systems that served as the foundation for civilization in China and other parts of east Asia.

**Geographical Influences** - Ancient China arose in a part of the world that was a long way away from the other centers of civilization. Although trade did exist between China and the others, distance and geographic barriers separated the areas so that in many ways east Asia developed independently from the others. Both agriculture and metalworking apparently were independently invented in China. The Huang He and Yangzi River Valleys were rich with river silt, and were quite conducive to agriculture, whereas much of the land space that eventually became China was far less habitable. The Gobi Desert stretched to the north and west of the rivers; the Himalaya Mountains lay to the southwest; and the vast Tarim Basin—high, dry, and cold—occupied the west. These geographic features have shaped the development of Chinese civilization, and even today, the vast majority of China’s population lives in the east along the rivers or the coastline.

The rivers absorbed a yellowish-brown dust (giving the Yellow River its name) from central Asia so that it formed **loess**, a thick mantle of fertile and soft soil easy enough to be worked with wooden digging sticks. Like the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the east Asia rivers were prone to irregular
flooding, and people responded by building dikes, channels, and basins to store river water and rainfall. (map, pg. 56)

**Economic Development** - Because the Huang He (Yellow) River was so prone to unpredictable flooding, early Chinese farmers and leaders had to come up with methods to control it. Increasingly elaborate irrigation systems kept up with expanding agriculture, and great earthen dikes were constructed to manage the flow of the river. An important early innovation was the hoe, a vast improvement over the digging stick since it had a wide, flat base. A later improvement was the four-pronged hoe that was used to turn over the soil for cultivation. Its use made Chinese agriculture much more productive so that it could support a larger urban population.

Ancient China’s growth was also spurred by mastery of metallurgy, particularly in the production of bronze weapons and tools. Ruling elites controlled access to copper and tin ores, and employed craftsmen to produce bronze axes, spears, knives, and arrowheads. Bronze was also used for fittings for horse-drawn chariots, a technology probably first invented in Mesopotamia that diffused across central Asia to the river valleys. A high level of craftsmanship is evident in bronze vessels created for religious rituals and household use by wealthy families. An important development that was to be of immense importance in the development of China was the pioneering of the key processes of silk manufacturing: raising silkworms on mulberry trees and carefully unraveling their cocoons to produce silk thread.

Cities were centers of political control and religion, and were surrounded by great walls of hardened earth. Large public buildings were constructed, such as palaces, political centers, storehouses, royal tombs, shrines of gods and ancestors, and houses of the nobility. Ordinary people lived in villages outside the city walls. The cities were laid out on a grid plan aligned with the north polar star, the gates opened to the cardinal directions, and all major buildings faced south, reflecting a concern for order.

**Political Development** - By the 18th C BCE, the areas north and west of the Huang He River were home to many nomadic groups who followed domesticated animals from pasture to pasture. As would continue to happen for thousands of years, these nomadic groups often came into conflict with people that had settled into agricultural villages along the river valley. According to legend, an ancient dynasty (family-based kingdom) called the Xia came to control much of the area, but no archaeological sites connected to it have been found, so its existence is still not proven. The history of China may be traced to the first written records that describe a distinctive culture with its own cuisine, beliefs, and practices that emerged between 1700 and 1500 BCE. The culture is known as the Shang Dynasty, which conquered most of the other tribes, and founded a kingdom that stretched north and south from the Huang He River Valley, and lasted about 700 years.

The political system probably emerged from the need to control the great floods of the river, but the Shang tribe was still nomadic, and the leaders were warrior kings who fought on horseback with very effective bronze weapons. Their armies were made up of subject people, and the other warrior leaders swore fealty (loyalty and obedience) to the Shang monarch. The king was seen as the intermediary between the Supreme Being, Shangdi, and ordinary mortals, so the power he had was significant. Most of the people were governed by **vassals**, lords who served the king and were bound to him by personal ties. These warrior aristocrats collected tribute (payment usually in the form of produce) which supported the monarch and his court.

In the 12th C BCE, the Shang rulers were overthrown by the Zhou Dynasty, a group from farther west that became the longest-lived of all the Chinese Dynasties. We know much more about the Zhou than we do about the Shang because they kept written records, including tax rolls, lists of imports and exports, and historical accounts of successes of the monarchs. The dynasty falls into two distinct phases: the Western Zhou
(11th – 8th C BCE) with capital cities in the west, and the Eastern Zhou (8th – 5th C BCE) when the capital was moved east to Luoyang. The Zhou extended their territory far beyond the earlier borders of the Shang, but they also ruled through a system of decentralized loyalties, so that local rulers [vassals] had a good deal of autonomy.

Probably to justify their forcible removal of the Shang Dynasty, the early Zhou rulers claimed that they had been given the right (or mandate) to rule by “heaven,” or the supernatural deities who oversaw earthly life. As long as the rulers were just and fair, they retained the confidence of heaven, but if they were not, the Mandate of Heaven would be lost. Prosperity was a “sign from heaven” that the rulers still had the mandate, but misfortunes were usually interpreted as a communication from the deities that the ruler was not living up to their high expectations. If a ruler lost the mandate, his subjects not only had the right, but the responsibility, to replace him. The Mandate of Heaven is a central belief that guided China through dynastic cycles that lasted until the early 20th C CE.

An important political development under the Zhou was the growing size and responsibility of professional bureaucrats, or shi (men of service). These administrators were the best-educated men in the empire, and they served as scribes, clerks, advisors, and overseers, both in the king’s court and in the subordinate governments of the king’s vassals. They came to specialize in keeping records, running public works or wars, and organizing rituals and ceremonies. The shi were the forerunners of a scholarly governing class that would gain great power and status in later dynasties.

Social Characteristics- By the time of the Zhou, China consisted of three main social groups:

1. The Elite- The royal family and allied noble families enjoyed great prestige, as well as economic benefits. The landowning aristocracy plus the educated bureaucrats formed this top group. Their houses were palatial, and they monopolized the use of bronze weapons, tools, and decorative objects. Less privileged classes used clay pots, and had much simpler diets than the elites, who consumed most of the meat. During Zhou times, a great deal of emphasis was placed on proper behavior, including strict requirements for table manners.

2. Peasants, Free Artisans, and Craftsmen- Peasants owned no land but worked the land that belonged to the nobility. They lived in small houses dug deep into the earth, protected by thatched walls and roofs. Their work became easier in the late Zhou Dynasty, when iron production increased in China, and iron farm utensils became available. However, peasants were burdened by their lords’ demands for labor on public works (roads, buildings, and irrigation projects.) Artisans and craftsmen worked almost exclusively for the elite, providing them with bronze objects, jewelry, embroidery, and silk textiles. They lived primarily in cities in relatively comfortable houses made of pounded earth, an expensive type of construction.

3. Unskilled Workers and Slaves- This category, sometimes called the “mean” people, had the lowest status and performed hard labor, such as clearing new fields and laying foundations of buildings and walls of cities. Household slaves also existed within this class structure, but their numbers were small, and China did not depend on slaves for actual production. Merchants and traders did exist, but they fit uncomfortably into the existing social structure, and little was written about them until the late Zhou era. Long distance trade appeared in China even during the Shang era, despite the geographic barriers that stood between China and other major civilizations of this time. The tin for bronze came from southeast Asia, jade came from central Asia, and military
technology, such as horse-drawn chariots, came from Mesopotamia. The Confucian emphasis on learning and political service led to low status for merchants and traders, who devoted their lives to making money.

Like other ancient civilizations, women lost status as civilization progressed. Military prowess was highly valued, and males dominated the political scene. The rituals honoring the ancestors especially venerated males as the important guiding forces in the lives of family members. During Neolithic times, the female line of descent was important in determining family power, but this matrilineal characteristic disappeared during the Shang era. During the Zhou era, women appeared to lose even more status, since no temples were erected to honor queens, as they had been during the Shang era.

Cultural Developments- Organized religion did not play as important a role in the development of early China as it did in most other ancient civilizations. There was an emphasis on the will of “heaven” (such as the “Mandate of Heaven”), but the Chinese did not recognize personal deities who controlled human affairs, nor did they support a large priestly class. A few priests assisted royalty in rituals, but connections between family members on earth and their ancestors who had passed on were a very important element of “heaven.” Rulers and family patriarchs were interested in consulting the ancestors for guidance, and made use of oracle bones, specially prepared broad bones or turtle shells, each inscribed with a question. When properly heated, the bones would crack, and shamans, individuals who claimed the ability to contact the ancestors, would interpret the communication by the patterns formed. Many of these oracle bones have survived, and they tell us a great deal about early Chinese society and beliefs.

Oracle bones are also a great source of early Chinese writing, which by Zhou times was commonly inscribed on bronze ceremonial dishes as well. As in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the earliest form of Chinese writing was the pictograph, a standardized picture of an object. Written Chinese did not include an alphabet, but pictographs were often combined to represent abstract ideas. The characters used in modern China are direct descendants of those from Shang times, and scholars have identified more than two thousand characters inscribed on oracle bones. As in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the complexity of the early language meant that only specially trained people could read and write, but in China writing was often associated with the king’s court, not with merchants and long-distance trade. (image and text, pg. 60)

Another early use of writing in China was the development of philosophy and religion, with Confucianism being the most famous. Values and beliefs are reflected in the works that have survived, including the Analects, a collection of Confucius’ teachings; the Book of Changes, with instructions for shamans for divination; the Book of History, a collection of deeds of Zhou rulers; and the Book of Etiquette that taught the elite proper manners and behavior. Perhaps most notable is the development of early Chinese poetry, collected in the Book of Songs.

EARLY CIVILIZATIONS OF THE AMERICAS

Until the late 15th century CE, developing civilizations in the Americas were almost completely cut off from those in the Eastern Hemisphere, so agriculture was independently invented and cultural diffusion took place within the geographical boundaries of North and South America. In prehistoric days, humans reached the Western Hemisphere from Asia, although scholars disagree about when and how those migrations took place. The crossing of the land bridge (now Aleutian Islands) from northern Asia to Alaska is widely accepted, although estimates of when the first migrations took place range from 35,000 years ago to about 15,000 years ago. Some contact with Polynesians may well have taken place, but the interactions did not continue on a regular basis.

Geographical Influences- The most basic impact of physical geography was the separation of the Western and
Eastern Hemispheres by vast oceans and great distances. However, the tremendous distance north to south was important as well. Environments included frozen regions in the extreme north and south, tropical rain forests, vast plains, heavily forested areas, and high mountain ranges. These characteristics made farming impossible in many areas and quite possible in others, but long distances between arable areas made contact among groups difficult. The two areas were farming provided the basis for the development of early civilizations were Mesoamerica (now Mexico and northern Central America) and the Andean Mountains along the coast of northwestern South America. (map, pg. 88)

**The Olmec (1200 – 400 BCE) of Mesoamerica**

In Mesoamerica agricultural villages appeared by about 3000 BCE, and spread throughout the region over the next thousand years. Farmers cultivated beans, peppers, avocados, squash, maize, and tomatoes—all completely different crops than those domesticated in the Eastern Hemisphere. In contrast to civilizations in the Eastern Hemisphere, they domesticated a limited number of animals. They raised turkeys and dogs, but had access to no large animals (such as horses, cattle, goats, and sheep) that were domesticable. Human labor, then, provided all the energy for agriculture, and without the animals to pull them, wheeled vehicles were not used to facilitate the process. Civilization appeared with the development of religious centers along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, which grew into cities with specialized labor and class distinctions. By 1200 BCE (or perhaps earlier) a complex society had emerged that archaeologists called the Olmec, or “rubber people”.

**Economic Development and Social Distinctions**- The Olmec Civilization was based on agriculture, but farmers had no need for extensive irrigation because the area received abundant rainfall for cultivating crops. They build elaborate drainage systems to control water, as well as raised fields that allowed crops to grow in wetlands. The cities grew as religious and trade centers, exchanging products like salt, cacao, clay for ceramics, and limestone. There is no evidence of competitive city-states, such as those that developed in Mesopotamia.

Like many other early civilizations, Olmec society was probably authoritarian and hierarchical. An elite group of priests dominated the early Olmec cities and conducted elaborate religious rituals at the temples in the center of the cities. They also provided practical advice about rainfall and other important crop conditions, and directed the planning of urban centers so that they aligned with the paths of certain stars. Clearly, astronomical events were considered to be significant influences on human affairs. Another elite group included the ruler and his family, who were able to require the direct labor for city building projects from the general population, who mostly lived in areas outside the relatively small cities. Skilled artisans created carvings and sculptures for the buildings, and also produced high-quality jade figurines, jewelry and ceremonial objects. A class of merchants probably did some long distance trading in jade, obsidian, and pottery.

**Political and Cultural Characteristics**- Little is known about the nature of political power, but some form of kingship that combined religious and secular (non-religious) responsibilities appeared in the major cities. These political elite had large, elaborately decorated houses and lived very different lifestyles than those of commoners who lived in simple small structures constructed of sticks and mud. The mysterious giant heads sculpted from basalt that the Olmecs are most famous for may well have symbolized the power of the ruling families. These heads range up to 11 feet high, and have clear, distinct facial characteristics that may have been carved to honor specific rulers. However, much about these carvings remains mysterious... The Olmecs were great carvers of jade, and they traded or conquered to get it. They developed a numerical system based on 30 and a 365-day calendar.
(combined with a 260-day ritual cycle) that became the basis of all later Mesoamerican calendars. What language they spoke is unknown, but some scholars believe that they were the ancestors of the great Maya civilization that followed.

The decline of the Olmec civilization is still a puzzle, but it appears as if the main ceremonial centers were destroyed and the sites deserted somewhere between 900 and 600 BCE. No clear evidence has been found of attack from outsiders, so most scholars speculate that some sort of internal conflict occurred that caused the cities to be abandoned. By 400 BCE societies in other parts of Mesoamerica had arisen, and the Olmec civilization had disappeared completely by about 100 BCE. (image, pg. 89)

**The Chavin of South America (900 – 250 BCE)**
At roughly the same time that the Olmec civilization was flourishing in Mesoamerica, the Chavin dominated a heavily populated region that included both the Peruvian coastal plain and foothills of the Andes. Both civilizations differed from those of the Eastern Hemisphere in that they did not develop in river valleys, but the geographic challenge for the Chavin was particularly strong. The coast of Peru has little rainfall, and in some places is quite narrow, but the abundance of fish and other sea life provided a dependable supply of food. The Andes Mountains rise dramatically from this coastal plain, with many peaks rising above 20,000 feet before they drop on their eastern slopes, and the terrain changes to thick jungle that surrounds the massive Amazon River Basin. The Chavin civilization arose in this unlikely environment that combined dry coast and high mountain valley.

**Economic Development and Social Distinctions**- The Chavin capital, Chavin de Huantar, was located in a high mountain valley of about 10,300 feet altitude at an intersection of trade routes connecting the west coast with mountain valleys, and mountain valleys to tropical lowlands to the east. This location helped the Chavin to control trade and gain important economic advantages over surrounding peoples. Agriculture was based on maize (probably from Mesoamerica), which could be grown in the coastal areas. Potatoes and fruits were raised in the mountain valleys, and cotton and coca leaves (a mild narcotic) in the tropical areas. Exactly how labor was organized for public works is unknown, but in later times, people were organized by communities to share the responsibility. In contrast to the Olmec, the Chavin had a domesticated beast of burden—the llama—to help with chores. Llamas were first domesticated in the mountains, where they carried large bundles of goods up and down mountain paths in organized trading caravans.

The Chavin independently invented metallurgical techniques that probably diffused to Mesoamerica. Craftspeople worked in silver and gold, creating decorative and ceremonial items for buildings and religious objects. Advanced techniques of production were used for pottery and textiles that were first produced along the coast, but eventually in the mountains as well. Superior-quality textiles and gold crowns distinguished rulers form commoners, and skilled artisans were probably a social class that served the elite.

**Political and Cultural Development**- Since the area encompassed three ecological zones that abruptly began and ended, one motivation for empire was to control all of them, as well as the connecting trade routes. Since arable land was limited, some kind of political organization was needed for irrigation and protection of land. There is evidence of early warfare, so political rulers probably directed wars, but we don’t know much about the nature of their rule. The fact that Chavin culture diffused over a large area is some proof that the civilization was politically well-organized.

Part of the Chavin’s influence appears to be based on its religion, which spread through most of the territory, and perhaps to Mesoamerica. Although the beliefs of the religion are unknown, a jaguar god with combined human and animal features was a very important symbol for that religion. Jaguars
were inscribed on buildings, pottery, and textiles over a huge expanse of territory, including Mesoamerica. Other intricate stone carvings depicted snakes, hawks, eagles, and humans with feline characteristics.

**EARLY CIVILIZATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 1700 – 1100 BCE**

By the 2nd millennium BCE, agricultural communities had developed into civilizations in the Middle East, the Americas, and east Asia. All had developed trade routes that enriched their economies and put them into contact with other groups of people. However, the Middle East had developed a broader, more intense web of interactions among various groups of people than the other areas had. The era between 1700 and 1100 BCE is often called the **Late Bronze Age**, and it is characterized by an early version of **cosmopolitanism**, or the shared cultures and lifestyles that result when different groups are in regular contact. The cultural diffusion among groups included not just trade goods, but also ideas, values, and standards of living. The web of commerce and cultures included:

- **Egypt**- The New Kingdom of Egypt began in 1550 BCE, after the defeat of the Hyksos. Egypt was no longer the isolated civilization of its earlier days, and it developed extensive diplomatic and commercial ties with the states of western Asia, and it maintained a large army to promote its strength in the network.

- **Mesopotamia**- The area around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers continued to be subject to political fragmentation as cities and kingdoms waxed and waned in their military might. By 1500 BCE Mesopotamia was divided into two political zones: Babylonia in the south and Assyria in the north. Although another group—the Kassites—came to power in Babylonia, trade continues, and urban centers prospered.

- **Hittites**- This group originated in Anatolia (modern Turkey) and formed a large empire to the northwest of Mesopotamia. Anatolia’s rich natural resources of copper, silver, and iron helped the Hittites to play a vital role in international commerce. They developed new techniques for iron working, providing them with military advantages that allowed them to conquer the area.

- **Nubians**- To the south of Egypt a great civilization arose along the Nile that connected Sub-Saharan Africa with north Africa. Nubia was richly endowed with gold, copper, and semiprecious stones, so it also played an important part in the international commercial web of the Late Bronze Age. For most of this era Nubia was dominated by Egypt, although in the 1st millennium BCE it gained power as Egypt weakened, and it eventually came to control Egypt.

- **Mycenaeans**- By the late 3rd millennium BCE an advanced civilization had begun to develop on the island of Crete, just south of the Aegean Sea. These people were named Minoans after the legendary King Minos, and excavations have unearthed a large palace complex, massive walls, and shaft graves (burial places at the base of deep, rectangular pits). They were followed by the Mycenaeans, an early group on the Greek mainland, who came to dominate the area by the Late Bronze Era. They were warlike and aggressive, and controlled trade across the Aegean Sea and with the other civilizations of the Middle East.

Around 1200 BCE, many of the old cultural and economic centers of the Middle East and Mediterranean were destroyed. Many people were moving around (for reasons that are not completely clear), and one by one the civilizations began having problems. The Hittite kingdom fell to invaders, who made their way to the eastern end of the Mediterranean where
they destroyed trading cities there. Egypt also experienced a major invasion by the “Sea Peoples” that they survived, but they lost many of their territories to the northeast. The Mycenaean centers also collapsed in the first half of the 12th C BCE, initiating an era known as the “Dark Age” of Greek history. The cosmopolitan world of the Late Bronze Age was gone by the 12th century BCE.

CHAPTER THREE: EMPIRES AND TRANSREGIONAL TRADE NETWORKS, 600 BCE TO 600 CE

During the time period from 600 BCE to 600 CE, large empires appeared in Eurasia and the Americas and expanded their boundaries to govern increasingly diverse cultural and ethnic groups. As the empires grew, they developed powerful militaries and governments, but eventually they encountered problems with holding their vast domains together. Even though all of the big empires collapsed before 600 CE, the long-distance trade routes allowed a vibrant exchange of goods, people, technology, and religious and cultural beliefs that connected regions as never before. New empires emerged in several areas:

- **The Mediterranean** - The Greeks emerged as an influential civilization in the Mediterranean area, followed by the Romans.
- **Southwest Asia** - The Persians rose to control territory that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus River.
- **The Indian Subcontinent** - Two empires arose on the Indian subcontinent: the Mauryan Empire and the Gupta Empire.

**East Asia** - China emerged from the Warring States Period that followed the Zhou Dynasty to form the Qin Dynasty, followed by the much longer-lasting Han Dynasty.

**The Americas** - In Mesoamerica, Teotihuacan and the Maya city-states emerged, and the Moche controlled Andean South America.

**MEDITERRANEAN CIVILIZATIONS**

Settled agricultural communities had developed along the Aegean Sea in the eastern Mediterranean area by about 2000 BCE, probably first on the island of Crete. Although these communities were not far away from Mesopotamia and Egypt, their environmental conditions were quite different. Greece is mountainous with little suitable land for farming and no broad river valleys or level plains. The sea is ever-present, since much of the main land is surrounded by water inlets, and the sea itself is filled with small islands. One geographical advantage the early Greeks had was good access to water through natural harbors and navigable bays, and calm waters with islands that served as multiple docking places for ships. Land travel was difficult because of the mountains and deep water inlets, so the early Greeks became some of the most skilled sailors of their day.

The Minoan civilization on the island of Crete controlled most of the area about 1600 BCE and was replaced by the Mycenaeeans, who almost certainly were part of the great trade network of the Late Bronze Age that fell apart about 1200 BCE. The Mycenaeeans were often at war with the city of Troy on the other side of the Aegean Sea (in Anatolia). Their cities were invaded about this time by a people from the north, so the times were chaotic, eventually ending in destruction with inhabitants abandoning the area. After the fall of the Mycenaeean civilization, the Aegean area entered into a “Dark Age” that lasted until about 800 BCE, when Greek cities began to reemerge as important urban centers. (map, pg. 74)

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**The Phoenicians and the World’s First Alphabet**

Around this time, another seafaring people, the Chanani (called “Canaanites” in the Bible), appeared in the western Mediterranean. The Greeks called this people “red men,” Phoinikes, or Phoenicians in English, most likely because they produced an extremely rare reddish-purple dye made from the glands of snails. The Phoenicians began to expand outward from their homeland in modern-day Lebanon around 900 BCE. They used a new type of writing system: an alphabet of twenty-two consonants. Unlike cuneiform, this alphabet had no pictorial symbols and depicted only sounds. Like many other scripts, Phoenician did not record vowels, which most native speakers can readily supply. (Consider the many abbreviations we use when texting.) The phonetic alphabet was surely one of the most influential innovations in the ancient world because it was much faster to learn an alphabet than to memorize a symbolic script like cuneiform. (map, pg. 99)

By 814 BCE, the Phoenicians had established one outpost at Carthage (modern-day Tunis in Tunisia) and subsequently built others at different ports along the North African coast as well as the southern coast of modern-day Spain. The Greek historian Herodotus credited the Phoenicians with the discovery that Africa was surrounded by water except where it joins Asia. He described a Phoenician voyage circumnavigating Africa sometime around 600 BCE:

“Every autumn they [the voyagers] put in where they were on the African coast, sowed a patch of ground, and waited for next year’s harvest. Then, having got in their grain, they put to sea again, and after two full years rounded Gibraltar in the course of the third, and returned to Egypt.”

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The Phoenicians founded new colonies by sending groups of men and women to coastal towns around the Mediterranean and even beyond. We learn this from a Greek account about the Phoenician explorer Hanno, who set off from Carthage in 500 BCE with sixty vessels and thirty thousand men and women. Hanno passed a river and two large gulfs and then captured three “gorillas”, probably chimpanzees or baboons. Then he turned back. The vagueness of the description makes it difficult to know how far the Phoenicians traveled, but they may have reached Sierra Leone. (map, pg. 106)

The veracity of both of these accounts—the Phoenician circumnavigation of Africa and the Phoenician colonization of West Africa—is much debated because of the lack of independent confirmation, but it is certain that the ongoing Phoenicians transmitted their knowledge of geography along with their alphabet to the Greeks.

**Carthage’s Commercial Empire**

Historians know far more about the new settlements in the western Mediterranean than they know about the cities, such as Byblos and Tyre, in the Phoenician homeland. Much of this knowledge comes from the Greeks’ and Romans’ reports of their wars with the western Phoenician communities. [...]

With a population of roughly 400,000, Carthage was one of the largest cities in the world in the mid-first millennium BCE. Given the limitations of ancient technology, the provision of food, water, and sanitation must have posed substantial challenges. The city housed an ethnically diverse population, including people likely to have been the ancestors of modern-day Berbers, and immigrants form all over the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa who had come to Carthage to make their fortune.

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Each year two “judges” were elected from the upper-class families. They served as heads of state and carried out administrative and judicial functions. The real seat of power was the Senate, made up of members of the leading merchant families, who sat for life, formulating policy and directing the affairs of the state. Within the Senate, an inner circle of the heads of the thirty or so most influential families made the crucial decisions. [...] There is little evidence at Carthage of the kind of social and political unrest that later plagued Greece and Rome. This perception may be due in part to the limited information in our sources about the internal affairs at Carthage. However, a merchant aristocracy (unlike an aristocracy of birth) was not a closed circle, and in a climate of economic and social mobility, ambitious and successful new families and individuals could push their way into the circle of politically influential citizens. The ruler class also saw to it that everyone benefited from the riches of empire, and the masses were usually ready to defer to those who made that prosperity possible. [...]

The foreign policy of the Carthaginian state reflected its economic interests. Protection of the sea lanes, access to raw materials, and fostering of trade opportunities mattered most to the dominant merchant class. Indeed, Carthage claimed the waters of the western Mediterranean as its own. Merchant vessels of other peoples were free to sail to Carthage to market their goods, but if they tried to operate on their own, they risked being sunk by the Carthaginian navy. Treaties between Carthage and other states included formal recognition of this maritime commercial monopoly. [...]

Unlike Middle Eastern empires of this time, Carthage did not seek direct rule of large amounts of territory. A belt of fertile land in northeastern Tunisia, owned by Carthaginians but worked by native peasants and imported slaves, provided a secure food supply. Beyond this core area, Carthaginian domination was usually indirect. Other Phoenician communities in the western Mediterranean (like Gades, later Cádiz, in Spain) were essentially independent. However, because of Carthage’s superior economic and military resources and the shared interests of all the Phoenician communities of the west, they normally looked to Carthage for military protection, and they followed Carthage’s lead in foreign policy. [...] The Phoenicians retained control over the western and southern Mediterranean until their defeat by ancient Rome in 202 BCE.6

ANCIENT GREECE

Political Development - The geographic features of the Greek homeland encouraged the development of the polis, or the city-state. Each city was separated from others by mountains, inlets, or the sea itself, so each came to dominate the countryside around it. At its peak, Greek civilization was made up of about 200 poleis, each a separate political and cultural unit, independent of every other. Some were stronger and more influential than others, and at key times they cooperated with one another in inter-city organizations called leagues, but they were never united under one government. Often when we refer to Ancient Greece, we are thinking about one city-state: Athens. Although its politics and culture dominated other city-states for much of the time period, Athens was always its own city-state, and its main rival was Sparta, a city-state south of Athens with very different values and practices. Each city-state had its own patron god or goddess, and held regular rituals to celebrate and maintain the patron’s protection. (map, pg. 122)

The poleis took different political forms, including monarchies (hereditary rule by one), oligarchies (rule by a few), aristocracies (rule by leading families), and democracies (a new form of popular government, rule by citizens). One outcome of these conflicting governing styles was the emergence of tyrants by the 6th C BCE. These tyrants were often military leaders who won popular support against the aristocracy, and though they were not necessarily

6 Hansen and Curtis, pp. 149.
oppressive (as the modern term implies), the idea of one-man rule contradicted traditions of each community governance.

Early Athens- Athens went through all of these forms of government in the period between 800 and 400 BCE with democracy emerging during the 5th century. A rebellion in 510 BCE put an aristocrat in control, but the instability of the times encouraged him to experiment with democracy. At the heart of Athenian democracy was the “town meeting” of all free males [the citizens] who were called together to make decisions affecting the future of their polis. All could speak freely, and citizens often tried to sway others to their opinions, and the collective vote determined political actions. Also present was the Council of 500, citizens chosen by lot for one-year terms who were responsible for making and implementing policy under the supervision of the town meeting. It is notable that women and slaves held no political power. (image, pg. 125)

Early Sparta- Before the 7th C BCE, the two city-states of Sparta and Athens were probably similar in many ways, but major rebellions in and around Sparta apparently influenced a highly militaristic society to develop there. In the 700s the Spartans had defeated a neighboring city-state, Messenia, and had taken their people as servants, called helots. Although they were not slaves, they could not leave the land, and their role in society was to provide agricultural labor. During the 600s the Messenians rebelled over and over again, encouraging the Spartans to emphasize military control. The rebellions were put down, and the helots met the society’s economic needs, while Spartan men were warriors. The Spartans were self-disciplined and rigidly obedient, and put a great deal of emphasis on physical fitness.

Economic Characteristics- In their settlements on the western edge of Anatolia, an area the Greeks called Ionia, rivers formed broad and fertile plains near the coast, but no other area had large rivers. As a result, Greek farmers on the mainland depended entirely on sparse rainfall to water their crops. The soil was poor, and so they could only raise a limited number of crops. They usually planted barley (which was harder than wheat) on the flat plains, olive trees at the edge of the plain, and grapevines on the lower slopes of the foothills. Sheep and goats were raised in most areas, and cattle and horses in northern Greece. Natural resources included building stones such as marble, and clay for pottery, but very few metal deposits. They traded across the Aegean for timber, gold, iron, copper, tin, and grain to allow them access to basic needs for building a civilization. The significant invention of coins (probably in western Anatolia) facilitated trade because it replaced an inefficient system of weighing gold, silver, or bronze in exchange for goods. Coins were much small and easier to store, and also make bookkeeping and storage of wealth more efficient.

In early Greek history, farmers were part-time soldiers who were called up by the government of their city-state for brief periods to meet military needs. Campaigns took place when farmers were available, which meant that military actions were generally not planned during planting and harvesting seasons. These Greek farmer soldiers served as hoplites, heavily armored infantrymen who fought in very close contact and cooperation together. Each soldier was protected by a helmet, breastplate, and leg guards, and held a shield that protected half of his body and half of the soldier next to him. The shields were arranged in continuous formation in front of the men, who moved together so no gaps appeared between shields. When two hoplite lines met, the fighting was brutal and short with a clear victor, a convenient fighting style that allowed the survivors to get back to their crops quickly.

Colonies, such as Ionia and those areas settled along the northern Aegean, formed partly because the Greek mainland’s limited land space could not support a growing population. Eventually, Greeks formed colonies far away,
including Marsalia, now called Marseille, in southern France. This colonization served to spread Greek culture far and wide, as well as create new trading partners across the seas.

**Social Distinctions** - An important social distinction in most city-states was between citizens and non-citizens. In Sparta, the helots were a large subject-people that outnumbered citizens by perhaps ten to one. Beyond that basic distinction, all Spartan citizens were theoretically equal in status. To maintain this equality, Spartans wore simple clothing and no jewelry, nor did they accumulate possessions. Their houses were equally unadorned, and their lifestyle overall was frugal and austere. Distinctions among citizens were based on athletic prowess and military talent, and the Spartan educational system prepared boys, starting at age seven, to be soldiers. They were removed from their families, placed in military barracks, and trained until they were ready at age twenty to join the military. Spartans also maintained self-sufficiency, believing that trade and the luxuries it brought were harmful to their purity. Although the Spartans lost some of their zest for equality over time, with their aristocracy succumbing to luxuries by the 4th C BCE, they still maintained a society based on military values.

In Athens, the basic distinction between citizens and non-citizens was also important, but Athenians had no disdain for luxuries, and developed a clear urban-based aristocracy. Most Athenians were simple farmers that lived outside the urban area, but aristocrats made differences between themselves and common folk within the city. These distinctions led to discontent and, in response, reforms were enacted that gave commoners more rights, including membership in the town meeting and Council of 500. As a result, democracy spread to all free male citizens, making them more equal, but ironically deepening the division between free men and slaves. Perhaps 30% of the total population was enslaved, although by most accounts slaves were generally well treated. Only in the silver mines near Athens were they abused on a regular basis. Most others were personal servants, and some were craftsmen who worked for pay but were not free to seek employment from anyone other than their owners. Slaveholders usually did not own more than one or two slaves, and friendships often formed between slaves and non-slaves. However, slaves had no political rights, nor could they serve in the military.

In regard to gender relations, Sparta and Athens provide an interesting contrast. Spartan women were free and equal with men, and they were encouraged to be as physically fit as the men, especially so they could have strong, healthy babies. Wives did not live with their husbands (who were away at war), so Sparta in many ways was run by women, who were left at home to take care of everything else except fighting. In Athens, gender inequality was much more clearly defined. Respectable Athenian women were confined to the home and only ventured outside under the guardianship of slaves and servants. One or two rooms of a home were reserved for women, always located away from the street. Rural women probably had more freedom of movement because of their many farm chores. However, no Athenian woman had political rights, nor could they own property or businesses. Women were citizens, since it was important that citizenship be passed down to their children, particularly the males. Besides respectable women, others were prostitutes who did not follow the same rules and had even lower status.

**Cultural Characteristics** - Like most other ancient people, Greeks were polytheistic... Greek gods, however, were not omnipotent, and they were quite capable of deceit, playfulness, jealousy, and anger. Neither did the Greeks have a priestly class, although priests served as informal leaders of religious services. Most educated Athenians did not take their gods very seriously, nor did they believe that the gods controlled human destiny. The Greek emphasis on **secularism**, or affairs of this world (non-religious affairs), led them to seek answers to the
dilemmas of human existence in philosophy, in much the same way that the ancient Chinese embraced Confucianism.

The Greek word philosophy means “love of wisdom.” The early philosophers were mainly interested in investigating the physical world. They did not believe that the gods caused natural phenomena. Instead, they invented natural law, or forces in nature that cause phenomena to occur. Socrates (470 – 399 BCE) was the first philosopher to focus on ethical questions and truth-seeking regarding human nature, understandings, and relationships. He particularly emphasized the rational in human nature, or the ability of individuals to reason for themselves. We know about Socrates through the writings of his student, Plato, who wrote about his mentor’s arrest, conviction, and forced suicide for “poisoning” the minds of Athens’ youth. On the outskirts of Athens, Plato founded the Academy, a school where young men could pursue a course of higher education. He wrote dialogues—an oral form—in which his protagonist, Socrates, uses the “Socratic method” of question and answer to reach a deeper understanding of the meaning of values such as justice, excellence, and wisdom. He believed that full apprehension of a higher reality, of which our own sensible world is but a pale reflection [allegory of the Cave], could be entrusted only to “initiates” who had completed the earlier stages of philosophical and spiritual training that took place at his Academy. Aristotle was Plato’s student who was interested in practically every field of human endeavor, including the natural and social sciences.

The Greeks also developed at least three major art forms:

1. Drama- This Greek invention arose in the 600s BCE, probably in Athens, as a presentation of myths about the gods and their interventions in human affairs.

2. Lyric Poetry- This style of poetry has the form and musical quality of a song that often expresses personal feelings. Aristotle contrasted lyric poetry to drama and epic poetry, whose intentions are to tell a story.

3. “Classical” Architecture- Greek temples, including the Parthenon atop the Acropolis in Athens, were widely copied by the Romans, and still provide basic building principles for modern architecture.

Greek sculpture reflected a strong belief in the worth of the individual, and reveled in human capabilities, both physically and intellectually. The bodies depicted in the sculpture influenced later concepts of beauty and perfection, and their facial expressions were individualized. Greek ceramics were in great demand throughout the Mediterranean world, and craftsmen also worked in metal, leather, and wood. The overall achievement of the Greeks during their “Classical Age” (c. 500 -300 BCE) is termed Hellenic culture, based on the Greek name for their homeland, Hellas.

THE RISE OF PERSIA

Ancient Persia arose in the area that is now Iran, mostly a high, dry plateau surrounded by mountains to the north, east, and west, and by the Indian Ocean to the south. Its location was in between the population centers of the Indian subcontinent and southwest Asia, so traders had crossed the area for many years before its people organized under the first Persian warrior-king, Cyrus the Great. He overcame other rulers, such as the king of Medes, to extend his territory from the edge of India to the Mediterranean Sea. The empire continued to expand under Darius I, extending into Egypt, and an area north of Greece called Macedonia. (map, pg. 116)

The success of the empire was due partly to superior military leadership and organization, but Cyrus also should be credited with the political system that he left in place after he conquered various territories. He allowed his subjects to retain

7 These sentences on Plato are from Bulliet, pg. 133.
their own customs and laws under the supervision of his Persian representatives, the satraps. These governors were responsible for collecting tribute (such as precious metals), providing soldiers, and keeping order. The satraps had miniature courts that mimicked that of the Persian king in Persepolis, and their positions tended to become hereditary. Persians intermarried with locals, and strong ties between Persepolis and the provincial courts were possible. Darius I also established a law code based on earlier Mesopotamian codes that governed the empire.

**Zoroastrianism, Ideology, and Social Structure**

The Persians established their ideology of kingship on religious foundations. They believed that the supreme god, Ahura Mazda, appointed the monarch as ruler over all peoples and lands of the earth and charged him with maintaining a perfect order from which all could benefit. Unlike their Mesopotamian neighbors, the Persians drew their religious ideas from their pastoral and tribal roots (which reflected the same traditions of warrior and priestly classes as those preserved in the Vedic texts of he Indus Valley).

Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra), who most likely lived sometime after 1000 BCE in eastern Iran, was responsible for crystallizing the region’s traditional beliefs into a formal religious system. The eastern tribes of the Iranian plateau spread the ideas of Zoroastrianism to the Iranian people living in the west, and Zoroastrianism ultimately became the religion of the entire empire. The main source for the teachings of Zoroaster is the *Avesta*, a collection of holy works initially transmitted orally by priests and then, according to legend, written down in the third century BCE.

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taught three things only: “to ride, to shoot with the bow, and to tell the truth.”

The Persian social order included four diverse groups: a ruling class of priests, nobles, and warriors; an administrative and commercial class consisting of scribes, bureaucrats, and merchants; and two laboring groups of artisans and peasants. Each group had a well-defined role. Priests (known as *magi*) maintained the ritual fire in temples; nobles administered the state by paying taxes and performing appropriate duties, warriors protected and expanded the empire, bureaucrats kept records, merchants secured goods from distant lands, artisans rendered raw materials into symbolic form, and peasants grew the corps and tended the flocks that fed the imperial machine. [...]

**Public Works and Imperial Identity**

The Persians engaged in large-scale road building and constructed a system of rapid and dependable communication. The key element in the system was the Royal Road, which followed age-old trade routes some 1,600 miles from western Anatolia to the heart of the empire in southwestern Iran, continuing eastward across the northern Iranian plateau and into central Asia. Traders used the Royal Road, as did the Persian army, while subjects took tribute to the king, and royal courtiers carried messages to the satraps and imperial armies over the road. The Persians placed way stations with fresh mounts and provisions along the route.

In addition to the Royal Road, the Persians devised other ways to connect the far reaches of the empire with its center. Darius oversaw the construction of a canal more than fifty miles long linking the Red Sea to the Nile River. One of the Persians’ most ingenious contributions was the invention of *quanats*, underground tunnels through which water flowed over long distances without evaporating or being contaminated. (Later adopted by many cultures, this type of system moves water under arid lands even today.) Laborers from the local populations toiled on these feats of engineering as part of their obligations as subjects of the empire.

**The Greeks v. The Persians**

Most of what we know about the Persians comes to us from the Greeks, who faced them in battle throughout the early 5th C BCE. The wars occurred because both civilizations were expanding into Anatolia, and their clash was probably inevitable. The wars were sparked by rebellions in Ionia, an area governed by the Persians but inhabited by people with Greek backgrounds and sympathies. When Darius I sent his troops to put down the rebellion, Athens went to aid fellow Greeks in Ionia. In order the punish the impudence, Darius then sent an army to mainland Greece, where the Greeks defeated the Persians at the legendary Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. A second series of battles began under Darius’ successor, Xerxes, who was defeated even more decisively at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 and again in Platea in 479. Some historians see this clash between Athens and Persia as a trigger event that set “West” (Greece) v. “East” (Persia) as a defining concept for modern day international politics. Following this line of thinking, today’s clashes in the Middle East are framed in the mindset that “West” and “East” have been natural enemies since these ancient days.

The Persian Wars were significant not only for sparking the decline of Persian power, but for the boost they gave to Athens as the premier city-state in Greece. They formed an alliance with other city-states called the Delian League, and under the leadership of Pericles, they offended the Spartans by attacking Sparta’s ally, Corinth. What followed was the highly destructive Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) between Athens and Sparta. Although Sparta eventually won, the war set off a series of quarrels among the city-states, fueled by their long-established independence and individuality. All were weakened in the end, leaving them vulnerable to conquest by a new power to the north, Macedonia.

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9 Ibid., pp. 138.
The Hellenistic Synthesis- Until the 4th C BCE, the kingdom of Macedon was a sleepy frontier state in the northern part of the Greek mainland. Some Macedonians were farmers, others were pastoral nomads who migrated seasonally between the mountains and valleys, and others made a living trading with Greek city-states. King Philip II transformed Macedonia by building a powerful military of farmer infantrymen and aristocratic cavalry. After he consolidated his power by subduing local Macedonian clan-based leaders, he turned his attention to the quarreling Greek city-states to the south. Philip was able to conquer the poleis one by one, since they were unable to agree with one another long enough to form an alliance against him. In a little more than ten years, he brought all of Greece under his control. He was poised to invade Persia when he was assassinated in 336 BCE so that task fell to his 20-year-old son, known in history as Alexander the Great.

In his short career (13 years), Alexander conquered most of the world known to the Greeks, and his feats became legendary. He inherited a well-equipped, disciplined army from his father, and his ambition drove them to conquer one area after another, starting with Anatolia, and then Egypt, now a mere regional state, where he was greeted as pharaoh. Persia was weaker than it had been, and he dared to press his troops on until they had defeated the mighty old empire. Alexander's army made it all the way to the Indus River Valley, where the troops refused to go any further. He planned to merge Greek and Asian institutions under his control, naming many cities Alexandria in his honor, and forcing his men to marry Asian women to forge the new, blended civilization. Alexander himself married multiple daughters of conquered princes. His dream of consolidating the empire was cut short by his untimely death of a fever at the age of 33 in Babylon. Without his leadership, the empire fell apart. Although his political ambitions failed, his conquests had a huge cultural impact on the course of world history.

Historians call the epoch following the conquests of Alexander the **Hellenistic Age** (323 – 30 BCE) because of the spreading of Greek culture to northeastern Africa and western Asia. After Alexander's death, his empire was divided among his generals into three large states: Antigonus took Greece and Macedonia (this state would soon be annexed by the Roman Republic); Ptolemy took Egypt (establishing the Ptolemaic dynasty, but annexed by the Romans in 31 BCE); and Seleucus took the bulk of the old Persian Empire (establishing the Seleucid Empire, which existed until 64 BCE). Many Greeks left their overcrowded homeland to settle in the new lands, and they took their culture with them, where it blended in a Hellenistic synthesis with many other cultures, creating cosmopolitan societies connected by trade and Greek culture. Recent archaeological expeditions have unearthed Greek shrines and inscriptions as far away as Bactria (area between Afghanistan and Tajikistan) and India. In the urban centers, many individuals spoke Greek, dressed in Greek fashions, and adopted Greek customs. Without Alexander's conquests, little Greece probably would have remained just that. Instead, its beliefs, values, and material culture spread, so that its legacy has reverberated through the ages to make it one of the most influential civilizations in all of world history. (map, pg. 137)

**MAURYAN AND GUPTA INDIA**

Before the fall of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa in the Indus River Valley, the Aryans had migrated into the Indian subcontinent from their home north of the Black Sea. After 1000 BCE, they began to settle in the area between the Himalayan foothills and the Ganges River, and by 500 BCE, they had migrated as far south as the Deccan plateau in the south central part of the sub-continent. At first, they probably had a fairly simple society consisting of herders and farmers led by warrior chiefs and priests. As they settled, however, their social complexity grew, especially as they interacted with the native Dravidians.
The Development of the Caste System—The term *caste*—a social class of hereditary and usually unchangeable status—was first used in India by Portuguese merchants and mariners during the 16th C CE when they noticed sharp distinctions on the Indian sub-continent. The Aryans used the term *varna*, a Sanskrit word meaning "color", to refer to their social classes. By about 1000 BCE, four major varnas were recognized, as explained in a creation myth: *Brahmins* (the highest social classes, made up of priests and scholars); *Kshatriya* (warriors and government officials); *Vaishya* (landowners, merchants, and artisans); *Shudra* (common peasants and laborers). During the era between 600 BCE and 600 CE, the caste system became much more complex, with each caste further subdivided into *jati*, or birth groups, each with its own occupation, duties, and rituals. Each *jati* had very little contact with others, and its members intermarried and followed the same occupations of the ancestors.

Early Religion and Culture—The period from 1500 to 500 BCE is called the “Vedic Age,” after the *Vedas*, religious texts that were passed down from generation to generation of Aryans in the form of hymns, songs, prayers, and rituals honoring the Aryan gods. The most important is called the *Rig Veda*, compiled between about 1400 and 900 BCE, but not written down until about 600 BCE. The Vedas reflect the conflicts between Aryans and Dravidians (people native to the Indian subcontinent). Over the years, the Aryan religion blended with beliefs of the Dravidians, as reflected in a body of works called the *Upanishads*, which appeared in the late Vedic Age, about 800 to 400 BCE. The Upanishads spoke about a universal spirit known as Brahman, who is eternal and unchanging. A central belief was that through reincarnation, the rebirth of the soul after the body dies, the human spirit (*atman*) could eventually join the universal spirit, as long as the human being behaved ethically. Eventually, these beliefs came to be called *Hinduism*, the religion of most people that live today in the Indian subcontinent. The gods were altered, both in identity and in their relationships with humanity.... Hinduism emphasized the worshiper’s personal devotion to a particular deity.¹⁰

A second major world religion, *Buddhism*, began in India during the 6th C BCE. Its founder was *Siddhartha Gautama* (d. 483 BCE), born to a kshatriya family in the north of India. Although his life as a prince was comfortable and satisfying, he left his family to seek the meaning of life, and eventually experienced an enlightenment that became the foundation of the faith. Siddhartha was called the Buddha (“Enlightened One”), and spent the rest of his life in the area around the Ganges River Valley spreading his knowledge to others. He never claimed to be a god, but after his death, some of his followers elevated him to that status. Although the religion spread in two forms (Theravada Buddhism, or those who did not believe the Buddha was a god, and Mahayana Buddhism, or those who see the Buddha as a god), most Indians remained faithful to the old beliefs, and by the 3rd C BCE, it looked as if Buddhism was destined to be a small regional religion.

Political Development—Political developments in India greatly impacted the growth of Buddhism, particularly after *Ashoka*, the third and greatest ruler of the Mauryan Dynasty, converted to it. Before the 4th C BCE, India was politically fragmented into separate kinship groups and independent groups. Different terrains—mountains, river valleys, plains, forests, steppes, and deserts—made transportation and communication difficult, and various languages and cultural practices developed. The caste system was in place across the sub-continent, and although religious beliefs were shared, hundreds of *jati* separated people into groups of identification, so political authority was of only secondary importance. Despite these divisions, the Mauryan Dynasty came to rule a good part of the area for almost 300 years, beginning in the

¹⁰ Bulliet, et al., pg. 181.
kingdom of Magadha, in eastern India. The Ganges River Valley, and its leader, Chandragupta Maurya, expanded it into India’s first centralized empire. His grandson, Ashoka, ruled over the entire subcontinent except for the southern tip of the peninsula. A large imperial army helped the dynasty to maintain control over the area.

Ashoka’s early life was spent conquering different regions of India until, according to his own account, he was shocked by the bloodshed at the Battle of Kalinga at the midpoint of his reign. He turned to Buddhism because of its emphasis on peace, tolerance, and nonviolence, and he spent the remainder of his years promoting these values partly through a series of new law codes known as Ashoka’s Edicts. Ashoka’s dominant image in Indian history is of a young warrior turned responsible monarch who saw himself as the father of his people. The Mauryan Empire lasted for a time after Ashoka’s death in 232 BCE, but eventually it collapsed form the pressure of attacks in the northwest. In 184 BCE, India returned to its usual political arrangement—fragmented regional kingdoms—for more than 500 years. (map, pg. 176)

In the early 4th C CE, a new empire rose to centralize power once again, although it was never as large as the Mauryan Empire had been. The Gupta Empire began in the same powerful area, Magadha, with its founder, Chandra Gupta, modeling himself after the Mauryan founder by borrowing his name. The Gupta Empire was not only smaller, but it also never had as much control over regional lords as the Maurya had, particularly under Ashoka. The Gupta did not build a genuine bureaucracy to rule their subjects, but instead were content to draw tribute from them, allowing regional warrior elites a great deal of autonomy to rule their areas.

A technique used by both the Persians and the Gupta is “theater state,” or the art of awing subjects into remaining loyal to the ruling family. In both empires the ruler took the title “King of Kings,” and both required tribute to be brought to their capitals, where a splendid palace, magnificent buildings, beautiful grounds, spectacular entertainment, and ornate court costumes were designed to impress the visitors.

At the Persian capital of Persepolis, visitors first entered the Gate of All Nations, a grand hall where a pair of Lamassus (bulls with the head of a bearded man) stand on the western threshold, and another pair with wings and a Persian head on the eastern entrance, to reflect the Empire’s power. The palace at the Gupta capital of Pataliputra was described by a Buddhist monk, Faxian, as too beautiful to have been built by human hands, but instead was “all made by spirits which [King Ashoka] employed.”

THE ANCIENT SUPERPOWERS: ROME & CHINA

ANCIENT ROME

While Greece and then Alexander held the focus of civilization around the Mediterranean Sea, a new city-state was rising to the west on the Italian peninsula. Rome was heavily influenced by the Greeks but developed its own unique characteristics, including the Latin language. Roman influence spread gradually first on the peninsula, and eventually to an area that stretched from northern Europe to southwest Asia to northern Africa. Roman history went through many phases, encompassing more than 2000 years from start to finish, and dominating the area for more than 700 years. Rome brought many diverse people together under its rule, and came into contact with nomadic peoples who eventually contributed to its downfall.

Political Development- The Etruscans came into Italy about 800 BCE, where they established a series of small city-states that ruled the native people. Exactly where they came from isn’t known because they left only a small amount of writing that has never been deciphered. A federation (central

11 Woods, pp. 90 - 105
government with smaller subunits) headed by Etruscan kings who managed local leaders existed from about 750 to 509 BCE. One of its subject communities was Rome, founded according to legend by twin brothers Romulus and Remus. In 509 BCE, Rome gained independence from Etruscan rule, and established itself as a republic, or a state without a monarch (res publica). The republic lasted until the rule of the first emperor, Augustus (r. 31 BCE – 14 CE), when it became an empire that fell in 476 CE, although the eastern part of the empire existed until 1453 CE (as the Byzantine Empire).

Under the republican form of government, Rome was not a democracy, even though it was not ruled by a monarch. Instead the most important ruling body was a Senate, composed of patricians, or aristocrats who passed their positions down to their sons. The plebians, commoners who made up about 90% of the population, were represented by an elected General Assembly. Even though this political structure looks democratic on the face of it, the General Assembly had little power, and the patricians of the Senate controlled political decisions. The executive was headed by two consuls, elected from among the members of the Senate for one-year terms that were not to be repeated. Each consul had veto power over the other, and because they were usually military generals, they were often fiercely competitive and keen to challenge each other's power. These generals came to have great sway over the republic, especially after the Senate discontinued the practice of replacing the consuls every year. The plebians protested their lack of political power, and managed to get the government to allow them representatives called tribunes, who at first were elected by the people but eventually came to be controlled by the Senate in the mid-1st C BCE.

The Senate's power was challenged by Julius Caesar, a charismatic patrician general with great sway over his soldiers, and a Triumvirate (rule of three) was formed: Caesar, Crassus (for his wealth), and Pompey, a rival general to Caesar. Caesar eventually declared himself dictator, only to be assassinated by senators on the Ides of March (15 March) in 44 BCE. His nephew Octavian then battled a general, Mark Antony, for control of Rome. Octavian defeated Antony in the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, and the Senate declared him Augustus (“revered one”) Caesar, establishing the Roman Empire.

Augustus Caesar did not change the old political structures of the Roman Republic. He retained the title of “consul,” but in effect became consul for life. The Senate remained intact, and for the remainder of the empire’s history, the Senate technically named the new emperor. In reality, though, the Senate had no real power because they gratefully gave it to Augustus for saving Rome from destruction. Augustus Caesar was a clever politician and an effective ruler, always catering to the Senate, while he made all real policy decisions. He preferred to be called princeps (“first citizen”), but in his forty-year rule, he overhauled the military, the economy, and the government, putting in place a system that would last for another 250 years without substantial changes.

One of the many accomplishments of Augustus was a new civil service that managed the large empire with considerable efficiency and honesty. The officials were equites, a class of Italian merchants and landowners who helped run the Roman Empire. The provinces were ruled by governors appointed in Rome but allowed a great deal of freedom in local affairs. Augustus studied and codified Roman Law, adding onto the code from the days of the republic—the Law of the Twelve Tables. He also set up a network of officials to hear cases and administer the law. A new class of legal experts rose, whose opinions and interpretations often were given the force of law. His reforms to the military included reducing its unwieldy size, so that all that remained were professional soldiers. The army also became an engineering force to build roads and public works all over the provinces. The army was made up of twenty-eight legions, each with about 6000 infantrymen supported by cavalry. The navy was reorganized effectively to combat pirates, who had been disruptive to shipping on the Mediterranean Sea and the rivers.
These reforms ushered in the **Pax Romana**, or the “Roman Peace”, that lasted until the late 2nd century CE. The empire reached its largest extend during that era, and settled into a long period of peace and prosperity in which Roman strength was generally unchallenged. After that, Rome settled into a decline that eventually ended in its conquest in 476 CE. One continuing problem was the uncertainty concerning the emperor’s successor. Although heredity was important, the emperor had the right to name a non-relative to replace him, a situation that often led to intrigue, competition, and conflict. (map, pg. 146)

**Economic Development and Social Distinctions** - The early Roman economy resembled that of Greece about three centuries before. Aristocrats controlled large plots of land that were worked by tenant farmers, but there were many independent farmers who also served in the military. The elite were called patricians, and the commoners were known as plebians. The basic unit of Roman society was a multi-generational family with domestic slaves. The oldest living male, the “paterfamilias”, had complete authority over his family, and he was tied to other family heads through **patron-client relationships**. Patrons were men of wealth to whom clients turned for help and protection. A senator had many clients who depended on his political power, and in return they gave him military service, labor, and political support. The Roman Forum was the center of business for these networks, and senators with large throngs around them held high prestige. Some of the senators’ more prosperous clients might in turn be patrons of poorer men, so Rome’s citizenry were tied to one another in a web of inequality. [...] 

Women in the upper classes were generally treated like children under the strict scrutiny of the men of their family. During a woman’s life cycle, first her father supervised her, then her husband, and finally her son. However, compared to women in Ancient Greece, Roman women probably had more freedom, with some economic rights. By the first century BCE, many women supervised family businesses and the financial affairs of wealthy estates. Roman literature describes women who appeared to be well-educated and vocal.

As the Roman Republic expanded, Romans began to play a large role in the Mediterranean Sea trade. Their economic and political power increased tremendously after their victory in the Punic Wars fought with Carthage between 264 and 146 BCE... With expansion came the issue of how to incorporate conquered peoples into the republic. Some gained Roman citizenship, wealth, and respect through military accomplishment, but others were taken as slaves. Although slaves existed in most ancient societies, Rome was one of the few in which slave labor was indispensable. Some worked in households or craft production, but gangs of slaves were used in mining and on the great agricultural estates. Slaves worked longer and harder than hired laborers, and their numbers grew to probably about two million people by the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE.

During the Pax Romana from 31 BCE until 180 CE, the empire prospered. Its borders stabilized, giving economic relief to the strains of constant expansion. Trade thrived, with transport across land and sea protected by the Roman political and military structures. Economic problems returned during the third century crisis (CE), after a series of weak emperors, and under pressure from a growing number of raids by nomadic people (“barbarians”) across Roman borders.

**Roman Culture** - Although the Romans borrowed heavily from the Greeks in philosophy, science, and the arts, they had their share of independent inventions as well. Most of their contributions were in law, bureaucratic administration, finance, and engineering. The size and diversity of the Roman civilization called for a flexible system of laws that combined effective central control with local autonomy. The Roman legal system developed pragmatically as the republic grew, and continued to change during the years of empire. Some legal inventions include:
1. The concept of precedent, or court decisions that help to determine how courts rule in subsequent cases.
2. The belief that equity among all citizens should be the goal of the legal system.
3. Interpretation of the law, or the responsibility of judges to decide what a law means and how it should be applied.
4. Natural law, an idea that would be a foundation for later European and North American societies; the belief that all human beings have basic rights in nature that cannot be abridged.

**Roman Arts, Literature, and Religion**- Greek art and literature shaped the everyday lives of the Roman elite so deeply that their influence sparked a debate in the early days of the empire about what Roman values actually were. Cultural diffusion from Greece was facilitated by a large number of Greek servants who worked for wealthy Romans. Most were well-educated and often served as tutors for Roman children. Imitation of Greek culture was also promoted by the similarity between the religions of the two civilizations, since both had essentially the same gods and goddesses with different names.

Rome’s literary contributions are not as numerous as those of Greece, partly because the Greeks were generally better read. However, the Roman poet Virgil linked great epic poetry like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to Roman history in his *Aeneid*, which became the official version of the founding of Rome. Roman literary works also spread its language—Latin—far and wide, so that poetry written by Ovid and history written by Livy could be read in many areas of the world long after the Roman Empire was gone. Romans valued oratory skills and ethical philosophy, although they tended to value the practical more than the philosophical. This preference is reflected in the fact that they did little beyond copying Greek sculpture, and yet they made significant advances in architecture that served a particular purpose. Roman roads were built for marching armies and facilitating trade, and great aqueducts were built to carry water to the urban areas. Roman genius was unmatched when the task was to solve a practical problem. (image, pg. 157)

**The Decline of Rome**- Reasons for the decline of Rome are numerous, and in most ways it was a slow process. A common problem of all the large empires was defense of a very long border, far from the capital city. This difficulty was sensed by Germanic tribes in the north, and their constant attacks meant that defense costs went up significantly. Unfortunately, these attacks increased during the 3rd C CE during a time when Rome had a string of incompetent, often corrupt emperors (the “third century crisis”). Although the strong emperor Diocletian stopped the slide temporarily, the problems continued. As in the waning days of the Republic, the Empire by the 3rd C CE was rife with class struggles over land, since large estates that used slave labor had taken up most free land. Contact through easy trade and transportation had its downside as well, in the form of devastating epidemics that followed the trade routes, killing large numbers of people as they spread.

In the 4th C CE the Roman Emperor Constantine established a second capital city in the east in order to have better connections to that part of the empire and to escape the threatening attacks of Rome by nomads. The second capital was built on the site of Byzantium; he renamed this city capital “Constantinople.” This move had the effect of gradually sacrificing the western provinces to the Germanic groups, including the Franks (who would settle in Gaul—modern-day France), Saxons and Angles (who would sail across the English channel and settle in Britannia—modern-day England), Vandals (who would travel across the Strait of Gibraltar and settle in Mauritania—modern-day Tunisia), Visigoths (who would settle in Hispania—modern-day Spain and Portugal), and Ostrogoths (who would eventually conquer Rome and settle in Italy, after deposing the last Roman emperor in 476 CE).
QIN AND HAN CHINA
At the same time that Rome was increasing its influence around the Mediterranean Sea, China was recovering from the Warring States Period (475 – 221 BCE) at the end of the Zhou Dynasty. The Warring States Period was a time of political turmoil, with regional warlords constantly challenging the authority of the Zhou. However, it was also a period that prompted much debate about how to solve China’s many problems, resulting in the origins of three influential belief systems:

1. **Legalism** - Legalist thinkers believed that humans were naturally evil and would only obey authority through force. They advocated strict laws, harsh punishments, and sacrifice of personal freedom for the good of the state. Han Fei (d. 233 BCE) is the best-known Legalist.

2. **Daoism** - A philosopher named Laozi, who reputedly lived during the 6th C BCE, reacted to the constant warfare by encouraging people to avoid useless struggles by following the Dao (also Tao), or the “path”. He shunned political and military ambitions as lacking morality and meaning, and guided his followers toward nature for comfort and understanding. Daoism emphasizes acceptance and individual retreat from society.

3. **Confucianism** - The philosopher Confucius emphasized the importance of hierarchical, harmonious relationships in the creation of an orderly society. Everyone has a place in society, from the ruler to his lowliest subject, and all have responsibilities in their relationships with others. Confucius believed that the family was the foundation of society that served as a model for benevolence, duty, and courtesy.

The Qin Dynasty - Legalism met an enthusiastic response from the Qin leaders, who used the philosophy of harsh, strict rule to dominate their neighbors in western China. The Qin army was well-organized and equipped with the best available iron weapons, and it defeated one state after the other, until finally it controlled China. Since the Qin government had much stronger centralized authority than the previous dynasties had, the king declared himself “The First Emperor,” or Shi Huangdi; he ruled from 221 – 210 BCE. The dynasty only survived for a few years after his death, but its brevity does not reduce its significance in the development of the Chinese state.

Shi Huangdi ruled his empire through a centralized bureaucracy from his capital near the modern city of Xi’an. The tenets of Legalism served him well as he stripped the nobility of power and divided China into administrative provinces governed by administrators that served as his pleasure. He built roads to facilitate communications and move his armies. He also forced his subjects to contribute their labor to build public works, including the first fortifications of the Great Wall of China (although the Great Wall wouldn’t be completed for over a thousand years, under the Ming Dynasty). Confucians widely criticized the harsh rule of the emperor, who responded by sentencing them to death. Quite famously, he demanded the burning of all books of philosophy, ethics, history, and literature, and only allowed books of practical use (such as medicine and agriculture) to be spared.

Despite his harshness, Shi Huangdi strengthened China in many ways. He standardized laws and currencies, so that they were the same across all regional states. An important step in the unification of China was his mandate that the Shang version of Chinese script be used all over the empire. The regions continued to speak their own languages, but the common script enabled people across China to communicate with one another through writing.

Although Shi Huangdi today is seen as one of the greatest figures in Chinese history (it is his tomb, at Mount Li, which includes the famous terra cotta soldiers), his strict rule made him quite unpopular. Shortly after his death, revolts
began, resulting in the overthrow of the dynasty in 207 BCE, when state buildings were destroyed and government officials killed, paving the way for the Han Dynasty.

The Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE)
Instead of falling into years of chaos, as had happened during the Warring States Period at the end of the Zhou Dynasty, China was brought under control quickly by Liu Bang, partly because he picked able bureaucrats who organized the new dynasty efficiently.

Political Development - Like their contemporaries, the Romans, the Han organized and controlled the realm through a strong, nonhereditary bureaucracy. Although they kept many of the structures created by Shi Huangdi, the Han de-emphasized Legalism in favor of a government based on Confucian values. The family hierarchy became the basis for government structure, with subjects owing the emperor the same obedience that children gave to their fathers. The old Zhou belief in the “Mandate of Heaven” was incorporated into Confucian values; the emperor had the support of the heavens as long as he was a good ruler, and people owed him their fealty. The Han brought forward the Confucian value of benevolence to substitute for the Qin strictness and reliance on force.

Liu Bang was followed by several able rulers, most notably Han Wudi (d. 87 BCE), who issued a royal decree that required nobles to divide their land between all their sons so that large estates would be broken up, checking the lords’ power. The emperor’s appointees extended their authority at the expense of local lords and centralized power in the central government, sometimes going so far as to confiscate land in the name of the emperor.

Even more than Shi Huangdi, the Han rulers expanded the Chinese frontiers west, north, and south. These conquests brought the Chinese into contact with other civilizations, including the Romans, although probably only through intermediaries. Other trade contacts included India, northeast Asia (the Koreas, Japan), and Southeast Asia. The nomadic groups to the north (Xiongnu, in modern Mongolia) were a big threat to Han stability, as they had been for the Qin. The beginning structures of the Great Wall were built to keep them out, but these skilled horsemen constantly got around it to attack settlements to the south. Han Wudi’s forces defeated the nomads and annexed their pasture lands to the Han domain, although the annexation only brought temporary relief. In the east, the northern parts of Korea were conquered, and many of the various groups in Southeast Asia came under Han control. (map, pg. 161)

Economic Developments and Social Distinctions - Like Rome, Han China was an urban empire that ruled a rural and peasant population. Urban areas of China grew rapidly during this era, with the population of Xi’an (also called Chang’an) reaching about 100,000 within the city walls with thousands of others outside the walls and in neighboring communities. The emperor lived in the Forbidden City, so called because only his family, servants, and closest advisors were permitted within its boundaries. Administrative buildings and houses of aristocrats and the scholar-gentry surrounded the Forbidden City, and the streets bustled with commerce. Other urban areas grew as well, so that as much as 30% of the population lived in towns and cities. Canals were built, and the road system expanded to improve communication and commerce. The most important export was silk, and its production from cocoons on the leaves of mulberry trees was a closely guarded secret that gave the Chinese a silk monopoly.

Despite the importance of trade to the empire’s prosperity, merchants did not have a high social status. Instead, the highest regard was for the shi, or the scholar bureaucrats (sometimes called mandarins). The shi generally fared much better under the Han than they did under the Qin, largely because their affinity for Confucianism had brought Shi Huangdi’s disfavor. The Han rulers after Liu Bang increasingly
promoted Confucianism, and thorough knowledge of Confucian teachings became essential for promotion in the Han government. A university was founded in Xi'an to educate young scholars to prepare them for jobs in the bureaucracy. The examinations were based almost exclusively on knowledge of the Confucian texts. Theoretically, any Chinese man could take the exams, but only the sons of the wealthy had the leisure to study for them, so the bureaucracy was generally filled from aristocratic and scholar-gentry families. The importance of social class was reinforced by the fact that many government positions were still hereditary, and automatically passed from father to son.

Three main social classes characterized Han China:

1. **The Scholar-Gentry** - This class was linked to the shi, and eventually superseded it. Their status was based on control of large amounts of land and bureaucratic positions in the government. Wealth from land-holding supported their brightest sons to study for and win important administrative positions. These families tended to maintain homes in both the city and the countryside, and they passed wealth and status down to their children, sometimes for many centuries.

2. **Ordinary, but Free, Citizens** - The common people included a broad range, with the majority being peasants. Some peasants had significant amounts of land, and occasionally might support a son to study for government examinations. Most peasants who had a decent-sized plot of land lived well. However, others were forced to work for landlords, and still others did not have enough to eat. All peasants were required to work a designated number of days each year on public works, and they could also be forced to join the army.

3. **The Underclass** - This broad category consisted of many different groups, including non-Han Chinese on the fringes of the empire. Some were shifting cultivators driven out of their areas by the growing Han population. They were described in various accounts as bandits, beggars, and vagabonds. Slavery did exist, but was far less prominent than in Ancient Rome. During the Warring States Period, dependent peasants as well as slaves worked the large estates. The Qin government tried to abolish slavery, but it persisted into the Han era. However, only a small fraction of the population was enslaved, and most people that were slaves served as domestic servants.

Although they were not given high status by the scholar-gentry, the artisan and manufacturing classes grew during the Han period as a result of numerous inventions and technological innovations. The introduction of the brush pen and paper greatly facilitated the work of the scholar-gentry, and the demand for their manufacture increased. The Han Chinese also developed water mills for agriculture, rudders and compasses for ships, and new mining techniques for iron and copper. Skilled artisans were in high demand, and most probably lived more comfortable lives than the peasants, although their social status was not too high. Even though trade expanded greatly during the Han era, Confucian scholars continued to regard merchants and traders with disdain, and their status remained low.

Like all other ancient civilizations, China was a patriarchy, but most historians believe that women's status during the Han period was higher than in later periods of Chinese history. Marriages were arranged according to family ties, but neither young men nor women had much say about who their partners would be. Powerful relatives usually protected their daughters from abuse by the husband's family, and women of upper-class families were often educated in writing, the arts, and music. Still, women at all social levels remained subordinated to men. Families were run by older
men, and male children were favored over their sisters. Political positions were reserved for men, and only boys could sit for the examinations. Women from peasant families played traditional roles as cooks, house cleaners, and support for men in the fields. All were legally subordinated to their fathers and husbands.

**Han Culture and Science** - The Han were interested in decorative arts, and their bronze and ceramic figures, bowls, vases, jade and ivory carvings, and woven silk screens were of very high quality. One of the highest art forms was calligraphy, or the artistic rendering of the written word, a skill that his still highly prized in Chinese society. Historical record-keeping was important for the Han, with some scripts surviving until today. Mathematics, geography, and astronomy were also valued, especially for the practical inventions that were based on these sciences. An interest in the sciences led to more intensive knowledge of the parts of the body and their functions, including the circulation of the blood. Acupuncture was first mentioned in the historical records of the Han period. All in all, the Chinese were more drawn to practical scientific experimentation than theory.

**The Decline of the Han Empire** - Although the Han Dynasty lasted for more than four hundred years, its last two hundred years were a time of gradual decline. Defending the long borders from nomadic invasions remained a problem, and the expense became burdensome. The early emperors were successful in reducing the wealth and landholdings of the aristocracy, but by the late Han era, many had regained huge tracts of land and local nobles again controlled peasants in their areas. Official corruption and inefficiency marred the government’s ability to effectively rule, and peasant uprisings destabilized many parts of the empire. Like the Zhou before, the Han Dynasty suffered the ill effects of the dynastic cycle, and a period of chaos followed its downfall in 220 CE that lasted for 135 years.

**SOUTHEAST ASIA**

Southeast Asia consists of three geographical zones: the Indochina mainland, the Malay Peninsula, and the thousands of islands extending on an east-west axis far out into the Pacific Ocean. Poised between the ancient enters of China and India, Southeast Asia has been influenced by the cultures of both civilizations. The region first rose to prominence and prosperity because of its intermediate role in the trade exchanges between southern and eastern Asia.

**Early Civilization** - Rainforest covers much of Southeast Asia. Rainforest ecosystems are particularly fragile because of the great local variation of plant forms within them and because of the vulnerability of their soil to loss of fertility if the protective forest canopy is removed. As early as 2000 BCE people in this region were practicing *swidden* agriculture—clearing a patch of land for farming by cutting and burning the vegetation growing on it. The cleared land, known as *swidden*, was farmed for several growing seasons. When the soil was exhausted, the farmers abandoned the patch to the forest, allowing it to regenerate before they cleared it again for agriculture. In the meantime, they cleared and cultivated other nearby fields in similar fashion.

A number of plant and animal species spread from Southeast Asia to other regions. Among them were wet rice (rice cultivated in deliberately flooded fields), soybeans, sugar cane, yams, bananas, coconuts, cocoyams, chickens, and pigs. Rice was the staple food product, for even though rice cultivation is labor intensive, it can support a large population.

Historians believe that the Malay peoples who became the dominant population of this region were the product of several waves of migration from southern China beginning around 3000 BCE. By the first millennium BCE the inhabitants of Southeast Asia had developed impressive navigational skills. They knew how to ride the monsoon winds

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12 Ibid, pp. 190 - 192
and to interpret the patterns of swells, winds, clouds, and bird and sea life. Over a period of several thousand years groups of Malay peoples in large, double outrigger canoes spread out across the Pacific and Indian Oceans—have the circumference of the earth—to settle thousands of islands.

The inhabitants of Southeast Asia tended to cluster along riverbanks or in fertile volcanic plains. Their fields and villages were never far from the rain forest, with its wild animals and numerous plant species. Forest trees provided fruit, wood, and spices. The shallow waters surrounding the islands teemed with fish. This region was also an early center of metallurgy, particularly bronze. Metallsmiths heated bronze to the right temperature for shaping by using hollow bamboo tubes to funnel a stream of oxygen to the furnace.

The first political units were small. The size of the fundamental unit reflected the number of people who drew water from the same source. Water resource “boards,” whose members were representatives from the leading families of the different villages involved, met periodically to allocate and schedule the use of this critical resource.

Larger states emerged in the early centuries CE in response to two powerful forces: commerce and Hindu/Buddhist culture. Southeast Asia was strategically situated along a new trade route that merchants used to carry Chinese silk westward to India and the Mediterranean…. In India demand for silk was increasing—silk both for domestic use and for transshipment to the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea to satisfy the fast-growing luxury market in the Roman Empire. At first a route developed across the South China Sea, by land over the Isthmus of Kra on the Malay Peninsula, and across the Bay of Bengal to India. Over time merchants extended this exchange network to include not only silk but goods from Southeast Asia, such as aromatic woods, resins, and cinnamon, pepper, cloves, nutmeg, and other spices. By serving this trade network and controlling key points, Southeast Asian centers rose to prominence. (map, pg. 191)

The other force leading to the rise of larger political entities was the influence of Hindu/Buddhist culture, imported from India. Commerce brought Indian merchants and sailors into the ports of Southeast Asia. As Buddhism spread, Southeast Asia became a way station for Indian missionaries and East Asian pilgrims going to and coming from the birthplace of their faith. Indian cosmology, rituals, art, and statecraft constituted a rich treasury of knowledge and a source of prestige and legitimacy for local rulers who adopted them. The use of Sanskrit terms such as maharaja (great king), the adaptation of Indian ceremonial practices and forms of artistic representation, and the employment of scribes skilled in writing all proved invaluable to the most ambitious and capable Southeast Asian rulers.

The first major Southeast Asian center, called “Funan” by Chinese visitors, flourished between the first and sixth centuries CE. Its capital was at the modern site of Oc-Eo in southern Vietnam. Funan occupied the delta of the Mekong River, a “rice bowl” capable of supporting a large population. By extending its control over most of southern Indochina and the Malay Peninsula, Funan was able to dominate the Isthmus of Kra—a key point on the trade route from India to China. Seaborne merchants from the ports of northeast India found that offloading their goods from ships and carrying them across the narrow strip of land was safer than making the thousand-mile voyage around the Malay Peninsula—a dangerous trip marked by treacherous currents, rocky shoals, and pirates. Once the portage across the isthmus was finished, the merchants needed food and lodging while they waited for the monsoon winds to shift so that they could make the last leg of the voyage to China by sea. Funan stockpiled food and provided security for those engaged in this trade—in return, most probably, for customs duties and other fees…. For reasons not yet clear to modern historians, Funan declined in the sixth century. The most likely explanation is that international trade routes changed, bypassing Funan.